Telling Absence:

Aboriginal Social History

and the

National Museum of Australia

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of

The Australian National University
This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed:

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Figure 1. Deanna Davison in the Snowy Mountains, 10 November 2007
Acknowledgements

The generosity of others made the writing of this thesis possible. Firstly, for awarding me an APAI scholarship I am deeply grateful to Ann McGrath, Tom Griffiths and Margo Neale, all of whom wrote the original research proposal on which this thesis is based and all of whom have travelled the long distance with me as I developed their original aims. Ann remained a vigilant and supportive supervisor throughout my candidature. Tom’s creative and caring teaching was an inspiration as was his encouragement to follow my instincts. Margo offered an invaluably perceptive analysis of my research task as well as professional and private support.

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Abstract

The ordinary stories of ordinary Aboriginal people are a necessary part of Australian history. Yet museums throughout Australia, and in particular the National Museum of Australia, which are charged with the task of telling these stories, struggle to find appropriate material means to do so: the history which shaped Australian museum collections and the history which shaped contemporary Aboriginal communities do not neatly converge. This research reflects on both.

The structure of this thesis is fashioned around three distinct voices. The first of these is my own where I give an account of my engagement with the Ngarigo community from the Snowy Mountains region of New South Wales into whose contemporary reality and history I am drawn. This reflexive narrative also provides the means for consideration of the complex and sometimes confronting research process as it unfolds in the field. Stories rather than objects were central to the interests of the community participants and it was a story, or rather a series of stories, which I felt would best serve the thorny conjunction of politics, history and representation at the core of this project. Story is also the central method in the second voice of this work, that of the historical narrative. Here the plot centres not so much on reflection as on reconstruction of a Ngarigo family history. It is this voice that provides a powerful juxtaposition between the reality of lived lives and the constructions of Aboriginality emanating from both the academy and from within institutions of popular culture such as museums. The third voice of the thesis offers an analytical examination of the ideas underpinning the conceptual and historical elements out of which a museum is constructed. In this way I explore how the processes which have constituted the museum might be re-configured to accommodate the particularities of Aboriginal social history.
When people talk about ‘the history of Australia’ they mean the history of the white people who have lived in Australia. There is good reason why we should not stretch the term to make it include the history of the dark-skinned wandering tribes who hurled boomerangs and ate snakes in their native land for long ages before the arrival of the first intruders from Europe... for they have nothing that can be called a history. They have dim legends, and queer fairy tales, and deep-rooted customs which have come down from long long ago; but they have no history, as we use the word. When the white man came among them, he found them living just as their fathers and grandfathers and remote ancestors had lived before them.¹

Australian school primer 1917

It is easier to register the loss of traditional orders of difference than to perceive the emergence of new ones.²

James Clifford 1988

¹ Cited by Attwood (1996):103
² Clifford (1988):15
Figure 2.  *Australia - showing study area*[^3]

[^3]: All maps by author unless otherwise stated.
Figure 3. Study area detail
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1. Introduction – an ordinary tale

Where Aboriginal people are concerned, the twin strands of dysfunction and idealization weave a highly-coloured thread through the fabric of Australian culture. The strand that remains all but invisible is that of ordinary Aboriginal lives, the preoccupations and pleasures that amidst all the furore and sentiment remain robust and sustaining.\(^4\)

Kim Mahood 2008

Ordinary lives of ordinary people are the theme of this thesis and they lie at the heart of the stories it contains. For myself and for my fellow story-tellers who animate these pages, the ‘ordinary’ is full of robust and sustaining pleasures, as Kim Mahood proposes. Not least of these is a good yarn. This particular thesis yarn begins in Melbourne where I grew up in the 1960s and 70s. It was an exciting city, full of foreign languages, the smell of newly imported foods and cliques of artists living bearded and bejewelled lives in run down inner city mansions. This mix of flavours, sounds and sights cohered into a spicy backdrop against which my uneventful suburban childhood played out. In the aromatic, multi-coloured texture of my surrounds, it never occurred to me then that Aboriginal people were missing from the mix. As everyone in those days knew, the Aborigines were long gone; their ancient lineages vanished into the blank past from which we (Australians) had sprung freshly minted into the new world.

Like many children of my generation, I was taken to the Museum of Victoria by my parents to view the evidence of science out of which came our understanding of nature and humankind. The marvellous planetarium taught me about the night sky, the Egyptian mummy was an excuse to learn to spell sarcophagus and the stuffed body of Phar Lap educated me in the wonders of large scale taxidermy. What I made of the dioramas of plaster Aborigines sitting around camp fires I can’t remember, nor can I recall what impression, if any, the grand displays of ‘native tools and

\(^4\) Mahood (2008):168
weapons’ made on my young mind. Aborigines were no concern of mine; my fantasies lay with children in boarding schools who enjoyed flasks of hot cocoa at midnight feasts.

My best friend for the entirety of my kindergarten and primary school years lived with her parents in their milk bar a couple of blocks from my house and the two of us spent much of our time pilfering lollies and returnable Tarax bottles from the storeroom behind the shop. On one of my many outings with her family, both of us tucked unbelted into the rear-window compartment of her parent’s VW Beetle, we drove to a gymnasium in another suburb for what my friend’s dad assured us was a special treat. The place we arrived at was a disappointingly dingy, smelly room full of grown-ups in various sporting outfits; nothing us girls were interested in. My friend’s dad knew everyone and we had to wait forever while he chatted and smoked his way through the assembly. On the way home he told us to remember what we’d seen for we’d just met the bantam weight boxer Lionel Rose, the great sporting hero of the moment and the most famous Aboriginal man of his generation. I was maybe six years old and couldn’t have cared less.

It was after working on this thesis for a year that I recalled our visit to the gymnasium four decades before. The realisation dawned on me, as I began to understand the implications of the episode, that I had on that day been given access to something that had hitherto remained a secret. The next time I spoke to my own father I mentioned the incident to him and asked “do you think (my friend) could possibly have been Aboriginal?” “Oh yes, I knew that all along” he replied without hesitation. “They came from somewhere in Gippsland.”

It took forty odd years for me to work out that I had spent a significant part of my early childhood deeply embedded in an Aboriginal family and I hadn’t known. The ordinary lives of an ordinary family in an ordinary suburb did not connect with any learning about Aboriginal culture or history I had been exposed to at school. There was no discussion of Indigenous issues in my own family, despite the 1967 referendum being held around the time of our visit to Rose’s gymnasium. As I began a scholarly enquiry into the Aboriginal past as an adult I saw the many ways in which the stories that might then have informed an understanding of not just of an Aboriginal past but an Aboriginal present, had been silenced and withheld. I could also see that for precisely the reasons that the silences on my side of the racial divide had formed, listening for
those missing stories was not a straight-forward proposition. If there was a trail leading between the ‘Aborigines’ in the museum’s dioramas and my little friend in her patent leather shoes and lace-trimmed socks, it was not one that was going to be easy to follow.

***

The great silence surrounding Aboriginal history has well and truly been broken since the 1960s with the biographies and auto-biographies of Aboriginal people and histories of Aboriginal communities being published in all states and territories of Australia. Many of them have been collaborative works between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal historians and many of them have found great acclaim.\(^5\) Similarly, the unmediated voices of Aboriginal people have been present in film, television, radio, theatre, fiction writing and museum exhibitions for more than two decades, where they have often taken on the challenge of directly contesting mainstream historical narratives.\(^6\) Nevertheless, heritage archaeologist Rodney Harrison believes that the notion of Aboriginal history being \textit{prehistor}y is still shockingly pervasive within the wider community. Aboriginal people’s presence before the arrival of white invaders, he tells us, is “commemorated through a heritage discourse which memorialise[s] fossilised representations of the deep Aboriginal past … while emphasising that authentic forms of Aboriginality [exist] only outside of settled Australia.”\(^7\) It is the role of museums in both perpetuating and dismantling these ‘fossilised representations’ on which this research project focuses.

That museums in Australia play a major role in public understandings of the past was borne out in the survey \textit{Australians and the Past}, in which respondents were asked to rank which sources of information about history they most trusted: museums were consistently ranked at the top of the list.\(^8\) This role in the dissemination of history is something that the National Museum of Australia (NMA) takes very seriously. Despite its position as the most recent addition to the list

\(^5\) For example Read (1984); McKellar and MacCallum (2000); Somerville and Cohen (1990); Pepper (1980); Kenny (2007); Landon and Tonkin (2000)

\(^6\) For example the television series \textit{First Australians} directed by Rachel Perkins, the films of Ivan Sen, Richard Frankland and Warwick Thornton, Alex Wright’s novel \textit{Carpentaria}, Tony Birch as curator of Melbourne Museum’s \textit{Koori Voices}.

\(^7\) Harrison, Williamson et al. (2002):5

\(^8\) Ashton (2003)
Australia’s of national cultural institutions, the NMA holds a large inherited collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artefacts, as do many other museums around the world, stemming from the period when the collecting of artefacts from ‘primitive peoples’ was a central element of ethnographic practice. Many of these collections have undergone radical re-interpretation from within a post-colonial context. Being a national institution however, the NMA has had to redefine its relationship to Indigenous material culture in the light of shifting political realities in a way many other institutions, such as smaller regional museums, have not.

Aware of the burden it carries to be both accurate and to find stories that are interesting and relevant, the NMA agreed to a collaborative project proposed by colleagues within the Australian Centre for Indigenous History at the Australian National University. The project aimed to “investigate the material objects that Indigenous people collect, display and hold dear within their homes and communities, and to consider the personal, family and collective significance of these items” including “how Indigenous people have used material objects to express identities and maintain connections with the past.” This agenda, put forward by the Chief Investigators Professors Ann McGrath and Tom Griffiths, coincided with the Museum’s interest in expanding its knowledge of the role material culture plays in the historiographic practices of contemporary Indigenous people outside of an institutional setting. Concerned to find stories that moved beyond the inherited and outmoded discourses contained within its store of ethnographic artefacts, the Museum’s Senior Indigenous Curator at the time, Margo Neale, agreed to the collaboration and the Australian Indigenous Collectors and Collections project was launched.

It was my good fortune to be the successful candidate for the position of research scholar on the project and so it fell to me to conduct this research on behalf of the Linkage team; this thesis is the result.

***

9 The National Museum of Australia opened to the public on 11 March, 2001. Originally held at the Institute of Anatomy, the 80,000 artefacts known as the National Ethnographic Collection were transferred to the custodianship of the NMA on its inception in 1980 with the passing of National Museum of Australia Act.

10 See Appendix I
Friends on the south coast of NSW introduced me to a Ngarigo family whose traditional lands encompass the Snowy Mountains and Monaro plains region of south-east NSW. Ngarigo country and the history of the Ngarigo community offered an opportunity “to consider the particular issues or problems faced by Indigenous collectors in heavily colonised parts of Australia, whose beloved possessions may be popularly defined as less authentic or valuable”, one of the aims of the research I was particularly interested in pursuing (chapter 2). It would be fitting that, if they were willing, I would work with this community to develop a case study for this research project.

The fragments of Aboriginal history remaining in the Monaro and Snowy Mountains region are few and indistinct. In contrast, Anglo history is unavoidable, paraded through the heritage interpretation signs, public art and tourist brochures found in every petrol station, sandwich bar and picnic stop from Cooma to the Victorian border. Yet there is significant interest in the Aboriginal history of the region within the local non-Aboriginal community and Aboriginal people from the early 20th century are still fondly held within living memory (chapter 11). With no traditional owners as visible permanent residents however, nostalgia for the ‘lost’ past casts a misty haze over what exactly the Aboriginal history of the area might be. Furthermore, the focus on archaeological evidence of pre-contact Aboriginal occupation, a topic well researched within the region, conditions local people and visitors to look only to pre-history for information about the material culture of the Aboriginal past. All of these circumstances combined to provide the ideal location for an examination of remembrance and identity amongst the Ngarigo and in particular, how material culture articulates with their understandings of, and connection to, the past.

***

The structure of this thesis is shaped around the different textures and requirements of three distinct voices which are interleaved sequentially. The first of these voices is my own where I give an account that describes how my understanding has changed through the process of engagement with the research, the museum, the Aboriginal community and historians. I also reflect on the meaning of the research process as it unfolds. It became clear during the writing process that a linear structure could not do justice to the kinds of associative connections I was encountering, nor would it resonate with the people I was writing for and about. Stories rather than objects were central to the interests of the community participants and it was a story, or
rather a series of stories, that I felt would best serve the thorny conjunction of politics, history and representation that was the core of the project. Historian Tom Griffiths tells us that story is “a privileged carrier of truth, a way of allowing for multiplicity and complexity at the same time as guaranteeing memorability. Story creates an atmosphere in which truth becomes discernible as a pattern.”\textsuperscript{11} Including my own story provided the opportunity for a reflective internal narrative which allowed not just truth about the topic to become discernible but about the process of discovery and understanding as well. It also allowed me to expose the workings of my primary research methodology: community engagement.

Story is also the central method in the second voice of this work: that of the historical narrative. Here the plot centres not so much on reflection as on reconstruction of a family’s history. The shards of archival evidence for this have been placed end-to-end in roughly chronological order (chapters 3, 6, 9 and 12) to form the spine of the thesis. As reported in chapter 5, the participants I was working with had little interest in either an analysis of the relationship between material culture and historiography or my own reflections on the project. An opportunity to work on their family history however held immediate appeal for them. By developing this historical voice as a narrative that can be presented separately, it remained in a form available for return to the family at the conclusion of the project, an outcome that was not only important to all of us involved in the research but a mandatory requirement of the ethics clearance process. Although it was this imperative that drove me to experiment with a three-voiced structure, the resonances between the voices set up powerful tensions within the text, adding their own momentum. At the exact moment a museum curator of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, for example, was studying the “Australian aborigine … as a relic of the early childhood of mankind … [who] remained in a low condition of savagery” (see chapter 7), one of the historical Aboriginal figures in the family saga was applying for his first job, turning up for duty at the local police station (see chapter 12) were he was employed for the next 30 years. This juxtaposition between the reality of lived lives and the constructions of Aboriginality emanating from the both academy and from within popular representations powerfully articulate important differences in the location of ‘truths’ without need of further elaboration.

\textsuperscript{11} Griffiths (2003):15, citing Lopez, B. fn 5
As the project shifted beyond the boundaries of the original proposal (chapters 2, 5), I saw the importance of re-examining the epistemologies driving understandings of objects as carriers of meaning. This meta-narrative forms the third voice of the thesis and offers an analytical examination of the ideas underpinning the original research questions. In dismantling the conceptual and historical elements out of which a museum is constructed my intention is to examine how the processes which have constituted the museum might be re-configured to accommodate the particularities of Aboriginal social history. This third voice arrives at a series of recommendations to the NMA (separate from this project) suggesting ways in which the process of creating Aboriginal social history narratives, both for exhibition and within the National Historical Collection, might be approached. All three of these voices sit in both juxtaposition and conversation with each other, until they come together as one in the conclusion (chapter 14).

***

Forty years on from my childhood brush with Lionel Rose’s fame, I am now able to view his silk shorts on display at the National Museum of Australia and remember how real the fiction of my Aboriginal-less childhood felt. The dismantling of that fiction allows all of us access to a much richer engagement with the past and a more critical engagement with the present than I could have hoped for then. The ordinary history of ordinary Aboriginal people is indeed full of robust and sustaining preoccupations and pleasures. These ordinary stories are a necessary part of Australian history making and are the means by which we can navigate away from the partial stories which prohibit us from reflecting on and understanding our shared experience.
2. All roads lead to home

It is Easter 2006 and the queue from the bakery stretches out through the sliding doors onto the footpath, swollen by the cold and hungry Four Winds Festival crowd. Bermagui is used to hosting the three day classical music event and the coffee shops and restaurants are doing their expected roaring trade. A cold turn and a sprinkling of rain however has sent a surprising surge into the bakery looking for hot pies and sausage rolls. I notice two Koori lads a couple of spots ahead of me in the queue, impatient with the blow-ins prevaricating over the steak and onion or cheese and bacon. When their turn comes they load up with sliced bread and push their way back out to the street. A moment later I see them heading out of town in the direction of Wallaga Lake. I had heard on the grapevine that a bloke from the mission had died in hospital a few days ago under difficult circumstances. My guess is the funeral is today.

Back at the Festival site the program is beginning. A welcome to country is offered by the Gulaga Dancers, who I suspect are young relatives of the lads in the bakery. They perform the ‘brolga’ dance from their repertoire, smeared with pipeclay and dressed in red loin cloths. The audience cheers and claps. The dancers exit and another Aboriginal man enters. He takes a seat centre stage and sounds a deep resonant note on the didgeridu or yirdaki. It is the first moment of composer Peter Sculthorpe’s ‘Quamby’. The MC speaks over the music from off stage, telling us that ‘Quamby’ was written by Sculthorpe in 2003 as a response to a tragic 19th century story from Tasmania, told to him by his father as a child. Local legend has it that Quamby Bluff, a mountain close to the young Sculthorpe’s family home, was the scene of a massacre when white settlers forced an entire local tribe over a cliff, plummeting to their deaths. One of the tribe members is supposed to have shouted “Quamby!” (save me!) before jumping. As the Four Winds Quartet takes up the opening bars, the clouds clear and the sun sparkles on the golden Bermagui sands. The audience applauds enthusiastically at the end of the piece and immediately breaks into chattering groups, moving up the hill towards the festival ‘market place’ where local wines and kangaroo sausages are available for lunch.
I try to enjoy the performance but the Koori lads in the bakery haunt me. The sepia tones of the Quamby story jar with my experience of the community just over the ridge. Perhaps for many of the audience it is their first encounter with stories of frontier massacres. For me, today, it provides a discordant accompaniment to the funeral of the young man I am aware of being held up the road, so close that if the audience fell silent they could hear the chatter of the women as they turn the loaves of bread into curried egg sandwiches for the morning tea that will follow the service. Perhaps that would serve as a more suitable welcome to country than the ‘brolga’ dance.

This particular Easter marks my second year of field work here and I now know that that’s the kind of place the far south coast of NSW is; full of oppositions and contradictions, tensions and competitions. And it is for exactly those reasons that I chose it as the location for this study: its combination of circumstances – the history of settlement, the still fairly sizeable Aboriginal population, and the proximity to major cities – offers a focus for examining issues around Indigenous material culture with particular concern for the problems faced by Aboriginal people in heavily colonised parts of Australia.

Living within driving distance of two major east coast cities, the traditional country of the Aboriginal people here encompasses large areas of national park and extends across some of the most scenic and popular tourist destinations in south-eastern Australia. Not surprisingly, it is the needs of holiday-makers that invade the towns and villages of the south coast for weekends and school holidays that dominate the local culture. Luxury gift shops, cafes and wine bars line the shopping precincts of Batemans Bay, Eden, Merimbula and Bermagui, while art galleries and Devonshire tea houses dot the highways and back-roads. Within this seaside playground, although hidden in bushland, sit the old Aboriginal mission sites of Wallaga Lake just west of Bermagui, Lake Tyers, over the Victorian border to the south and Wreck Bay on the most northern fringe. All are now fully owned Aboriginal Land Co-operatives. The more than 1400 Aboriginal people spread across the Bega Valley and Eurobodalla shires can mostly trace their history to these old mission sites.12

12 Bega Valley Shire Council (2001)
Not that their history began with missions. The Aboriginal people of the south coast have as deep and complicated a pre-colonial history as any other Indigenous people in Australia. Their proximity to the colony of Port Jackson left them vulnerable to early invasion and by 1829 the first of the British squatters had come looking for pastures, returning with their cattle and sheep in 1832. Within a year the three Scottish Imlay brothers, George, Peter and Alexander, had laid claim to a massive 65,000 acres, founding the first permanent white settlement of the Biggah (Bega) region. By 1855 Eden and Merimbula both boasted ports and over the next ten years the town of Bega flourished as the main service centre for the coast: hotels were built, churches erected, post offices established, court houses founded and even a newspaper, the *Southern Standard*, had set up operation.\(^\text{13}\)

As early as the 1840s many Aboriginal people from south-east NSW were looking for work with the new settlers, primarily as sheep washers or agricultural labourers. The whaling industry based in Eden in particular depended heavily on the local Aboriginal community for its seasonal workforce. As new laws allowing for the break-up of large squatting runs in favour of smaller holdings of free selectors were passed, sheep farms gave way to dairying, requiring extensive land clearing and allowing for a larger population.\(^\text{14}\) With their resources severely contracted, Aboriginal people were forced onto the fringes of towns or onto the reserves at Wallaga Lake and Lake Tyers. By the 1860s the pre-colonial economy of Aboriginal people on the far south coast had been effectively dismantled.

The NSW Aborigines Protection Board, established in 1883, took control of the 152 hectare reserve at Wallaga Lake in 1891, staffing it with white managers and imposing a strict regime. Visitors were not encouraged, food was rationed and permission to leave the site could only be granted by the mission manager. Although these conditions were not uncommon for many Aboriginal people across the south east of the country during this era, Wallaga Lake was the most extreme within this region. Wesson notes however that Aboriginal experience during these years in Eden-Monaro was not uniform.

\(^\text{13}\) Gaha and Hearn (1994) cited by McKenna (2002):163-167  
\(^\text{14}\) Ibid
In Gippsland, for example, missions and informal camps were the usual places of abode, whereas on the far south coast there was only one mission and both formal camps were important. On the Monaro there were no staffed mission stations: at Delegate a reserve was gazetted in 1892, but with little assistance from government, most of the twenty or thirty Aboriginal people who lived there had moved to Wallaga Lake by the 1920s.  

Despite the imposed limitations to their lifestyle and associations, Aboriginal people adapted to this state intimidation with resourcefulness, developing a parallel and mutually exclusive sphere of operation. While the government was herding people onto missions, away from the prying eyes of the managers, those same missions were becoming new repositories of culture and

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Figure 4. *Aborigines at Wallaga Lake Station* circa 1898 by William Corkhill

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15 Cited by McKenna (2002):164
community.\textsuperscript{16} When they did venture beyond the tight-knit cohort of family and friends, the Yuin people of the coast were derided by the white public for displays of their culture, criticised variously for being too native or for not being native enough. The anthropologist Alfred Howitt, for example, had to abandon his plans in 1883 to “witness a ‘grand corroboree’ when a group of ‘larrikins’ from Bega harassed the ‘Aborigines’ and mocked their rituals”, despite people having walked from up and down the coast to attend.\textsuperscript{17} Seventeen years later, describing a corroboree that took place at Wallaga Lake in 1900, one journalist complained “that the ‘Aborigines’ had not paid enough attention to ‘dressing’, unlike the corroborees of ‘the old tribal days.”\textsuperscript{18}

This history resonates deeply and directly with the current experience of south coast people as they struggle to find representation of their own culture within the wider society, despite the fact that the area still has a cohesive population of families who consider themselves to be living in ancestral country. Issues of authenticity and public conceptions of identity are deeply rooted in the history of occupation for this community. Here visibility plays out in the shadow of long-held notions of cultural purity which echo through contemporary discourse with surprising potency, turning up as complicating mechanisms in a range of locations. The most visible of these currently is the fine art market where ‘authenticity’, or in the parlance of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, ‘nativeness’, and ‘value’ are inextricably linked. The new French ethnographic museum, the Musee du Quai Branly, opened in June 2006, offered an example of this when it commissioned works from several Aboriginal artists from the central desert and the northern tropical regions of Australia to be incorporated into the museum building. At the time of the commission, the Museum’s managing director Stephane Martin noted that the Aboriginal art chosen for such honour was both “ageless and contemporary.” He was supported by the leading Parisian Aboriginal art dealer Stephane Jacob, who confirmed that Aboriginal art is in a “vibrant phase.” “Arnhem Land communities are still very remote” he is reported as saying. “They still have ceremonies, do walkabout, have initiations, speak language. I think it is a strong culture.”\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Read (1988)
\item \textsuperscript{17} McKenna (2002):115
\item \textsuperscript{18} McKenna (2002):164
\item \textsuperscript{19} Button (2005):19
\end{itemize}
These comments illustrate the way in which complex cultural discourses are reduced and reiterated in the wider community to become the prevailing orthodoxy. In this formulation Indigenous communities which still have ceremonies, do walkabout, have initiations and speak language have a strong culture. Conversely, where those signifiers are not present there is not a strong culture, or so the logic would have it. Here ‘remote’ stands in for ‘authentic’, terms often used interchangeably, both of which fix authorised forms of Aboriginality within an imagined pre-colonial moment. The forms that diverge from it, and the living Aboriginal people associated with those forms, are but “diminished and impoverished versions.”

This commentary is constantly repeated through a range of social discourses, where such binary thinking serves a political end. According to anthropologist Melinda Hinkson, living Aboriginal people and the challenges they pose to settler colonial society have been cut loose from the “dominant representations of Aboriginality that are prevalent because images of exotic and ancient cultural richness are extremely useful in the workings of nation-states; unresolved political contests are not.” Political contests however, according to senior Indigenous curator Margo Neale, are at the heart of all modern Aboriginal histories and are just as central to desert and top end people as they are to south-east Kooris. While recognition and inclusion of Australian Aboriginal art in a major French collection is to be celebrated, it cannot stand in for resolution of political complexity; neither can it represent the diverse cultural practices of Aboriginal people more widely, where identity and meaning are constructed outside this binary ‘authentic/inauthentic’ framework.

Unconcerned by the political nuances of representation, the Kari Yalla Aboriginal Artists’ Cooperative in Eden is determined to ride the wave of popularity enjoyed by the Aboriginal art movement. Formed by renowned local Koori artist Cheryl Davison in 2004 the group exhibits at regional festivals and in town halls and community centres in the area. Despite Cheryl’s encouragement to draw on their own culture for inspiration, a few of the painters, finely tuned to the expectations of the tourist market, specialise in desert style dot painting techniques,

21 Hinkson (2002):63
22 Personal communication during NMA staff meeting, April 12, 2005
producing works entitled ‘Waterhole’, ‘Meeting Place’ and the like. Invariably they sell like hot cakes. The holiday-makers at the coast know what they are looking for in their Aboriginal art and the popularity of these works confirms to the Kari Yalla mob that they have not misread the market. That these artists are Aboriginal gives them an authority to produce the type of art they do within the local tourist economy, but the reason for their success in this environment is also the reason that they are excluded from representation in the lucrative fine art scene, where markers of authenticity are much more complex. For the tourist market, the gesture that renders a work recognizable as Aboriginal can be reduced to a homogenized shorthand. Dots and waterholes, x-rayed animals and bark are the current signifiers of Aboriginality that have taken up where decorated boomerangs as tourist art left off (although there is usually a rack of those as well).

Further along the spectrum however the criteria of authenticity is, according to Arjun Appadurai, complicated as a “way to preserve the function of these commodities in the prestige economics of the modern West.”23 He proposes that “[t]he very complicated competition and collaboration between ‘experts’ from the art world, dealers, producers, scholars and consumers is part of the political economy of taste.”24 Here the complicating criteria are much more sophisticated, with notions of ‘country’ and lineage that the south coast mob have no claim to precisely because of the historical circumstances of their colonisation, being used to create kudos and therefore value. Along the same lines, Bourdieu’s understanding of consumption stresses the hierarchical character of modern society and the centrality of consumption practices upon which the hierarchy is based. He sees material possessions as representing the individual’s possession of symbolic and cultural capital and the way in which taste can be displayed.25 Clearly the market’s continuing infatuation with Aboriginal art plays into extremely sophisticated displays of taste and wealth, with its inference of ‘ancient’ spirituality and esoteric understandings of place.

Meanwhile, the struggle that Aboriginal people from this area have to find representation of their presence let alone their culture outside of their own community is constantly articulated through

23 Appadurai (1986):44-45
24 Ibid
25 Ibid
absence of inclusion. Commemorative murals made in 1997 in Eden for example, show Aborigines with spears and headbands occupying a pre-contact world with pilot whales. They migrate into the early whaling industry but once the timber milling arrives the Aborigines disappear.

Figure 5. Eden mosaics, February 2006

Further up the road, but still in the same land council district, Mark McKenna notes that the 1999 commemorative publication, *Cooma 150 years on*, dealt similarly with the issue, where “Aboriginal people are given two pages under the heading *Early Days of Cooma and Monaro*, then they disappear from the story”, presumed dead.26 As I was soon to discover, this community was lots of things, but dead was not one of them.

26 McKenna (2002):257, fn5
At Home Party

I took my hands out of the perfumed blue foam to inspect my nails, following the woman’s instructions. Yes my hands were miraculously soft and smooth, ready for an application of moisturizing hand and nail balm. If I turned to page 52 of the catalogue I could find these products listed and if I flipped over, I could see the range of lipsticks she was about to demonstrate.

This Body Shop ‘At Home Party’ was my introduction to some of the women I was hoping would help me in my research. I had been taken to the house in Pambula by Cheryl Davison as a way of meeting several of her workmates/relatives/neighbours (the convoluted kin networks were now so dense I had given up trying to work out the distinctions). We’d been going to pop in for just a moment, but two hours later I was still sitting in Joy’s lounge room surrounded by her mum, sisters, daughters, daughters’ friends, sons’ girlfriends, workmates and neighbours, soaking my hands in the complimentary softening liquid. As the only gubba, I was something of a curiosity. Not one that anybody had to make any serious attempt to talk to, but a curiosity nevertheless.

The house was full of dogs, kids, piles of clothes, men sitting on the bed watching telly (hiding from the women), teenage boys in baseball caps, car parts, BMX bikes, framed photos, mugs of tea at various temperatures and of course the women. And so began the kin talk, the endless kin talk that seemed to precede any occasion I had been at where people from out of town were present.27

Joy’s mum had caught the bus down from Nowra for the party which meant that Cheryl, not having met Joy’s mum before, was required to launch the protocol. So Aunt, where you from? Within a few sentences, a relationship through the marriage of an uncle on Cheryl’s side to a cousin on Joy’s mum’s side as well as historical connections to Wallaga Lake had been established. That done, but not before everyone in the room (except me) had added their bit, the finger soaking could begin.

27 I have borrowed the evocative term ‘kin talk’ from Somerville and Cohen (1990):xiv
I had been regularly visiting Cheryl and her family in Eden for a year or so, doing the rounds of exhibitions and town hall art fairs to photograph the Kari Yalla paintings and generally make myself known. Having positioned my research to “consider problems faced by Indigenous collectors in heavily colonised parts of Australia, whose beloved possessions may be popularly defined as less authentic or valuable” this community offered the perfect location. Furthermore, given that these artists are producing the next generation of artefacts, they were potentially a group of people who would be interested in objects, museums, stories and history. With all this in mind I set out to get to know them and I began by following Cheryl around, ‘developing relationships’. By the time they had tasted my cooking, seen my photos, borrowed 50 bucks, fed me, spooked me with dooligah stories, given me a bed for the night (more than once) and speculated about my private life amongst themselves I was ready to start asking them about their objects. I was of course aware that questions about personal objects could be considered extremely nosey and that people would need time to get to know me before fully engaging with the project: my presence at the At Home Party was part of this strategy. I was sure that stuff from the old days would soon be pulled out of the cupboard; the memorabilia from grandparents, political struggles, mission life, sporting events, whatever, would be revealed and I would photograph them and their collectors and my research would have begun in earnest.

Three months, four months, five months passed. No objects, no collections, no interest. I had met maybe six or seven different families by now and had been on numerous abalone diving picnics, lomandra grass picking expeditions and to multiple exhibition openings, as well as the odd social event such as the Body Shop party, community festival day and children’s birthdays. But nothing was gelling. Finally I realised I was working with the wrong generation. The people my age were too busy raising their children and making a living to care about history, objects, culture, identity, or whatever it was I thought I was researching, right at this moment. But I was assured that the old people were avid history keepers and that they would be more than willing to help me with my enquiries. The next step was clear: I needed to meet Cheryl’s mum, Deanna.
Connecting with Deanna demanded a change in location. As one of the Elders in the Ngarigo traditional owners group, she was a member of the joint management committee for Kosciusko National Park and as such was often in the Snowy Mountains on official business. An opening of a Kari Yalla exhibition at the Perisher Blue ski resort near Jindabyne, for which she was to give the welcome to country, provided an occasion for us to meet.

The golden sands of Bermagui and Merimbula gave way to the Monaro plains as I began the drive across the stretch of undulating terrain that flattens the high country between Canberra and Adaminaby. Lying in a rain shadow caused by the Snowy Mountains to the west and the Coastal Range to the east, the dry open grasslands rippled with stands of *bigeniculata* driven flat by the

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28 Horton (2000)
chill winter wind. Basalt flows from the more than 65 ancient volcanic eruption sites across the region filled the bedrock contours five billion years ago. It is mostly eroded now. Only the harder core rock remains, outcrops left perching on the surface of the sheep-chewed paddocks – lichen covered balls that wait out geological eras as they wait out the passing cars; freezing, baking, cracking, shedding. Little brown hawks wheeling above the road kill sat in the currents as I drove by. Cheryl had told me during one of my visits that they are her totem and I was reminded that I was in her country, her mother’s country, as I watched them hover and dive onto the wallaby gizzards smeared across the tarmac, retreating into the distance in my rear view mirror.

I stopped for petrol at Cooma, stung by the sleety wind as I stood at the bowser. The horizon had turned from open plains to snowy peaks and the threat of snowfall was building in the green storm clouds. I had just driven the northern leg of the Monaro Highway, the central artery of Monaro or Monaroo country, named for its gentle curves with a word in local language meaning a woman’s breasts. At least that is what Currie, Ovens and Wild were told by their Aboriginal guides during a night of fire-lit boys’ talk in 1823. The road swings between the treeless bends in graceful asphalt arcs, following pathways that archaeologists claim were walked by the first human inhabitants of the area sometime before the last ice age.\(^{29}\) Maintained by fire and sung into memory maps, these tracks carried warriors, diplomatic missions, climate refugees, young initiates and wedding parties to the high country festival grounds. They came from the coast on the east, from modern day Albury to the south-west and from as far north as the Southern Highlands. By the time Europeans arrived looking for grass for their stock, the paths that thread in, out and around this country had been trodden by well over 800 generations of Aboriginal people.

The first thing I asked Deanna, after we’d found seats by the fire in the Jindabyne resort lounge, was to explain her complex connection to both the mountains and the coast. I knew from Cheryl that she has deep history with Wallaga Lake, Nowra, Wreck Bay, La Perouse, but I also knew she identifies as a Ngarigo woman, a traditional owner of the Snowy Mountains and surrounding

\(^{29}\) Kabaila (2005):127
country including the Monaro plains. Settled into our arm chairs with a view out into the blizzard where we could see her granddaughters throwing snowballs, she began…

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Deanna’s father’s people are Yuin, coast people, with a known lineage that stretches back to named individuals in the earliest written records of the colonial era and an unrecorded one (at least in writing) that goes untold generations before that. It is a venerable ancestry and it is through that side of the family that she is now on the Register of Traditional Owners of Gulaga and Mumbulla National Parks and a member of the management committee for both. She and her husband Jimmy raised their family on Wallaga Lake Mission, in the days when there was still a manager, before moving to Nowra to improve the educational opportunities for their kids.

It is from her mother’s side that she draws her Ngarigo identity and she is careful to begin that part of the story by reciting her lineage through her maternal grandfather. He lived at the Delegate Reserve and worked for the Cooma police, name of Alex Brindle. He was a high plains blacktracker in rocky, snow country, and highly regarded in the local community. His wife died young leaving him with two little daughters. He was willing and able to raise them but the welfare came and took them to Cootamundra Girls Home anyway. Trained as domestic servants and sent to other places, the girls never found their way back home. One of the girls was Deanna’s mother.

As she gives this brief synopsis, I wonder why none of the Ngarigo mob live in the mountains today. Geographer and historian Sue Wesson claims that “as early as the 1870s Aboriginal people on the Monaro and the south coast thought of themselves as one people. Their way of describing their relationship with one another left little doubt – ‘we are all one’.” But Deanna disputes this. It is true that the Delegate Reserve south-west of Bombala where they had been living had closed down by the late 1920s and it is true that most of that mountain mob moved to the south coast. Nowadays those people who identify as Ngarigo are primarily found scattered from Jervis Bay to Lake Tyers, including almost all of Deanna’s nine kids and their families. But Deanna insists that they are not ‘all one’ and that not all the Delegate families shared the exact

30 Wesson (2002):254-6
same history. Her grandfather for example did not move to the coast when the reserve closed but rather stayed in the mountains continuing his work as a blacktracker for the NSW Police Force, along with his colleague, friend and brother-in-law Billy Rutherford, up until the 1940s. His first wife was a woman from the Delegate Reserve (Billy’s sister, Daisy), his second a woman from Cooma. After he left the police force he moved to Liverpool in Sydney, not to the coast, and it was from there that he travelled into Redfern on the train to visit his daughter Iris and his granddaughter, the young Deanna. Sadly the last of the people to live at the Delegate Reserve, Uncle Arthur McLeod, died a couple of years ago and with him went the living memories of those times. His children, now middle-aged adults, are still alive, and although they’re interested in their inheritance, their direct experience of it is limited to day trips and weekend visits for meetings, as it is for all of the descendants of the Ngarigo mob.

I listen to this story and try to understand how it will tie into my research. Whether there are material traces ‘treasured and preserved’ that link this past to the present I don’t know. What I can see is that these stories, these people, are central to Deanna’s expression of her Ngarigo identity yet they are not mentioned in local histories or known beyond the family. The hazy conflated past overwritten with a heroic history of horses and cattle and rustic mountain huts pays little attention to the Ngarigo men and women who lived alongside the high country pioneers. “More often than not,” historian Keith Hancock noted, “the white man did not trouble to give his black guide a name, or, at any rate, to record it; thus we read of ‘the native who was with us’, or ‘my blackfellow’, or ‘my tamed black’.” Overwhelmingly the documents, including 20th century local histories, fuse the complex seasonal activities of the Ngarigo, both sacred and secular, into either roaming or hunting and reduce their presence to a collective noun, ‘the Aborigines’, or more commonly ‘the blacks’. It is as if the dense mist that rolls in across the Perisher valley as the day lengthens outside the windows of the resort is as heavy as the mist that shrouds the Aboriginal past of the Snowy Mountains; the black ahistorical mist into which the Ngarigo were so thoroughly absorbed.

31 Hancock (1972):69-70
Despite its density, this black mist is not entirely impenetrable. A name, a place, a date cuts through it and an historical character emerges into the light. Over the years I had heard Deanna speculate about the origins of the name ‘Brindle’ and I had heard rumour that an old lady in the Genoa River district had some information. Then, unexpectedly, Iris, Deanna’s eldest daughter, rang me on my mobile late one afternoon. She had something important she needed to discuss, some information that she’d just been able to authenticate about her family history. I pulled my car over to the side of the road scribbled down notes as she told me the story.

\textit{Nungatta station was owned by a man named Alexander Weatherhead. He had sons, not sure how many but more than one. It was reported to him that his sons were having relations with the local Aboriginal women. He told them that he did not care what they did with the women but if there was a child it would not take their family name but that he would name it. In time there was a child and he named it Brindle. This was a reference to the cattle that he bred – the first of the cross breeds being known as a brindle.}

\textit{Iris was with the Water Catchment Authority people doing a tour of Nungatta station. She met the owner of the station and said to him “my family has some history on this place.” When she told him the story he was amazed. He went off and came back with an old map of the holdings. It was a big station, still is. He pointed to the map – Brindle’s paddock.}

\textit{When they were out on the property later that day he stopped and said to the group that Iris had told him a story about her family and asked her if he might share it, then told the story and finished by saying “We’re now standing in Brindle’s paddock.”}

This tiny scrap of information is hardly an in-depth biography, yet it is enough to pierce the membrane around the excluded historical narratives. As this knowledge reverberates through our research, it begins a process of remembering, and brings into focus the first historical character

\textsuperscript{32} Egloff, Peterson et al. (2005):45
\textsuperscript{33} Verbatim from notes, August 19, 2008
with whom we can begin the tale: a woman, a Ngarigo woman, standing in the soon-to-be Brindle’s paddock, nurses a young boy on her hip as she holds the stare of the child’s paternal Grandfather, the cattle breeder whose name her baby son will not share.

Figure 8. Nungatta station map showing Brindle’s paddock
Map courtesy of Jim Osborne
3. Grandmother Dreaming

Contact

Family history and lineage are important to the contemporary Davison family, but what is held in oral history does not extend past living memory, that is both the direct memories Deanna has of her own life, including of her mother and grandfather, as well as the memories of her mother’s early years as told to her. There is no way of knowing for example what the exact first moment of contact was between Deanna’s ancestors and the colonial invaders: no records were made by either participant and no oral history remains extant. There is however no advantage in assuming that moment as a beginning, a ‘zero point’ with its inference of a before and after, with which to start the story. Such a point infers that the moment was of such radical and immediate transformation that the Ngarigo were somehow no longer themselves afterwards. Certainly their circumstances began to change at that moment, but those changes were played out in complex interactions that lead to adaptation as much as revolution. For the Ngarigo, the invasion of their lands was a problem they had to deal with, not a moment that constituted the beginning of a newly forged identity.

Within that broad circumstance of transition, we know that a Ngarigo girl grew up to have a child to a white man, a child who would be known as James Brindle and from whom the contemporary Davison and Brindle families descend. This girl was most likely born sometime in the late 1830s, around the time that Captain Mark John Currie, Brigade Major John Ovens, Joseph Wild and their Aboriginal guide rode south of present day Canberra to record their reconnaissance of the Ngarigo homelands. Captain Currie, in common with many other European travellers, claims to have been the “first white man the natives had seen”, although historians argue that this is most unlikely. 34 It was, by 1823, thirty-five years since the arrival of the first fleet, an entire generation, and the Ngarigo interacted with tribal groups to the north as far as Braidwood and Queanbeyan, and east to the coast from Shoalhaven to Twofold Bay and

34 Young and NSW Dept. of Environment and Conservation (2005):89
probably beyond. The coastal people had at the very least encountered whalers and sealers, often in violent clashes, events that would have been reported to their mountain cousins in detail, if not witnessed first hand. Travelling to the coast was after all an annual culinary expedition for the Ngarigo, the flowering of a particular wattle indicating that the season had arrived for a salt-water trip to harvest beached whale around Twofold Bay and other calving bays.  

Nevertheless, Currie was keen to declare himself the first and keen to make a lasting impression. Naming the country through which he travelled was one way of memorializing the adventure. On 4 June he noted:

Passed through a chain of clear downs to some very extensive ones where we met a tribe of natives… From these natives we learned that the clear country before us was called Monaroo, which they described as very extensive…

Once introduced into the English lexicon the word ‘Monaro’ remained, although its meaning, much like its spelling, has been in dispute almost ever since. Known variously across the next century and a half as Monaroo, Monera, Maneiro, Meneiro, Meneru, Miniera, Monera, the name survived Currie’s suggested but lack lustre and obsequious alternative of ‘Brisbane Downs’, “after (and subsequently by permission of) his Excellency the Governor.” Hancock doubts that “the white men correctly understood the aborigines who told them, so they thought, that Monaroo signified a woman’s breasts, gently rounded, like the undulating downs that so delighted Currie.” Linguists agree. Aboriginal systems of nomenclature in this region do not as a rule use proper nouns to describe large areas. Names are associated with specific sites, a fact which often infuriated early surveyors whose Aboriginal informants insisted on naming every bend in every creek in minute detail. As one early linguist wrote “Not a point or inlet, knoll or dell, glade or thicket, rock or rivulet, but was designated in the language, and faithfully delineated in the memory of the ancient inhabitants.” According to linguist Harold Koch, body parts are known to play a large role in Aboriginal place naming strategies and remnant wordlists

35 Wesson (1994):15  
36 Field (1825)  
37 Discourse on the Origin of the name Monaro, Cooma-Monaro Express, 23 December Cooma-Monaro Express (1968); Field (1825)  
38 Hancock (1972):6  
39 McKenzie Specimens of native Australian languages, 1874 cited by Wesson (1994):15
suggest this is so for the Ngarigo. From this point of view Currie’s reporting of his informants’ naming association with a woman’s breasts is more likely than Hancock gives him credit for. The word for ‘breast’ (or ‘milk’) however, recorded in wordlists from the Gungawal, Dharrawal and Dhurraga languages, all bordering on and related to Ngarigo, is ngaminyang a long way from Currie’s monaroo. The Goulburn grazier and close observer of Aboriginal life, E M Curr, offers an explanation for Currie’s expedient conclusion:

In connection with this name, Manera Plains, one suspects it at once, because though the tribes have names for every remarkable spot in their territories, they have seldom collective names for large areas. What seems probable is, that the Englishman who first saw the plains had a Sydney Black in his party, who on being asked their name replied manyer, or I don’t know.

Whatever the truth about the name of the area, as a pre-invaded world it would have been a place of certainty for the young girl and her parents. As part of a tight network that occupied an ancestral territory, they would have moved around both the higher and lower mountain country on a seasonal basis, with occasional travel to today’s Bega, Bateman’s Bay and Canberra regions for ceremonial and social occasions. Archaeologists have offered various theories on the patterns of occupation that they would have followed: one school proposes that they exploited resources seasonally, with the people retracting to lower, comparatively frost-free valleys during winter and moving back into higher altitudes during the Bogong moth migration in summer. Other theories suggest that higher occupation sites, providing permanent water and a variety of readily accessible food and industrial raw materials without any inherent seasonal stress, would be occupied year round. No matter what the patterns of occupation and the activities of daily life were in 1823, Ngarigo routines were about to change.

The naming and reporting of the region by Currie on his return to town, although both unknown and irrelevant to Ngarigo at this time, began the cascade of events that would lead to massive


40 Personal communication with Dr Harold Koch, School of Language Studies, ANU, 18 July 2006. See also Koch and Hercus (2009)
41 Curr (1886):xvii
42 See for example Flood (1980)
43 See for example Chapman (1977)
changes on the Monaro. As news of the potential grazing lands circulated in the colony, those on the look-out for opportunities turned southward and just three years after Currie’s mission, the first wave of occupiers gathered their stock and followed his map. The earliest of them was Captain Richard Brooks in 1827 who, with his son, herded a mob of cattle south and reached what was afterwards known as Cootralantra Lake, “where consequent upon the blacks proving hostile, he lost his cattle which he later found on ‘Gejizrick Flat’.

The rich pastures the cattle had found for themselves decided Brooks to settle where he landed and the first of the great Monaro stations was founded.

Figure 9. Map shewing the Routes of Cpt. Currie
Nla.map-nk 3274-v

44 Mitchell (1926)
We don’t know if the family of the young girl interacted directly with these trespassers but rumors of them and their grass-eating creatures would have circulated through their world. Adults would have discussed the invaders and devised strategies for dealing with them; perhaps they saw the truth of the emerging future and tried to imagine a world where the usurpers came to dominate or perhaps they were still intent only on how to get rid of them. The Ngarigo’s resistance to Brooks’ incursion, for example, was strong. Although he erected a homestead of timber slabs with a thatched roof in the bush “the blacks, proving still unfriendly, caused him a few years later to erect in the open another house.” Eventually some sort of truce was reached when Brooks persuaded one of the Ngarigo men to stop the others from spearing his cattle, in return for an annual ‘gift’ of a bullock. “This they roasted whole and had a great feast near the homestead.”

If Brooks was the harbinger of a new world order in the north of the Ngarigo lands, the enterprising Imlay brothers were his counterpart to the west, holding one million acres only a decade after their arrival on the Monaro in 1832, and Robert Campbell in the south taking up Delegate Station, around which the town of Delegate eventually grew. This station began as an outstation to the property ‘Duntroon’, established three years before on the Limestone Plains north of the Monaro. In the seven years from its establishment in 1827 to John Lhotsky’s reporting of it in 1834, Delegate Station had grown to a run of an astounding 22,000 sheep. If the Ngarigo still had any thoughts of evicting the trespassers, the proliferation of foreign animals soon demonstrated the scale of what they were up against. It was not just the number that was changing the landscape, overwhelming as it was; the way in which these animals consumed the pasture had an instant and almost irreversible effect. As Hancock explained,

    marsupials, having no hooves, tread delicately; but sheep tread firmly and cattle stamp hard: marsupials graze lightly; but drought afflicted sheep will eat the grass to its roots

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45 It is this scenario of encounter which Robert Kenny approaches in detail in The Lamb Enters the Dreaming: see Kenny (2007)
46 Mitchell (1926)
48 McKenna (2002):50
49 Lhotsky and Andrews (1979):70, 105
50 Andrews (1998):103
and then pull up the roots and lick up the seed… In the Monaro as elsewhere, [the squatters] made one blade of grass grow where two had grown before.\textsuperscript{51}

With 22,000 sheep on just one station, and one hundred and thirty-one stations named in the list of squatting runs on the Monaro in the 1830s, all of them running sheep or cattle or both, life on the Ngarigo homelands was profoundly altered.

By the end of the 1830s the region was already being described as crowded.\textsuperscript{52} The ruin of the pasture was fast. With little knowledge of the environment they now occupied, the squatters overstocked the land and within just a couple of decades had fouled the waterways, destroyed the thin top soil and decimated vast areas of native animal habitat. As early as 1848 Henry Haygarth was writing with nostalgia for an era that had already passed:

… to the lover of the picturesque perhaps this is the most beautiful scene that Australia can afford… Plains and ‘open forest’, untrodden by the foot of the white man, and, as far as the eye can reach, covered with grass so luxuriant that it brushes the horseman in his saddle; flocks of kangaroos quietly grazing,… emu crossing and recrossing his route; the quail rising at every step; lagoons literally swarming with wild fowl – these scenes are reserved for the eye of the enterprising settler…

Then mark the change that follows hard upon discovery. Intelligence of the new country reaches the settled districts, and countless flocks and herds are poured into the land of promise. It is divided into stations, and ‘improvements’ are everywhere erected on it… the wild blacks, indignant at the cool occupation of their territory, spear the cattle, and the settlers retaliate. The governor establishes a ‘protector of aborigines’, who perhaps has most need of protection himself.\textsuperscript{53}

Haygarth’s work has been cited as the first environmental history of the Monaro and is often used by environmental lobby groups (or nature conservationists as Hancock calls them) to map the beginning of the fall. But Haygarth’s eulogy tells more than the story of a lost paradise on the Monaro; it charts the deep collision of cultures that underwrote the occupation. The replacement

\textsuperscript{51} Hancock (1972):64-5
\textsuperscript{52} McKenna (2002):50
\textsuperscript{53} Haygarth (1850) cited by Hancock (1972):60
of Ngarigo open-range farming of native fauna with ‘stations’ or ‘runs’ stocked with hoofed herds was the outcome of what he termed the ‘cool occupation’. The temperature of this theft, in Haygarth’s view, marks its true nature: no hot headed impulse but a cold calculation, underpinned by an imposition of governance, as he goes on to tell us, which moved the Ngarigo from self-governance to subjection without consultation.

This shrewd appraisal of the forces at work on the Monaro was directed at the most senior colonial administrator of the district, Crown Lands Commissioner, Magistrate, property owner and Protector of Aborigines, John Lambie. Lambie made no secret of the fact that his sympathies lay both professionally and personally with the European population. His annual reports to the Colonial Secretary document his increasing frustration with the ‘natives’ whose conduct displayed what he saw as an incomprehensible (and ungrateful) lack of enthusiasm for the new regime, for example:

[they] continue to roam from one station to another… and are generally supplied with food for the time by the Settlers near whose Establishments they encamp, and by whom they are occasionally employed in odd jobs but which are performed in the usual listless and indolent way.\(^{54}\)

Lambie’s admission to the Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines in 1845 that the Ngarigo people’s “ordinary means of subsistence had diminished, inasmuch as the kangaroos retire as soon as the land is stocked” displays his talent for obfuscation. Hancock insists that Lambie was both perceptive and compassionate in dealing with the Europeans as the local Magistrate, but given his power as the most senior (in fact only) government representative in the district and his role as Protector of Aborigines, his overall lack of affection for and disinterest in the Ngarigo contributed significantly to their fortunes during this early period.

It was left to the astute and sympathetic Czechoslovakian medical doctor, John Lhotsky, to offer a glimpse into the Ngarigo domestic world as he paused at the northern edge of the Monaro in 1834:

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\(^{54}\) Lambie (1850)
their camp… presented in the delightful evening a tolerably good appearance. The men and women (some of the latter were out hunting) were sitting under their Gunyas, either without any particular occupation, or preparing Opossum skins for cloaks, making nets of currigiong etc. Upon a fine round Plain the male youths were playing with a ball made of wool, which they threw to a great height, catching it with much dexterity. It was very interesting to see these fine, naked, athletic bodies in such a gymnastic exercise; they were almost all muscular and smart people…

This description of a relaxed evening in a Ngarigo home gives a rare insight into their private lives: the scene that Lhotsky paints of boys playing footy while adults do a few odd jobs around the house, offers a depiction of life on a scale that was not commonly reported. The interior world of the Ngarigo was of little interest to the early invaders, and by the time ethnographic curiosity dawned towards the end of the 19th century, they were considered too culturally contaminated to be paid much attention beyond salvaging what little knowledge remained from among the ‘dying race’. The ‘social enjoyments’ that Lhotsky observed, although not unchanging, were retreating from view, presumed by those witnessing the retreat as being extinguished.

**Marriage and family life**

If the story of a young woman and her mixed heritage child allows a window into the larger story of invasion, it equally opens a view of the story of the entanglements that resulted. The baby James Brindle was after all an expression of the new world that was developing, evidence of a union between the participants in frontier life.

Although we cannot know if James Brindle was the first child of his mother or how old she was at the time of his birth, we can deduce that the young woman was alive and coming to maturity during the first two decades of occupation by the squatters. This brief 20 years was a time of enormous change for the Ngarigo, marked at the start by Richard Brooks’ pioneering invasion in 1826 and capped by Commissioner Lambie’s testimony before the Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines in 1845, in which he acknowledged, somewhat belligerently, the

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55 Lhotsky and Andrews (1979):41
threat occupation had caused to their survival. If foreign grazing animals had mutilated the hunting grounds, the influx of foreign pastoral workers equally altered the tightly woven Ngarigo social structures that controlled kin networks; the making of a marriage relationship would once have been a matter closely controlled by this girl’s parents and adult relatives. Whatever other children this woman had, and it is likely that she had others, James was the first generation of Ngarigo to be conceived within the new society.

The Monaro was never going to be a place for Europeans to make an easy living, despite its promise of endless grazing. The early cattlemen soon found that once the lower pastures were depleted, the country needed for seasonal rotation was rocky, dry, steep and in winter covered in snow. There was no close settlement, no supply of consumer goods, no churches or doctors. It was a hard country to work and not just because of its physical characteristics: when in 1829 Governor Darling proclaimed the boundaries of nineteen counties in which land could be taken up, a proclamation that did not include the Monaro, he defined the limits of the governed world beyond which there could be no formal title. The Surveyor-General’s Department, swamped with demand for land that could be selected, could not keep pace with the spread of settlement and while land remained unsurveyed it remained unavailable for alienation by any legal process. Hence, the Monaro lay beyond the boundaries of formal survey until 1839, and so beyond the limits of the law, quite literally lawless.

Despite the lack of formal governance, assigned convicts poured into the district as the squatters, at least those with access to capital, took up huge acreages and stocked their holdings with herds, creating a pressing need for labour. Convicts were the only choice. By 1828 the colony of NSW had a European population of not quite 37,000 of which nearly half were male convicts. Although transportation would be over by the time James was born in 1856, in 1834 there were still 10,800 assigned convict workers on privately owned properties in NSW, almost 9 out of 10 of the convict population. The colony, staffed almost wholly by convicts as it was for the first 50

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56 See Howitt (1996):197-8: “Their form of marriage is, a father or mother can give a daughter away to; whom they think proper (whether the damsel be willing or not) to a man who has a previous wife, or to one who has none. A brother can give a sister away in like manner. Also see Helms (1895), under ‘Marriage’.  

57 Poiner and Jack (2007)
years, was totally dependent on this source of labour and the Monaro in its early development was no exception. The huts of convict stock-keepers soon dotted the valleys and slopes. With no police, no magistrate, no law-enforcement of any kind many of the worst elements of the new colony washed up on the Monaro. Lhotsky reported his astonishment at the conditions he discovered during his 1834 expedition;

As I was now beyond the limits of the colony, I found myself quite in a new situation, even so far as social life is concerned. I had lived before under absolute monarchies and under commonwealths; here I found myself surrounded by absolute anarchy and lawlessness… fighting and disorder of all kinds is going on, for which there is no redress – no stoppage. … I must here likewise observe, that after leaving Mikelego Plains, we saw no more white females, although we travelled upwards of a hundred miles on stations.\(^{58}\)

With no European women available, it was inevitable that the men would turn to the Ngarigo women sooner or later. Not infrequently Aboriginal women were taken by force, often detained in the huts of their captors by being chained to the furniture. Governor Gipps was so alarmed by reports of this behaviour that in 1837 he was forced to explicitly outlaw it, making clear the link between the mistreatment of Aboriginal women and the escalating violence between the black and white communities. In almost certainly a direct reference to the Monaro, he began the decree with:

… beyond the limits of location, Overseers and other Persons in charge of Cattle and Sheep in those remote Districts, are not unfrequently guilty of detaining by force, in their Huts, and as their companions abroad, black women of the Native Tribes resorting to their neighbourhood, an offence not only in itself of a most heinous and revolting character, but in its consequences leading to bloodshed and murder.\(^{59}\)

Some white Monaro residents felt they had been unfairly singled out for official disapproval and vehemently denied such practices were going on. One anonymous correspondent from ‘Maneroo’ wrote to the *Sydney Herald* claiming:

\(^{58}\) Lhotsky and Andrews (1979):79
\(^{59}\) Gipps (1837):625
… Your strictures on the government Notice disallowing stockmen, hut keepers, and other from DETAINING Aboriginal women in their huts, appear to me to be just – it is a custom in these, and I mistake if it is not so likewise in all other districts, to allow the blacks of both sexes free ingress as well as egress of all huts; but if the Order is meant to convey the meaning that these people are to have every door closed against them, why not express it? I have no hesitation in saying as far as the inhabitants of this district at least, are concerned, that the informants of Government have cast upon them a gross libel, in asserting that some of them have been known to detain Aboriginal females in their huts BY FORCE… ⁶⁰

Neither the Notice or its trenchant denial had much effect. Women continued to be kidnapped and raped and their men continued to retaliate against the captors. Six months after issuing the first edict, following yet another violent incident, Gipps wrote to the Colonial Secretary in exasperation:

[Recently] I detailed to your Lordship the measures which I thought it right to adopt, in consequence of a collision between a party of the Mounted Police and a Tribe of the Native Blacks… Your Lordship is, I am sure, well aware of the extreme difficulty of devising any measure that shall effectually check the outrages, which I regret to state, are now of frequent occurrence beyond the boundaries of Location… I have also deemed it necessary to republish a Notice, which appeared in the Government Gazette on the 16th Septt., 1837, on the subject of forcible retention by white men of women belonging to the Aboriginal Tribes, which there is reason to fear is often the immediate cause of these outrages. ⁶¹

It is clear that the children born to these unions were considered the responsibility of their Aboriginal mothers. Although it was not entirely unknown for European men to form stable relationships with Aboriginal women and care for the children of the union, this was the exception and, according to Lambie, not something that occurred on the Monaro. He informed the Select Committee of 1845 that

⁶⁰ Maneroo, 24 June, Sydney Herald Sydney Herald (1839):3
⁶¹ Watson (1914):vol XIX:659
There are about twelve half-cast children, all living with, and after the manner of aborigines… There is no disposition on the part of the white labouring population to amalgamate with the aborigines, so as to form families.”

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The exact circumstances of James Brindle’s birth and the role his father played in his upbringing are not known but rumour of his genealogy leads to Nungatta Station on the upper Genoa River, owned at the time by squatter Alexander Weatherhead. Weatherhead had arrived from England in 1834 to work on the station ‘Bergalia’ in the Bodalla region but left soon after to take on his own run. When word reached him of the large but failing station higher up the mountains, he packed up his wife and two children and set out for the Monaro to take up the job of Nungatta’s manager. Within two years he owned the property and had turned part of it over to dairying.

On the inland side of the coastal range on the upper reaches of the Genoa River, Nungatta forms the western corner of a triangle of major pastoral stations, with Delegate to the east and Bibbenluke to the north. Between them these three properties and their out-stations ran almost all of the stock in the south-eastern corner of the Monaro during the mid to late 19th century. By the time the Weatherheads took up residency at Nungatta in 1840, the Ngarigo had begun clustering at these stations seeking food and employment, their presence increasing over the following decade as the viability of their resources diminished. Station records show that Aboriginal people moved between the large runs, looking to supplement their food supplies with station rations and take advantage of seasonal work opportunities. Travelling between locations within their country for cyclic exploitation of resources had always been part of Ngarigo life, one of the characteristics that so frustrated Commissioner Lambie. As Crown Land Commissioner he was required to submit a census of Aboriginal people in his district, a task in which he was constantly thwarted by the “Natives shifting so frequently”, but his comments give an insight into the kinds of economic adaptations the Ngarigo were undergoing in this period, where although they “occasionally assist in sheep Washing, Hoeing and Reaping, they are frequently found to be

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62 Lambie and Parliament (1845)
63 Weatherhead (1984)
64 Dawson (1996)
absent on some hunting or shooting excursion.” As their dependence on station rations grew so did their contact with the European squatters and labourers.

Rumours circulate for a long time on the Monaro. Unlike the neighbouring coastal regions, the area has not seen much of a demographic change over the last few decades and many of the current residents are descendants of the old farming families. Tales of wrong-doing stay in spoken lineages, passed from one generation to the next, surviving for more than a century in the same location. Alexander Weatherhead features in more than one of these stories. During his 1999 research in the region Mark McKenna was told this story by long time Bega resident Jack Burgess:

Alexander Weatherhead, one of the first men to own Nungatta Station in the 1840s, had killed many Aboriginal people. Part of the milk-making process was to put the milk pans out to let the cream settle on top. Attracted by the offering, Aboriginal men and women would skim the cream off. Weatherhead was apparently so annoyed that he laced the milk with strychnine and later, when the poison had done its work, disposed of the bodies. Burgess claimed he had heard this story from the manager of Nungatta Station in the 1960s. More than 120 years after Weatherhead had allegedly poisoned a large number of Aboriginal people, the story lived on, passed down from one manager of the station to the next. The persistence of the rumours in the area is in spite of any police or military investigation of the events which might have made details public.

The story relates

Mrs Weatherhead had given birth to four children by the time the family moved to Nungatta, although two of the children had died in infancy. She had more children after taking up the station, including at least two daughters, but it is not known how many. By the early to mid 1850s the oldest children, believed to be sons, would have been adolescents. The story relates

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65 Watson (1914): vol. XXII:649-50
66 McKenna (2002): 42
67 Weatherhead (1984)
how these boys were known by their father to be having sexual relations with the Ngarigo women who were camped on the land. The old man told them that he did not care what they did with the Aboriginal women but if there were any children they were not to take the family name. Instead they were to bring them to him and he would name them. Some time passed and in due course there was a child. As per their father’s instructions, the boy brought the child to him and the old man named it Brindle, in the way of the mixed colours on the hide of a cow are known as brindle, seemingly a reference to the child’s mixed race heritage and a sly nod to his role as a dairy farmer.

This story can only ever be rumour, but as a rumour that has survived within the white community for almost 150 years, it has some compelling evidence to substantiate it. For example, knowing approximately how old the Brindle child is when he enters the records as an adult some decades later, we can deduce that Weatherhead did have children of the right age to be sexually active at the time of James’ conception. Those same records refer to him as a ‘half caste’ and, as noted by Lambie, the only mixed race children on the Monaro at the time had Aboriginal mothers and white fathers. And finally, the name Brindle is further linked to the Weatherhead family through the old station records that refer to ‘Brindle’s paddock’ on the Nungatta property, an area still clearly marked and named on the station maps.

**Naming People and Places**

However their white relations saw them, the children of these first cross-cultural unions were born into and became the expression of the new order emerging on the Monaro, a world not of the Ngarigo’s choosing but increasingly part of their reality. Changes to traditional seasonal movements and resource use were the first demands of the new regime but other adjustments occurred, which began to filter into the known record.

A language of engagement was needed as the Ngarigo came into contact with white officials and pastoralists more frequently. It soon became apparent that the *lingua franca* would be English based, but exchange flowed both ways with many Indigenous words used, especially for place

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60 Lambie and Parliament (1845)
names. Despite the new forms that were developing, misunderstandings, linguistic and otherwise, gave rise to false popular conceptions of Ngarigo traditions as the British frequently failed to see their often extremely complex protocols. Although the endemic cultural blindness on the part of the British was at the root of the misinformation, the Ngarigo inclination to keep much of their world secret no doubt also contributed. In 1846 the convict Joseph Lingard, who had been assigned to a station on the Monaro, wrote an account of his life during his seven year term of labour, in which he tells his audience that:

> the Blacks… go about in Tribes, and in summer time they all go naked; men, women and children. They have no names among them, only, the black man calls his wife Jen, and she calls him Black fellow; the children they call Pickaninnies. When a child is born near any one of the stations, whatever name any white man gives it, in future it is known by that name. ⁶⁹

The clear purpose of Lingard’s account is to demonstrate the depth of the savagery of the natives, both nakedness and namelessness being evidence of their primitive state. His account unwittingly demonstrates more accurately the level of access that was afforded to an outsider. Ngarigo naming practices were complex and opaque, linked to stages of life and initiatory rites, not information that Lingard would have been privy to. An infant child did not, as Lingard correctly observed, receive a name immediately. Rather it was referred to as “child” (the anthropologist AW Howitt records the term as lit⁷⁰) until it began to walk when it received a pet name, a nick-name of affection that related to its moment of birth, an animal that the mother saw or some other sign. The child’s ‘real’ name was given by one or other of the grandparents when it was around 8 or 9, the first public acknowledgement of his or her impending maturity. This was a name of great significance and might be related to totem, the spirit world or a revered ancestor. After this name was given at initiation it immediately became secret, not to be mentioned by friends and never to be revealed to strangers. Considered as much a part of a person as hair or fingernails, a name could be made use of by someone who wished to ‘catch’ him or her by evil magic. Thus Howitt tells us that:

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⁶⁹ Lingard (1846)
⁷⁰ Howitt (1996):737-38
one of [them], of whom I inquired as to his child’s name, told me in a whisper, when no one else was present. When I asked him the name of [someone else], he said, “I cannot tell you, he might be very angry with me; our fathers have told us that we must never speak of our secret names.” 71

We cannot know that the Brindle child was not given a name through one or all of these traditional processes but the written record has preserved him only as James, son of a Ngarigo woman and a fully fledged child of the Georgian era, by title if nothing else. Common sense however would dictate that traditional naming practices continued, unseen and unmentioned to outsiders, at least during the time in which initiations were still being held, perhaps until the early 20th century. Remnants of naming practices are still extant: ‘bub’ is a common generic name for a younger person for example, while aunt and uncle are universally used as honorifics for older people. Giving nicknames is also still widely practised in the Koori community, a distinctive characteristic of contemporary Aboriginal life. That the nicknames are often given along traditional lines, such as commemorating what happened at the moment of birth has deep resonances with past naming protocols. Deanna for example is known widely as daughter, or Aunty Daught for the moment of her birth when her father, thrilled at having a girl, called out ‘a daughter, a daughter!’

Given the prohibition on speaking personal names, the real meaning of Ngarigo names that were collected in census records are a mystery. Contemporaneous with Lingard, Chief Protector of Aborigines for the Port Phillip District from 1837 to 1849, George Augusts Robinson, kept a diary of the epic two thousand mile journey he made across south east Australia in 1844. This expedition included a transect of the Monaro, beginning on the coast at Twofold Bay, passing through Cooma, and ending in Yass, with a brief stop at Gedgezerick en route:

Sunday 7 July 1844 (at Gedgezerick)
Frosty last night. Seven men, women and girl visited this afternoon, (?) alias Old Tom (chief) among them; the rest were firm young men; gave each handkerchief and some

71 Ibid
medals; took their names and names of all the natives of the tribe. The language is the same as the Omeo Blacks.72

The census he took at Gegedzerick details the presence of 23 Aboriginal people. Names such as *Joon.doo.mung.*, *Bug.ge.goke.*, *Joo.lo.cud.jang.*, *Moo.ro.rare.rere.* are listed against anglicized nicknames: Jemmy, Cherry Tree, Neddy, Blue Skin, Kitty, Polly, Biddy. No other notes about the encounter were made.73

This naming and numbering of the Aborigines, a task Robinson’s diaries attest he was dedicated to throughout his journey, opened the way for them to be brought into the written record. Once named, further information about them could be tabulated and preserved; blankets received, stations visited, spouses and offspring. Without any further context for their social, family or economic structures, this recording transitioned them into the white social and historical record which allowed them to be ‘discussed’ and ‘dealt with’ by the authorities, positioning them, according to historian Paul Carter, “in the same historical space as the Europeans – a space constituted culturally, according to social, economic and above all, intellectual criteria… names, in short, made them white history.”74

**Education**

Weatherhead might not have been keen to give his name to his grandson, but white officials were interested in educating him and his generation. The colonial imperative to civilize the natives, or if not civilize them at least educate them to a degree that was useful as a labour force, drove a series of experiments. These began with the Parramatta Native Institution founded in 1815 by Governor Macquarie. His ambition to turn out an alumni of trained black farmers and domestic workers was thwarted when every last one of the students returned to their parents to continue their Aboriginal education. Despite this perceived failing, the Native Institution was a successful school, proving to the administration that Aboriginal people were well able to develop literacy and English language skills. Indeed one of the students, Maria Locke, won the anniversary

72 Robinson (1980):7 July 1844
73 Ibid
74 Carter (1988):332
examination in 1819 over 100 European students at the central public school.\(^75\) The Governor was unimpressed with these academic achievements while the students continued to spurn white society and called for Aboriginal children to be separated from their parents in order to develop the necessary attachments to European ways. Not surprisingly the school foundered. Parents were unwilling to commit their children to the Institution while the Institution could not accommodate both the educational and cultural needs of the families.

In December 1821 under Governor Brisbane’s guidance they tried again, this time moving the school to the Blacktown Native Institution and shifting the emphasis to purely vocational training in the hope of attracting more students. By 1823 only 12 Aboriginal children were enrolled, well short of the planned 60 and by 1825 this school had also closed. The newly arrived Governor Darling was perplexed by the “Aborigines [who] learned to read and write yet returned to their tribes and remained with them as soon as their education was finished.”\(^76\) Other colonists put the matter more bluntly:

> They have been brought up by us from infancy in our nurseries, and yet the woods have seduced them at maturity, and at once elicited the savage instincts of finding their food in the trees, and their path through the forest – propensities which civil education has only smothered.\(^77\)

Not everyone, and especially not the Colonial Office in London, shared this pessimistic opinion. Governor Gipps, following the lead of his predecessors, sent word to the Monaro that he was interested in Lambie procuring some of the local children for training in his newly founded school at Parramatta. Lambie dutifully sought out potential students but in 1841 reported that:

> having had an opportunity of communicating with various Tribes on the subject, … none of the Parents or Friends will consent to part with any of the children.\(^78\)

\(^75\) Parry (2005); Kohen and Brook (1991); Kohen (1993);

\(^76\) Fletcher (1989):23

\(^77\) Fletcher (1989):24

\(^78\) Lambie (1841)
A year later they returned to the issue when it seems that the Governor’s enquiries shifted emphasis to the teaching of reading and writing more generally. Lambie offered a way to proceed which he considered would make the scheme more palatable to the parents:

the tribes … of the District, appear to wish that their children were taught to read and write, but at the same time they have an insuperable dislike to parting with them, if they are to be excluded from occasionally seeing them. If Schools were established in the District in the first instance, I have no doubt the Children would be permitted to attend them, provided the Parents and Friends were some times allowed to visit them – and the dislike of parting with the offspring on the part of the Parents most probably would gradually wear off when the children might be sent to some general establishment and finally separated from the Tribes. 79

In any event no schools for the exclusive use of Aboriginal children were established by Governor Gipps in Sydney or in the Monaro District until the Wallaga Lake Mission School was founded in the 1880s, well after James might have made use of it. Yet as discussed in chapter 6, the adult James was able to write his name and, if not fully literate, was well attuned to the power of the written word and its potential for use as a potent political instrument.

**The emerging economy**

Whatever the circumstances of James Brindle’s schooling, where once he would have been born into a tight-knit community and educated in the ways of language and culture from childhood, the world of flux that he inherited by the mid 19th century offered an entirely different future to that of his forebears. His grandparents, if not his mother, would have spent their lives making a living hunting small and large animals such as possum, kangaroo, emu, snake and lizard, as well as birds and birds’ eggs, fish, insects, seeds and tubers. Within the mixture of open grasslands and dense forest to which they had access, a diverse range of flora for medicine, carbohydrate and industrial fibre would have been available. They would have made weapons and tools from stone, wood, resin, reed and bark as well as fishtraps, nets, bags and water-carrying vessels. When they weren’t working, they would have been carrying out ceremonial duties, arranging

79 Lambie (1842)
marriages, initiating young people, fighting skirmishes and attending funerals, with an occasional trip to the coast for whale feasts, trade and to visit relatives.\textsuperscript{80}

Making a living from this land had been the job of Ngarigo men and women for many hundreds of generations. There is evidence of human occupation dating to between 6 – 7,000 years ago and some occupation sites as old as 21,000 years ago at Birrigai Rock shelter.\textsuperscript{81} Once the squatters arrived with their new animals, the pre-contact routines of the Ngarigo were damaged beyond sustainability almost instantly. The vast fields of yams that grew by the rivers were trampled by hooves, the permanent water ways fouled and the hunting grounds over-grazed. The trauma of that change must have ricocheted through the community during those first decades as the realization dawned that what were once dependable resources, to be returned to seasonally, had vanished. The necessity created by these changes drove the Ngarigo to experiment with the emerging colonial economy and they quickly had to learn how to exploit new possibilities as the old ones were extinguished.

The whalers on the coast were the first to trial Aboriginal labour in a serious way. George Imlay for example, reported that

\begin{quote}
[the] natives continue to behave well and make themselves useful in various ways, when their services are required. I have this year, by way of experiment, formed a whaling party consisting of four boats manned entirely by blacks…\textsuperscript{82}
\end{quote}

Commissioner Lambie, although not an overly insightful or perceptive observer of the Ngarigo, managed to convey something of the hybrid life that was developing:

\begin{quote}
… a good many … of the natives are employed in sheep washing, hoeing maze and reaping and last year three boat crews, in number eighteen, were employed by the Imlay [brothers] in the whale Fishery at Twofold Bay on the same pay or terms as the whites. The Blacks were stationed on the opposite side of the Bay to the other Fishermen and adopted the same habits as the Whites. They lived in Huts, slept in Beds, used utensils in
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{80} Byrne (1984); Wesson (2000); Hancock (1972)
\textsuperscript{81} Flood, David et al. (1987)
\textsuperscript{82} Letter from George Imlay to the Colonial Secretary attached to the record of a blanket issue, cited by Young and NSW Dept. of Environment and Conservation (2005):151
cooking and made the flour into bread; but as soon as the fishing season was over they all returned to their tribes in the Bush.\textsuperscript{83}

This observation demonstrates that engagement with European culture - sleeping in beds, using cooking utensils, making bread – was not at the expense of maintaining relationships with country, here characterized as ‘returning to the tribes in the bush’. Quite clearly interacting with the new economy and the culture that it brought did not extinguish Indigenous identity but was consistent with other responsibilities that no doubt extended to cultural business not discussed with either whaling bosses or the Commissioner of Crown Lands. It seems that for a moment in this founding era, a possibility for some compromise existed, where Aboriginal people could earn a living commensurate with that of their white contemporaries as well as maintain the practices which were essential to their cultural survival. It was not a possibility that the Presbyterian Scot, John Lambie, was interested in pursuing. A true son of the Ayrshire Kirk into which he was born, Lambie was repulsed by what he saw as an unwillingness to work on the part of the Aborigines. Year after year his reports are littered with judgements about the indolence and unreliability of the Ngarigo, beginning with his submission to the Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines in 1845 to which he reported that “the [Aborigines] are so unsettled they cannot be depended on, and consequently their services are not much in request. The remuneration is usually made in articles of food and clothing... They can scarcely be said to have any settled habits bearing upon an aptitude for employment”\textsuperscript{84} He continued this theme in his annual reports:

\begin{quote}
1850 [They] are generally supplied with food ... by the Settlers near whose Establishments they encamp, and by whom they are occasionally employed in odd jobs but which are performed in the usual listless and indolent way.\textsuperscript{85}
\end{quote}

And again the following year:

\begin{quote}
1851 Many of them make themselves useful at several of the Stations at the periods of sheep washing and harvest and are always well treated, and well paid by those who
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{83} Lambie (1842)
\textsuperscript{84} Lambie and Parliament (1845):item 9
\textsuperscript{85} Lambie (1850)
employ them. But they still exhibit their old aversion to constant and settled employment.\textsuperscript{86}

Lambie saw the work practices of the Ngarigo in terms of cultural ideology. His perception of them as ‘indolent’ and ‘unsettled’, views upheld by his squatter associates, marks them, in his view, as removed from civilisation. Despite admitting that ‘the kangaroos retire’ after the land is stocked, a fact which he understood threatened the Ngarigo’s very survival, Lambie is unwilling to admit the colonial agenda was wanting in compassion. The culturally inscribed attitude he displays to ‘a hard day’s work’ has deep roots in his own cultural history and critical self reflection is not articulated in any of his writing.\textsuperscript{87} That the Aborigines are paid nothing more than some food and clothing for their labour, labour on land they knew had previously provided for hundreds of generations of their forebears, did not seem to form part of the equation. Despite the fact that he witnessed the Imlay brothers successfully man their craft with all-Aboriginal crews, Lambie was adamant that Ngarigo attitudes to work were nothing more than belligerency.

Yet ten years later they still hadn’t been ‘civilised’

“… I would state that there appears to be no method of diverting them from their inherent love of their wandering lives and erratic habits – even those employed at the stations every few months join their tribe to ‘walking all about’ as they term it. They live most miserably making but a bare subsistence in the bush…”\textsuperscript{88}

That these destructive initial decades in the Monaro were benignly observed by the most senior government administrator of the time goes some way to explaining the speed at which the

\textsuperscript{86} Lambie (1851)

\textsuperscript{87} The literature which explores British attitudes to work in this era includes Fitzpatrick, Richards et al. (1992) who note the way in which Colonial society was riven with ethnic snobberies and religious sectarianism, often played out in attitudes towards physical discipline in the service of advancing prosperity. Hancock (1930) made an earlier contribution to understanding the cultural as well as economic forces at work at this time in his exploration of the origins of Australian culture. Curthoys, Markus et al. (1978) explore the work experiences of Aboriginal and Pacific Island labour, as well as the patterns of racial exclusion from the paid workforce, while Grimshaw, McConville et al. (1985) describe the early colonial economies of family life.

\textsuperscript{88} Bransby (1859)
destructive changes to the Ngarigo lifestyle took place. Once the role of Crown Lands Commissioner was taken over by AW Manning in 1853, a new attitude emerged from within the Colonial administration, although one already experimented with by businessmen such as the entrepreneurial Imlay brothers. In his first report of the year Manning notes:

From constant and intimate connection with Europeans their habits are gradually becoming assimilated. Quiet and orderly in their deportment, when not ill used, they are willing to labour for wages so small that their Services are in general demand.\textsuperscript{89}

Not long after Manning’s appointment a labour shortage driven by the first of the gold rushes in the region, struck the pastoral industry, causing a shift in attitude in the broader population. The first discovery of gold in the region was in 1839 by Count Paul Edmund de Strzelecki, but graziers were also making some significant finds. Once news of the discoveries spread, many thousands of people began to leave the cities and towns to search for their fortunes in the high country. This population movement was supported by the colonial government of Victoria in the early 1850s when Alfred Howitt was commissioned to cut approximately 350 kilometres of tracks linking the various goldfields. In 1859, the discovery of gold at Kiandra in the northeast of the Snowy Mountains stimulated a rush and by the winter of 1860 many thousands of miners had arrived.\textsuperscript{90} As a result many of the local farm hands left their employment to seek their fortunes alongside them. During its peak, the Kiandra goldfields supported approximately 10,000 people. By 1861 it was all over but during the peak of the rush the local pastoral industry was left with an acute labour shortage.\textsuperscript{91} This shortage drove a shift in the attitudes towards Aboriginal workers and by as early as 1855 Commissioner Manning reported:

During the recent excessive scarcity of labour many settlers were mainly dependent on the natives for the means of carrying on their operations. I know of several instances in which the blackfellow’s assistance has saved the Europeans from severe loss. Thousands of sheep have been tended, and large herds of cattle entirely watched by the natives, who some few years ago even in these parts were regarded as unteachable and useless, and

\textsuperscript{89} Manning (1853)  
\textsuperscript{90} Blainey (1993)  
\textsuperscript{91} Goodall (1996):chapter 5
whose presence even created alarm and was too often the signal for treachery and ill-usage.\textsuperscript{92}

Not all the prospectors were successful and after the rush began to subside many thousands of men sought employment in the district. The supply of available labour generated by the population surge soon overwhelmed the new attitude to Aboriginal workers. This situation was exacerbated by a change to the rules of land settlement. In 1861, the Premier of New South Wales, John Robertson, resolved to break up the monopoly of the squatter-pastoralists in the colony to give poorer purchasers access to land to encourage the development of agriculture. To this end he forced two Acts through Parliament; the \textit{Crown Lands Alienation Act 1861 (NSW)} dealt with the sale of land and the \textit{Crown Lands Occupation Act 1861 (NSW)} dealt with leasing. Together these Acts allowed for the free selection of up to 320 acres of Crown land by any person, on the condition that they pay a deposit of one-quarter of the purchase price after survey, and that they live on the land for three years.\textsuperscript{93}

Prior to this legislation being passed, powerful squatters had acquired vast amounts of prime land through illicit occupation. These new Acts opened up all leasehold land, including squatter held lands, for selection by anyone in the colony. Predictably, clashes between the squatters, whose wealth and power were directly threatened, and the selectors ensued. By enabling close settlement of pastoral lands which until that point had still been available for use by Aboriginal people, the Acts further limited their lands and what had survived of their economy. The influx of small landholders created by the Acts, unlike the earlier large landholders, would not have learned about their land directly from the local Aborigines.

These land Acts coincided with the gold rush and as prospectors lost hope of gaining their fortune in minerals, they sought their fortune through grazing. Hancock notes that the majority of these selectors never came within sight of Robertson’s objective – that they should be able to maintain their families by their own labour on their own land. Most of them had to earn their income by working for their more prosperous neighbours. As he notes “the hard times of these

\textsuperscript{92} Manning (1855)

\textsuperscript{93} Hancock (1972):chapter 3
men and their families are recorded, not on parish maps, but by the rubble and lumber of their ruined homes.”

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We cannot know what specific experiences James was exposed to as a young man within the rapid changes taking place. During his early years maps were made of his country and place names were assigned; white men flooded into his homelands looking for their fortunes; the new pastoral economy brought devastating changes to the region yet Ngarigo would still have been spoken fluently. Mention of Brindle’s paddock in the Nungatta station records indicate that there was some long term association between James’ family and the Weatherheads. Perhaps the Brindles raised a few head of cattle there or were part of station life as stockmen and domestic workers. Perhaps the family had merely camped there for some time while James was a child. Whatever the circumstances emerging in his own country, when James enters the record as an adult it is across the state border on the Gippsland mission station of Ramahyuck where Aboriginal labour was the focus of the operation, as discussed in chapter 6.

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94 Hancock (1972)
4. The nature of ‘things’

Objects and innovation

The immediacy of the historical narrative which the community engagement component of this project exposes is compelling, but the document which sets out the main research task, as submitted to the Australian Research Council, was devised in part to advance the National Museum of Australia’s collecting interests and clearly positions material culture, not archive-derived narrative, as its central concern. This emphasis provides an unambiguous articulation of the principal enterprise that drives the Museum and in doing so opens a possibility for an active critical engagement between this thesis and the thinking within the institution. Rather than simply conduct the research as set out in the project description, a method in which the original instructions would dissolve into the work and remain unseen, I intend to have a conversation with the discourses encoded in that agenda. The conversation will follow not only the proposed project schedule but the patterns of thinking out of which the Museum is constructed and which provide the premise for this research, as well as a broader engagement between the Museum and Aboriginal social history more generally.

Fundamental to this study as authored by the Chief Investigators is the link between material culture, cultural heritage and historiography. Quite rightly the authors note that “within academia, Indigenous material objects have long been considered the domain of anthropologists and archaeologists”. Unlike anthropological discourses which direct questions surrounding material culture towards an understanding of meaning, this study explicitly nominates the relationship between the material world and understandings of the past as its focus. Similarly,

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95 See Appendix 1 for excerpts from original Linkage Project application written by Australian National University academics Ann McGrath and Tom Griffiths in collaboration with Margo Neale from the National Museum of Australia.

96 Ibid

97 That is ‘meaning’ as distinct from the things themselves (Ingold (2000)). Or, as subscribed to by modernist anthropologists, as an elucidation of social and cultural ‘contexts’ (Pinney and Thomas (2001)). For a full discussion of
unlike archaeological interpretations of the material record which might share a similar emphasis, the focus will be directed to developing historical narratives where the agency remains with the historical actors. The intention of the project is to broaden disciplinary interests in Indigenous material culture and to investigate “new perspectives by locating objects treasured by Indigenous people within local and national histories of colonialism, survival, collection and museology.”

This explicit linking of objects and histories might be innovative in regard to the analysis of Indigenous material culture, but it is the core strategy around which museums, particularly contemporary social history museums such as the National Museum of Australia, revolve. The conjunction of the material past and historical narratives within this important ‘nation-building’ institution reflects history-making practices that flow through our society more widely. The notion of the keepsake, the heirloom or the collection, nestles deep within the personal, professional and public lives of mainstream society, as evidenced by the value assigned to aged objects and the way in which provenance, i.e. associated narrative, escalates value, both monetary and otherwise. This conjunction of objects and stories sits in the middle of our public and personal history-making practices and is deeply embedded in our collective cultural processes. But why do old things matter? What is it about the material past that inspires our private and collective fascination?

**The stuff of times past**

The museum, in its project of telling history, calls on the peculiar character of old things to describe the past. These objects carry the marks of handling by persons who are now dead and it is through the scratches and patina, form and decoration and in their archival journey as fondly preserved or discarded and retrieved that we can track the path from the deceased back to the living. Archaeologist Julian Thomas tells us that it is exactly this quality which makes old things

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various anthropological discourses in material culture studies see Henare, Holbraad et al. (2007) and Strathern (1990)

98 Appendix 1

99 Casey (2001):14

100 The concept of a ‘collection’ is examined in detail below.
compelling for in this way “things can stand as evidence for past lives, identities and relationships.”\textsuperscript{101}

The experience of materiality within our own lives, our embodied engagement with the material world, opens us to a non-discursive experience of the past through objects. Our sensory apprehension of things which form or alter our understanding of time, place and people allow them to serve as witness to history and substantiate particular narratives. It is this apprehension coupled with our impulse toward story which allows for fragments to be integrated in the telling, so that “if we are called upon to give an account of a thing’s identity, it may well take the form of a narrative which knits together the events of where it has been and who it has been involved with, to what purpose.”\textsuperscript{102} In seeing or touching these objects, their mnemonic character allows us to directly perceive the result of their life journey.\textsuperscript{103} It is this quality that museums call on to create a lens though which their audience is invited to view a moment or a story from the past.

The relationship between historical narrative, objects and meaning that a museum configures is a complicated conjunction of contemporary discourses, disciplinary polemic and material culture, resulting in “museum exhibition[s which are] a deeply unrealistic, highly artificial assemblage of objects, installations, people and arguments”.\textsuperscript{104} Nevertheless, the combination of elements in this environment is a powerful cultural force, created in part through invoking the emotional response we have to objects as audiences. In developing exhibitions, curators draw on Julian Thomas’ proposition that in bringing forward traces of the past, things are in some way able to transcend death. It is this very quality that ‘enlivens’ museum exhibition narratives. But this strategy implies the meaning we perceive in an object exists independent of context and that both object and meaning have somehow travelled immutably through time. Early 21\textsuperscript{st} century modernist anthropologists seem to have some sympathy with this thinking when they argue that:

\textsuperscript{101} Thomas (1996):81
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid
\textsuperscript{103} The term ‘life journey’ as used here is borrowed from James Clifford. See Clifford (1997):212
\textsuperscript{104} The discussion of museums as sites of contest as well as interpretation dominated the theoretical end of museum studies literature throughout the 1990s. See Macdonald and Fyfe (1996); Bennett (1995); Karp, Lavine et al. (1991); Griffiths (1996); Macdonald and Basu (2007). Quote: Weibel and Latour (2007):94
rather than accepting that meanings are fundamentally separate from their material manifestations, [we posit the notion] that things might be treated as sui generis meanings… [where] meanings are not ‘carried’ by things but just are identical to them.¹⁰⁵

This ‘hard’ materialist position which is both complex and valid, is a response to Appadurai’s 1986 work The Social Life of Things where he asserts that the exact opposite is true.¹⁰⁶ The ‘stuff of material culture’ as he calls it, alters fundamentally as it flows through contemporary social and political imperatives. He tells us that:

the way in which we read the meaning of an object shifts as the object changes use and context, circulating in different regimes of value in space and time … in specific cultural and historical milieus.¹⁰⁷

Reflecting on Appadurai’s essay, Nicholas Thomas develops this idea further, arguing that essentialist notions of the identity of material things being fixed in their structure and form is necessarily deconstructed as the object passes through social transformations. “What we are confronted with is thus never more or less than the succession of uses and recontextualisations.”¹⁰⁸ For the purposes of this thesis, I follow Appadurai and Nicholas Thomas’ thinking, rather than the ‘harder’ anthropological material culturalists, to examine the shifting complex of function and meaning in uses and contexts as an object travels through space and time. As part of a discussion that will intersect with discourses of race and identity, this ‘softer’ theoretical approach, i.e. that which is more interested in an object’s migration through the social world than its materiality, offers scope to follow the shifting politics inherent in projects of representation such as the National Museum of Australia.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Henare, Holbraad et al. (2007):3-4
¹⁰⁶ Appadurai (1986):4
¹⁰⁷ Ibid
¹⁰⁹ Material culture studies is a fast evolving domain of scholarly interest with many theoretical approaches. This thesis is not concerned with the diversity of positions within the field generally but touches only on that which is relevant to the case study. For a full discussion of the various schools of material culture studies see Woodward (2007)
Carrying water, carrying meaning

While ‘materialist’ anthropologists are concerned with illuminating understandings of a people through examination of their ‘stuff’, this study is concerned with the use of objects in self-representation, as preserved and treasured, not as texts of the everyday. This distinction is important as the separation of objects from the everyday by their users is the moment of agency which transfers them from one regime to another, at least for that moment in time. In asking the question what objects “Indigenous people collect, display and hold dear within their homes and communities”, the research proposal which this thesis addresses is asking ‘what objects have a particular group of people transferred from one regime of operation to another and why.’\textsuperscript{110} In this regard the museum is the exemplary regime-shifter, enacting a public display of the moment and meaning of such a transfer.

Also fundamental to this research is the notion of objects as carriers of historical narrative. Philip Jones offers a potent example of the way in which ‘things’ carry stories in his examination of objects from early Australian frontier encounters.\textsuperscript{111} Yet the moment of telling the story also fixes apprehension of an object within the context of its telling. While Jones demonstrates the way in which objects offer evidence of a particular narrative, the examples he has chosen, despite their contemporary incarnation as museum objects, are not discussed in relation to their full life journey, including that of symbol. This emphasis obfuscates the processes by which the museum (or, rather, the curators) becomes the agent or author of history as an object (that can be read as text) is moved from ‘useful’ to ‘symbol’ through their intervention. Although this research seeks to observe objects which have undergone this transformation in the context of families and communities (as I discuss below and in chapter 5), it is within the museum (and other institutions of representation such as art galleries) that this phenomenon can most clearly be observed.

\textsuperscript{110} Appendix 1
\textsuperscript{111} Jones (2008)
To demonstrate the way an object moves through a such successions of uses and recontextualisations (as proposed by N Thomas above) I nominate an artefact currently on display in the Gallery of First Australian in the NMA. I am not proposing that the object be examined as a static presence (it is a series of reconstructions and representations, not the very same object) but as a lineage which narrates the concerns of each context it passes through. In particular, its current manifestation as a museum object offers an occasion to discuss the role of museums in relation to material culture more broadly.

In this example the shifting meanings inherent in the object are not only accommodated by the NMA but, in the way of contemporary social history museums, are drawn on for a further iteration of the object’s narrative, this time a self-conscious articulation of the various discourses through which it has been apprehended.  

Figure 10.  

*Sauvages du Cap de Diemen preparant leur repas*  
nla.pic-an20973389  

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112 The New Museology which underpins curatorial strategies employed by social history museums is discussed in detail by Hauenschild (1988); Vergo (1989); Cobb (2005). See Chapter 7 for detailed discussion.

113 Labillardiere (1817):plate 5
Figure 10 is an engraving made in Paris in 1817, based on a sketch by the artist Piron entitled *Sauvages du Cap de Diemen preparant leur repas (the savages of van Diemen’s Land prepare their repast)*, executed during the d’Entracasteaux expedition to Tasmania in *La Recherche* in 1792. The picture depicts the occasion of a meeting between the Tasmanians and the French during the ship’s anchorage.

Figure 11 is a detail from the drawing showing a close up of two small baskets. The one on the right is a receptacle made from the bull kelp which is a feature of the Tasmanian coast and when worked, dries into a leathery consistency, easy to mold and good for carrying liquids. This object, in this time and location, is a bucket. The artist Piron found this article interesting enough to record it as part of the scene. No doubt to the Tasmanians, the French had many objects which were equally curious - a floppy cravat for example or skin tight hose, boots, hats. This sketch captures a quality that the object has when it is in use: as part of daily activity in the world it goes unnoticed, but when it is removed from its place in action, it becomes a curiosity, able to be seen in a conceptual framework rather than a merely equipmental one. Its life as a bucket tells us directly of the relationship between the object and its makers. By knowing of its use, we can apprehend its meaning, as Thomas tells us:

> our relationship with material things is better understood through making use of them in some task than by any analytic looking. Those material things which we are most closely

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114 Ibid, detail
connected with will therefore be those which serve as equipment: [as Heidegger termed it] things-for (zeug)… where we make use of something as a piece of equipment, we may find that we are concerned less… with the thing as an object and more… with the task in hand.\footnote{115}

This iteration of the object is aligned to the ‘hard’ material culturalists’ interests, where its nature (material) and meaning converge. Here the kelp water carrier in its original context, still in use by its maker, is equipmental. In the rendering of it in a lithograph based on a drawing made during a 1792 frontier encounter, it begins a transition through the agency of the curious gaze.

Now an object of wonder, the bucket in the picture narrates the story of encounter with the new world in a language that can be read at the site of the story’s making, that is in the studios, galleries and bookshops of 1817 Paris.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure12.png}
\caption{\textit{armes et ornemens} by Nicolas Petit\footnote{116}}
\end{figure}

\footnote{115}{Thomas (1996):67-68}
\footnote{116}{Dien (1824)}
The next depiction of the water carrier, of the same construction although certainly not of the same provenance, is made 10 years later by Nicolas Petit, artist on the Baudin expedition of 1802. This time the water carrier is illustrated as part of a collection of *armes et ornemens*, a study of objects sketched during the expedition’s unsuccessful search and rescue mission to find LaPerouse. Here the water carrier is disengaged from its surroundings, floating in space, in relationship only to other objects. Place, people and use are now deleted from the story and although the viewer can still guess at its function, its role here is to depict the implements of the sauvages as part of nature, closer in its arrangement to botanical illustrations of the time. The gaze is now displaying its classificatory impulses, and in doing so its contemporary allegiance to the advancing 19th century discourses of science. In arranging the implements as a display of ‘type’, the picture anticipates the concerns of the soon to arrive discipline of ethnography and foreshadows in its aesthetic the great displays of ethnographic objects with which museums of the late 19th and early 20th century became synonymous.

Next the water carrier is moved to London via a tour through empire, courtesy of Dr Joseph Milligan, the collector of the object, who lived and worked in Tasmania between 1830 and 1860. In his role as surgeon, he interacted with local Aboriginal people in various capacities, including
as Medical Officer of Aborigines.¹¹⁷ This water carrier is one of 5 objects shipped to London by Milligan for display in the The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations, held in the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park in 1851. Here it was installed in the exhibition of Tasmanian artefacts where it told the story of distant lands and curious native peoples. The still extant object is now in the British Museum collection although has not been on show since 1851.

Figure 14. Julie Gough Blanket return 4
National Museum of Australia

One hundred and fifty years later, Tasmanian Aboriginal artist Julie Gough returns to the Petit sketch to comment on its depiction of her cultural heritage. She reconstructs the sketch as a three dimensional work, substituting the materials used to make the original objects with grey woollen felt, of the type distributed to Aboriginal people as blankets by government agencies throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. The artist makes an observation on the intervening years between Petit’s sketch and her response to it in the statement accompanying the piece:

This work is a commentary on the repatriation of cultural material held in institutions including museums across the globe. A blanket return or repatriation is a reflection on the

¹¹⁷ Hoddinott (1967)
call made by many Indigenous peoples for illicitly taken cultural items to be returned to their respective communities. Since the French arrived on Tasmanian shores Tasmanian Aboriginal Cultural material has been studied and collected. [These objects] of culture have survived, buffeted from time, and ironically by careful handling by their captors in museums, but this survival has come at the expense of the objects participating in their intended, usual cultural lives.\footnote{118}

Here the artist’s clear intention is to use the object, or image of the object, as a bridge between past and present, making clear the divergent discourses separating the two depictions. She articulates her sadness at the shift the object has undergone from \textit{zeug} or thing-for, to artwork, and the politics of dispossession such a shift implies. In doing so she draws out both meanings contained in the Petit sketch - his observation of the original article in-situ and his subsequent recording of it as an object of curiosity.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{kelp_water_carrier_in_case.png}
\caption{kelp water carrier in case}
\hspace{1cm} National Museum of Australia, 2009
\end{figure}

In the final iteration we see the water carrier in the Gallery of First Australians at the National Museum of Australia, displayed in a glass case. An exemplar of what is considered New Museology, it is now exhibited as an object in relationship to ethnographic objects and images on

\footnote{118} Artist’s statement 2004, on file, National Museum of Australia
display around it, in a context which celebrates the revival of Tasmanian Indigenous culture. In the intervening centuries between Petit’s lithograph and this museum object, the disciplines of ethnography and anthropology and their effects on Aboriginal people have played out, as has the history of colonisation, including the extinguishing fiction of Truganini as the ‘last Tasmanian’. The interpretive text tells us that it is a water carrier of contemporary construction, but the framed print of Petit’s sketch on an easel next to it places it in an historic context with a provenance that can be traced to the early 19th century.

Figure 16.  kelp water carrier on exhibition, National Museum of Australia 2009

As an object of contemporary construction it did not pass through an equipmental phase as zeug in which it was used merely for the carrying of liquids, unnoticed in any conceptual way by its users. That it was made in 2002, long after modernity had replaced a physical need for seaweed water carriers, indicates that its function, even at the moment of its construction, is entirely conceptual. Rather, its task is to reach across the narratives generated about Aboriginal people from Tasmania during the 200 years which separate it from its prototype depicted in Petit’s lithograph. Here the maker is using the water carrier to reclaim a distinctive cultural voice through the revival of a craft practice and in doing so is asserting herself as a participant in continuing traditions. Her construction of the object articulates her right to construct the object through familial descent, a lineage which the bucket stands as proof was not extinguished. Both the bucket and the act of its construction therefore directly contest the extinction narrative with
which her and her family are popularly associated. The museum takes this articulation further by positioning the bucket in the context of the story of Truganini, the so-called ‘last Tasmanian’ as well as contemporary poetry and art work by Tasmanian Aboriginal people. The public display of this object in this context is the moment of conjunction where the meanings encoded in it by the maker draw together and can be read as intended. Here the audience’s gaze is recruited as part of the complex coalescence of meaning and counter-meaning, no longer complicit in the construction of new world narratives but in a revision of them. Although similar to Gough’s woollen version in intent, this iteration of the water carrier draws directly on the original craft practice to make its point, using its material connection to the past to jump over the intervening dispossession and forge new ties with a pre-contact history.

Across these representations, the kelp water carrier moves from an article of a domestic nature, a Heideggerean thing-for, to a conceptual object around which political meanings and cultural revival have been built. It is the display of this artefact in the Gallery of First Australians, both as 19th century image and contemporary construction, which allows for its meaning as an object of identity to be articulated. In other circumstances, the Great Exhibition of 1851 for example, the water carrier on display might tell a story of technology or craft techniques, or represent the practices of a foreign and curious people. All of these meanings are implicit in the water carrier on display but its juxtaposition with other objects and images allows it to function as a political statement. It is the museum curators who are the authors of this current narrative, as it was the artists who were the authors of its previous iterations. The context the museum displays the object within allows its political meaning to be revealed and the intention of the artist to be realised.

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The use in the above example of an object with clear ethnographic allegiances is somewhat disingenuous: in exploiting popular perceptions of what makes an object ‘Aboriginal’, I am positioning a wider discussion of the shifting nature of objects within a clearly recognisable Indigenous domain, invoking a history of museum representation regardless of the contesting commentary offered by contemporary Aboriginal artists. Although this mechanism remains
unexamined for the moment, the question ‘what is an Aboriginal object?’ will be dealt with in subsequent chapters.

The primary aim of my research is not to investigate institutional modes of representation derived from currently held collections of ethnographic material but reflexive displays of identity which express contemporary realities, an aim in line with social history museums. In this regard, by participating in this collaborative project the NMA is seeking to fulfil its obligation to engage with diverse histories, communities and modes of representation and, in relation to the representation of Aboriginal people, to move beyond the ethnographic, through this research.

**Collecting, collector, collected**

In her study of the nature of collecting in the European tradition, Susan Pearce defines collecting as the gathering together and [or] setting aside of selected objects.\(^{119}\) Although display is the public iteration of a museum artefact, it is this setting aside or separating of an object from common use that is the most significant museum intervention in its life journey. The act of accessioning an object into a museum collection immediately renders the artefact conceptual, no longer able to function in the way it was originally intended: no cup and saucer that is in a museum will ever again be used for serving tea, no piece of clothing will be worn, no weapon used again in battle, except perhaps in performance and even then rarely. Although such objects may have a life beyond the museum in the future, that will be for other generations to determine. For the moment their destiny is fixed.

This separating of an object from its *thing-for* nature by sequestering it from daily activity (even if it remains in nominal use such as a precious garment worn on special occasions) renders it valuable beyond its mere material presence, its significance now determined by its role as a carrier of story. The task of this research project, “to consider Indigenous people’s agency as collectors, curators and presenters of possessions which they hold dear”, seeks to observe and record objects that have made this transition, having been removed from daily use through the act of collecting, curating, preserving; that is, they have moved through the moment of conscious

\(^{119}\) Pearce (1995):3
intervention when the owner/user/custodian decides they should be sequestered because of their conceptual value.\footnote{120} Baudrillard explains the mechanism of this shift in function when he observes:

Possession cannot apply to an implement, since the object I utilise always directs me back to the world. Rather it applies to that object once it is \textit{divested of its function and made relative to a subject}. In this sense, all objects that are possessed submit to the same \textit{abstractive operation} and participate in a mutual relationship in so far as they each refer back to the subject. They thereby constitute themselves as a \textit{system}, on the basis of which the subject seeks to piece together his world, his personal microcosm.\footnote{121}

The system he refers to can be taken not only to mean a \textit{collection} in the private realm but also to include projects on the scale of a national museum. It is the shift of function that Baudrillard assigns to the noun \textit{possession} that positions objects as conceptual, not the specifics of their context.

Clearly the authors of this research task regarded the private or semi-private act of removing objects from daily use (collecting) and the objects chosen to be sequestered (collections), in this instance by Indigenous people of Australia, of interest to the museum. Keeping, treasuring, preserving and displaying are all verbs used in the proposal document to identify the quality of objects the research will be considering. By inference these will not be objects in kitchen cupboards and drawers, unseen except as articles of daily use. They will be special objects, treasured because of their \textit{associations with the past}, as the proposal makes clear:

This research, focusing on the theme of Indigenous people as collectors and keepers of precious objects\footnote{\. [will] break new ground in its consideration of this aspect of Indigenous history-making.}{122} and

\footnote{120} Anthropology on the other hand is often interested in objects which remain in daily use (and therefore not seen) as a way of examining a particular social group or society. See Daniel Miller’s analysis of Jamaican living rooms as an example (Miller (1990)) and more widely Miller (1987); Conroy (1998); Attfield (2000); Vannini (2009)
\footnote{121} Baudrillard (1994):7
\footnote{122} Appendix 1
By considering Indigenous people as collectors, curators and presenters of beloved objects, this project will offer major new perspectives on Australian Indigenous history...”123

The connection between history-making, sequestered objects and displays of representation which the authors assume in these statements is a complex web of cultural tradition, identity performance and a “political economy of taste.”124 The terms collector, collection and collecting have deep cultural implications and histories in themselves, although as a museum’s principal activities, they are constructs closer in nature to zeug or thing-for than their intangible nature would presume. Abstract in essence, their enactment is so reflexive within the museum world that they remain largely unexamined, the daily task of enacting them making them invisible.125 In this project, where such concepts are likely to encounter contesting world views in which notions of objects and value might not run in direct parallel, it is perhaps worth pausing to reflect on their origins and their accreted meanings.

**Hoardings**

Ancient, historic and contemporary material remains show that the acquiring and hoarding of valuable objects has always been a custom of the wealthy and powerful in Europe, although varying in expression and meaning through various epochs. Foucault positions the shifts in hoarding practices within the notion of ‘epistemes’ or periods of history organised around, and explicable in terms of, specific world-views and discourses; such periods are characterised by institutions, disciplines, knowledges, rules and activities consistent with those world-views.126 Pearce intersects with Foucault’s notion of the episteme implicitly when she contends that the geographical and cultural factors underlying the European tradition have helped to define and create the peculiarly intense relationship which [they/we] have towards the production and accumulation of goods.127

123 Ibid
124 Appadurai (1986):44-45
125 This is my experience as a curator in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program at the National Museum of Australia.
126 Foucault (1973)
It is this peculiarly intense relationship that has lead to the culture out of which contemporary interests in collecting grew. Tracing a historical line through the prehistoric European world, she cites hoards, caches and grave goods as the earliest evidence of the accumulation practices of chiefdom societies. Aligned to laws of inheritance, kinship and land ownership, complex engagements with precious objects were fundamental to the workings of governance and authority structures.

The epistemological concerns of the classical world similarly found form in the hoarding and possessing of objects. Leading figures such as Hadrian, Lausus and various members of the Byzantine court had large collections of art and *objet d’art*, as did Cicero, Mummisu and Verres during the late Roman Republic. So developed was the concern for acquiring that Cicero commented of his friend Verres:

The passion for building an art collection had reached a maniacal and violent degree.128 His passion was soon transformed into illness and even insanity.128

Alongside these formal collections Roman families also accumulated personal collections of both gold and silver plate, many of them enormous. Family prestige in this epoch came to depend to some large extent on collections of silverware as a way that money could buy visible gentility. Pearce asserts that it was here for the first time the way in which heirlooms which pass from one generation to another and are a source of pride and identity, and in another sense household goods which also carry an investment value, can be observed.129

It was during the Renaissance that the practices popularly associated with modern collecting interests fully emerged. The Renaissance collectors gathered all that had gone before them in the European tradition of possessions (after Baudrillard’s use of the term), arriving at the moment in which Florentine power and influence flourished. Cosimo de Medici was not the first and not the only collector in this period but he was the most visible and certainly the most prolific (not to mention the richest). Newly wealthy and aesthetically ambitious, he amassed a collection of possessions large enough to warrant its own building and so founded what is now considered the

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129 Ibid:95
first museum in Europe, the Palazzo Medici Riccardi in Florence, in 1444. The palazzo housed an extensive assortment of ‘effigies and images’, precious stones, engravings, sculptures, paintings and mosaics as well as articles from the ancient world. This private showroom of both taste and knowledge set the course for the proliferation of collections that were housed in rooms, buildings and cabinets across Europe, although such collecting practices were limited to a particular aesthetic and remained exclusively the domain of the moneyed and leisured. Coming at the conjunction of a re-emergence of interest in the classical past amongst the bourgeois class, as well as a new fashion for the flashy demonstration of wealth, princes, merchants and scholars all began to establish collections after Cosimo’s model.

Classical coins, medals, intaglios, inscriptions, fragments of buildings and sculptures were actively sought and collected for their legible importance along with codices, texts and illustrated volumes from classical times. Statues were dug out of the ground and new building sites were eagerly scanned for the pieces that might emerge… Emissaries were dispatched to search for the old neglected classical manuscripts that lay rotting in the cellars of the monasteries and cathedrals.

By the end of the 16th century, collections had become commonplace in Europe, all of which “had the function of bringing together a number of material things and arranging them in such a way as to represent or recall either an entire or partial world picture.” These ‘Cabinets of Curiosities’, which housed objects from natural history, geology, ethnography, archaeology, religious or historical relics and works of art, flourished over the next four hundred years. Often they would contain a mix of fact and fiction, including specimens from the new world that were collected during voyages of discovery and trade.

**Ordering**

The Cabinet of Curiosity was the prototype of the encyclopedic museum as an institution of learning, an institution which Foucault positions as central to the ordering of knowledge. Cabinets and collections, he asserts, describe the momentum of the episteme which allowed for

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131 Ibid:33
132 Ibid:78
the accumulating of everything, of establishing a general archive that enclosed in one place all the times, epochs, forms and tastes, but which itself sat outside time and its ravages, creating a perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place.\textsuperscript{133} These cabinets sought to bring together objects which, through their simultaneity, could act to represent all the different parts of existence while at the same time ordering the material into a demonstration of knowing. The divisions and categories used to divide such collections began to take on the hue of scientific classification as taxonomic divisions were developed. One distinguished Dutch cabinet of the early 1600s for example was designed to hold objects that represented the “animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms; the four contents; every period of historical time; tools for every variety of work and pleasure; and the traditional allegories of the four seasons, the five senses, the virtues, time and place.”\textsuperscript{134}

As the Renaissance dissolved into the age of reason at the beginning of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century the classificatory systems which allowed for the acceleration of scientific enquiry became the central schema for the ordering of collections. This moment of transformation saw the establishment of records and filing systems, catalogues, indexes and inventories, systems which stripped away much of the contextualising material that had accrued to things and ideas during the Renaissance.\textsuperscript{135} The ‘age of the catalogue’ as Foucault calls it, was an acceleration away from the circular relationships of resemblance, infinitely variable, often personal towards the tabulated, documented, limited canon of order.\textsuperscript{136} Hooper-Greenhill suggests the Repository of the Royal Society in England as the apotheosis of this type of collection, set up as a self-conscious “instrument to create a new ‘truth’, a cutting tool appropriate for a new episteme.”\textsuperscript{137}

In this project a new rational language was to be created that would enable the new rational ordering of things. A universal language, able to be used by merchants, divines, and scientists, would be used to classify objectively ideas and data about natural

\begin{enumerate}
  \item Foucault (1973)
  \item Kaufmann (1978)
  \item Hooper-Greehill (1992):138
  \item Foucault (1973):131
  \item Hooper-Greehill (1992):145
\end{enumerate}
phenomena in what might ‘prove the shortest and plainest way for the attainment of real knowledge, that hath been yet offered to the World’.’\textsuperscript{138}

As well as a moment in which a new language of order was envisioned, the Repository of the Royal Society was also a moment in which collecting practices shifted from private to public. Founded in 1660 as an experimental science club, the group reformed as a public institution, establishing a laboratory and a ‘keeper’ or ‘curator’ to set up experiments and look after instruments.\textsuperscript{139} Setting an agenda to compile a complete taxonomy of the knowable world, one of the founders, Thomas Sprat, wrote in 1667

that the Society was working towards a General Collection of all the Effects of Arts, and the Common, or Monstrous Works of Nature’, and that the Fellows had already drawn together into one Room, the greatest part of all the several kinds of things, that are scatter’d throughout the Universe.’\textsuperscript{140}

The emphasis in the collection was on the malformed and monstrous natural history specimens, including a chicken with four legs, a one-eyed colt, and even a gigantic cucumber.\textsuperscript{141}

The attempt to catalogue the whole of nature failed, yet as Hooper-Greenhill notes, that failure led to the creation of a museum that,

although it did not act as a scientific databank for information, did act as a compilation and repository of the values of rarity, pleasure, and curiosity. As such it related to other contemporary elements that included personal cabinets, ostentatious display, and social gain through the possession of unusual things.\textsuperscript{142}

The segue between the prototype encyclopaedic collection and the public museum as an institutional holder of knowledge came through the person of Sir Hans Sloane, one time secretary and later President of the Royal Society. One of the greatest collectors of his era, Sloane spent the considerable income he earned as a popular London physician on books,
manuscripts, art, coins, and natural history specimens of every kind, often buying whole
collections from contemporary botanists and zoologists. His collection, housed in several rooms
at his mansion in Bloomsbury, was open to the public by appointment. Sloane’s contact with
other Royal Society Fellows and the Repository influenced not only his collecting activities, but
his strong commitment to compiling systematic and accurate catalogues. Sloane left a will
specifying on his death in 1753 that his collections be offered for sale, first to the King and then
to the Royal Society, with the hope that they would be kept as one collection. The Parliament
voted to take over the material at which time it became the foundation of the British Museum,
the zenith of the encyclopaedic museum and the model on which museums were based for the
next 200 years.¹⁴³

This development as it played out in England was echoed in Europe where the French revolution
similarly transformed the emerging field of museology. In the place of private collections housed
in the palaces of princes and the homes of scholars, collecting rooms were transformed into
public spaces open to the whole community.¹⁴⁴ Then,

once ‘museums’ had been set up in a regular geographic network in France, they were
established in other parts of Europe … to allow the people to enjoy the collections that
had previously been reserved for the elite.¹⁴⁵

Milan, Antwerp, Brussels all transformed private collections into public institutions and “spaces
for storage and accumulation were re-articulated as spaces for exposure and exhibition.”¹⁴⁶
Science was similarly the discourse of ordering, with the Académie des Sciences in Paris
providing salaries for research workers and lavish facilities for experiments which in turn fed
into the taxonomic project of the museum and out into the public arena through the instrument of
public display. Similarly, as the edges of the known world contracted, oddities from the New
World became desired collectibles and objects of fascination, encouraging further engagement
with the newly emerging ‘museum’ audiences.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ MacGregor (1994)
¹⁴⁵ Ibid:184
¹⁴⁶ Ibid
¹⁴⁷ See Shelton (1994)
Displaying

Despite collections of fossils and other relics of the deep past being valued elements of cabinet and curio collections, the term ‘prehistoric’ was not in common usage until coined by Scottish artist and antiquary Daniel Wilson in 1851, as the disciplines of geology, palaeontology, prehistoric archaeology and anthropology, developed. These areas of enquiry signalled an epistemic shift that re-ordered understandings of previous epochs, thinking taken up by museums as they split either into separate institutions along disciplinary lines or into departments within larger institutions – art, natural history, anatomy, botany, geology, zoology, ethnography and so forth.148

As these new types of disciplinary museums flourished in the final decades of the 19th century, they played a key role in rendering understandings of the past visible and knowable in two ways: firstly as the ‘laboratory’ for the emerging disciplines, “providing the contexts in which the new pasts they organised could become thinkable and perceptible as new realities;” and second for “the part played by [their] exhibition practices … in translating these pasts into a significant component of late 19th century public culture.”149 While these developments both affected and involved museums internationally, their sway was greatest in Britain where they came to have a potent influence on late Victorian public culture. Suddenly, limitless vistas of pasts going back beyond human existence, let alone memory, came rapidly into view as the once mute traces they had left behind were made eloquent through the application of new methods of analysis and interpretation.150

These new methods included, most radically, the evolutionary theories proposed by Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. Despite being fiercely contested, evolutionary thinking was championed by various luminaries within the science community and became fundamental to the thinking about the deep past at the very moment that such a past was coming into view. While disciplinary museums were the ‘laboratories’ for this radical new thinking, they were also the means of its articulation: the sorting and displaying of material in sequences was the method of evidencing evolutionary thinking in the material world, an enactment of the reasoning and a

148 Alexander (1979)
149 Bennett (2004):152
150 Ibid
demonstration of its hypothesis. The lead proponent of this technique was Lieutenant-General Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt Rivers, scion of a wealthy Yorkshire land-owning family and zealous collector of archaeological and ethnographic material. Amassing over 30,000 objects during the course of his life, he was well able to demonstrate his method from within his own holdings. To this end, the objects were

arranged in sequence with a view to show ... the successive ideas by which the minds of men in a primitive condition of culture have progressed in the development of their arts from the simple to the complex, and from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous … Human ideas as represented by the various products of human industry, are capable of classification into genera, species and varieties in the same manner as the products of the vegetable animal kingdoms. If, therefore we can obtain a sufficient number of objects to represent the succession of ideas, it will be found that they are capable of being arranged in museums upon a similar plan.151

This style of arrangement was a revolutionary innovation in museum design and became the standard display configuration for the next 100 years. Pitt Rivers was celebrated as the pioneer who demonstrated how reliable human history could be built up bit by bit, in the shelves and show-cases of a museum; it was he … who pressed home the study of living primitive peoples as a clue to the customs, myths and beliefs of our long dead ancestors.152

This thinking became critically important as ideas of man’s progression sounded into public understandings of scientific discourses.

Following the lead and the model of British institutions, colonial governments in each of the Australian states developed major public museums between the 1870s and 1890s.153 Beginning with general collections, their focus increasingly shifted to ethnological collections, gathering pace as the fields of anthropology and archaeology developed towards the beginning of the 20th century. This shift was inspired by the emerging museology of Lieutenant-General Pitt Rivers, whose efforts were in turn furthered by material collected in Australia. The thinking which

151 Pitt Rivers (1874):xi - xii
152 Bennett (2004):65, quoting Keith 1913
153 Kohlstedt (1983)
favoured typological categorising of objects, particularly ethnographic objects, of which Pitt Rivers was the most famous proponent, became increasingly dominant in both the fledgling Australian collections and the museological theory that guided their display, mostly through the agency of Baldwin Spencer.

The appointment of Spencer as Honorary Director of the National Museum of Victoria in 1899 was a defining moment in the development of Australian museology. Spencer’s already ignited interest in ethnography had been stimulated during the Horn scientific exploring expedition to central Australia in 1894 when he joined the company as zoologist and photographer. It was on this trip that he met the Alice Springs postmaster Frank Gillen, who had been making his own ethnographic observations during his desert deployment. The two men formed a highly effective research partnership and in 1896 they mounted the most intensive field-work expedition ever attempted in Australia at that time. The resultant publication, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899), had an enormous influence on the developing theories of social evolution which positioned Aboriginal people as the most primitive in order of development.154 By the time Spencer was appointed to the directorship of the museum, he was on the cusp of an international reputation as an expert in ethnography and social evolution, two fields that were increasingly convergent. The ripples of global influence emanating from Spencer continued through other specialist commentators working in similar fields, for example that of James Frazer who consulted Spencer extensively in the development of his equally significant study of comparative folklore, magic and religion *The Golden Bough*.155

By the time of his appointment as director of the National Museum of Victoria in 1899, Spencer had developed a cohesive approach to the display of Aboriginal material culture. Drawing on his prior training at the Pitt Rivers Museum, he set about re-organising the processes of the NMV, beginning with a move to integrate its collections with those of the public library as a means of stressing its place in the development of knowledge. He then relocated the Museum’s holdings of Aboriginal materials to the natural history section and installed the objects in an arrangement that

154 Spencer and Gillen (1938)
155 Mulvaney (1990)
demonstrated evolutionary principals.\textsuperscript{156} These theories explained the decline in Indigenous population of the colonised world as a natural rather than violent process.\textsuperscript{157}

This conjunction of developing social theory, global notoriety and public display was a powerful mix that coagulated into the status quo for both exhibiting and thinking about Aboriginal material culture for the next 100 years (and which, according to Rodney Harrison as mentioned in the introduction, is still shockingly current). Spencer’s arrangements of artefacts were extant in the Museum of Victoria until midway through the second half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, and his ‘evolutionary evidence’ approach to display dominated Australian museums well into the 1980s.

\textbf{Show us your stuff}

Beginning then with the setting aside or separating of an object from common use, thus rendering it a \textit{possession}, through to the role of museums in the construction of public discourse, this research project is deeply entangled in culturally specific behaviours around material culture. This in no way implies that other cultures do not also practice some or even all of these

\textsuperscript{156} Mulvaney and Calaby (1985)
\textsuperscript{157} Dauber (2006):71
\textsuperscript{158} Bennett (2004):176, figure 7.1
activities, but in leading towards the National Museum of Australia, an undeniably distinct path through particular contexts can be followed. This trail of epistemological traces leads not just to the establishment of this social history museum (as discussed in chapter 7) but to the research proposal it produced to which this thesis is a response. In the light of this understanding then the proposition “[to] consider Indigenous people as collectors, curators and presenters of beloved objects, [in order to develop] new perspectives on Australian Indigenous history” might be re-phrased to ask the question of Aboriginal people: “how do you do what we do?” This uncovering of the subject/object positions implicit in the original proposal might be uncomfortable in such a bald re-framing, but by revealing the inner workings of the proposition a space is made for an alternative ontology to emerge.\footnote{Appendix 1}
5. Pear shaped

She has by now heard it many times before, but I explain my research to Deanna again, recording it onto the tape recorder. My pitch to her centres on the National Museum of Australia and its concern to broaden its interest in the project of Indigenous social history through its National Historical Collection. The research proposal is straightforward enough: Aboriginal people are, understandably, given the history of collecting in Australia, stereotypically seen as ‘museum victims’ whose precious possessions and ancestral remains have been acquired by sometimes greedy institutions for the purposes of examination, classification and display. By asking Aboriginal people to speak about the objects they hold dear, the power of that relationship will be reversed allowing new narratives to emerge. It sounds easy.

Deanna has visited and enjoyed the museum in Canberra and she understands the proposal. She nods politely, trying to find a response. ‘What sort of things?’ she asks. ‘Anything’, I say, ‘anything that tells about history, reminds you of the past, was handed down in your family, that you kept as a memento or you were given, or you thought was important enough to keep.’ She nods again and stands to put the kettle on. She’s struggling not to disappoint me. Firstly, she explains, her family moved around when she was a kid, each time starting anew from cooking pots up. And although she now has a lovely home of which she is justifiably proud, it was not always the case. As she struggled to raise her own nine children on Wallaga Lake mission and later in Nowra, similar circumstances prevailed. Keeping things was a luxury she never had the means to indulge. Nevertheless, I notice the china cabinet in the lounge room, the sideboard in the dining room, and the dressing table in the spare room are all full with what are obviously mementos, trinkets and collectables. I ask her to tell me about her ‘bits and pieces’ and she takes me on a tour around the house. “Jimmy picked this up from the tip” she tells me, pointing to a framed print of a Russell Drysdale painting – two figures in a streetscape. “I know it was done by a white artist but they remind me of Kooris.” Next are a couple of framed posters commemorating the opening of the Perisher Blue ski resort at which she gave the welcome to country. Gifts from children and grandchildren, bargains from sales and op shops, knick-knacks salvaged from garage sales and the poker-work boomerang all have their place. But Deanna
herself doesn’t identify any of these as being particularly precious or precious enough to attribute something as important as ‘history’ to. What’s important is already on my tape.

Over the next few months I visit six or seven more homes, several of them belonging to Deanna’s grown children, others of relatives from within the extended family as well as friends and neighbours – wherever the contacts lead. Each time I explain that the project is part of the Museum’s interests in Aboriginal social and material history and I ask about objects and history in as many different ways I can think of. Each time I ask, people try to think of something to help and suggest collections that immediately come to mind. Jimmy for example keeps a few old mobile phones in a gym bag in the garage, fascinated at the way in which the technology evolved; someone’s son, like many young guys his age, keeps a collection of polyfoam stubby holders on a bookshelf in his bedroom; another lady further up the coast collects china frogs as decorations. In each house I am shown personal mementos, often proudly purchased ‘bargains’ from garage sales and op shops, or objects found miraculously on the side of the road – decorative elements that are about homemaking and domestic life. But when I explain the project, there is no resonance with the idea of objects as carriers of narrative, or with material culture and history as being particularly important to each other. As I am from the University and/or Museum (I leave the distinction intentionally blurred), they know there is an opportunity for representation and my interviewees quickly move on to topics of more interest – there are good stories to tell that need recording. I leave the tape going and let the conversations wander where they will.

Although I am developing a great archive of recorded material, the lack of engagement with the topic is an ongoing problem. It did not resonate with the Karri Yalla artists, and it is not resonating with Deanna and her generation. Perhaps it is my expectation. Like any community, there are bound to be people who are more interested in the project of keeping ‘history’ than others. I hear rumours of collections just outside my reach. A curator from the museum tells me about an old lady up in Griffith who turned her house into a keeping place, a nest of memorabilia from a life lived in the struggles of the land rights movement and the emergence of a national Aboriginal identity; I read a story by Margaret Somerville about an old cardboard suitcase with granny’s clay pipe and dilly bag in it, stored lovingly under a bed; in her article Aboriginal
Family History, Maria Nugent footnotes a footnote from the Australians and the Past survey, citing two Aboriginal women who “explained that they each had their own little keeping places at home, where they kept mementos from the past. One woman talked about keeping some clothes belonging to her mother.” How do I find these people?

Even though I’ve not managed to engage anyone with the idea of objects as historical vectors, I’ve now been around long enough to know that group activities are what piques people’s interest. Fishing, basket weaving workshops, barbeques, music festivals, community days are all enjoyable and well attended activities. Perhaps I need to frame my research as a community project if I want to drum up some engagement. Besides, the idea of a group enterprise brings other benefits. Rather than me going into people’s homes and asking questions, a public event allows people to speak directly into an authorized communal space already recognizable from within existing regional and local networks such as Elders groups, church groups and so on. This idea mimics the rationale behind contemporary museums which set out to create mutually agreed spaces out of multiple contributions, where objects are contextualized within a larger narrative which offer access and identification with the story. All I need is the means to bring people together and the project can begin:

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HISTORY PARTY

Date:  
Location:  

Have you got a special something hanging round at home that you would like to bring to our ‘History Party’? We’re looking for people to bring along their favourite objects and spin a yarn about their history...

Maybe you’ve kept your old footy jumper. What a great story that would make – the year you NEARLY won the cup!

Or maybe you’ve still got Gran’s old pudding bowl. If only it could talk – how many stories of Christmas in the old days it could tell.

You might have saved an old poster or button from a protest or some tools from your trade.

Or maybe it is something that you inherited from the family.

Perhaps you just like to collect things – dolls, china, old fishing rods, who knows?

Whatever it is, if you think it is special and it tells a part of your history, bring it along. We’re collecting Koori history for our ‘Lost and Found’ History Festival so come and lend your voice. We’ll record your story and photograph you and your object. At the end, we’ll collect up all the histories and put on an exhibition in Bega during NAIDOC week. You’ll get a copy of the photos and your story on CD and a copy of the exhibition catalogue – because you’ll be in it!

The recordings will also be used for our ABC radio documentary series called ‘Lost and Found’. Listen out for it on Local ABC Radio (Eden 106.3 FM, Bega 810 AM, Batemans Bay 103.5 FM)

So join in and help us get the word out about Koori history in the area. Bring the family, bring an object and bring a story to our ‘History Party’ and be part of making history.

For further information you can contact Christine Hansen on 0438 203 445 or at Christine.hansen@anu.edu.au
Lost and Found

South East Koori History Festival

The ‘Lost and Found’ Koori History Festival is a community project planned to run over the first six months of 2006 within the Bega Valley region. Focusing on contemporary and living histories, the project aims to celebrate the depth and breadth of Koori influence in the region’s character and the ways in which local histories are both preserved and communicated within families and communities.

Early in the year a series of ‘history parties’ will be held at libraries, keeping places, churches, school halls, or any other place where Koori people like to get together. Participants will be invited to bring an object that represents a moment of history – be it personal history, family history, community history or even an aspect of national and international history. As part of these events, participants will volunteer a story to which the objects relate. These stories will be recorded and photographs of the people and their objects will be taken. The audio recordings of the stories will be edited into 5-10 minute episodes of a radio documentary series. This series, under the name ‘Lost and Found’ will be played weekly on the Local ABC Radio Network (Bega), beginning in February and finishing in the first week of July.

The project will culminate in an exhibition held in the Bega Gallery during NAIDOC week. This multimedia collection of photographs of objects and their accompanying narratives, when viewed as a whole, will provide insight into history-telling practices within the local Indigenous community by focusing not just on oral histories, but on material culture and the ways in which objects are used to carry historical narratives. In this way, the exhibition will mirror strategies employed by contemporary museums, creating in effect a temporary mini-museum of local living Koori history.

As part of the 2006 NAIDOC celebrations, the exhibition will be launched with a major function at the Bega Gallery, attended by dignitaries from the area as well as all the ‘history party’ participants and their families. The entire festival of ‘Lost and Found’, including the radio series, the exhibition and the launch function, sets out to invite the Indigenous community into an environment in which their lives and histories are publicly celebrated.

For further information you can contact Christine Hansen on 0438 203 445 or at christine.hansen@anu.edu.au
The local ABC Radio network thinks this is a terrific idea and within moments of receiving my email, the morning show producer is on the line and I’m on air. The Bega Regional Gallery is happy for me to put in an exhibition proposal for the use of their gallery space and the Bega branch of the South East Region Arts Council funded by the NSW Ministry for the Arts offers assistance with applications and funding, although a friend makes an unkind sotto voce remark about my ‘Antiques Roadshow’ methodology. I’m inclined to agree but it is worth a try. I’m getting desperate.

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A couple of the ladies who work in the office wander over to the table in the gardens of the Umbarra Aboriginal Culture Centre at Wallaga Lake to see if there is any action. The microphone and digital recorder are set up on the table, the camera is on the tripod and afternoon tea is spread out ready for the ‘party’. The only action so far is the flies landing on the icing of the Boston bun. I try to engage the by-standers in conversation about the project. They think it is a great idea. They hope some people turn up. They themselves don’t have anything but they’d be interested in what other people might have. I offer them some cake anyway. I wait an hour or so more before admitting defeat but eventually it is more embarrassing staying than going.

I try again in Eden a week later with the same result, despite the fact that I have rung my contacts in the town and personally invited them, have in fact been given assurances that they would turn up. I leave flyers with people I know and ask them to pass them on. No one rings.

I return to Canberra beaten. People are not engaging with the project, and I’ve exhausted all the different ways I can think of to express it. Perhaps it is my question that I need to start questioning. The original project proposed to the ARC was to investigate “the material objects that Indigenous people collect, display and hold dear within their homes and communities with consideration of the personal, family and collective significance of these items.” Certainly I have seen objects collected, displayed and held dear. But when I ask people about them, they are mystified as to why I would be interested.
I conclude that the responses I am getting are either because of my inability to explain the research properly or a conceptual misfit is emerging. This project is based on the notion that collecting or preserving objects that hold narratives or meanings of the past is a historiographic practice that crosses cultural boundaries. The obstruction I am hitting brings that assumption into question. What are the veiled cultural beliefs that are concealed in such an overly familiar concept? The assumption that objects displayed and held dear are at the same time objects which hold “personal, family and collective significance” is not being supported by my experience. In order to understand the root of the problem, I need to take a step back and examine the origins of the question and to pick apart the unintentional but deeply ingrained ontological bias that frames this project.

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I have known all along that the ladies of the south coast, like the rest of us, have lives that are littered with objects of indeterminate status that hang around in garages, cupboards and wardrobes - slightly too important to throw out, but not quite important enough to be offered to a researcher as evidence of history or as emblematic of cultural identity. So what is the moment in which these things transition into objects that have been ‘collected’, or ‘preserved’ or recognized as being significant? In this instance I am not looking to be the agent of that transition myself by identifying objects to which I could point and say ‘this carries an important historical meaning’. That is not to say that such intervention is never warranted. Quite patently museums not only have an interest in finding the means of appropriate representation but have a duty to do so. If that requires actively pursuing objects that are not held in current collections then that is appropriate and justified. This project is not about my agency as a curator however, but seeks to identify the ways in which the people I am speaking with use objects to “sustain a sense of dignity and purpose [where collected objects become] both autobiography and monument.”

But this form of autobiography and/or monument seems not to have resonance with the Aboriginal people of south-east New South Wales of whom I have asked my questions. As much

\[161\] Pearce 95:254
as the aims of this project are in keeping with the practices of the museum, and to be honest my own, it is not inspiring connections or insight in any of the people I’ve spoken to.

The way museums move objects between the personal and the public might be the first clue to the conceptual misfit I am experiencing in the field. Usually, ordinary objects of every day use go through a process of being employed before becoming worn out and discarded. However, occasionally events interrupt these flows when ordinary objects may, for some essentially irrational reason, survive. As Pearce observes:

Partly worn saucepans, for example, in the possession of their owner at death, escape the dustbin by moving through a house clearance sale. They become part of the world of rubbish, as does the collected ordinary in the eyes of the world, and, like all rubbish, take their chances of resurrection in the form of re-collecting.162

An example of transformation in status of an object from junk to cherished is currently on display at the NMA in the exhibition From Little Things Big Things Grow: fighting for Indigenous rights 1920-1970. In curating the exhibition, the question of how to tell the story of a no longer existing mission station was raised. Through contacts in the community, a piece of tin formerly used as cladding for a hut on the Hollywood Mission site at Yass, NSW, was identified and a team of museum professionals was sent out to pick it up. In the intervening years the tin had been re-employed as the side wall of a chicken coop. The white gloved museum conservators nevertheless prised the tin off the chicken coop and gently laid it in a padded transport vehicle before removing it to the lab where the chicken poo was cleaned off with small instruments. This object, for all its modest material presence, tells the story of the mission huts in a way that is both direct and emotional. For the old mission residents who once lived in the huts, seeing the piece of tin overwhelms them with memories. For those who are seeking to learn, the tin evokes the materiality of the time and place in a way that text alone struggles to replicate. Social history museums such as the NMA are full of these kinds of objects. They tell stories of the working lives of ordinary people who are either exemplars of their experience (such as

162 Pearce (1995):382
migrant stories or working/labour stories) or they belonged to people who became famous during their lifetime, adding the history of their achievements to the provenance of the objects.

In the private world collected material which comes from the personal past, although “capable of expressing and embodying profound meaning and deep feelings”, circulates in a different domain. Bringing it into focus by presenting it as the carrier of a particular story would require a shift in the status of the object from a private and perhaps unarticulated meaning to a public or semi-public meaning, where the memory or narrative is shared and understood by others, including, perhaps, strangers. The objects which this research is asking about then, will, I hope, sit somewhere between these two domains – objects of everyday use that have survived and in surviving have become historic, and objects of personal meaning which hold feelings and memories of people and times past.

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The way in which museums shift the hierarchy of an object from the private to the public means that the very idea of an object which carries meaning is linked to that of a museum ‘artefact’ with all its associated baggage. This link in turn evokes notions of representation and the requirement of such objects to tell big stories on a big stage. Maybe this is why the objects I could see so clearly on display in people’s homes were not offered for inspection; it was not that they weren’t loved or did not have meaning; it is that they weren’t representational enough. What my research participants knew explicitly, and which I only later realised, is that any whitefella asking about Aboriginal people’s private possessions, particularly one with the kind of institutional associations that I have, is necessarily asking about the site at which their possessions intersect with the wider narrative of Aboriginal history and the representation of cultural identity.

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As a social history museum, the NMA is interested in representing the diversity of Australian experience, with a heavy emphasis on the nation’s first peoples, as it should as our premier and unashamedly nation-building cultural institution. However, although the Museum has abundant ethnographic material, objects that adequately narrate the story of 20th century south eastern

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163 Pearce (1995):243
Aboriginal life are by and large missing. This is not a situation unique to the NMA or Australia. Museums across the world that are struggling to find ways of representing Indigenous people appropriately are encountering the same ‘hole’, as veteran curator and consultant to the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian at its establishment (as she was to the NMA) Elaine Heumann Gurian has found:

> Often the people in the lowest economic strata could hardly wait to exchange their objects for those that were more valued, giving no thought, at the time, to the preservation of the discarded material. So it goes for most peoples during their most impoverished historical periods.\(^{164}\)

The reasons for a lack of engagement with the idea of objects as historical record in this research however may be more complicated than the narrative of poverty suggests. Objects of everyday use are not easy to translate into objects of representation by the people who use them every day, no matter what their circumstances. Furthermore, everyday objects which might be useful as a means of telling stories about mission life, work or political struggle did not delineate the type of cultural distinctiveness that was an important element in maintaining a unique identity for many Kooris during the 20\(^{th}\) century. Making ‘exotica’ such as boomerangs and woven baskets for tourists was a much more productive assertion of cultural distinctiveness than collecting and preserving commonly used familiar objects.\(^{165}\)

Another element in this disjuncture is that the museum’s dependence on the static nature of objects sits in opposition to the community’s more fluid engagement with the material world. The inability of the museum’s collection to narrate complex Indigenous histories of the south east, in as much as they are characterised by their interactions with and absorption of other cultural influences, is expressed as a lack or an absence. This absence frames the discussion about Indigenous material culture that sits outside an easily recognisable ethnographic context more generally, where Aboriginal people’s possessions that do not reference a pre-contact culture have not been seen as valuable. These notions of either value or absence disallow the ontological alternative in which material culture is not conceived of as static but as the carrier of process, where objects take their rightful place in the cycles of creation and decay to be re-made.

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\(^{164}\) Gurian (2001):78

\(^{165}\) See for example references to boomerang making in Kleinert (2006) and Nugent (2005)
and in the re-making to be invigorated. In an historical context Dawn Casey points out “the materials used to make [certain] items including bark, wood, grasses and feathers did not last and in some instances the destruction of objects were part of ceremony.”

Australian Aboriginal cultures are not alone in this. David Lowenthal offers a diverse range of examples to demonstrate the same point:

“When the product is preserved and venerated, the impulse to repeat the process is compromised,” wrote Chinua Achebe of Nigerian art. … Museum retention of Melanesian churinga is likewise distressful; these artifacts, essential in tribal exchange rituals, must be destroyed after use so that new churinga can be made. The human life-cycle requires reiterated creation, exchange, and destruction of forms that embody or host beings.

In south-east Australia, the way objects remain in circulation within Aboriginal communities is a means of expressing kinship, community cohesion and shared participation, a cultural practice which remains extant. A Murri friend from Brisbane for example, takes great pleasure in telling me stories about seeing her possessions unexpectedly in the houses of friends and relatives and the way in which the recognition of the object’s journey is a source of great amusement to all parties.

Both intentional disposability and the cultural imperative for circulation work against the static nature of museum artefacts where the emphasis is on preservation and removing objects from circulation. The non-discursive evocation of the past that objects offer and which is so enjoyed by museum audiences is thrown into relief as a culturally specific practice when viewed against alternative attitudes to material culture. This disjuncture played into early representations of Aboriginal people in museums, where the proof of their ‘primitiveness’ was on display in the form of their objects. As anthropologists Peterson, Hamby and Allen point out:

Aboriginal people and their ways of life captured the European imagination not least because they were seen as humans in the chrysalis phase. Their nakedness, their lack of material possessions.. confirmed this. It took nearly a hundred years… before it was

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166 Casey (2006)
167 Lowenthal (2005):396
realised that this material simplicity was juxtaposed with great cultural and social complexity.\textsuperscript{168}

Although anthropologists may have examined this social complexity in great detail, the understanding of the ways in which objects circulate in contemporary urban contexts, which can be seen as an extant cultural process, has not been credited in Indigenous material culture studies.

The contest between flexible and adaptive relationships with material heritage and western heritage regimes such as heritage registers and institutions of conservation such as museums are not exclusive to an Australian context but are present in many communities that have remained in place. Archaeologist Denis Byrne experienced a similar disjuncture during his research in the Philippines, where he was exposed to the distance between western heritage regimes and Indigenous knowledge systems, where local participants viewed the archaeological or heritage record as part of the spirit world of which the material remains were the least important aspect.\textsuperscript{169}

Similarly James Clifford offers an example of the divergence between museums’ preservation agendas and a more direct relationship to the impermanent nature of artefacts, when antique Zuni war-god figures repatriated from a museum collection in the south-west of the United States were allowed to rot on sacred ground, much to the horror of the curators, thus, according to the Zuni, completing their “interrupted traditional life journey.”\textsuperscript{170}

The lack of engagement with my research question within the community forced me to think about the project in a new way. Particularly pertinent was consideration of the extent to which the museum is not just infused with, but is in fact a product of, deeply embedded cultural assumptions about the material world. Clearly, at least to my mind, there was an ontological mismatch at the root of this research project which caused the questions I was asking to fail. Yet despite this failure, the questions did not set up a contest between these alternative world views, where one way of thinking dominated the other. In fact, somewhat counter-intuitively, the reverse was set in train.. As a social history museum, the NMA is committed to its task of

\textsuperscript{168} Peterson, Allen et al. (2008):1
\textsuperscript{169} Byrne (1993), Byrne (2005)
\textsuperscript{170} Clifford (1997):212
representing Australian society and Indigenous representation plays a central role in that
devour. Likewise community, like many other Aboriginal communities, are interested in
being represented and understand that the National Museum is an important venue of high
cultural standing in which to have a voice. Although goodwill extends from both sides, the
problem is that the medium, the objects through which a conjunction of intentions can take place,
is missing.

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The disjuncture I encountered between the notion of ‘collecting’ and the material culture
interests of the community into forces me back into the origins of the project within the museum.
The assumption about the primacy of the material world which underpins this study is not
immediately apparent from within the institution. Out in the field it becomes glaringly obvious
that I am asking questions from within a paradigm that is deeply embedded in centuries of
western thinking. The whole enterprise of object based narratives in the context of a museum
assumes a centrality of the material that is so natural as to be almost unrecognisable. That
doesn’t mean that these particular Aboriginal people have no interest in how they are represented
or in material culture or museums generally. On the contrary, like the rest of the population, they
enjoy visiting museums as a leisure time activity, particularly if Indigenous people are
represented, and respond with just as much interest to historical objects as any other group. But
outside of their interest as an audience, their own historiographical practices are not
symmetrically aligned with those of the museum in the way that the research questions of this
project assume.

Although my observations lead me to a new understanding of the relationship between material
culture and history in this community, I realise that picking apart the reasons for the failure of
my question is an impossible task. It might be that the people I’ve been speaking to are
mistrusting of me because I come from an institution such as a museum or a university and,
given the history between us, are not comfortable revealing what they consider to be their
treasures. Or it might be that poverty has played the major role in the dearth of what families
would consider heirloom objects and that the forced migration between missions and reserves
that characterises 20th century Aboriginal history of the south east made keeping objects almost
impossible. It might also be that the way objects circulate in this community is in itself a mark of a distinctive cultural practice, where the emphasis is on relationship rather than preservation or ownership. It might be that my research results are specific to this community and had I asked the same question in another place, Brewarrina or Kempsey or Tamworth for example, I would have had an entirely different outcome. On the other hand the failure of my question might have nothing to do with the specifics of the Aboriginal community but might equally have emerged from within the wider community amongst people of European and other descent. All I can be sure about is that if I was to arrive at a definitive understanding of the reasons for the failure of my question I would need to test all of these variables against each other and against other similar research, a massive undertaking that would ultimately contribute very little. Instead I decide to move on from my original question about objects and identity and to try and find a more useful engagement with the community.

**Family history**

Having asked a question about the connection between objects and history which was not resonant with or relevant to the interests of the community, I needed to reframe the project in a way that was interesting. I began my next discussion with Deanna on a different tack, by asking about the importance the past has for her. The answer, predictably, was complex and difficult and began with her reflecting on her own history. She told me about growing up in Wreck Bay and on Cowra Mission, working in hospitals as a domestic and later for the Aboriginal Health Service as a driver, raising nine children, fighting for rights, becoming a recognised traditional owner in her later years. She had a swag of stories about her own experiences and those of her parents but as the discussion progressed over the following weeks we stretched beyond living memory and we turned to the literature to try and fill in some of the gaps. Immediately we hit the obstacle that pioneering historian of Indigenous lives Dianne Barwick identified in 1981 when she observed that

> Most aborigines grow up learning two kinds of history; the memories preserved by their families and the humiliating textbook history … which denies the realities of their past and present.\(^{171}\)

\(^{171}\) Barwick (1981):75
In this instance, ‘the humiliating textbook history’ documents the sad extinction of the Ngarigo with the passing of the ‘last full blood’ in 1914. (A full discussion of this literature follows in chapter 13). Not only is this humiliating, it is wrong. Deanna has lived her life knowing the lie within this historical narrative of extinguishment. For me, the experience of reading the texts in the presence of someone who is directly affected by the story they preserve was distressing. This was my first flesh and blood engagement with the deep and ongoing hurt that legitimising processes (such as history writing) can cause. My own blithe approach to reading and thinking about history was thrown into relief by this engagement with Deanna’s reality and I suddenly saw the naivety in the original research question. The primary concern for Deanna and her family is to challenge their erasure and assert their presence. Understanding both the depth of the hurt and the enormity of challenging the dominant narrative puts my project into perspective. It is clear that history is a battleground, not a mantelpiece where mementoes rest in peace. The museum will have to wait its turn.

By the time I understand this, Deanna and I have become friends. We live within a couple of blocks of each other in one of the outer suburbs of Canberra and pop around to each other’s houses on the way to or from the shops. We chat about all manner of things but most importantly we discuss what she would like to get out of this project. Over and over she comes back to the sadness of her mother’s removal from country and family as a young girl. So much was lost in that removal; the stories, the language, the knowledge of country, the experience of family and the unspoken transmission of belonging. What Deanna wants is to connect those pieces up again in a family history. It might result in a book about the women of the Monaro or it might be a genealogy that traces the family back past the dismembering removal. Whatever it is, it will counter the lie of extinction.

I begin to be excited by the project again as its potential dawns on me. Exactly as Deanna specifies, a family history is what is needed, a lineage of named individuals with identities and histories that can penetrate the black mist. No longer ‘the Aborigines’ or ‘the natives’, but black tracker Alex Brindle, his brother-in-law and colleague Billy Rutherford, their fathers James Brindle and Billy Rutherford snr., their mothers Lizzy Bradshaw and Emily Peters. The mist clears to reveal named characters who navigate their way through the familiar terrain of the
Monaro Plains and Snowy Mountains, rendering it strange again, a forgotten historical landscape.
6. Travel and travail

Emily

Although only the slimmest of details can be known about Deanna’s Ngarigo ancestors at the time of first contact, and those more by inference, context and rumour than by archival evidence, the next generation, spanning the era from the 1850s to the first decade of the 20th century, comes into clearer focus in the records. The first example is a photograph of a group of well dressed young ladies who sit demurely on the banks of the Avon River in Gippsland, Victoria. One of these girls, we guess the third from the left, is Emily Peters, Deanna’s great grandmother.

Figure 18. Girls on the Avon River, Charles Walter1865
Accession number H96.160/1603, Victorian Copyright Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Emily first enters the written record as she travels from Albany in Western Australia to the Moravian run ‘Ramahyuck’ mission station in Gippsland in 1867, managed at the time by the Reverend F A Hagenauer. She is perhaps not quite 15 years old and on the greatest adventure of
her young life so far, a ship’s journey to the east where her married future awaits. Her companion, the older and steadier Bessie Flower, writes home to their friend and school teacher Missie during a brief stopover en route in 1867:

… A baker drove past us in a cart and dropped a double loaf in the mud. We could not help laughing. [The clergyman] called out to him but he did not hear. Emily went to pick it up and she told me to tell you it was so hot and smelt so nice. She was going to pick a piece out of it (we have such fun with her).\textsuperscript{172}

Emily, it is clear, is full of beans, if not bread.

Sent in a party of five young women from Albany, Emily along with three of the other girls were to be given as brides on their arrival, an arrangement made between friends and fellow Moravian missionaries, the Rev. John Ramsden Wollaston in Western Australia and Hagenauer in Victoria. The plan had originally been hatched between the Reverends for two other girls but both fell sick on the journey and died in the Melbourne Hospital before they had a chance to meet their fiancés. Not dissuaded, the two Moravians tried again, this time with five girls, although two of them, including Emily, were still too young to marry. Another Western Australian girl had already married the Wotjoballuk man Nathaniel Pepper at Ebenzer Mission, the location of Hagenauer’s previous posting, and the missionaries had been very pleased with the marriage.

The girls were all well educated young women, having been through the Annesfield School in Albany, established by Henry and Anne Camfield in 1852. Founded specifically to educate local Aboriginal children, the school was the Camfield’s contribution to the ‘civilising and Christianising [of] the Nyungar’.\textsuperscript{173} Anne Camfield, a trained teacher and, it seems, a talented educator, took responsibility for both developing and teaching the curriculum. Historian Bain Attwood believes the school’s primary aim was to provide children “trained in those habits of order, obedience and industry considered appropriate for a labouring class…” for positions in service.\textsuperscript{174} Certainly this was their stated aim. But the experience of Bessie Flower, Emily’s school mate, travelling companion and soon to be Ramahyuck teacher, shows that Mrs Camfield

\textsuperscript{172} Pepper and De Araugo (1985):136-7
\textsuperscript{173} Attwood (1989):32
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid:34
was dedicated to education, not just for vocational purposes but for more general intellectual development. On her recommendation the academically gifted Bessie had been sent to Sydney under the auspices of the Anglican Archbishop of Perth, where she attended one of the Anglican model schools. There she was taught not only the basic subjects of English grammar and literature, arithmetic, history and geography, she also had access to drawing, music, dancing and calisthenics classes and developed skills in piano and singing as well, on one occasion playing the organ at a Sunday afternoon service in St Philip’s Church, leading ‘a full congregation’ in singing the hymns.  

By the time that Emily and Bessie would have began school, presumably sometime in the late 1850s, many of the Nyungar had already moved into European settlements more or less permanently and no doubt their parents were part of this demographic shift. Unlike the experience of the Ngarigo, the education of their children was not coupled with a threat of separation and as their parents’ relationship with the church and the local missionaries strengthened, the children began to attend the newly established school freely, with many of the children able to live at home while attending classes. The success in attendance contrasts starkly with the model proposed in NSW, where the children were to be removed from their parents for long periods of time.

Despite Bessie’s superior educational experience, the Camfields’ goal for their students was that they would find “respectable situations as domestic servants or be settled in marriage upon Aboriginal reserves.” Since no such reserves existed in Western Australia by the time these girls were ready to graduate, the idea of sending them to Victoria offered a solution to both mission managers. Hagenauer knew that the Camfields were looking for Christian husbands for female students of the school, just as he was looking for Christian girls for the Ramahyuck men. As was often the case in the newly established missions of the mid 19th century some of the young men on the east coast had made enthusiastic conversions to Christianity but none of the women had followed suit. The mission managers recognized that if the still-forming communities were to flourish, suitable Christian wives for the men would need to be found.

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175 Ibid
176 Ibid
Likenesses had been exchanged and it seems that all parties were pleased with the arrangement, including the girls’ parents - the idea of finding husbands from appropriately distant communities may have been compatible with extant traditional marriage rules - and so five young women, including Emily Peters, left Albany in June 1867.177

**Ramahyuck**

Emily arrived at the orderly but rudimentary Ramahyuck mission station as an educated young lady, versed in the gospel, domestic arts and nursery duties as well as reading, writing and arithmetic. While waiting to come of age, it was intended that she should spend a year or two working with Mrs Hagenauer in the mission house as a general domestic assistant. Ramahyuck was a classical Moravian mission, a disciplined complex of cottages and public buildings set out with precision around a central square and surrounded by neatly fenced farm yards. This was a moral architecture which sought to reshape and control those who resided within, a material and spatial expression of the principals of the Church. Originating in central Europe in the fifteenth century, the Moravian Church, also known as the Church of the United Brethren, was essentially a missionary fellowship and had arrived in New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria in October 1849 at the invitation of the colonial authorities for exactly that purpose; to establish missions.178

The Reverend Hagenauer who founded two missions in Victoria was clearly well equipped for the job. By 1874 a visitor remarked of Ramahyuck that what had once been a ‘dense and dreary woodland, void of improvements of any kind’ was transformed ‘into what now is… a comfortable, neat and clean hamlet.’179 Life for the residents was likewise: on a visit in 1871, the ethnographer A W Howitt described one of the cabins as being “very neat and just as whites might occupy, a few books, some [needle]work and some knickknacks were lying about.”180 Founded by Hagenauer on the Avon River near Sale in 1863, the first buildings were a makeshift

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177 Pepper and De Araugo (1985):132-143  
178 Edwards (1999); Kenny (2007)  
180 Van Toorn (2006):189
church and a bark schoolhouse, soon replaced with a dormitory for the school children to live in and a neat white church. By 1871 Hagenauer had implemented his Victorian ideal of a gender-segregated playground for the children which could be viewed from all main buildings and a separate ‘orphan house’ where they could be separated from their parents for the purposes of education, a factor he considered vital to the process of civilisation.  

Children were taught the three ‘R’s’ as well as vocational skills including wood-work for boys and sewing for girls. Victoria’s Board for the Protection of Aborigines hoped that such skills would eventually make the reserves self-sufficient.

![Ramahyuck Mission Station, Gippsland, Victoria](image)

**Figure 19.** Ramahyuck Mission Station, Gippsland, Victoria

*Notes in catalogue: “Two adults and five children standing in front of house. This is the home of Reverend Hagenauer.” State Library of Victoria, Accession No: H31867, Image No: a13413*

Life on the mission was not what the Nyungar girls were used to, unaccustomed as they were to the kind of rigid conformity that Hagenauer demanded. The strict Moravian believed that “in

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181 Hagenauer 1885; Attwood (2000):47
182 Attwood (1989)
order to carry on the work successfully, [the station] needs a regular plan … [into which can fall] every individual Black from the old man down to the child, so that each one knows his place and work.”

183 The Western Australian girls fell well short of his expectations. Almost instantly he wrote to Western Australia complaining that “very much wanted in them, which one would not see at first”, and as a remedy he increased his demands, insisting that a heavy work load was the antidote to their inadequate training which “lacked a practical turn.”

184 Indeed these highly literate young women may well have been disappointingly uninterested in the laundry, Emily’s first assignment in the mission house. Bessie was worried by Emily’s dissatisfaction and high spirits and wrote to Missie asking for her intervention:

July 24th 1867

I forgot to tell you lots of things; first I have had my plaid frock washed; only the skirt for I wore it all the way from Melbourne and I am trying to sew it on… Emily washes our clothes on Tuesdays… When the steamer was coming up the river this morning, we were thinking if you and Martie were in it what would we do. Emily said she would jump in and swim to it. I said I would give the girls a good thumping… Oh if you did come, Mr and Mrs Hagenauer say they would be delighted… I must not forget to tell you, I am making a gruel for Mrs Hagenauer every night. She says it is very nice. Emily is so wild here. Will you dear Missie, write and tell her she must not be so… God bless you.

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With fulltime school for the children, heavy agricultural work for the men and household and lighter farm duties for the women, church on Sundays supplemented by twice-daily services for hymn singing, choir practice during the week and bible studies classes encouraged, the routine at Ramahyuck was both busy and disciplined. Soon after arriving, Bessie began to teach in the school, conducting her classes with what she called ‘great earnest’.

186 The girls had seemingly settled into the demanding schedule yet in the new year of 1868, just six months after their arrival, the mission descended into chaos when most of the Aboriginal residents staged a walk-off over demands for better working conditions. Hagenauer was furious. Believing the two older

183 Attwood (1989):8
184 Ibid:37
185 Pepper and De Araugo (1985):140
186 Harris (1994):202; Flower (1867)
Nyungar women had fomented the rebellion he wrote to Camfield “Instead of making the others settle down, these two girls persuaded nearly all 60 blacks on the station to leave... they [are] worse than any of the common bad lubras in the district.”\(^{187}\) This was one incident too many for the missionary and he resolved to restore order by any available means, including arranging for the immediate marriage of the two remaining Nyungar girls, Emily and Bessie’s younger sister Amy, although they were still too young.

Emily was married off to local man John Ellis and within little more than a year after her arrival, had had her first child. Letters from the east coast back to Albany, reports from Hagenauer to the Central Board and the Ramahyuck School records trace her growing family over the next few years: on 20\(^{th}\) May 1875, Jessie, the oldest is registered in the school records as being 7 years old, indicating he was born in 1868, one year after Emily arrived on the mission.\(^{188}\) She would have been about 16 years old. In 1871 Harry Flower wrote that Emily had had another girl (presumably she already has at least one) and in 1873 Bessie wrote that Emily had had another boy with another child following in 1875.

Married to John Ellis and with a full complement of babies and young children to care for, her life would have taken on the rhythm of the mission as she settled into the routine of raising her young family. Attwood draws an evocative picture of life on Ramahyuck in the 1870s, depicting the milieu in which Emily would have operated:

[The Aborigines] worked hard for themselves and their families and became quite well off during the 1870s. They lived in comparatively comfortable cottages, in which both men and women took enormous pride, and while the men’s wages were not high [they] were supplemented by government stores, a plentiful supply of milk and butter, a wide range of vegetables and fruit from the mission garden and orchard, and meat from animals fattened and slaughtered there... A refinement in ‘taste’ and manners was evident in the acquisition of sets of crockery, while the most prized objects were rocking chairs, gramophones and sewing machines. With the latter, the women made themselves

\(^{187}\) Hagenauer (1865-72)
\(^{188}\) Ramahyuck School (1871-1884)
elaborate dresses in the latest styles, while the men boasted nicely tailored coats; they donned these on Sundays and on important occasions.\footnote{Attwood (1989):41-42}

For all the seeming comfort however, an undercurrent of discontent was brewing. In 1877, ten years after Emily’s arrival, Reverend Hagenauer refers to Emily and one of the other Nyungar girls in a report, stating that they “had large families but were careless and did not attend to their housework, and neglected their children.”\footnote{Cited by Court and The Traralgon and District Historical Society (1973)} He makes no mention of the fact that Emily was by this time a young widow with many small children to care for. The school records show that the Ellis children were talented students, all of them at the top of their class so clearly the neglect was not of their education. Perhaps Hagenauer’s criticism held hidden meanings, for in the same year as his complaint Emily, still only in her mid twenties, met and married a man not of Hagenauer’s choosing but of her own.

**James**

James Brindle arrived at the Ramahyuck mission station probably around 1876. Hagenauer writes in December of that year that “a great many blacks have come down from the ranges to the station so that there will soon be nearly 120.”\footnote{Hagenauer (1876)} Hagenauer’s fellow mission manager from nearby Lake Tyers, the Church of England missionary Reverend John Bulmer gives a much more detailed account of the migration:

> The past year has been a remarkable one. Quite unexpectedly the last remnants of the wandering tribes of Aborigines from beyond the mountains made their appearance. We have often heard in days gone by from our blacks of those ‘warical’ tribes far away who would some day come down upon them and do them much harm. So great was the fear, that mothers frightened their children by telling them of those wild people… the expressed fear was needless, for the ‘waricals’ did not appear, and we naturally concluded that they had passed away like many other tribes in different localities of the colony. At last we learnt that there were some left, and they did come, in a most
deplorable condition, but in a friendly way… There was no need to be frightened of the handful of sick people who came in friendship, saying they wanted to make the station their home. They had been in contact with the Chinese on the goldfields and most of them had eaten and smoked opium.\footnote{Bulmer (1876)}

Whether James was one of the opium-sickened men is not known but given the speed at which he attracted the educated and vivacious Emily and organised himself permanent accommodation in a purpose built cottage it seems highly unlikely. Although no records confirm his previous residence, he was probably a resident of Lake Tyers prior to moving to Ramahyuck. The Lake Tyers Mission Station was established in 1861 by Bulmer, who continued to manage the station until 1907. Two years after its inception, an area of 2,000 acres was gazetted by the Victorian Colonial Government in 1863 as the Lake Tyers Reserve.\footnote{Kleinert (2006)} As Bulmer’s record notes, Lake Tyers was a popular point of arrival for people travelling from the Monaro, making it most likely the first port of call for James in Victoria. He may well have made the move from Lake Tyers to Ramahyuck expressly because of Emily; the traffic between the two missions was constant and the timing of their union suggests an existing familiarity.

Whatever James’s background, it is clear that the pressures on the Ngarigo caused by the gold rush and the Robinson land acts on the Monaro affected mission populations in Gippsland. The spatial logic of this southern migration is clear; the country that James came from and to which he and Emily would return was not yet run through with a state border, but rather centred on routes of movement that lead from high country to low and from inland to the coast, following along rivers and ridges. Gippsland and the Monaro were linked by ancient trails and tracks and it may well be that James had travelled these ways before.\footnote{See for example Grinbergs and Australian Heritage Commission. (1993)}

Emily and James lost no time becoming a couple; within a year they had moved into a new cottage and had had a daughter, Lilly Brindle, who was born in 1878. Once they paired up, old resentments between Emily and Hagenauer flared and rebellion was again on the agenda. At this point James enters the written record for the first time as a fully formed, politically savvy adult.

\footnote{Bulmer (1876)}\footnote{Kleinert (2006)}\footnote{See for example Grinbergs and Australian Heritage Commission. (1993)}
The entry is a rare treasure for a 19th century Aboriginal man - his own authentic voice, albeit a collective one. James and Emily were two of thirteen residents of the mission station who on July 11th 1878 signed a letter of complaint to the Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines listing a number of issues with which they were dissatisfied. The document records not just his and Emily’s dissatisfaction with the administration of the mission but their astute political acuity.

The letter begins:

Dear Sir,

We would humbly ask of you if it is lawful that the blankets are distributed to the favoured ones rather than to the poor sick blacks, when we asked for the blankets, the answer was that they were kept for the dead;

It then ranges across concerns about keeping livestock, attending sporting events, the provision of tomahawks and axes and disparity in wages, before landing on the crux of the matter:

We have heard that Mr Hagenauer said that government was not over him & we would know whether its true… Another thing that the blacks wish to say before you; that they cannot agree with Mr Hagenauer. May we ask the use of Mr Hagenauer’s coming here to preach the Gospel to the poor blacks & then for him to send them away… This is the first complaint we make to you & no more to say. We remain yours truly… Please send an answer. 195

A list of scratchy signatures follow, including that of Brindle JJW & wife.

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195 PROV: Item Number 172. NAA, CRS B313 Central Board for the Protection of the Aborigines, Correspondence Files Hagenauer (1869-1957)
The Central Board acted immediately, sending a demand for an explanation with the next post. Hagenauer was ready. On July 20, 1878 he replied:

Sir, … In explanation I need not draw your attention to my [earlier] letter regarding the defection of those men from Coranderrk and the secret success they after all seem to have had with some few here. I may add that already one of those here went to Lake Tyers, no doubt on a similar errant, so that if not prompt steps are taken to put down such rebellious spirits it will spread further. One or two of the ringleaders, James Brindle, who is not here long, and whom I build a fine cottage, is the worst and thinks he must get everything and
do nothing… These few ought to make feel that there is such a thing as law and order. The others are only dummies. 196

It was clear that bible studies had made way for politics as the favoured topic for night time discussions in the mission cottages and strategy and information was shared across the network that extended between Coranderrk, Ramahyuck and Lake Tyers. Certainly Hagenauer singled the Brindles out for the harshest punishment. Moving swiftly to crush the rebels, within a month he had drafted a minute outlining his recommendations, including:

That James Brindle, being a native of New South Wales, be dismissed from the Station, his wife to be allowed to follow him with her infant child (these are young healthy half cast people).

Despite its unhappy conclusion, this incident reveals much about James, both through the pitch of the letter of complaint and Hagenauer’s response. Without flinching, the rebels addressed Hagenauer’s central structuring principal, his unquestionable authority, and addressed it directly at its source, the Central Board. This was a sophisticated tactic, displaying a nuanced understanding of exactly how the power flowed in colonial administration. They could have been under no illusion about what they were doing. Questioning Hagenauer’s authority by exposing his overblown claims to being ‘above the government’ was sure to set off an explosion of retribution, with dismissal from the mission a possibility from the outset.

Through this incident, we can form at least a vague picture of Emily and James as a partnership. Emily is an educated woman, her level of literacy perhaps beyond that of many of her white contemporaries. James is not afraid of authority, managing to inveigle a house out of Hagenauer before complaining about him to his superiors, a strategy which points to some experience with white administration prior to his arriving at Ramahyuck. Together they are a powerful force, as Hagenauer admits when he singles them out as the ring leaders behind the letter, all the more reason for them to be split off from the rest of the community as soon as possible.

196 Ibid
The aftermath

James and Emily left the mission with their new baby and headed to the place that was increasingly becoming a refuge for people leaving the Moravian run Ramahyuck station, Lake Tyers. They weren’t there long before Hagenauer warned Reverend Bulmer of their potential to cause disruption. The liberal Bulmer was more sympathetic than Hagenauer but he too was having problems with threatened rebellion, ostensibly stirred up by men from Coranderrk. A couple of months later the Brindles were on the road again and there they leave the record for the next eight years. Three of Emily’s children by her first marriage – Laura who was 6, Jessie the oldest who was 8 and the baby John Ellis who was 5 – were according to Hagenauer’s instructions, to be kept in the orphanage unless instructed otherwise by the Board.197 His wishes prevailed as all three remained in the ‘orphan house’ at Ramahyuck to complete their schooling. With Bessie now in charge of the school’s boarding arrangements, Emily may well have felt more comfortable leaving the older children in her care rather than taking them on the road into an uncertain future. Certainly Hagenauer was keen to keep the children under his influence and away from their mother.

197 Pepper and De Araugo (1985):181
By the time the Brindle family enters the records again in 1886, James and three young Brindle children are back on the Monaro receiving blankets from the Cooma Police at Ingegoodbie, a remote locality in the heart of the southern Snowy Mountains. These children, born to the couple in the intervening years, would be Jimmy, by this time about 7, his little brother Jack, around 4, and their sister Lily who by then would have been about 8. Why Emily is not mentioned in the entry is not known. Perhaps she had returned to visit her other children in Gippsland or perhaps she was just not present at the blanket distribution. That the family were at Ingegoodbie is in itself a mystery. No other people are mentioned in the blanket distribution records as being present; not surprising given that the date recorded is June 22nd, the middle of winter in the middle of the mountains. This was no fleeting trip as they are mentioned again in the Police blanket records the following year although no specific location is given. The imperative would
have been for James to find work to support his young family and with his employment options in Gippsland severely attenuated, a return to home country would have at least reunited him with his family, not an option open to his Western Australian wife Emily.\textsuperscript{198}

**Mountain Home**

Deep in the southern Snowy Mountains, the Ingegoodbie track was, according to archaeologist Alistair Grinbergs, one of the most important traditional human movement routes in the region. Archaeological evidence and historical records, including oral histories, point to this pathway being the traditional access route for Aboriginal people moving between the Gelantipy district and the headwaters of the Snowy River, as well as into the Thredbo River valley and associated ranges.\textsuperscript{199} The track had been used by graziers from the 1830s as the major cattle route between the Monaro and East Gippsland and remained so until the 1950s, becoming a major factor in the colonisation and economic development of East Gippsland. Indeed, the presence of cattle runs in the Snowy River valley was a direct result of the access provided by the track and, before the Gippsland road and rail connection with Port Phillip and Western Port had been built, was the chief link between East Gippsland and the Monaro. The development of Port Albert in central Gippsland led to an escalation in the numbers of cattle being moved down the Ingegoodbie track (some coming from as far away as Queensland) for sale at the Bairnsdale yards and by the end of the 19th century East Gippsland had become a major centre for Australia’s expanding beef-cattle industry, with its pre-federation economy more closely linked to that of south eastern NSW than Melbourne.\textsuperscript{200} Cooma in those days was considered the big smoke.

For a man looking for work, this was the place to be at certain times of the year. But Ingegoodbie is an untamed track that weaves between rocky slopes and wild water even today, although some of it has been incorporated into the Barry Way and Snowy Mountains Road. There is no

\textsuperscript{198} I have deduced the ages of the children from the Ramahyuck school records which records name, age and year of Inspector’s visit, as well as mentions of the children at various ages including in Hagenauer (1876); Pepper and De Araugo (1985); Attwood (1989). See Young and NSW Dept. of Environment and Conservation (2005):190 for blanket distribution records.

\textsuperscript{199} Grinbergs and Australian Heritage Commission. (1993)

\textsuperscript{200} Ibid: 2
settlement, no housing, just an open semi flat paddock at the summit of the southern range to rest stock in before a steep descent to the Snowy River. The record shows only the Brindles receiving blankets there, with no references to any sort of commonly used camp in the area. This would have been well known territory for James, with his background in the district at the head of the Genoa River, to the west of Ingegoodbie. Raised by his Ngarigo mother and probably surrounded by her male relatives, at least for some of his childhood, who’s to say what he knew about the old ways. There are tantalising references in the records to a character named Jamby, formerly of Lake Tyers, who worked for the O’Rourke family whose property lay at the southern end of the Ingegoodbie track. O’Rourke senior made two annual trips with 12 pack horses to Cooma with this stockman and as an old man O’Rourke reported to the Monaro Post in 1894 that Jamby knew the old routes well, was their main ‘man’ for many years. Jamby is a nickname of sorts, an honorific that is said to refer to the uncle or senior man who takes a young boy through initiation, but has a more modern meaning as brother-in-law or close male relative, still used as a term of affection. Historian Mike Young of the Kosciusko National Park believes that this Jamby is probably James Brindle, most likely the same Jimmy or Jim Brindle from the Delegate Reserve who worked occasionally as a black tracker for the NSW police at the turn of the 20th century.  

Working the Ingegoodbie track as a stockman would make sense for a man with family connections at both ends, particularly as circumstances surrounding the children begin to change. The year after their second mention in the blanket records the Brindles have another child, Alex, born in Jindabyne and destined to become Deanna’s grandfather.

**Half-caste cast-off**

The birth of Emily and James’ son Alex at Cobbin station near Jindabyne in 1888 places Emily in the mountains, but two years later she is back in Gippsland with four sick children, the two boys and her daughter Emma from her first marriage and most probably Lilly Brindle, her oldest child with James. By the end of the year both boys and Emma had died, almost certainly from consumption.  

It is not known if Lilly survived but she is not found in the records at any point

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201 Pers. comm. with Mike Young at NPWS Jindabyne, October 2005
202 See Pepper and De Araugo (1985):210-12 for a full account of the fate of Emily’s children from both marriages.
later. After this tragedy Emily and Bessie, along with Bessie’s daughters Maggie and Louise, spent much of their time in Bairnsdale, working when they could and petitioning the Board for the Protection of Aborigines for help to feed and clothe themselves and their remaining children, who, like their mothers, were often in poor health.\textsuperscript{203}

By this time the Aborigines Protection Act passed by the Victorian Parliament in 1886 and often referred to as the ‘half-caste’ Act, had been in operation for eight years. The intention of the legislation was to move as many people out of government supported missions and reserves as possible. The line of exclusion was decided by racial ‘purity’, with policies regarding residents eligible to live on missions tightened to exclude so called ‘half castes’. Under the Act the

\textsuperscript{203} Attwood (1989):55
Victorian government had the power to remove any Aboriginal person from a reserve who was under the age of 34 and was categorised as less than ‘full blood’. The legislation was posted at police stations throughout Victoria, and police were regularly requested to remove people from reserves. Aboriginal people affected by the Act found that they could no longer receive any assistance from the reserves, and any Aboriginal person who continued to live on a reserve who was found to be supporting expelled community members with food were ‘threatened with having their own rations stopped’.  

Emily and James were perfectly positioned to be the victims of such assimilationist policies. Too black for white society and now too white for black welfare, they were forced to move to the nearby fringe camp of Toorloo Arm, along with many other families in similar positions. One last mention of the family in the Victorian records has them receiving contraband rations from the Reverend Bulmer at Lake Tyers who “was reported again to the Board late in 1894 for giving food to half-castes’, this time to the Brindle family who were camping near the lake.”

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Emily, James and Alex, who by this time was six years old, are not seen in the records as a family unit from this point on, yet we can guess from his entry of the records at the age of 18 as being from Delegate, that Alex was raised on the Delegate Reserve across the NSW border for the rest of his childhood, no doubt in the company of his grandmother’s Ngarigo relatives. Although the Delegate Reserve was officially gazetted at around the time of Alex’s birth, it was already a favourite camping place, on the track between Gippsland and the Monaro. It seems from the blanket records that James and Alex may have remained on the Monaro while Emily returned to Gippsland to be with her sick older children from her first marriage.

This crossing and re-crossing of the state border was happening within the context of the legislative changes that had taken place with the 1886 ‘Half-caste Act’ in Victoria, with families refusing to be separated along ‘full-blood/half-caste’ lines. Yet they were not only operating within a colonial imperative. As the Brindles moved along traditional routes, camping in traditional places such as the Delegate Reserve and along the Ingegoodbie track, the story

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205 Kleinert (2006)  
206 Pepper and De Araugo (1985):212
weaves through different spatial and temporal realities. They are using knowledge that is old, in a politic that is new. And although the boundaries of their lives are clearly delineated by the colonial masters, they also inhabit a world in which whitefellas played a less internalised role than they might have thought. For all their experience with European life, the Brindles were Aboriginal people and colonial boundaries, cultural, spatial and temporal, were not of their construction. The record draws the space in which their story took place as a familiar landscape with a state border running neatly through the middle and regions either side named ‘Gippsland’ and the ‘Monaro’. But these geographic divisions are an overlay on an already existing world, a sphere of operation run through with much older routes of cultural and economic engagement. The certainty of colonial boundaries hid Aboriginal people from view, for while the Maneroo Crown Lands Commissioner was lamenting the disappearance of the natives, mission manager Rev. Hagenauer was recording their arrival. The mountains and the river lands of the south were connected through associations that were known in one world but unseen by another, one inside history, one outside.
7. Something old, something new

Prehistoric people of the present

Historian Graeme Davison calls on data produced in a wide ranging survey looking at Australians’ relationship to the past to tell us that:

When people in … Australia are asked to rank the sources of information about the past that they most trust, museums come close to the top of the poll, well ahead of history teachers and far ahead of politicians who come last.²⁰⁷

Museums, it seems, are still compelling houses of learning, perhaps more than ever. Full of fascinating evidence that reveals narratives of places, people and events, they offer a direct experience of the past through the display of objects that can be found nowhere else.

What Davison fails to mention however is that in the same survey, Aboriginal people nominated the family as the most reliable source of information about the past while museums fell far down the list.²⁰⁸ This is hardly surprising when we consider that as late as the turn of the 20th century the director of the National Museum of Victoria, Baldwin Spencer, was writing in his Guide to the Australian Ethnographic Collection in the National Museum of Victoria:

The Australian aborigine may be regarded as a relic of the early childhood of mankind left stranded in a part of the world where he has, without the impetus derived from competition, remained in a low condition of savagery; there is not the slightest evidence either in his customs, social organisation, weapons, or implements to show that he has retrograded from a higher state of civilisation.²⁰⁹

Historians writing of the same era show that by the time Spencer wrote his guide, a well informed and vocal Aboriginal population were patently leading non-savage lives within full

²⁰⁷ Davison (2006):91
view of the Museum audience.\textsuperscript{210} Spencer’s classificatory displays however dominated the formation of popular perceptions of Aboriginal people, amplified by remaining on exhibition in the National Museum of Victoria well beyond his tenure.

It took until 2001 and Australia’s celebration of its first century as a federated nation, for a national museum to be built in the nation’s capital. The distinctive bright red and olive green building now sits on the water’s edge of Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra, a major tourist drawcard and a place of significant cultural influence.\textsuperscript{211} In his speech to open the Museum, the then Prime Minister John Howard proposed that the NMA “represents an attempt to put forward a museum which tells a story of a country in a way that is peculiar to our own nation and our own nation’s experience.”\textsuperscript{212} Although the last in a line of governments from both sides of politics to offer support to the idea of a national museum, the allocation of finances exclusively from the Centenary of Federation Fund revealed his government’s, if not the broader community’s, ‘clear commitment to the production of a centrally co-ordinated national past.’\textsuperscript{213} The inaugural NMA director, Dr Dawn Casey, confirmed this in her address to the Museums Australia Conference just one month after the opening of the museum, admitting that “Australia’s national museum, like others of its era, is a consciously nation-building exercise.”\textsuperscript{214} But it was never going to be an uncontested project. Indeed, the whole enterprise of building an institution with such a deliberately articulated role in the construction of a ‘national identity’ immediately invoked, as Graeme Davison observed, the “tangled lineage of ideas that has governed thinking about national selfhood … [and] the close connection between the development of museums and the 19\textsuperscript{th} century discourses of race and colonialism.”\textsuperscript{215}

\textsuperscript{210} See Barwick (1963); Attwood (1989); Broome (2005); Kenny (2007); Pascoe (2007) for example.
\textsuperscript{211} It was, for example, the ignition site of the ‘history wars’. See Windschuttle (2002); Manne (2003); Macintyre and Clark (2004)
\textsuperscript{212} Prime Minister of Australia, March 11, 2001, speech 810
\textsuperscript{213} Bennett (1995):143
\textsuperscript{214} Casey (2001):14
\textsuperscript{215} Davison (2006):97
Inside the big house

The tripartite concept of the Museum’s exhibitions inter-link three themes: 1) Australia’s history since European arrival in 1788; 2) the interaction of people with the environment; and 3) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture. Indigenous history was always central to the development of a national museum, right from its first mooting in the second half of the 19th century, even before the nation existed. In 1887 the premier of NSW, Sir Henry Parkes, called for a “Memorial State House’ as part of the celebrations to mark the centenary of colonial settlement, intended for the ‘education of the soul of citizenship.”

There was to be:

A Museum … where shall be deposited, as they can be collected, all books, documents, maps, printed or written matter, and relics which may be illustrative of the historical, material, and industrial stages of the Colony’s progress, and of the various aboriginal races of Australia, their customs, languages, and ethnological characteristics.

However, Parkes not only did not get his proposal through but was ridiculed for making the suggestion. Never-the-less, the idea of an institution to house the national story had been launched.

From the end of the 19th century, Australians, although secure in their membership of the British ‘race’, increasingly searched for ways to express their feelings of an emerging national distinctiveness.

These colonials did not want to secede from the Empire, but they did seek separate nationhood. If the desire for political autonomy was often seen to follow from a sense of distinctiveness, it in turn called distinctiveness into being. National character or something like it had to be made explicit and visible.

It was not until the end of WWI and the establishment of the War Memorial however, that the idea that “Australia had a material history that was worth preserving and through which it could distinguish itself as a separate nation” would gain purchase. This search for national distinctiveness from Britain collided with (and contributed to) the emergence of the new sister

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217 Gore (2002):370
218 Thomas (1999):95
219 Gore (2002):169
disciplines of ethnography and anthropology, fields growing in stature in both museums and universities at the turn of the 20th century. It was no coincidence that the confluence of these elements resulted in the idea of a museum with a national focus being revisited. The idea for a new museum with an ethnographic focus found momentum from the growing “expectation of Aboriginal extinction,” fuelling the “urgency of preserving the records of a dying race.”

Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, the Chair of the newly minted Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, made a heartfelt plea to the Minister for Home Affairs and Territories in 1927:

If such an ethnological museum is ever to be established at all, some steps must be taken immediately. Every year it becomes increasingly difficult to obtain specimens illustrating the life and cultures of the Australasian peoples. The native people themselves are dying out or are ceasing to make or use the things they formerly had.

On the strength of this petition, Prime Minister Bruce appointed a committee of inquiry whose 1928 report recommended that a Commonwealth Museum be established and that an Institute of Anatomy be constituted as the first unit in the Commonwealth Museum “self-contained and with its own Keeper or Curator, but destined in course of time to take its place in the group constituting the whole Museum.”

Although Radcliffe-Brown’s sought-for Institute of Anatomy opened in Canberra in 1931, the larger project of a national museum, of which this were to be a part, was once again consigned to the backburner.

A depression and another world war drained any funds that may have been found for a national museum for another thirty or so years and by the time the idea was revisited in the second half of the century, a new sensibility was beginning to emerge. In 1965, two years before the 1967 constitutional referendum that allowed for Aboriginal people to be counted in the Census and three years before his famous Boyer Lecture ‘The Great Australian Silence’, anthropologist W E H Stanner re-launched the debate with a letter to the Canberra Times. Calling for a ‘Gallery of Southern Man’ to be established in Canberra, he argued that

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220 Griffiths (1996):26
221 AA CRS, A1/15 1932/524, National Museum of Australia
222 Ibid
223 See Robin (2007) for a full discussion of the origins of the National Ethnographic Collection
Everyone loves a good story, and one of the world’s best stories could be told about Australia. Told properly, and continually filled out by new discoveries, it could appeal to every generation afresh. It has nothing to do with Cook or Parkes; with Sturt or Leichhardt; with the Colonies or Federation; with rum, wool or gold; with Eureka or Anzac. Its subject is older, grander and more full of meaning than any of them. It is the story of the discovery, mastery and enrichment of the continent by the aborigines, and it makes one of the most splendid tales of its kind that any country in the world can offer. This exhortation to establish a museum with a different attitude to Aboriginal history had to wait until the advent of a new political era, almost ten years later, to be heard.

**New wave, new way**

In 1974 the Whitlam Government established the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections, under the chairmanship of Peter Pigott, to look at museums and collections across the whole of Australia and to make recommendations to government for a national program. The report that the review committee returned made clear that the centrepiece of any new museum would be its Aboriginal content. Piggott maintained that:

> The argument for a major display of Aboriginal history is overwhelming. The chronology of the human occupation of Australia is dominated by Aboriginals. If the human history of Australia were to be marked on a 12-hour clock-face, the era of the white man would run for only the last three or four minutes…

This report put forward a conceptual approach for the National Museum of Australia in which not just Aboriginal content but Aboriginal *history* was at the centre. Having found that in natural history museums

> the technological triumphs of Aboriginals are either ignored or even out of perspective.

Likewise the values of their civilisation are, by implication, dismissed as totally irrelevant or totally inferior to the values of our civilisations

the report sought to open a new era in the representation of Aboriginal people.

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224 Stanner (1965)
226 Pigott (1975)
Six years later, on 2\textsuperscript{nd} April 1980, with the Fraser Government now in office, the legislation to provide for the ‘establishment of a national museum of Australian history’ was passed with bipartisan support. The Minister for Home Affairs and the Capital Territory, R J Ellicott, in a triumphant speech given to the House, hoped that:

\begin{quote}
[i]ts establishment will fill a gap in the array of institutions charged with the preservation of our cultural heritage and will demonstrate to the world the pride that we have in our country. As a nation we have been somewhat diffident in expressing an interest in our history and our culture… This museum will provide that opportunity and will, I hope, prove to be a national focus for all Australians.\textsuperscript{227}
\end{quote}

That diffidence was not to be overcome with any haste. Although a bureaucratic framework was put in place and the institution called the National Museum of Australia was initiated with a skeleton staff, it took another three Prime Ministers and twenty-one years before the opening of a new museum was celebrated. In that hiatus, new museologies had begun to emerge: In the early 1990s, out of an era of cultural policy activity and a growing awareness of the museum sector’s past insensitivity towards Indigenous Australia, the Council of Australian Museum Associations began the development of a policy document on which interaction between museums and Aboriginal people could be based. In 1993, the International Year for the World’s Indigenous People, it released \textit{Previous Possessions New Obligations: Policies for Museums in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples}. The document provided guidelines for consulting with Indigenous people in dealing with human remains, secret/sacred material, the general collections of Indigenous cultural material; including Indigenous people in research and public programs; and issues of governance.\textsuperscript{228} So significantly did museum practices shift that the Indigenous inaugural Director of the NMA, Dawn Casey, was able to declare:

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\textsuperscript{227} Minister for Home Affairs and the Capital Territory, RJ Ellicott, Museum of Australia Bill, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Reading, \textit{Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives} (Hansard) 2\textsuperscript{nd} April 1980

\textsuperscript{228} Sullivan, Kelly et al. (2003)
the days when museums could collect and display ethnographic material from the viewpoint of a dominant culture depicting an exotic minority culture are well and truly over.229

The ‘native people’ who were ‘dying out’ according to Radcliffe-Brown, now found themselves not only alive and well but actively asserting their rights to self-determination in respect to cultural heritage matters. Despite having inherited the old Institute of Anatomy’s National Ethnographic Collection of more than 20,000 items (which still makes up almost 80% of all objects currently held in the National Historical Collection), the project of decolonising the museum had begun.

Social history on show

Given that over 5 million people have visited the museum since 2001, the vast majority of them Australians, most of whom find museums to be a source of information about the past that they trust, it is not surprising that the Museum is now seen as a major player in the creation not only of ‘national identity’ but of national political discourses. The debate that the opening of the Museum sparked, now famously known as ‘the history wars’, was one of the most passionate public discussions on national identity and ownership of historical narrative that the country has ever had.230 In the light of this debate, it might be easy to see the Gallery of First Australians within the NMA as an innovation rising out of the Museum’s self-conscious understanding of its role in contemporary politics, but given the history of its development it is clear that an Aboriginal presence has always been central to the project of a national museum, despite shifting authority over modes of representation. Much has changed since Parkes’ first suggestion for a national museum in 1887, not least being the degree to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves interact with the collection and exhibitions. As is the case for contemporary museums in former colonies around the world, this interaction has lead to a profound change in approaches to collections, exhibitions and education, inspiring a new paradigm: the social history museum as national museum of representation.

229 Casey (2001):14
230 For a discussion of the Museum’s role in the ‘history wars’ see Windschuttle (2002); Manne (2003); Macintyre and Clark (2004)
In her analysis of the NMA at its opening, Christine Dauber observes that the museological methodology that most influenced curatorial strategies within the Museum was ‘new museology’. Although described as ‘new’, New Museology, the fundamental concepts of which are based on social history, is a phenomenon of the 1970s and 80s. Taking momentum from the revised definition of museums issued by the International Council of Museums in 1974, and within a broader context of advances in the granting of civil rights to oppressed populations, three unrelated experiments in three separate social contexts emerged simultaneously: neighbourhood museums in the United States, integral museums in Latin America, particularly in Mexico, and eco-museums in France and Quebec, all of which came to exemplify the ideas around which the term ‘new museology’ developed. These three experiments re-focused attention away from the traditional spheres of collection, preservation and classification of objects to the development of narratives that addressed social concerns of local populations. With an emphasis on identity building, attention was given to labour history, Indigenous peoples and their customs and local ecologies and environmental concerns. This radical move reflected social reforms of the 1970s more widely, where a growing appreciation of alternative traditions and histories was gathering impetus.

The experiments flourished. Observers began to notice the positive effects these newly conceived museums were having on the societies in which they had been established and in response formed the International Movement for New Museology (MINOM) in the early 1980s. Interested in ideas of the museum as a democratic, educational institution in the service of social development (particularly at the local and regional level), this influential group of museum professionals declared that:

this new active or community museology resolutely challenges the museum as an institution, the omnipotence and omniscience of the curators… the absolute precedence

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231 Dauber (2006):3
232 ICOM Statutes, adopted by the Eleventh General Assembly of ICOM, Copenhagen, 1974, states that “The museum is a permanent non-profit institution, open to the public, in the service of society and its development, which does research on the material evidence of man and his environment, acquires such evidence, preserves it, communicates it and, in particular, displays it for the purpose of study, education and enjoyment.”; See Hauenschild (1988) for discussion of the success of these museum experiments.
of objects over life and the abiding nature of the history and values of an elite that turns
to its profit the resources of the planet, the creativity of its inhabitants and taxes of its
fellow citizens.”

The alternative they proposed was defined by its socially relevant objectives. Within this new
paradigm both material and non-material elements that constituted local and regional identity
became important. No longer interested in merely recording an inventory of artefacts, the ‘new
museum’ instead became theme-centred rather than object-oriented. These themes were found
among the ‘collective memory’ of the population and focused on the advancing of the
contemporary needs of the community. The 1984 working document of the Ecomusée de la
Haute-Beauce for example proposed that in such a model

Contemplation and intellectual pleasure are supplanted by the participation and
involvement of the visitor, who in this way becomes an integral part of the new museum
in place of being merely a guest. Through his knowledge and his living forces he is called
upon either to participate in the museum adventure itself or to involve himself in the
sociocultural and even economic development of his territory. He is no longer a visitor;
he becomes a decision-maker, an actor, a museographer and an agent of multiplication.

In the ‘new museum’, the stress of collection and conservation activities was placed on non-
material cultural heritage and in this regard, “all knowledge, all historical and social perceptions,
all testimony become subjects.” In this way the ‘new museum’ came to be seen as existing
without architectural barriers, without disciplinary barriers and without barriers to public access,
therefore an open museum in the most extreme sense. The methods used to develop exhibitions
within this paradigm called on humanistic approaches which no longer exhibit objects for their
own sake but as part of a story or as elements in a narrative, “forming part of a thread of
discourse which is itself one element in a more complex web of meanings.”

233 Baron, G 1987, New Museology and Ecomuseology in the Environment of the American Indian. Courcelles, cited
by Hauenschild (1988):3
234 Ibid
235 Ibid:3.1
236 Vergo (1989):3
accommodating what people feel, and how they respond to the events of history, objects were used to illustrate abstract qualities of people’s emotions, requiring as a result the deployment of fewer objects in an entirely different manner making what were very extensive colonial collections almost redundant.\textsuperscript{237}

As American commentator Amanda Cobb noted, ‘new museology’ was of particular assistance to First Nations peoples in developing representational techniques which allow self-actualisation. This she suggested arises in part from the fact that the ‘new museology’ generally “throws the authority of museums into question thus subtracting some of their power.”\textsuperscript{238}

This museological revolution hit Australia at the moment at which the academy was undergoing a similar disruption in its apprehension of Aboriginal history. Historians such as Henry Reynolds and Lyndal Ryan and others, were publishing revisionist histories that challenged dominant narratives about Australian ‘settler’ society.\textsuperscript{239} The atmosphere amongst commentators and legislators was ripe for a recognition of Indigenous histories and the imperative for Indigenous people to “control their own representations in a culturally appropriate manner, within the institutional space” drove the development of the gallery within the National Museum of Australia that was being planned.\textsuperscript{240} The ‘new museology’ principles which sought to open engagement with marginalised groups were applied here in part as a redress of the racial and evolutionary categories and hierarchies which previously governed the collection of Aboriginal material culture, in particular the objects that the NMA had inherited with the National Ethnographic Collection.\textsuperscript{241} The narratives these objects were once used to construct were now dismantled, even if the objects themselves remained in the NMA stores. The re-assembling of alternative narratives would demand not just consideration of intangible heritage and community and personal memory but, above all, relevance and representational authority. These new narrative demands drove a need for new engagements with history and Aboriginal communities, not to mention new ideas about what constitutes ‘Indigenous material culture’. One of the ways

\textsuperscript{237} Dauber (2006):4-5
\textsuperscript{238} Cobb (2005):488
\textsuperscript{239} For example Reynolds (1981); Ryan (1981). McIntyre, Wehner et al. (2001) discuss this cultural paradigm shift in \textit{Negotiating Histories: National Museums}
\textsuperscript{240} McIntyre, Wehner et al. (2001):xv
\textsuperscript{241} Davison (2001):18
to facilitate such engagement might be to “innovate new perspectives by locating objects treasured by Indigenous people within local and national histories of colonialism, survival, collection and museology”\textsuperscript{242} through a research project such as this. But within the vast enterprise of the museum, even within its post-colonial iteration as a ‘new museum’, such an undertaking assumes a cultural symmetry that, on examination may be seen as an epistemological blind spot. If that is the case, what can a museum, in this instance the National Museum of Australia, do?

\textsuperscript{242} Appendix 1
8. Performing Aboriginal history

Being a participant in this story is not comfortable. The history of this country is not comfortable and we, the inheritors of a colonial past, both colonisers and colonised, are not comfortable with each other. For the first two years of field work I was too naive to understand how deeply these currents of discomfort flowed. Slowly, as the anger and mistrust washed up against me, I began to see how integral they are to our history making.243

One of my first encounters with this truth was at the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Kosciusko Education Centre at Saw Pit, just inside the Jindabyne entrance to the National Park. NPWS in this region have an excellent relationship with the traditional owners group and consult them both formally and informally through a number of channels including a Joint Management steering committee. This weekend was one of the formal meetings, where the NPWS staff and the Ngarigo families gather to discuss a range of issues to do with caring for country.

Iris, Deanna’s daughter and a senior spokeswoman within the group, invited me to attend the meeting to explain to everyone what I was doing. I was very happy to be invited – at last the rumours circulating about my work might be seeping through. This would be a chance to speak to the traditional owners as a group, to tell them about the project and if not get their assistance or even approval, at least allow for some transparency in the process.

243 My use of the term ‘comfortable’ here makes reference to the former Prime Minister John Howard, who during an interview in the lead up to the 1996 Federal election said: “Let me respond to your question by saying this, ... by the Year 2000 I would like to see an Australian nation that feels comfortable and relaxed about three things: I would like to see them comfortable and relaxed about their history; I would like to see them comfortable and relaxed about the present and I'd also like to see them comfortable and relaxed about the future. Jackson (1996)
I picked Deanna up on my way out of Canberra and we drove the 150 km or so to Jindabyne, arriving at the NPWS offices in the town before going up to Saw Pit where the meetings would take place. All the park rangers knew Deanna and they jumped up from their desks to kiss her fondly. She was clearly among old friends. As more of the traditional owners arrived from Sydney, Wreck Bay and north-east Gippsland there were waves of greetings with much laughter and hugging. I hung on the outside of this circle, a stranger in country, invited but not yet known.

The agenda for the next two days was full. Parks had a long list of issues that needed addressing and the traditional owners had business of their own to discuss outside of the formally convened sessions. We all headed out to Saw Pit to begin.

The education centre is a relatively new building made of local stone and timber, an attractive and sensitive addition to the landscape. Inside, the roomy foyer ringed with display cases and panels sets out the story of the Kosciusko National Park, moving from geology to flora and fauna to Indigenous and settler histories. Classroom and meeting spaces open up from this exhibition area, furnished to accommodate groups of school children or conference delegates.

Figure 23. Deanna and Christine in front of displays at Saw Pit, 2006
Part of the display features tools and weapons found in the area flanked by a large reproduction of a 19th century photograph by Henry King entitled *Australian Aborigine, Monaro District*. Moving on from the Monaro Man, the next exhibition bay holds a bark slab hut and some horse tackle but the Aborigines are nowhere to be seen. The ‘pioneers’ have arrived, the high plains cattlemen have begun operations and that’s the end of the Aboriginal story. I am familiar with the King photograph and was surprised to see it in this context, but with the meeting about to begin there was no time for reflection.

![Figure 24. Australian Aborigine, Monaro District, Henry King, date unknown](State Library of Victoria, Image number H20918/59)
The families took their places in a ring around the room and the formal proceedings began. After the welcomes and opening addresses, including an introduction to the archaeologist who later in the day would be demonstrating stone flaking on the terrace outside, Iris handed me the floor. I began by explaining that I was a researcher working with Deanna doing interviews and gathering together some of the history of... I looked at the faces surrounding me. Suddenly pronouns and possessives became tangled. Me, you, her, us, we, I’m doing, we’re doing their, your history. Out loud the complexities which sat together without too much friction in my mind were exposed as being full of tension. I stumbled and tried to backtrack. I explained that I was interested in Aboriginal social history which, in this particular area was largely missing, as the exhibition in the display area so ably demonstrated. Monaro Man, I explained to the room, exists in his pristine and primitive world but is extinguished as soon as the settlers arrive, which, as the gathering here today was testimony to, was not the case. There was no history available after Monaro Man and it was this gap that I was interested in filling.

I did not expand on the super-sized photograph any further than that but I could have gone on to say that it had been used by Josephine Flood on the front cover of *Moth Hunters*, the seminal (and for a long time the only) book that examines archaeological evidence in the Monaro region. The photograph was produced by Henry King sometime during the late 19th century, most probably for his entry in the World Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893 to which he submitted a display of Aboriginal portraits. By the time it was taken the Monaro had been occupied by Europeans for about 60 years. A gold rush had come and gone, the Robertson Land Acts had been passed and what became known as the Half-caste Acts had come into force. If strapping men in kangaroo skin loin cloths were thin on the ground in the Monaro at the time, audiences in Chicago would not have been any the wiser.

The injustice of the extinguishment had hit me immediately on entering the Education Centre that morning. This bloke whose photograph stood in for pre-history was an historical character smothered by a fiction. He may well have been party to the staging of the photograph – certainly he looks comfortable with his pose – but in becoming short hand for a pre-contact world he was

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244 King (1983)
wiped out of the historical narrative, an extinguishment perpetuated firstly by his placement on the cover of an archaeology book in the 1980s without any critique and then again in the NPWS display.

Figure 25. Moth Hunters of the Australian Capital Territory
Flood and Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. (1980):front cover

Instantly everyone in the meeting hated me. I had insulted the National Parks staff who had obviously put both thought and resources into the exhibition and whose goodwill was evident on so many fronts, and I had insulted the traditional owners who were more aware than anyone of their missing history, both humiliated by the gaps and conscious of the agonizing events which filled them. Silence stretched out into the room until one of the traditional owners, a woman who had travelled up from the south coast to attend the meeting with her elderly mother, turned and eye-balled me. “We know that this history is missing and we know why. But what you might not understand is that the reasons behind that are very PAINFUL.” It was the only sentence she spoke to me for the entire weekend. I was chastened. I slunk out to the morning tea room and
waited for Deanna to take pity and offer me a Monte Carlo. It was not that I was wrong. I just did not yet understand my own role in the research. One thing I learnt very quickly that morning was that it was not neutral.

The meeting at Saw Pit was an exemplar of the situation: clearly everyone in the room had had cause to think about the kinds of unexamined assumptions within contemporary culture in regard to Aboriginal history, and they all sat in various relationships to the problem, both professional and personal. They all get it, but they don’t know what to do about it. The National Parks managers are geologists, archaeologists, botanists, education and natural resource management professionals and apart from anything else, are busy managing the complex 673,524 hectare Kosciuszko National Park. There are of course Indigenous rangers who work with the local community and park visitors but their focus is on management issues and visitor education. Although they hold extant knowledge from within their own families, they are not researchers. The only written history that exists are local or specialist histories focusing on the cattle industry, the ski resorts or the mountain huts, or Keith Hancock’s *Discovering Monaro*. NPWS have tried to redress this situation with the publication of *Aboriginal People of the Monaro*, an annotated anthology of primary and secondary sources (to which this work owes a huge debt), but a collection of documents in itself does not immediately redress the missing narratives.

It was clear that I had insulted the traditional owners but it was only later, when I heard one of the senior rangers proposing to an Elder, slightly desperately, that perhaps they could have a pin board in the display centre with snapshots of contemporary families on it that I realised how deeply I had hurt the NPWS staff. They were really trying to do the right thing; to consult, to listen, to represent, to fund. My insensitive comments had only pointed out how inadequate their efforts were. It took me some time to understand that it was not that I was wrong, it was that the relationship between me and the participants that day was not at a stage where public critique was appropriate. It was not enough that I had the imprimatur of the University or the Museum, that I was an ARC research scholar or that the project had its own validity away from the specifics of this particular community. I not only needed to reassess my topic, I needed to reassess my own position within the research. I had fallen into a participant observation methodology, despite the research being historical not anthropological, without a conscious
strategy for representing my own engagement. Once I realised that, it was clear that there was no ethically viable passive voice available to me. My presence was affecting the very nature of the enquiry and I was implicated in not just the process but the resultant history. I had unavoidably taken sides and the only option was to be transparent. It was after this meeting that I began to write in the first person, to incorporate my field notes in my own voice and to give up the fiction that I was nowhere to be seen in the frame.

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The disciplinary pathways that lead me to the practice of history writing are of no help to me here. I grope at the literature of the anthropologists, who at least know how to handle themselves in a tricky situation, but their methodology leads to an anthropological outcome. I am not asking their questions or looking for their results. I ask myself what effect does the methodology have on the outcome? What does working with living people in the field, not just as informants or carriers of oral history but as contestants of the legitimacy of my position within the project, do to both the outcome and more importantly the question itself?

These complexities have been tackled in various ways by researchers working in the field, articulated by James Clifford for example, as part of a developing post-modern anthropological discourse. Clifford questions assumptions about fieldwork as travel, going out in search of difference, where the field remains somewhere else, albeit within one’s own linguistic or national context. Drawing on the writing of Kamela Viswewaran, Clifford proposes an alternative model for conducting primary research by repositioning fieldwork as ‘homework’. ‘Homework’, he proposes, is not defined as the opposite of exoticist fieldwork, rather it is “a person’s location in determining discourses and institutions – cutting across locations of race, gender, class, sexuality, culture.” Such a critical confrontation is aimed at bringing the researcher to an examination of the “often invisible processes of learning that shape us as subjects. [It is] a discipline of unlearning as much as of learning.” In that ‘unlearning’, a space is cleared for “unorthodox routings and rootings of ethnographic work.”

In this instance my work with the Ngarigo community, although not positioned within an anthropological framework, was in every

\[245\] Clifford (1997):85
sense, including the literal, *homework* and the invisible processes of both learning and unlearning were rapidly becoming apparent.

The imperative to address the researcher’s position in cross-cultural production has been likewise confronted in Australia by practitioners working across the spectrum of anthropology, ethnography, history and archaeology. Nicholas Thomas for example addressed his disquiet at the unavoidable problem of voice in his work on Indigenous art and colonial culture:

[I am] a white Australian. I attempt to discuss both colonial and indigenous traditions in a broadly balanced way ... but it must be conceded that I do not write from an insider point of view ... the fact [is] that I happen to live in a particular part of the world. I am not so much concerned to ‘come to terms’ with this in a personal sense as to illustrate why the region’s history makes ‘coming to terms’ always an incomplete business: one that is necessary, awkward, rewarding and also improbable.\(^{246}\)

Thomas sees his position as a commentator and cultural producer as part of the post-colonial and perhaps generational obligation to both address and dismantle what Clifford calls ‘learning’. He is implicated because of where he lives and although he makes a case for his lack of need to ‘come to terms’ with his national inheritance, he nevertheless acknowledges that his position within the cross-cultural dynamic, i.e. that of a white Australian and an ‘outsider’, informs his enquiry. Stephen Muecke enters the discussion from both a different discipline and a different perspective when she reports the following:

In order to tell yourself the story of an event from an unfamiliar standpoint, you have to position yourself there *as yourself*. Speaking as myself, and as an Australian, there is something of a dilemma in visiting others within my own country. Aboriginal people have been playing host to a lot of visitors over the years, going backwards and forwards with changing stories about what they experience in Aboriginal country. The paradox of ‘visiting Aboriginal Australia’ concerns the unresolved political question of ‘them’ and ‘us’. At what level are we the same people within a nation?\(^{247}\)

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\(^{246}\) Thomas (1999):19

\(^{247}\) Muecke (1999):53
The anxiety of the ‘visitor’ who hovers at the border of ‘us’ and ‘them’ is overwhelmingly familiar.\textsuperscript{248} The political contest in which those pronouns slide to accommodate the context – an intervention for them, a celebration for us – is played out here not in distinct geographical locations as Muecke experiences in his work in remote Western Australia, but amongst the densely populated heartland where the ‘nation’, whatever that may be, is enacted. Here the history slips imperceptibly between ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’, not entirely shared but deeply entangled. Archaeologist Denis Byrne addresses this issue when he admits that his concern as an archaeologist working in the field of ‘Aboriginal heritage management’ is to trace the lineage of my own practice and thus, optimistically, break free to some extent from its colonial complicity. As this implies, I believe that archaeology in Australia can only be post-colonial to the extent that its practitioners deconstruct its colonial underpinnings. Archaeology in Australia must decolonize itself before it can claim to be post-colonial.\textsuperscript{249}

Byrne’s admission that the critical struggle is located within the examination of his own disciplinary practice suggests that his interests extend beyond decolonizing the field in general, to decolonizing \textit{himself} as a current practitioner. The methodology he employs then is truly ‘homework’, where the epistemological boundaries of fieldwork are re-examined in the light of his own location in institutions and discourses. In encouraging such critical reflexivity, both Clifford and Byrne recognize the challenges in developing an appropriate methodology when working in a cross-cultural situation and prompt me to assume a similar attitude to my own research work.

There is a certain anxiety that is inevitable when working in this domain as Thomas, Muecke and Byrne articulate. The critical confrontation in this project demands not just a dismantling of the cultural underpinnings of the initial research question but a re-examination of the ways in which the relationship between me and my research participants define our interactions: my status as a gubba defines the ways in which they are prepared to reveal their possessions and their stories; I am not just an observer but a necessary part of the narrative as the following example demonstrates.

\textsuperscript{248} Journalist Nicholas Rothwell discusses this discomfort in detail in \textit{Another Country}. (Rothwell (2007))  
\textsuperscript{249} Byrne (1996):82
Drinking from the gubba cup

Nowra, a seemingly endless string of car dealerships and shopping malls on the NSW coast, an hour or so south of Wollongong, is flat and hot. The veneer of urban sprawl which covers over the original swamp is a thin layer that shimmers in the heat haze, evaporating into the steamy still air. I am cushioned from it by the air-conditioning in Tabatha’s four wheel drive for the moment, although stopping to drop our gear off in the local caravan park, the late February furnace hits us. Tabatha’s 86 year old grandmother doesn’t seem to mind. When we arrive at her new ‘elder care’ unit, a purpose-built development of retirement village style accommodation for Aboriginal elders out near the naval base, she is keen to take us on a tour of its features. I admire the large light switches, the phone with oversized numbers and the button in the bathroom to call for help. My real interest however lies with the amazing array of black, red and yellow decorations that adorn the tiny unit, from the ornately crocheted dress on the cupie doll in the china cabinet to the painted cork coasters on the table and patchwork knee rug across the back of the couch. I try to admire them but Aunty Barb is more interested in showing off the kitchen; the cupboards are just the right height and there is room for a microwave on the bench. It is a perfect place to segue into stories of other houses she’s lived in, from the zinc shacks at Lapa where she raised her children to the river front cottage at Orient Point of her own early childhood. Tabatha prods her in that direction but she won’t start the stories until we’re settled with tea and bikkies in the lounge room.

I set up my camera and tape recorder while the kettle boils. I’m here to film Tabatha and her grandmother, Aunty Barb, speaking together for an oral history project and as usual I’m relegated to the technological fringe; focusing lenses, testing microphone levels, framing shots. I put my headphones on and settle into the shadows as the conversation heads back towards the mission at La Perouse and the fun of diving for mutton fish and boiling the billy on the beach. We’re well into the shady country of memory, with a pack of bare footed kids running wild while their mother, with her long black wavy hair, dives deep into the rock pools of Botany Bay, when Tabatha jars us back into the present with an exclamation. “For Christ sakes Nan, why’d you giver her that cup?” I freeze, the cup mid way to my mouth. I’m suddenly aware of the delicate piece of china in my hand, cream with a yellow rose pattern and gilded filigree edge. It is a lovely cup. I took it with some pleasure when Aunty Barb handed it to me, noticing that she
served herself and Tabatha in regular thick navy blue mugs. I don’t understand what the problem is, I don’t understand the question. It is polite to give the visitor the good cup. Does Tabatha think I don’t warrant it? Aunty Barb ignores the question and we all return to the interview. As we are leaving I reach into my bag and pull out a slab wrapped in alfoil and offer it to the old lady. She takes it and pulls back the wrapping to reveal a corner of the sticky, dark, brandy-soaked fruitcake that Mum had given me for Christmas. No further words are exchanged as she shoves it deep into the back of a kitchen cupboard and shepherds us towards the door.

Back at the caravan Tabatha, perhaps sensing my confusion, feels the need to explain. The bone china cup is what her Nan calls the ‘gubba cup’, given to gubbas who need to have impressed on them her good manners and her ability to maintain a properly functioning household. The tradition of the gubba cup stems from the mission days, when the manager, or perhaps his wife, would do a weekly house inspection. Blankets were lifted to examine the condition of the sheets, a gloved finger run across surfaces to check for dust and cupboards opened to check for food. That the same bag of flour was seen in the pantry of a row of neighbouring houses, run between them by a string of kids, seems not to have been noticed. During the weekly examination a cup of tea would be offered to the inspector in the gubba cup. This polite ritual of tea and chat was in reality a game of high stakes: if the mission manager felt you were not up to scratch, an unfavourable report could be made to the ‘welfare’ and a review of whether your children might need to be taken into care could ensue. This is how Tabatha explains it anyway, as she tries to knock out a seagull with chips the size of doorstops. I have no reason not to believe her.

Suddenly, irreversibly, I am in the frame. I have walked into shot and found myself cast as a central character: I am the gubba. I constitute the other half of the story. I am the antagonist around which the action is generated; the mission manager’s wife, the school headmistress, the babies’ home matron, the missionary, the gubba historian.

On our return the next day, Aunty Barb tells me that she had a slice of fruit cake with her milo before bed. It was very nice. I confess that my Mum made it. She nods and seems to be a little warmer. As I am setting up the gear while the tea is being made, I look at the tiny unit through new eyes; gubba eyes. The tender objects of family and identity crowd the cabinet, coffee table
and walls: posed studio photos of the children and grandchildren, the handmade decorations in team colours, gold rimmed sherry glasses holding posies of dried flowers. As she hands me a cup of tea I notice I have been upgraded to a navy blue mug, by virtue of Tabatha’s intervention and Mum’s Christmas cake. But it is too late. I know what it feels like to be the gubba. Someone has to be and it is not like we can pretend they don’t exist – the truth of that constellation is all around us: the huge family photo that takes up almost the entire wall above the couch tells the story. Christina (Tabatha’s mother) smiling out from the far left, was taken into care as was Tabatha in her turn. Vic the oldest boy, leaning on his mother’s shoulder and eyeballing the lens, famously made a record (entitled “Stranger in My Country, Stranger in My Land”) in Long Bay jail, the first ever inmate to do so. Each of the seven of them have their story; husbands, wives, children, siblings and parents all came up against the gubba in one way or another. That’s just the way it is. With tea made and bikkies eaten, we get back to the stories of clever men transforming themselves into cattle (?!), fishing at Pussy Cat and recipes for Johnny cakes. Her conversation is dotted with references to ‘them gubbas’ after which she looks over at me and adds ‘not you but’. When it’s time to go she kisses me on the cheek and invites me back anytime, but I’ve already been warned off by her daughter Ruth and Ruth is scary. It seems other gubbas from other universities had been there before me and had misbehaved, writing her mother’s stories into unsanctioned works. The fact that I am merely the techno support of her niece mattered little, I was not to be trusted. When we arrive back in Sydney I immediately hand the master tapes to Tabatha.

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It is as I am sitting with the Ngarigo ladies in their lounge rooms and kitchens that the incident of the gubba cup comes to mind. In truth I suspect that they all have their version of the gubba cup but they are not objects that are volunteered for viewing. It is not their way to insult me for a start. And in truth I am not the gubba of old. Aunty Barb’s retraction of that status on the second day of recording acknowledged that we don’t have to stay in clichéd relationships with each other. New stories and new relationships are available if we listen for them. But neither can the truth of that past be denied. While the story of the gubba cup remains linked to the object, the cup acts as a potent symbol of the relationship embedded in it. It was not only the history of the tea cup we played out together but its still potent symbolism. Being given a cheap navy blue mug
would have had no meaning without going through the process of being given the china cup first. The poignancy of the switch was moving and gratefully accepted, but only after I was given the story by Tabatha during the night. The whole procedure, including the exchange of cake, the tea cup, the coffee cup, was an enactment of the old lady’s history of relationships with gubbas, a tea ceremony of a kind, where the re-enactment of the symbolic significance brought the meaning to life.

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Aboriginal objects that hold important historical narratives such as the gubba cup, face a number of difficulties in coming to light; not only are they not widely seen as Aboriginal by outsiders, but they may also not be seen as important by their custodians/owners. While museums have been obsessed with the ethnographic, Aboriginal people have continued to circulate objects within an entirely different economy of exchange; resources are re-imaged into different uses, useful things are distributed amongst friends and family constantly. And there is nothing to say that that particular gubba cup is of any heritage value. It may have been bought in the local op shop, or at last year’s Myers sale. There may also be shame associated with poor circumstances in the past as well as memories that people would rather not have dredged up. This is a continuing sensitivity for the Museum curators whose task is to acquire objects for the National Historical Collection. Opening painful wounds is part of their remit in looking for artefacts that tell difficult histories, yet they are very aware of the trauma inherent in the painful remembering that such an exchange generates.

This particular story is my story, and the telling of it is a legitimate (if not entirely comfortable) place from which to speak. That I was needed to enact a history of relationship reminds me that I am not just writing history, I am making it. I will be in future stories as the mission manager is now in my tea drinking story. The on-going-ness of the narrative and both its fragmentary and relational parts are held together in the object of the cup. That the narrative should travel back to an object is appropriate in a story that leads to the museum. It also reminds me that so many of the stories unfolding here could be told from a similar position. All of them are entangled with people and objects in ways that can never be undone, and all of them have voices on both sides of the cultural divide yet to be explored.
9. Farms and fences

The old people, old Tongiai used to sing in the river for the rain. Used to whack the water with wattle, get a bit of wattle and whack the water with it and make a rainbow come out of the water and sing a song.

Yes they’d sing that song. We still know a bit of that song.

That was the song of the rainmaker. Mount Delegate, he was the rain maker.250

Grandfather camp

The NSW town of Delegate lies two and a half hours drive south of Canberra. Just 10 kms from the Victorian border, with views west to the Snowy Mountains and east to the coastal range, this charming town with a population of just 700 provides a “service centre for people living in the far North East Gippsland area and boasts a fascinating historical retreat into the bygone era of early settlers and pastoralists.”251 Although full of suggestions for good local pub meals and maps to well known fishing spots, the Tourism NSW brochure which can be picked up in pubs, newsagents and real estate agents throughout the district makes no mention of the old Delegate Aboriginal Reserve, the historical black counterpoint to the sheep stations of “early settlers and pastoralists.” Why would it? There are no monuments to see, no cultural centres running tours to local sites and no interpretive walking tracks. Yet this 10 acres in the Parish of Currawong, County of Wellesley, is a place of deep meaning for the descendants of the old reserve dwellers; a site for the location of their identity as Monaro-Ngarigo people, and the focus of their aims to be acknowledged as such. 252

250 Mason and Dixon (2009)
251 Tourism NSW brochure, 2006
252 Chittick and Fox (1997):p 36-39; Margaret Somerville and Patsy Cohen discusses the nexus of identity and ongoing relationship to place in similar circumstances, locating their study at Ingelba in the New England region of NSW. Goodall and Cadzow (2009) similarly cites the Georges River in southern Sydney as a case study.
Although the old cabins are long gone, visitors to the reserve site today can imagine the attraction for the old time residents: the gently undulating grazing land flows down to a bend in the trout-stocked Delegate River, with unobstructed views south to the peak of Mt Delegate which rises as a perfect cone to 400 metres above the surrounding plain. Along fault lines, the Bendock River and Haydens Bog Creek course off the mountain as clear streams.

The Gazettal notice of 1892 which declared these 10 acres an Aboriginal reserve show that the land was already classed a temporary common on crown land, a classification which would have been determined in the wake of the 1861 Robertson Land Acts. Heritage archaeologists reason that this classification indicates Aboriginal people were already camping on the river site at the time of the Acts being passed.253 The Delegate River had always been an important resource for the Ngarigo and given that a view of Mt Delegate, a place known to be highly significant, is accessible from every location on the reserve, a camping spot located at least in the vicinity makes sense.254

*So the thing is this was the camping ground and this was where they’d meet and one would go that way and another would go that way and that other one would go that way but this is where they met, at Delegate here. That mountain, Mt Delegate, is the grandfather camp. It is a cone, just straight up like that. There is another cone up near Cooma there, on the Murrumbidgee. You can see it. It is the only cone up there near Cooma. And there is three others called the brothers.*255

Occupation of this country started early in the colony’s history. Delegate Station was founded illegally in 1827 by squatter Robert Campbell as an outstation of Duntroon on the limestone plains in present day Canberra, but licences were granted to both him and George Simpson in 1841. The flood of permits that followed included those issued to the O’Hares at Corrowang, the Nicholson’s at Little Plain, Ross on the Delegate River and Lawson at Craigie.256

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253 Santo (2005):7
254 Ibid
255 Mason and Dixon (2009)
256 Vann (1865)
All of these permits allowed for huge tracts of land to be ‘taken up’: 53,000 acres, 24 square miles, 11,520 acres, 34,000 acres. While boundaries showing these ‘runs’ began to appear on maps, the Ngarigo continued their practices of seasonal travel. The escalation in the pastoralists’ takeover of their traditional lands from the 1830s to the 1880s offered the Ngarigo little choice but to interact with the new economy if they wanted to survive and remain in their own country. The 1889 NSW Aborigines Protection Board report, the first year that the Cooma District was mentioned specifically, tells us that the “aborigines in the district… are generally employed on stations as labourers and stockmen. None are in need of aid from the Government.”

By 1890 the camp site at Delegate appeared as a named location, along with plans both for acquisition of the common as a gazetted reserve and the building of shelters. Fifteen adults and six children were counted as residents in that year’s census, although the shifting nature of the population was acknowledged, as was their reliance both on employment in the pastoral industry and other sources of food. That the men travelled between the shared social space of the reserve and the stations where they worked was established as an observable pattern by 1891, with the ABP Report for that year noting

Some of the reserves, and more particularly those in the pastoral districts, are simply used as camping grounds, the men being generally employed in various kinds of labour on sheep-stations, or in rabbiting, marsupial hunting, & c.

This way of life – working on stations, moving camps, supplementing European rations by hunting birds, fish, rabbit, possum and kangaroo – continued well into the mid 20th century.

So [the old people would] come here for the long grass birds in spring and summer. The long grass birds are pigeon, three different types, quail and bush turkey, the Australian Bustard. So when they got here they’d light a big fire on top of the hill, Mt Delegate. They’d light a big fire up there and you could see it all the way to Cooma. You can see

257 Aborigines Protection Board New South Wales (1889)
258 Aborigines Protection Board New South Wales (1891)
259 See Rae Stewart’s account of growing up in the area in Young and NSW Dept. of Environment and Conservation (2005):409-411
Mt Delegate in Cooma. Everyone around the whole of this place would know that they was camping at Mt Delegate.\textsuperscript{260}

Most of the Ngarigo working on stations throughout the 19\textsuperscript{th} century followed a schedule of travel between the high country and Gippsland. The Delegate campsite was always part of the itinerary as Emma ‘Dollie’ Williams recalls:

The blacks were fairly numerous at that time [ca. 1880s] but they was all tame. A number of them used to work about the stations but they were restless and could not stay at the one place long. Often in the mornings when the people arose they were gone. Delegate first stop as a rule and later Gippsland. They would stay away about twelve months and they would start to make back again.\textsuperscript{261}

Similarly the ‘restless’ Ngarigo made accurate census reporting a challenge. The APB found “great difficulty in taking a correct census, owing to the wandering habits of the race, more especially in the remote districts; by the border tribes crossing in to the other Colonies.”\textsuperscript{262}

The reporting of these movements give no insight into the type of business being conducted on the round trip between the Monaro and Gippsland. Presumably there would have been visits to relatives, perhaps to the Lake Tyers or Ramahyuck mission stations and almost certainly various cultural exchanges, including the reporting of political developments. The Board, it seems, were equally uninterested in following the progress of the Ngarigo across the colonial (and what would become state) border, yet it was the drawing of this ill-conceived political boundary which designated them a ‘border tribe’. Proclaimed by Governor Gipps in 1843, the boundary in this area runs in an arbitrary and perfectly regular line between the headwaters of the Murray River in the west and Cape Howe in the east. Serving merely to join the most eastern point of the Murray with the coast, the line was ruled on a map without any reference to the geography of the region let alone Ngarigo knowledge or boundary sensitivities. The cultural landscape it cut through was a complex topography of meanings and interconnections, with mountain ranges, rivers, tracks

\textsuperscript{260} Rodney Mason speaking at the gates to the old Delegate Reserve on the Delegate-Orbost Rd, 10th March 2009
\textsuperscript{261} Hand written reminiscence by Mrs Emma Sophia (Dollie) Williams (born 1872) transcribed by Mike Young of NPWS. See Young and NSW Dept. of Environment and Conservation (2005):250
\textsuperscript{262} Aborigines Protection Board New South Wales (1894)
and trails defining zones of exclusion, zones of contact and transition, boundary areas of agreement or contestation and paths along which people and stories had travelled for millennia. Although, according to Mr J O’Rourke, “the NSW blacks claimed all that territory to the Buchan River and down as far as the rapid water continued [but not as far] as the low-lying country”, the new and unnuanced political boundary bisected it for the purposes of administering the colonies. This border not only did not allow for an interconnected geography of subtle and negotiated meanings and shifting boundaries, it caused both administrations to lose sight of the Ngarigo whenever they crossed it, a sometimes manipulated invisibility. Although important cultural and economic resources straddled the newly drawn line (for example the Snowy and Ingegoodbie Rivers, the Ingegoodbie track, Mt Delegate and its associated streams and the grassbird hunting precincts), the Board was only able to collect data from the NSW side making the census figures for the Delegate Reserve, especially in the 19th century, approximate at the very best.

**Working in country**

Further to the north and higher into the mountains, Harry Bradshaw, also known as Black Harry, was starting a family with his wife Lizzie during the early 1880s. A stockman and labourer at Cobbin station near present day Jindabyne, Harry was well known in the district for his athletic skills and held the ‘belt’ in the Jindabyne-Cooma area for both running and jumping. He was a favourite with the gamblers in the district, with a lucrative book run on the strength of his athletic abilities. Although part of the wider Ngarigo milieu, for reasons we can no longer know Black Harry was reluctant to travel with his kin folk, preferring to stay in the high country of the mountains with the cattle and horses. Dollie recalls that

Black Harry spent the greater part of his life on Cobbin Station. His gin was Lizzie. He was a very smart man... He was also a great horseman. His name was Harry Bradshaw.  

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263 The Bairnsdale Advertiser and Tambo and Omeo Chronicle, 17th March Bairnsdale Advertiser and Tambo and Omeo Chronicle (1910); For other views on tribal boundaries of the area see Matthews, 1904, cited by Young and NSW Dept. of Environment and Conservation (2005):309 fn 207

264 Young and NSW Dept. of Environment and Conservation (2005):251
In an era when the use of the pejorative ‘gin’ was common place, Dollie volunteers that Black Harry was ‘very smart’. In the context of the mountains’ pastoral industry his distinguishing intelligence would have included knowledge of country, of stock animals and horses, of weather, and of men. Her further elaboration, that he was a ‘great horseman’, opens a window deep into his world and through that aperture we can see some of the particulars of his life.

That Harry worked on Cobbin station reveals a number of details about his circumstances. In the 1880s Cobbin was one of the large high country stations running beef cattle. A farm such as this ran in seasonal cycles; during winter the cattle grazed on the lower valley pastures of the station. In summer they were driven into the high country to feed on the nourishing grasses and alpine herbs that grow above the tree line. Much of Harry’s work life would have revolved around these migrations. In the summer he would have lived in the alpine pastures in one of the cattlemen’s huts, from where he would have roamed with the animals as they followed the feed and the weather. To follow cattle in this country is dangerous and takes great skill. The rocky alpine ridges are exposed and prone to blizzards, even in mid summer. The gradients are steep. The understorey in the stringy bark and snow gum sub-alpine forest is often impenetrable. The moss bogs are treacherous, particularly for cattle, and in the 1870s the whole place would have been run through with dingoes. The lower country is wet and cold for much of the year and by the 1890s, almost the instant it was invented, the Dryzabone coat had become essential equipment. In these conditions Harry would have been expected to catch his own food, tend to his own medical needs and provide his own company.

Towards the end of summer, when the animals were in peak condition, they were rounded up and driven back to the station before setting off on a long drive to market – which in this era meant a journey along the precipitous Ingogoodbie track into Gippsland and finally to the sale yards in Bairnsdale from where they would set sail for Melbourne.

This cycle, in fact the whole enterprise of the cattle industry in the mountains, depended on good stockmen. Stock work is by its nature seasonal with most stock workers taken on for the summer drive and laid off in autumn. If Black Harry spent his life on Cobbin, then he was not a seasonal worker, he was permanent staff and as permanent staff he was probably the head stockman, even
more likely since he was remembered as very smart man and a great horseman. Unlike the crew taken on only to drive the animals to market, although they too have their skills, the head stockman plays a crucial role in the running of the station. In the winter months he makes his own stock whips, most often from kangaroo skin, an innovation introduced by Aboriginal stockmen, not insignificant considering the Ngarigo were possum skin cloak people and well adept at leatherwork. He also repairs his saddles, saddle bags and other kit and makes his own harnesses both for riding and for draft work. Draft harness making is a very specific skill for which you need a deep understanding of the anatomy of horses and the way in which a team works together. Making a riding harness involves not just an understanding of horse anatomy but an understanding of the individual animal it is being made for. This was an essential element in what would have been Harry’s most important winter work, training horses.265

The compliment a born and bred mountain woman such as Dollie Williams pays in calling someone a great horseman, has specific meanings. Part of that is, as Banjo Patterson so exhilaratingly portrayed in his poem *The Man from Snowy River*, the ability to ride down steep gradients over rocky ground at high speed and stay in the saddle but it also refers to a horseman’s ability to train and work with his horses, to communicate with them without using force, to develop an intimacy with them that knows their capacity for hard work and hard riding, their dietary requirements, the history of their injuries, their harness. He would also have had a flare for breeding, adjusting the task specific mix of Arab, thoroughbred and quarter horse in each generation.

If Harry was able to do all of these tasks in an exemplary fashion then presumably he was a highly valued worker whose contribution to the station’s profitability would have been significant. Yet there was another element in Harry’s life that would have contributed to the perception of him as very smart, which was his Ngarigo cultural knowledge. This would have ranged across a number of fields, from familiarity with landscape and travel routes, to knowledge of edible flora including medicinal use of plants, to a comprehension of weather patterns and seasonal behaviour of fauna, all of which could be translated directly into his work as a stockman

265 See McCall (2000)
with considerable consequence. Despite the limitations of working in the pastoral industry in NSW during the mid to late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, it was a time when, as historian Heather Goodall tells us, Aboriginal people could still

travel frequently over their country, maintain traditional ceremonial and social traditions, eat healthy native food as well as European rations, speak their own languages and teach their children about land, traditions and recent history. These are remembered as times when Aboriginal traditional knowledge was acknowledged by whites for its value to pastoral work, and when Aboriginal expertise at stock work, horse riding and property management were widely respected.\textsuperscript{266}

Sadly Black Harry died young, leaving Lizzie, still only 23 years old, a widow with two small children.

\textbf{Billy Rutherford Snr.}

Like Black Harry, Ngarigo stockman William ‘Billy’ Rutherford snr. was a talented high country cattlemans and was held with much affection in the district, so much so that the Crisp brothers, the owners of the large and prosperous Jimenbuen Station for whom Billy worked, paid for his burial and for a stone memorial to be erected in his honour.\textsuperscript{267} Although Black Harry is not remembered widely, Billy Rutherford snr. survived into the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and is still in living oral tradition. His origins are somewhat mysterious, with this story surviving amongst the local white community of Delegate.

Old Billy Rutherford was said to have had a club foot. The Doctor in those days, William Rutherford, found Billy when he was a little baby on the ground near Hayden’s Bog. He’d just been left out there. Dr Rutherford took him home and reared him but he died

\textsuperscript{266} Goodall (1996):66; See chapter 5: Dual Occupation in same for an in-depth discussion of Aboriginal pastoral workers in NSW during this period. This is a subject which attracted much scholarly interest during the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Other studies of this topic include McGrath (1987); Read (1988); Curthoys and Moore (1995); Castle and Hagan (1998); Russell (2006)

\textsuperscript{267} Young and NSW Dept. of Environment and Conservation (2005):252 citing Dollie Williams
not all that long after and when the Dr died, Billy’s people came and took him back again. That’s how it was in those days I suppose.\(^\text{268}\)

As Ngarigo compatriots, stockmen on two of the larger Monaro stations and habitués of the Delegate Reserve, it is impossible that Billy and Harry would not have known each other. At the very least the two men would have had many friends and work interests in common. After Harry Bradshaw died Billy married his young widow Lizzie and took on the responsibility of raising her two young daughters, Christina who was seven at the time and Daisy who was two. Given the swiftness with which Billy stepped into the breach after Harry’s premature death, it is possible that the two men may even have been in some traditional kinship relationship of obligation such as brothers, cousins or related through skin group or totem. For whatever reason, Billy snr. married the young widow Lizzie Bradshaw and together they had two sons, William (Billy jnr.) in 1892 and Frederick in 1897. Frederick did not survive childhood but Daisy, the last of Harry’s children, and Billy jnr., the first of Billy Rutherford’s, grew up as close siblings and Daisy was identified as a Rutherford throughout the district.

This network of relationships plays out further within the family tree of the contemporary Davison family. During the time Black Harry worked at Cobbin, James and Emily Brindle are known to have passed through the station, if not resided there at least for a short period. Given that James was in the blanket records as receiving blankets on the Ingegoodbie track some years before and had probably worked for the O’Rourkes as a stockman, he was likely to have been taken on at Cobbin as one of the stock workers for the summer drive. Emily Brindle is recorded as giving birth to her son Alex at Jindabyne in 1888 and the story in the family is that he was born on Cobbin Station. The Brindles’ constrained circumstances after their problems at Ramahyuck Mission meant that the family would have been travelling for work opportunities, moving between stations in the high country and Gippsland where their other children were still in the mission school. Lizzie Bradshaw would have been at Cobbin with her one year old daughter Daisy at the time and presumably would have helped Emily with the birth. That the two babies, Lizzie’s daughter Daisy and Emily’s son Alex, would grow up to marry may well have

\(^{268}\) Ingram (2009)
been discussed, after all Emily’s own marriage had been arranged by her parents and the local missionaries and being on the lookout for suitable marriage partners in right kin relations for their children would once have been a prevailing occupation. If nothing else, the children’s marriage confirms that James Brindle from the Genoa area and Harry from the Jindabyne area came from different totemic groups (Emily was from Western Australia and Lizzie was from the Glenroy area in the western Blue Mountains, probably of Gundungurra descent, a group in proper marriage relationship to the Ngarigo), but presumably both men were Ngarigo speaking.269

Nobody’s business but their own

Although Emily Brindle chose to give birth at Cobbin, Lizzie, both as Mrs Bradshaw and Mrs Rutherford, chose to travel to Delegate to have her four children, as her daughters would do in their turn and as other Aboriginal women of her generation did. Why? What did Delegate offer as a place of refuge for a woman in labour? Lizzie’s journey to Delegate as an 18 year old girl to have the first of her children in 1880, despite the official gazetting of the reserve still being 12 years away, indicates that there was a community she was choosing to rely on which must have consisted of women with midwifery skills, camped on the river. A warm circle of aunties and female relatives may have held more attraction for the young mother-to-be than giving birth on the station where her husband worked. That she travelled back to Delegate over the next 12 years as she gave birth to three more children indicates that this was a place of return for her that held special meanings, a place to bring her children into the world.

Contemporary knowledge of the site makes reference to a women’s place on a creek a short distance from the camp270 and in the late 19th century the world of the Ngarigo would likely have still have been strictly gendered. But the men also travelled between the shared social space of the reserve and the stations where they worked, returning to the camp for family and community

269 Elizabeth Bradshaw noted on birth certificate of Frederick Rutherford (NSW Reg no. 1897/029659) as born at Glenroy NSW, 1862
270 Mason and Dixon (2009)
business, a pattern which was observable by 1891 and noted in the Protection Board report for that year.

The Delegate camp found official status when it was gazetted on 11th June 1893, with the Department of Lands declaring that

His Excellency the Governor, with the advice of the Executive Council, directs it to be notified that, in pursuance of the provisions of the 101st section of the Crown Lands Act of 1884, the land specified in the Schedule appended hereto shall be reserved from sale for the use of aborigines and is hereby reserved accordingly.271

Compared to the vast acreages that had been licensed to the squatters 50 years before, the modest 10 acres behind the old hospital counted for little. Nevertheless, it had been secured for exclusive Aboriginal use, a tiny holding that gave the Ngarigo a place from which they supposedly couldn’t be removed. Most importantly it was a place of their own choosing, one that had been in use well before the strangers arrived. With the gazetting of the reserve, cabins were erected, a market garden planted, irrigated by a complicated water race and a cemetery established. What was once a seasonal camp became a much loved home where community and family life could be enacted away from the prying gaze of the Protection Board or any other authority. Once the Reserve was officially reserved the Aborigines Protection Board began a programme of erecting accommodation huts. The Board also observed that the community had become self sustaining in regard to health care, noting that “they are seldom ill, but when they are. .. [at] Delegate they attend to one another.”272

Of the four locations on the Monaro regularly surveyed, from the time that the Aborigines Protection Board began to collect census figures in 1889 until its final survey in 1915, Delegate consistently returned a count of almost 30 residents, with the other locations numbering 4 or 5 at the most, usually just 1 or 2. Given the persistent complaints about the difficulty of obtaining accurate figures due to the movement of people across the colonial state border, there is no guarantee that the same 30 or so people were being recorded. The total number of the reserve

271 Dept. of Lands (1893)
272 Aborigines Protection Board New South Wales (1891)
cohort may even have been closer to 40 or 50 at its peak. Oral traditions within Aboriginal families tells us that people were crammed into the huts

_There was 30 people in them old huts. Hmmm. They had big families._

_Were they all the same family?_

_I guess so. I don’t know. I just know there was about 30 people._²⁷³

During this period, when Aboriginal men were finding more secure work in the pastoral industry, two distinct spheres of operation developed. While the Ngarigo were occupying a role that gave value to their knowledge of country on pastoral stations, their social lives were being conducted on the Delegate Reserve. Aboriginal people from across the Monaro such as Lizzie and Harry Bradshaw as well as Billy Rutherford snr. were treating Delegate as their place of return, the home camp where they could meet and socialise with friends and relatives, give birth to their children, leave older children to be cared for by extended kin networks when employment demands called them further afield, make marriage arrangements and be cared for when they were sick.

Being self-managed, the residents of the Reserve generated no bureaucratic attention except for an occasional brief mention in the Aborigines Protection Board annual reports. Despite this autonomy they were forced to apply to the local police for permission to travel beyond their immediate place of abode. An entry in the Delegate Police diary for 22 November 1900 notes that “Three Aborigines Billy Rutherford, Tommy Arnott and Jimmy Tongai are desirous of visiting Sydney during Commonwealth Celebrations and ask for passes.”²⁷⁴ This request may have been refused given that the Protection Board considered it was not desirable for Aboriginal people from rural areas to be visiting Sydney at all, but the application shows that despite their distance from the centres of government, the residents of the Delegate Reserve had an interest in affairs of the day and that news of governance and politics was closely followed, with the impending Federation of enough interest to warrant a journey to Sydney. No doubt socialising

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²⁷³ Dixon (2009)
²⁷⁴ Young and NSW Dept. of Environment and Conservation (2005):296
and news gathering from friends and family in Sydney would have been part of such a trip, but an engagement with administrative developments was clearly of importance.\textsuperscript{275}

\textbf{Too black, too white}

That Billy Rutherford snr. was one of the men applying for a rail pass to Sydney for the Federation celebrations is no surprise. Although still working as a stockman for the Crisp brothers during this era, he was often in the middle of Reserve affairs and was clearly playing an important role in the community. When he enters the record four years later it is as an advocate for the children of the Reserve, looking to secure them an education with a place in the local school. It appears that he had developed friendly relations with the local Senior Constable, George Stutchbury, who evidently held Rutherford snr. in high regard; it was through Stutchbury’s intercession that the teacher at the Delegate Public School agreed to allow the Reserve children to be enrolled in class. This event and its consequences became something of a minor scandal in the town, with a Sydney newspaper using events in Delegate as a pretext for an editorial polemic on Aboriginal inferiority.\textsuperscript{276} When the incident hit the press Stutchbury was ordered to report to his command in Goulburn regarding events. He details the episode as follows:

\textit{23\textsuperscript{rd} September 1904}

\textit{The Senior Constable spoke to the public school teacher here, in reference to the Aborigine children attending school. He [the teacher] had no objection to them doing so. On the following day the Senior Constable accompanied William Rutherford aged 12 years, full-blood, Alexander Booth aged 13 years, half-caste, and Edward Christopher aged 7 years, half-caste, and Maggie Tonqui aged 11 years, half-caste, to school. They were all clean and well dressed, and no reasonable objection could be made to them. On the following day one or two residents who have children attending the school, and

\textsuperscript{275} The local school teacher refers to Billy Rutherford snr as an “intelligent and partly-educated blackfellow” which presumably is a reference to his level of literacy (1904 Response to memorandum from Teacher at Delegate School (unamed) to Dept of Education. Correspondence file, Box 5/15677, SANSW). Given that the opportunity for education amongst the Ngarigo of his generation was limited, newspapers may well have provided the means of gaining reading skills as well as information about political developments.

\textsuperscript{276} See Colour in Schools Evening News, 5 October 1904
whose habits and mode of living are not quite as clean as the Aborigines raised objections to these children attending the school. The local paper here published a paragraph which of course incited the people; the teacher then requested the Aborigine children not to attend. There is not slightest truth in these children being filthy and likely to spread disease.\textsuperscript{277}

Stutchbury clearly holds the teacher accountable for requesting the children’s dismissal. A report to the Department from the teacher however has Rutherford Snr. initiating a withdrawal.

\textit{11 October 1904}

\textit{Sir, In reply to your memorandum with regard to the above I beg to report as follows:}

\textit{On Tuesday 13\textsuperscript{th} Sept. four children from the Aboriginal Mission Station, 2 ½ miles distant, were brought to the school by William Rutherford (father of one of them) and Senior Constable Stutchbury. One child is a pure-blooded aboriginal, two are half-castes, and the fourth has only a trace of aboriginal blood, having blue eyes and fair skin. They were neatly dressed and apparently clean. I admitted them and they attended school the remainder of the week.}

\textit{Finding however that there was a number of residents who objected to their presence in the school I visited the Mission Station on Sat. 17\textsuperscript{th} Sept, and interviewed William Rutherford, above mentioned, who is an intelligent and partly-educated blackfellow, and who seems to act as guardian of the children. On my telling him that some objection was being taken to the children’s attendance he said: “I suppose I better not send them”, and they have not attended since.}

\textit{On Monday following I received a telegram from Mr Inspector Smith requesting me to exclude them. I telegraphed in reply as follows: “Aboriginal children not now attending. Voluntary withdrawn. Report following.” A report was sent to Mr Smith the same day.} \textsuperscript{278}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{277} Stutchbury (1904)
\textsuperscript{278} 1904 Response to memorandum from Teacher at Delegate School (unamed) to Dept of Education.
Correspondence file, Box 5/15677, NSWSA
\end{footnotesize}
The Aboriginal Protection Board referred to the matter in their annual report for the year:

[Aboriginal children] are in some instances absolutely prohibited from attending the public schools, owing, it is understood, to objections that have been raised by a few parents of European children, although, as has previously been pointed out, there is nothing to which exception can be taken either in their habits or behaviour, and the Board are ever ready to see that they are decently clad.279

That one of the children refused entry to the school was Billy and Lizzie’s son, Billy Rutherford jnr., adds further to the question of the children’s education. Rutherford jnr. was considered in his adult life not just literate but well read and was known to have had a ‘beautiful hand’ in reference to his copperplate script. Given he was refused entry to the school when he was already 12 years of age, he was left little opportunity to join the state education system, even if the decision to omit the Reserve children had been rescinded quickly. The teacher’s report mentions that Rutherford snr. was a “partly educated black fellow” presumably meaning that he had a level of literacy. Reading and writing were clearly of interest to the Rutherford family and there must have been some hurt and disappointment experienced by both children and adults at their being turned away. If the teacher is to be believed, Billy Rutherford snr. wanted no excuse for trouble between the local white community and the Reserve, hence the ‘voluntary’ withdrawal.

This colour bar did not last. By the close of the 1920s the Reserve children had been enrolled at the school for some years and the last of the Ngarigo people to have lived at Delegate, Uncle Arthur McLeod, had fond memories of his time as a student there. Neither did it promote general ill will between the Reserve residents and the other local people more generally. Billy and Lizzie it seems were almost universally well regarded. Many examples of their interactions with local people, particularly children, survive in oral tradition including this one:

When a friend of mine’s father was a little boy he lived at Riverview, one of the large properties in the area which was about 8 kilometres out of town. To get home he had to pass the Aboriginal Reserve which was about three quarters of the way home and old Mr

279 Aborigines Protection Board New South Wales (1904)
and Mrs Rutherford used to always take him inside for a cup of tea. That’s something he remembered.280

While the simple gesture of offering a cup of tea to a young boy might have endeared the Rutherfords to the community’s children, their qualities were also recommended to anthropologist RH Mathews by their mutual friend Senior Sergeant George Stutchbury. Writing from Bombala Police Station on 8th December 1906 Stutchbury notes that

What Aborigines there are in Monaro are at Delegate – they appear to like that place and you could not shift them from it… [however] the Aborigines are dying out fast on Monaro, I buried a good many while stationed at Delegate, I think it is consumption that takes them off in this District. You will find a few good old sorts among them at Delegate still, viz Rutherford and family [with a margin annotation ‘Lizzie his wife – RHM’] 281

Stutchbury’s championing of the Rutherfords may well have had other long term effects. In 1909, five years after the incident at the Delegate school, Billy Rutherford jnr., by then 18 years old, is entered in the Police Salary Register under the heading Trackers – Southern District. He is stationed at Delegate where he would have worked within the Bombala Command, then headed by Stutchbury. His contemporary and brother-in-law, Alex Brindle, had already been working as a tracker under Stutchbury for a year and the same year was transferred to Cooma, where he remained in the employ of the NSW Police for the next 30 years.282

But the Reserve residents’ relationship with the police was fickle and dependent on the good will of individuals. By the early 1920s the Aborigines Protection Board had begun a drive to move all Aboriginal people off self managed reserves and onto mission stations where they would be under the control of managers. The Ngarigo community was extremely fond of the Delegate Reserve, a place of their own choosing with not only traditional associations but legislative status since its declaration as a common in 1861 and its gazettal as an Aboriginal Reserve in 1893. The

280 Ingram (2009)
282 See following chapter for a full discussion of Trackers Brindle and Rutherford.
administrative betrayal which saw them expelled is still remembered by those whose parents were effected.

   And they were all forced off the reserve.

   Forced off?

   Yes. Well it was let known by the police for them to leave if you know what I mean. They [the Aborigines Protection Board] told them [the police] to remove them [families living at the Reserve] and so they all had to leave. Aunty Cecilia was working as a domestic in Sydney and they waited for her to come back home. That’s what they was still doing here at the time. Because they wouldn’t leave without her. So she came back home then they all went to the coast to live.283

The community had no choice but to move. With existing connections at La Perouse, Wreck Bay, Wallaga Lake and Lake Tyers, the coast was the obvious place to go and so by 1927, all the old Delegate families had left. Uncle Arthur McLeod remembered that “things were getting difficult at Delegate, the tribe went to look at other areas… The older people went in a horse and sulky, the children walked.”284 They would have taken the old routes down the mountain via Cathcart, then followed the Towamba River, coming out just south of Eden, setting up camp along the Bega River or moving onto Wallaga Lake Mission, some going as far as Nowra and Jervis Bay/Wreck Bay or south to Lake Tyers. They picked beans, cut timber and hauled tuna. Their kids married locals, had more kids, became part of the coast community. People would say of the old mountain mob that there were none left, hasn’t been for almost fifty years, and that would be that. But that would be very wrong.

This forced abandonment of the Reserve contributed to the belief that no Ngarigo people remained on the Monaro by the end of the 1920s. Given that no missionaries had been generating records of the reserve residents, which in other places in NSW and Victoria was the means by which the wider community held the history of local Aboriginal people, few archival traces of the Delegate Reserve remained.285 Sometime after the Reserve was abandoned the huts were

283 Dixon, McLeod et al. (2009)
284 Egloff, Peterson et al. (2005):45
285 See Lydon (2005); Nugent (2005); Goodall (2006)
removed, perhaps for materials to be reused, and stock was allowed to graze on the property. But
the truth is that at least two of the old Ngarigo families remained. Both of them are in Deanna’s
lineage, and both of them are remembered in oral history of the region.
10. Soft landing on hard history

Jostling for position

Within the project of acquisition, which is still the central function of museums around the world, curators and other professionals have, since the 1980s, been asking themselves “what makes certain objects, rather than others, ‘worth’ preserving for posterity?” David Lowenthal provocatively extended this question to contest the entire project of museum collecting, declaring that...

With so much transmuted into heritage, it takes special effort to resist keeping it all. Packrats by nature, we preserve too well. Not only do we not need all we have, we need desperately to be rid of it… Yet heritage is such a sacred cow that none dare call for its culling.

For all its alleged allegiances to the person focus (as opposed to object focus) of ‘new museology’, the National Museum of Australia, in its heart and in its storerooms, is addicted to objects. Perhaps it is the way objects are perceived as carriers of inalienable truth that make them irresistible. Perhaps it is the Museum audience’s need for their experience of history to be anchored in the material that drives the addiction. Or perhaps inherited collections have their own momentum, always hungry for renewal. Whatever the reason, as a national museum, the NMA has the task of ‘narrating the nation’; it is to objects that it turns.

Aboriginal people have always been a central element of this narrative undertaking, whether as specimens or as agents of history, right from the Museum’s conceptual beginnings in the 19th century. But the post-colonial discourse which underpins this current iteration of the Museum casts a deep shadow on its material inheritance that is not easy to resolve. As Nicholas Thomas observes:

\[286\] Vergo (1989):2
\[287\] Lowenthal (2005):396
\[288\] as already discussed in chapters 2, 4 and 5
In settler museums, the jostling of ‘modern’ and ‘primitive’ objects does not so much display affinities of form [as] point unavoidably to rival attachments to country, and competing imaginings of the nation…

This is a rivalry that the NMA ethnographic collections are particularly vulnerable to articulating. Nevertheless, the NMA must jump over these opposing attachments to country, or rather illustrate competing attachments to country, through the display of objects and so must answer the question: what makes one object worth preserving over another? If the post-colonial concerns of the NMA have left what were once “very extensive colonial collections almost redundant”, how are new narratives constructed and out of what?

Identity as history

Walking through the various galleries of the NMA, the distinct fields of material culture that the curators have called on are clearly observable. Hills Hoist clothes lines and Victa lawn mowers, EH Holdens and plywood caravans tell of 20th century Australian life; hand-stitched boots, broken crockery, corseted dresses and wrought iron wrist cuffs convey stories from a deeper colonial past; rabbit traps, bullock catchers, flame throwers and chicken wire fencing reveal human interactions with the environment; Gertrud Bodenwieser’s ballet costume, Nancy Bird’s aviation goggles, Annette Kellerman’s swimmers, even the dashboard of the family car used as evidence in the Lindy Chamberlain trial, all meet in the imagined social world out of which we were created as a nation to commemorate our achievements and scandals. Included throughout the exhibitions are objects that have belonged to Aboriginal people: Cathy Freeman’s Olympic sprint suit; coolamons used for winnowing seeds; stone tools from Lake Eyre; all thread through the various themes, carving out a place for Indigenous people in the previously impervious white narratives that dominated Australian museums until the mid 20th century.

Entering the Gallery of First Australians however, the experience shifts to a culturally distinct domain, with the bushel of pukamani poles at the entrance setting the scene. Here the emphasis turns to an Indigenous view, where history and culture are articulated not through objects

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289 Thomas (1999):14
290 Dauber (2006):4-5
sequestered from daily life (the majority of objects in the rest of the Museum) but through objects made specifically for the purpose of carrying consciously determined meanings. Newly constructed possum skin cloaks, shell necklaces, grass fish traps and ceremonial headdresses form the backbone of the upper gallery, interspersed with multimedia presentations that play statements of identity and celebrations of survival, including commentary on the making of the objects. The deep history of the knowledge traditions called on in the construction of the objects is the emphasis here, along with their context within social networks. Older ethnographic objects are sprinkled through the exhibitions marking chronological as well as cultural connections, but the text avoids the history of their museum journey including the circumstances of their collection, focusing instead on their meaning for contemporary communities.

The decision to separate the Gallery of First Australians from the rest of the Museum was one of the recommendations of the 1975 Piggott Report, the *Museums in Australia Report* to the Australian Parliament known for the name of its chairman. It was considered to be an exciting and innovative advance at the time, reflecting in part the radical make-up of the committee tasked with reporting on the ‘Gallery of Aboriginal Australia’ as it was originally known; a ground-breaking combination of heritage professionals and Aboriginal people. The committee took on the historically offensive representation of Aboriginal people in museums, directly quoting Baldwin Spencer’s 1901 references to their “low condition of savagery” and countering it with a range of recommendations that placed Indigenous autonomy at the centre of the decision making process. Fundamental to this proposal was a separate gallery of representation that was “designed to give voice to those once voiceless.” The emphasis was to be on history and culture, a direct contestation of previous representations, which in the Committee’s view were “Europocentric preconceptions conceal[ing] the essential spirituality, the network of social bonding and obligations and intimate man-territory relationship which typify Aboriginal society.”

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291 Pigott (1975)
292 Dauber (2006):20
293 Ibid
Gallery, the Committee set in train a revision not just of historical content in relation to Aboriginal people, but the way in which Aboriginal history is conceived.\textsuperscript{295}

In the more than 30 years that have lapsed since the Pigott Report was submitted to Parliament, an entirely new field of Indigenous historiography has opened up. Drawing on alternative methodologies, much of this work is based on oral histories and memories held within families. The acceptance of these methodologies by academic historians has not been universal however. As Attwood and Foster observe:

> These representations have been particularly disruptive … because they often challenge traditional ways of doing history (which have been inherently European). … this largely results from the fact that Aboriginal histories are based on memory. One of the crucial intellectual debates in the area of Aboriginal history has been about the similarities and differences between memory and history, and across the political spectrum there are historians, … who are apprehensive about the ways in which memory, in the context of ‘identity politics’, threatens to displace the authority of history.\textsuperscript{296}

This nexus of memory and identity is immediately apparent in the GFA exhibitions, particularly in the display of contemporary works which reference ‘classical’ forms. Fish traps, possum skin cloaks, kelp water carriers and fibre baskets are all clearly identifiable as Aboriginal, which in this representational context is their reason for being. In their form and in their associations with people and places, they comment on what has come before while marking a cultural distinction between Indigenous cultural practices and mainstream Australian society as depicted in the rest of the Museum. This connection to a pre-contact past is an important element in marking out a distinctive history. Indigenous curator Hettie Perkins has no hesitation making this authenticating connection explicit when she says “The same communities that made rock art are making the art

\textsuperscript{295} This report was written in the wake of W.E.H Stanner’s 1968 Boyer lectures After the dreaming. It was in these lectures that he identified a ‘cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale’, for which he coined the phrase ‘the great Australian silence’, as a major force in Australian cultural production. (Stanner (1969))

\textsuperscript{296} Attwood and Foster (2002):20-21. Tim Rowse (2006) is also concerned with Indigenous historiographic process and their legitimacy within the academy. Apprehension around the displacement of authorial authority that Attwood & Foster identify was central to the ‘history wars’ debate where documentary proof was pitted against memory and orality in a public dispute over historical legitimacy.
we see today.”297 This representational strategy, as well as making explicit the politics of identity, sits well with audiences. Feedback from visitors overwhelmingly refers positively to their GFA experience. The merchandising opportunities that the Museum Shop offers follows through the ‘traditional’ Indigenous aesthetic with the opportunity to purchase similarly crafted items with provenance labels identifying the artist and community they came from.

Calling on distinct and ancient traditions and cultural lineages to construct statements of identity is clearly an approach that has worked well for the Indigenous curators who assembled the exhibitions in the upper galleries of the GFA. Yet this strategy is limited when it comes to social history narratives. By containing representation within the ethnographic, for all the intentions within the Gallery to dismantle outmoded discourses, the people represented are “no longer [able to] invent local futures. What is different about them remains tied to traditional pasts, inherited structures that either resist or yield to the new but cannot produce it.”298

As the exhibitions move into post-contact histories on the Gallery’s lower levels, this strategy is less available. Here the narratives are about dispossession, trauma, resistance and survival, as well as celebrations of success and community/family life. These stories are not easily constructed from the repertoire of ‘Indigenous artefacts’ available in the upper gallery. The National Historical Collection held by the Museum holds very little in the way of objects that tell Aboriginal social history not primarily concerned with pre-contact traditions. Similarly, the use of memory and oral history confines the narratives to a limited zone within the not so distant past while, unlike the other galleries within the Museum, social histories that tell of the deeper past are missing. For the people who are represented, the reassertion of their contemporary presence directly addresses the extinction narratives out of which museum exhibitions were built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and within which many of them are still popularly conceived.299

For the Museum’s directive to tell ‘Aboriginal history’ in it is role as institution of community education, this limitation is less satisfying.

297 Hettie Perkins, curator of Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Art at AGNSW, cited by Lowenthal (2005)
298 Clifford (1988):5
299 This is particularly pertinent for the Tasmanians. See Griffiths (2000):25
Whitewashed objects

As the once firm ground of representation, ownership, custody and preservation shifts under the weight of a reasserted Indigenous presence, “real people with modern lives now stand in for the objects which once stood in for them…” , although not as uniformly as Griffiths’ comment would suggest.\(^{300}\) It may be true in the domains of exhibition and interpretation. Within the protocols of the collections however, archaic notions of Indigenous material culture are preserved by practices which memorialise the collector through whose agency they came into the collection. While Indigenous people whose material is displayed are consulted by the Museum, allowing objects to be united with stories held in the oral traditions of source communities, the history of how such objects came to be in collections is not expunged in this process. Although some collecting was conducted with both permission and sensitivity, much was not. Nor were the objects collected valued or cared for greatly beyond the moment of their collection. Griffiths relates the story of a group of stone artefacts belonging to the Museum of Victoria, for example, although it is one which is repeated many times over:

During the Second World War, truckloads of stone artefacts were removed to an outside store to clear museum space. That is where they mostly still are today, stranded in a warehouse in boxes layered with dust… Although there is vagueness about the dispersed places of origin of [these] individual artefacts, there is precision about the person who gathered them together. In their sheer volume and disarray, these boxes of stone artefacts represent an orgy of collection.\(^{301}\)

The legacy of this collecting is, as Griffiths illustrates, mountains of artefacts disconnected from their origins. The way in which contextual information was ignored in these early collecting drives is discussed extensively in the literature yet the narrative needs of the social history museum drives the historicizing of these collections.\(^{302}\) Naturally the strongest storyline to emerge is the one which archival sources best support, and invariably that is the one in which the collector features. Further, the mechanism through which collectors became the primary agent in the construction of discourses within the museum are extant in the administrative processes in

\(^{300}\) Griffiths (1996):27  
\(^{301}\) Ibid:67  
\(^{302}\) Pearce (1994); Thomas (1999); Gosden and Knowles (2001)
use today. The NMA for example still names objects, for the purposes of cataloguing, with the name of the collector.\(^{303}\) This emphasis casts the collector as the originator of the history of the object at the moment it begins its museum life, often the only documented aspect of its journey. Indeed the roll call of famous collectors memorialised within museums throughout the country narrates the early history of ethnography and anthropology in Australia through the titles of its collections.

Academic interest in both the collectors and their collections over the last decade has resulted in several important studies on the subject, most recently *The Makers and the Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections*. The front cover of this latest edition to the field shows a group of clearly identifiable ‘Indigenous’ objects on contemporary display. With no people in the frame, their ethnographic presence is left to articulate their meaning only in the context of the museum. Both the title and the cover of the book infer an Indigenous presence, yet the series of essays deals exclusively with the histories of white collectors. This classificatory sleight of hand exemplifies the undertow that the history of collecting exerts on ethnographic objects, even when they are regarded within contemporary museological sensitivities.\(^{304}\)

Similarly, the masses of objects held in these collections generate their own activity. A rich collection of artefacts, photographs, audio visual recordings and archival material assembled by Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land and the Great Sandy and Tanami deserts held by Museum Victoria for example is hailed in their publicity as “one of the most comprehensive and significant collections of Aboriginal cultural heritage material in the world.” The claim is supported by a photograph of a string basket, taken in the style of an art gallery catalogue, placing the object firmly in the discourse of aesthetics as well as ethnography. This collection is rightly considered a jewel of ethnographic collections, exquisitely assembled and extensively provenanced as it is. It is no surprise that scholars have been consistently drawn to the material during the 25 years it has been held by Museum Victoria; it has inspired scholarly publications,

\(^{303}\) As do most museums. See the Donald Thomson Collection in Museum Victoria below as an example.

\(^{304}\) Philip Jones (2008) works against this current in his book *Ochre and Rust*, where he reads a series of objects as historical texts. Even here collectors are still often cast in the lead role, as in the case of Daisy Bates, the central figure of chapter 7.
coffee table books, articles, conferences and even a popular feature film.\textsuperscript{305} The so-called ‘digital repatriation’ of parts of the collection has also become a celebrated example of contemporary museology.\textsuperscript{306}

The interest which a collection such as this inevitably generates in turn engenders further interest, creating a positive feedback loop which continues to enhance the collection’s value as contemporary meanings and new engagements are added to its history. Harder to see however is

\textsuperscript{305} See for example Thomson and Peterson (1983); Carment (1990); The Big Picture: Thomson of Arnhem Land, ABC TV, 29 June 2000 (ABC Archives, Sydney); The Ten Canoes (2006) directed by Rolf de Heer

\textsuperscript{306} See Toner (2003) for a discussion on the definition of ‘digital repatriation’, with emphasis on its meaning for Indigenous communities; For example the major ARC Linkage project conducted between 2003-2006, known as Anthropological and Aboriginal perspectives on the Donald Thomson Collection: material culture, collecting and identity, which investigated among other things “digital modes of repatriation” of images from amongst the more than 2,000 photographs and 4,500 objects held by Museum Victoria. Papers on this work have been given at international conferences including the World Archaeological Congress (Dublin) 2008 and The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections (Melbourne) 2006.
how the boundaries of such a collection trace the historical limits of academic interest in the lives of Aboriginal people.

Born in Melbourne and educated at a private boy’s school and at Melbourne and Sydney Universities, Thomson was mentored into the field of anthropology by the great academics of his era, Sir Baldwin Spencer, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and later during his doctoral studies at Cambridge, the evolutionary theorist A. C. Haddon, before himself becoming Professor of Anthropology at the University of Melbourne for four years in the mid 1960s. This compelling academic biography is the least of his achievements; his reputation for solo and intrepid field work as well as his championing of many unfashionable causes of his era such as Aboriginal land rights, led to him being dubbed ‘Australia’s Lawrence of Arabia’. That Thomson consistently travelled over 4,000 kilometres to conduct his field work offers an insight into attitudes of the intellectually privileged towards Aboriginal people in proximity to the southern capital cities in the early to mid 20th century. While he was (unsuccessfully) proposing land rights policy to the government on behalf of the Yolngu in the Northern Territory however, only a few kilometres from his Eltham farm north of Melbourne the local Wurundjeri people were being removed from their land at Coranderrk to make way for soldier settlement schemes in 1947. Despite the vast amount of material in his archive, there is no record of his opinion on this matter. That the Wurundjeri were not ethnographically interesting to the local scholars and would not become so for another 30 or 40 years is no criticism of Thomson, merely an observation of the historical context in which his collection was assembled. One of his biographers notes that

[Thomson’s] collection of more than 7000 artefacts, comprehensive in its scope and scrupulously described, together with 11,000 photographs documenting every aspect of

307 Morphy (2002)
308 Soldier settlement schemes and their effect on the Coranderrk campaign is discussed in Barwick, Barwick et al. (1998):311; This is in no way a criticism of Thomson’s fierce 1947 campaign against the establishment of a rocket range at Woomera, South Australia, merely a comment of the geography of his interests. Attwood (2003) documents Thomson’s passionate involvement in social justice issues in regards to Aboriginal people. See Rowley (1983) for a discussion of what became known as the ‘land rights’ movement in this era.
Aboriginal daily and ritual life, enables the viewer to recapture the Aboriginal world of Cape York and Arnhem Land in the 1930s and 1940s.\textsuperscript{309} The Aboriginal world of south-eastern Australia in the same era however is almost entirely missing from the material and archival record. Not only is the record missing but the richness and depth of the Arnhem Land record as assembled by Thomson now generates contemporary interest because of its exemplary qualities and thus perpetuates the boundaries of intellectual concentration.

This brief example of just one of Australia’s great ethnographic collectors, one who was deeply ethical and unerringly humane, was repeated over and over, not always with such compassionate attention. It is exactly this march of late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century collectors from the south to the centre and north in search of ethnographic booty, gaining momentum as the once richly covered Victorian landscape was cleared of Aboriginal material, that \textit{The Makers and the Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections} documents. John Tunney, Norman Tindale, Charles Mountford, Spencer and Gillen, Herbert Basedow, the Berndts, TGH Strehlow: the list of collection makers referred to by the authors records the great names of Australian anthropological achievement. The essays are in themselves a collection, one which chronicles the contemporary scholarly interest in these historical figures. The editors are not unreflexive about the essays’ demonstration of white intellectual interests and the nature of the disciplinary discourses the collectors worked within, yet their positioning of the essays as part of a wider discussion about Indigenous material culture demonstrates the strength of the pull exerted by this current of intellectual inheritance.

Meanwhile, Museum Victoria is looking to its Donald Thomson archive to generate social history narratives as they investigate new relationships with contemporary communities. Like their counterparts, including the NMA, they strike the problem of representing Aboriginal social history – what objects do we use to tell these stories? One solution is to use an ethnographic collection as inspiration for contemporary responses and certainly the Thomson Collection is perfectly suited to such a strategy. But this approach places the relationship between Thomson

\textsuperscript{309} Morphy (2002)
and his informants at the centre of the public narrative which unfolds, standing in for an Aboriginal social history. Thomison himself was such a compelling figure and his collection so magnificent that to not investigate all the possibilities it offers would be negligent. But hidden in this history is an unexamined politic which silently infers that the power relations between Thomson and his informants, both in his time and now, are even. To recap from Chapter 1, “Images of exotic and ancient cultural richness are extremely useful in the workings of nation-states; unresolved political contests are not”, yet as senior Indigenous curator Margo Neale points out, political contests are at the heart of all modern Aboriginal histories and are just as central to desert and top end people as they are to south-east Kooris, a point which is glossed over in the rush to celebrate cultural richness and successful cross-cultural relationships.

What is an Aboriginal object?

It is not the job of this thesis to deal with the silences the disciplinary interests of early anthropologists and ethnographic collectors generated, however in returning to the NMA and the task of this research, those silences are clearly defined. Not only were the Ngarigo people of the Monaro of no interest to early anthropologists, not having had any material culture collected they are not the subject of contemporary repatriation projects. This silence within the collection is perpetuated in direct and opposite symmetry to collections such as the Thomson Collection and flows out into history where the literature has declared the Ngarigo extinct for almost a century. Even before they were declared extinct the heroic histories of the Snowy River and the great story of sheep and cattle on the early frontier pushed them into the narrative margins, their role in the economic development of the region deleted and their objects of everyday use spurned as uninteresting.

Degenerate modern

In my first month of working on this project, I was told by a senior research advisor at the NMA that my work was problematic due to its location. The people of south-eastern Australia, he told

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310 This is the case in the public articulation of the project. Presumably for the families involved the emphasis is reversed.

311 Hinkson (2002):63
me, had no distinctive material culture and I had made an unfortunate choice in focusing on the far south coast of NSW. Decimated by the colonising process, their possessions would reflect merely their similarity to poor white rural people. Sadly, he noted, this was true for all Aboriginal people ‘this side of the frontier’. The frontier, he said, could be drawn on a map as a line that stretched approximately from Townsville to Perth. As I was about to discover, he said, Aboriginal people’s possessions this side of the frontier would be the same as those of non-Aboriginal people from the same class and era. If I were to find that there was an extant ‘economy of knowledge’, there may be some hope for an interesting research project, but he could tell me that I would not find any ‘Aboriginal objects’.

This research advisor was not alone in his opinion of what constituted an ‘Aboriginal object’. As Rodney Harrison notes, the notion of Aboriginal history being prehistory is still shockingly pervasive, with Aboriginal people’s presence before the arrival of white invaders “commemorated through a heritage discourse which memorialise[s] fossilised representations of the deep Aboriginal past … while emphasising that authentic forms of Aboriginality [exist] only outside of settled Australia.” 312 The lack of equity in this position is articulated by Byrne when he notes that while Aborigines were engaged in transactional relationships with white settlers and were establishing a new cultural geography, “settler society was spatially marginalizing them and denying the authenticity of their emergent (south-east) Aboriginal culture… [settler society] was also beginning to regard the archaeological remains of pre-contact Aboriginal culture as a benchmark of authentic Aboriginality.” 313 Byrne sees the adaptation of Aboriginal equipment at the moment of contact as the moment at which the criteria for classifying Indigenous material culture by Europeans were laid down. He proposes that as Aboriginal people adapted their lifestyles and material culture under European influence, Europeans lost interest in them.

The Aborigines were seen to have lost or to be fast losing that quality which … was the only excuse for being a native, the quality of being authentically primitive… [I]t is important to understand that [the Europeans] saw themselves as the exclusive agents of change. Lacking such agency, the natives could only ever be the passive recipients of

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312 Harrison, Williamson et al. (2002):5
313 Byrne (1996):82
European ways and products. And it was for this reason that with few exceptions the early observers failed to attend to the process by which Aborigines were recontextualising or Aboriginalising elements of European culture.\textsuperscript{314}

That such ‘Aboriginalised’ objects were of so little interest to Europeans pointed to the way in which Aboriginal cultures were conceptualised as existing outside of systems of transaction and exchange, particularly in regard to technological innovation. As Byrne points out, the passivity with which Europeans saw their technology being adopted was a function not of the Aborigines’ interaction with new objects, but the thinking which separated Europeans from ‘primitives’ and thus from history.

Although Byrne’s focus here is on the archaeological record, the distinction he makes between these conflicting positions is paralleled by the division that developed between anthropology and history, a division that was central to the building of museum collections, as the distinction between the historic and the ‘timeless’ found form in object classificatory systems. In this vein, while the equipment of pre-contact Aboriginal life was sought by museums as representative of authentic Aboriginal experience, objects holding contact narratives were overlooked. From the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, for example, Aboriginal people created artefacts that documented their experiences of interaction with European settlers, producing boomerangs, shields, spear throwers, clubs, walking sticks and stock whip handles decorated with engraved or painted depictions of animals, people and plants. These decorations often worked as narratives, depicting changing circumstances brought about by European settlement as well as links to land and traditional cultural practices. That objects such as these are both important and largely missing from public collections was addressed by the Australian Museum (Sydney) when it initiated a study of transitional objects followed by a collecting drive which ran between 1998-2003 noting:

some of the objects we examined from early museum collections had ‘degenerate modern’ written on them by past curators because they were adorned with skilfully produced and faithfully rendered figurative imagery.\textsuperscript{315}

Although this drive increased the Australian Museum’s holdings marginally, a significant dearth of artefacts that represent this genre of Indigenous production remains including in the

\textsuperscript{314} Byrne (1996):83

\textsuperscript{315} Tacon, South et al. (2003):100
collections of the NMA. This gap directly reflects the limited interests of anthropologists in cultural processes in heavily colonised parts of Australia for most of the 20th century.

This lack of interest was demonstrated succinctly during a 1934 field trip by an anthropologist from the University of Sydney who spent four months undertaking research on Barambah Mission in south-east Queensland, later known as Cherbourg. Her task was “to form some idea of the ritual and social life which obtained before the breakdown of the local cultures.”\textsuperscript{316} In keeping with the anthropological practice of the time, the researcher was not interested in examining contemporary dynamics of social interaction on the settlement; rather, she was concerned with Aboriginal culture in its pristine form, or “the uncontaminated native.”\textsuperscript{317} AP Elkin who oversaw the project, noted that they were able to observe only a “disintegrated society”, where the residents led a “kind of cultural non-existence.”

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{boomerang_from_cherbourg.png}
\caption{Detail of boomerang from Cherbourg Mission, QLD\textsuperscript{318}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{317} Blake, T. (2001) 2001:34
\textsuperscript{318} The NMA has recently purchased a large and important group of artefacts made at Cherbourg during this period which clearly demonstrate the narrative interests of the makers and their adaptive responses to changing circumstances. The boomerangs pictured in figures 26 & 27 are included in this collection.
This thinking, at the foundation of cross-cultural discourses for the best part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, played a role in foundational museological practices throughout Australia. Tom Griffiths argues that this binary discourse of the historic and the timeless emerged also at the moment in which anthropology was coming into existence, in fact was an agent in its formation. Anthropology he argues “was the study of ‘primitive’ peoples, of people without history. Europeans had a history and were continually making it, while ‘primitive’ peoples were the timeless subjects of a different form of analysis, anthropology.”\textsuperscript{319} Museums articulated this conflict as a matter of course in both the scholarly and public arenas. They were after all the repositories of the objects collected by the founding fathers of anthropology (as well as occasionally the commissioners of such collections) and at the same time, the storehouse of the nation’s historic treasures, although the two collecting domains were kept strictly in different cupboards.

While the masses of objects inherited from the now defunct Institute of Anatomy, the beneficiary of so much anthropological booty, were handed over to the NMA at its inception, artefacts which offer a place to Aboriginal people within an historical narrative held in the National Historical Museum, Cherbourg Mission, QLD

\textsuperscript{319} Griffiths (1996):25
Collection are, not surprisingly, few and far between. This is changing as the contribution Indigenous curators are making to the collection begins to find form. Nevertheless, the vast ethnographic collections found in museums in Australia and overseas have had a heavy hand in defining what Aboriginality is and how it is conceived in the popular imagination, with the trope of the ‘primitive’, the ‘traditional’, the ‘authentic’, or whatever the language of the day prescribes, well outliving the museological paradigm within which it was formed. Although it is now decades since the last of the dioramas showing tableaux of ‘primitive man’ at work and play were dismantled, the conception that ‘real Aborigines’ are not part of modernity is, as Harrison points out, still shockingly pervasive.

Straining relationships

Knowing the central role that Aboriginal material culture plays within the telling of distinctive Australian stories within museums, the Ngarigo research participants involved in this project understood that the real question being asked was not “what objects do you treasure, preserve, display in your homes and community places that connect you to the past?” but “what objects do you have that tell the history of Aboriginal people of the south coast?” The reluctance to offer objects from within their possessions as a demonstration of their interest in the past was not an unwillingness to associate themselves personally with history – history they are happy to narrate at length in conversation – but an admission that their objects do not tell those stories. Most of the stories told during recording were of tough times; picking beans, living on the mission, manning timber barges, moving around looking for work, running from the ‘welfare’, fighting governments and raising families in exceptionally poor conditions. These were people who were trying to move beyond their material circumstances. Nostalgic associations with objects from daily life were therefore low on the list of priorities. Equally, conceptualising such objects as historic artefacts at the time in which they were in common use was not their main concern. Furthermore, these objects did not delineate the type of cultural distinctiveness that was an important element in constructing identity for many Aboriginal people of the early and mid 20th century. As Byrne argues, after all, “Aborigines, for their own reasons, also trade in the currency

320 Lynette Russell offers an in-depth analysis of the mechanisms which drive the persistence of this outmoded discourse from an Indigenous perspective in Russell (2001).
of essentialism... hardly surprising, considering the extraordinary valorisation of the timeless-traditional conception of Aboriginal culture by settler discourses.” 321

The trajectory of an object within a family on the other hand, has no need to account for itself in terms of distinctiveness. Objects that were once in common use may be kept by immediate descendants as keepsakes of a beloved individual or a memento of a time and place, no matter what their ethnic allegiances are, but as they travel further from their origins they are kept as historic artefacts, linking generations to each other. Such personal memorabilia may hold different meanings for different generations and different individuals within the one family, seen either as historic artefacts or still in transition from the equipmental. Depending on the context, such objects may intersect with museum interests because of their antiquity or the stories they narrate. It is this intersection of the public and the private and their associated social and family narratives which is at the heart of this research project. By examining this intersection, a conflation between collecting domains inherent in the aims of the project is exposed: any whitefella asking about Aboriginal people’s private possessions is necessarily asking about the site at which their possessions intersect with the wider narrative of 20th century Aboriginal history and the survival of cultural identity.

Stories which contest essentialist depictions of ‘authentic’ Aboriginal culture and peoples are emerging as the following example given by Tony Birch, curator of the Bundjilaka Gallery of the Melbourne Museum, illustrates. Here Birch offers an alternative to the ethnographic paradigm and challenges museums to look again at the links between Indigenous history, narrative and material culture:

In my father’s family … we had an old brass tea strainer at home that was battered and beaten and no one would throw the tea strainer out. My father is not an articulate man, but I asked him what it was like to live in the Fitzroy house. He lived there with his grandmother, mother, two aunties and sisters. When he saw the house knocked down he couldn’t believe it. When he walked onto the block and started to look around in the rubble he found the tea strainer which reminded him of sitting around the table drinking

321 Byrne (1996):101
tea and his grandmother telling him stories. So the only way he was told the stories of his ancestry was around the table. So the tea strainer became the repository of stories.  

This anecdote of the tea strainer illustrates the circumstance of one of the most contested moments of contemporary Koori history in Melbourne: the knocking down of the Fitzroy Terraces. Inhabited by a large community of Aboriginal families for many years, their destruction to make way for Housing Commission flats was the cause of much ill will, still being played out in Gertrude St today. Having inscribed the battered tea strainer with the meaning of its context, it becomes the mnemonic device for recalling the specifics of time, place and action – invoking the rubble left after the destruction of the terraces, the old man picking through the ruins, the discovery of a tiny but meaningful remnant of a life once lived in a community of relatives. For Birch’s father, the strainer contained stories about his ancestry. For us, it becomes available to illustrate the larger narrative of political contestation.

The tea strainer in this story cannot be immediately read as an Indigenous object without the corresponding narrative, lacking as it does the ethnographic markers which render it immediately recognisable as culturally distinctive. Not pre-historic or part of a pre-contact history, the tea strainer had to transform from a cheap and readily available domestic object by being used then buried in very specific circumstances, then retrieved. Birch’s story starts with him asking his father why he kept the old tea strainer, a question which came out of the shared use of his father’s possessions. Lives are littered with these sorts of objects but what is it that turns them into something that has been collected or that carries collective meaning? Is it possible to know that while still engaged with the object or is it only through the intervention of a third party that their nature can be seen? Tony Birch has been a museum curator and is now a poet lecturer in creative writing. He brings to his interactions with objects an unusual degree of narrative awareness. But is it only this type of consciousness that transforms ‘stuff’ into a collection? This question points to a certain anxiety that is inevitable when working in this field. Any non-Aboriginal person looking at and photographing objects belonging to Aboriginal people is part of a history of collecting that needs to be consciously acknowledged, particularly when working on

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322 From transcript of recorded interview with Tony Birch, 4th April, 2005
a project that has substantial links to a museum. That is not to say that those links are all bad: being seen and heard by an outsider, especially one with institutional connections, can sometimes be an affirming moment for those who have struggled to preserve a marginalised history. But based on delicate relationships, as this research attests, there is no room for naivety.

Aboriginal objects such as the tea strainer have a further difficulty in coming to light; not only are they not widely seen as Aboriginal by outsiders, but they may also not be seen as important by their custodians/owners. While museums have been obsessed with the ethnographic, Aboriginal people have internalized the discourses that continue to be re-iterated within institutions of representation. Why would anyone be interested in their old junk? There may also be shame associated with poor circumstances in the past as well as associations with memories that people would rather not have dredged up.

Aboriginal people, as evidenced by the choices made by Indigenous curators of the NMA and the willingness of communities to participate in exhibitions, have a continuing interest in finding materially distinct means of expressing their identity in institutions of representation. Although these representations do not call on the flattening narratives of ethnography with which such material was once associated, in their allusions to a classical past, they evoke notions of the ‘authentic’ that for many Aboriginal people are unavailable precisely because of the circumstances of their colonisation. Anthropologist Fred Myers proposes that we reconsider our approach:

A fundamental question … that engages with the present is how to think about cultural continuities without reifying culture? If we are not only antiquarian, concerned to unearth the truth of an original Aboriginal alterity (however alluring that is), attention to what is happening directs us to Aboriginal cultural production, to the production of Aboriginal cultures.  

This shift in emphasis is well accommodated in social history methodologies, where the tracing of historical characters and cultures positions the choices made by Aboriginal people within a

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323 Myers (2005):5
larger historical context. But looking to Aboriginal social history for new approaches to representation brings its own problems, as discussed in detail in chapter 12.
11. Bega Park

Local history, located memory

Despite the majority of this story taking place in the Snowy Mountains, the political heart of it plays out on the far south coast of NSW, the area within which most Ngarigo descendants live today. Much of this region falls within the boundaries of the Bega Valley Shire, a district with a history of painful race relations, the fractures of which still show in the fabric of Bega town.

This fault line travels directly through the life of Deanna’s much loved cousin and fellow Ngarigo elder Margaret Dixon. Aunty Margaret was for many years at the centre of the human rights struggle in Bega, as both a community member and, in 1967 along with the Anglican Rev Frank Woodwell, as founder of the Bega Valley Aboriginal Advancement Association. Her participation in the front line of the fight for rights was prompted by her inability to find a landlord willing to rent her and her family a house in the area. The campaign she and Woodwell mounted succeeded in securing some housing in the town but not without the locals instigating a counter protest, most offensively by erecting a sign on the street designated for the housing project that read ‘Coon Avenue’ in 1967.324 Aunty Margaret told ABC Radio in 2005:

Coon Avenue. So you can imagine what they thought. I suppose they think we’re not supposed to have anything. Why did they put up Coon Avenue? It was just racist. It didn’t make me feel good. A bit scared, as well. Don’t know why people would put things out like that. You never know what they’ll do. I was only living on my traditional lands.325

Thirty years later the Bega Valley Shire Council was still resisting change, voting three times between 1997 and 1998 against the endorsement of an expression of regret at the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families. Forced or coerced separations of children were a

324 For a detailed account of the struggle see McKenna (2002): chapter 9
325 Hindsight, ABC Radio National, 13 March 2005
common occurrence in the area during the 20th century, including in Margaret Dixon’s family where her younger brother and sister were taken. Unable to support a public apology, the Council was sacked by the NSW State Government in 1999, partly for being “out of step with the majority of local and state governments” of the time.\textsuperscript{326} The first act of the State appointed Administrator was to adopt the previously rejected motion of “sorrow and regret.”\textsuperscript{327} It was Aunty Margaret’s powerful testimony to a public meeting, where she described the ‘very hurting thing’ her family had been subjected to, which provided one of the turning points in the sacking of the Councillors.

These days the Council’s reconciliation agenda is on very public display in the Aboriginal art installation mounted in the garden beds outside the Council Chambers in Zingel Place. The so-called ‘totem poles’, a reference – unconscious or not – to the iconic pukumani funerary poles of the Tiwi Islands, were created by a team which included two of Margaret’s children to celebrate the inaugural 2001 Memo of Understanding between the Bega Valley Shire Council and the three Aboriginal communities of the Bega Valley. The MOU, believed to be the first agreement of its kind in Australia, acknowledges past injustices and racism as well as recognising Aboriginal people as the original inhabitants and custodians of the Bega Valley Shire.

Despite the goodwill of the current Council, the legacy of the past is still apparent in the occupation of social spaces within the town, as I discovered during my field work when Deanna and I visited Bega to interview Aunty Margaret. Margaret’s father was from one of the old Delegate Reserve families that were moved on by the authorities in the 1920s. As many of the mountain people did, he married a woman from the coast and settled first in Nowra and then in Bega. Despite living most of his adult life on the coast, he remained a loyal mountain man all his life, identifying as Ngarigo and teaching his children their mountain heritage. So, as on many other occasions during this research, Deanna and I headed for the coast to talk about the mountains.

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\textsuperscript{326} McKenna (2002):215
\textsuperscript{327} Ibid
I had been visiting Bega regularly over the three years of this project and had come to know the
townscape of grid laid streets, public buildings and coffee shops quite well, but under Deanna’s
commentary on this particular morning, an Aboriginal Bega began to emerge – an alternative
geography of zones of relationship, avoidance and reflection.\textsuperscript{328}

Although we had phoned ahead the day before, Aunty Margaret was not at home. Deanna
however spotted a friend on the street who directed us to the park where she would apparently be
arriving shortly. The park is a square of grass that stretches between the Woolworths carpark and
the Council Chamber buildings at the back of the main street, ringed by footpaths and decorated
with a collection of metal rubbish bins, all-in-one picnic table and chair sets and a memorial rock
with brass plaque. Surrounded on three sides by carpark or road and on one side by shops,
everyone coming or going can be seen for some distance.

By the time we arrived mid-morning, several groups of Kooris were dotted between the steps,
the picnic tables and a couple of sunny spots on the grass. Deanna instructed me to drive round
the block on reconnaissance before indicating a suitably distant carpark from where she could
see but not be seen. Watching the groups form and re-form from the car, she offered notes on
each of the distant relatives, acquaintances, spouses and enemies that milled on the grass. As she
watched the people in the park, I watched the people at the periphery returning to their cars from
Woolworths or crossing the carpark from the Council Chambers on the other side. While the
Kooris enjoyed a morning of socialising in the sun, meeting friends, passing on messages,
repeating gossip, the non-Aboriginal townsfolk walked out of their way to avoid the space.
Although at other times I had seen people stop here to eat a pie from the hot bread shop or fish
and chips from the chippy across the main road, this morning they averted their gaze and
circumnavigated the grass, sometimes going out of their way to do so. Eventually Deanna
recognised one of the women and wandered over to join the group. A few minutes later she
called me over for introductions. The young women were some of Margaret’s relatives and they
could not only give us an update on her health, they could tell us that she had decided to break
her routine today and by-pass the park for the RSL club.

\textsuperscript{328} Gillian Cowlishaw conducted an extensive anthropological study into Aboriginal people’s complex relationships to urban spaces in Cowlishaw (2009)
We drove the two blocks to the club and found Aunty Margaret, arranging to drop by later with the recording gear to tape an interview. Finding ourselves with a couple of hours to fill, Deanna and I headed for the river to unpack our thermos and sandwiches. Seated on one of the new benches overlooking the restored wetlands, Deanna gave me a memory tour of the old camp site which the benches now faced. “That’s where old Aunty Ruby had her house. It only had a dirt floor but she kept it spotless. She used to wear bright red lipstick”, and so on across the site. Where there were now tasteful bike paths and re-vegetated bird habitat, Deanna saw her younger self surrounded by a community of friends and relatives camped in the shanty town along the river bank.

We returned to the club to do the interview with Aunty Margaret. Deanna and Margaret are well rehearsed in this conversation, with the Delegate Reserve one of their favourite sites of reminiscence, even though neither of them ever lived there. Aunty Margaret moves between telling some well worn stories for the tape and telling Deanna the latest hot gossip from the community.

Later in the day, after the recording was finished, I dropped Aunty Margaret at home and Deanna at her daughter’s house, returning to the town to visit the Bega Pioneers’ Museum. Run by the local historical society, the museum is housed in an 1859 hotel, with bedrooms, kitchen, foyer and stables still intact. The massive collection of artefacts covers every aspect of Bega’s early history including local industry, agriculture, clothing, military connections and household effects. The museum had its origins in the historical society formed in 1952 with the Catholic nun Sister Bernice Smith at its centre. I chatted to the volunteer staff about the research assistance they offer to family historians with Bega pioneer connections and spent several hours moving through the exhibition rooms, overwhelmed by the mountain of objects on display. The single reference to an Aboriginal past was a glass box of boomerangs and nulla nullas that had been collected by a local man while on holiday in Queensland sometime during the 1940s.

It was not until my return to Canberra that I reflected on the meaning of the boundaries between the seemingly heterogeneous zones of the park, the river bank and the museum and the way the
occupation of these spaces articulates a deeply ingrained division within the town. I consulted an archaeologist colleague who has worked for many decades with Aboriginal communities, including in this region, primarily to gauge her response to the re-vegetation of the river wetlands and the impact these renovations have had on the 20th century Aboriginal heritage in the area. It was her reaction to my story about the park and its social function however which drew my immediate attention. Her conjecture was that the park had become a social gathering place in lieu of any other space being available. She felt it was likely the people I had met in the park lived in houses in which two or three large families would be accommodated and that the spillage into the park was a sad reflection on the appalling conditions faced by Aboriginal people throughout the country. I hesitated to agree. It had not been my observation that these people lived in cramped conditions. I had dropped Margaret home from the club and saw that she did not live in a house with three other families, she lived with her partner and one son in a tidy little home with shrubs along the driveway and a small table and two chairs on the front verandah. My other Koori friends similarly lived in newish brick veneer homes with garages and flower gardens, where everybody had their own bedroom, houses that I regularly stayed in on visits from Canberra. The situation was repeated the entire length of the south coast, with Aboriginal housing no longer confined to the old mission sites but sprinkled liberally through all the major towns and villages from Eden to Wollongong. Aunty Margaret’s efforts in the 1960s and 70s had not been in vain, yet popular and even well informed perceptions had not moved on, contending that lack of access to resources was almost always the engine driving social behaviour. By the time this conversation took place I had been dismantling notions of absence, loss and extinction within this project for some time and immediately recognised the distance between the evidence and the prevailing discourse.

My Canberra colleague was not alone in seeing the Koori occupation of the park as aberrant. For her it was an expression of lack, an absence of alternatives; for many of the Bega townsfolk occupation of public spaces has historically been seen as an expression of threatened social disobedience and a flouting of authority, if the Shire Council reactions are any indication to go by. The issue of Aboriginal occupation of public spaces ignited in 1998 when the Council, against the express request of the Aboriginal community, cut down the old willow tree on the corner of Gipps and Bega streets. The willow tree meeting place was a central feature in the
Aboriginal landscape of Bega, and as such, its removal was a deliberate act of sabotage, a clear message that they were not welcome in public places. Although some attempt at reparation was made, with a new tree ceremonially planted on the site by a Council official and one of Margaret’s sons, it was too late. Allegiances had shifted, at least partly, to the alternative park on Zingel Place.

As we watched the groups form and re-form, as Deanna approached those known to her and as I was invited in to be introduced, it struck me how comfortable the Kooris in the park were. People came and went, exchanging smokes and coffee and sausage rolls, relaying information and catching up on news, all business transacted with a joke. There was laughing and teasing, calling out and conferring. Despite the majority of these people clearly being of Aboriginal descent, racial divisions were fluid with non-Aboriginal partners and even the odd council worker on the way to or from their offices joining in. Nevertheless, the terms of engagement were clear – this was an Aboriginal world and on joining Deanna at one of the picnic tables I stepped off the footpath and into country, where relationships are of primary importance and the occupation of outdoor spaces is simultaneously both private and public. These people were at home. Perhaps, I reflected as I hung around awkwardly on the fringe, it is this confident occupation of public space that contributes to mainstream community angst about the park Kooris, for there was no doubt that I observed them being avoided. Such an occupation brings to the surface not just historical injustices but deep ancestral connections that disrupt what might otherwise be a cohesive sense of belonging for the non-Aboriginal townsfolk of Bega, reminding them of the interplay between ownership and dispossession. Although their avoidance of the park could be seen simply as racial discomfort, and certainly the racist history of the town would lend weight to that perception, that discomfort could be fuelled by an unconscious response to the casual confidence with which the public space is occupied by their black neighbours.

It was my colleague’s comments about over-crowded housing that helped me to see how this scenario tallied with my interest in material culture. By positioning the occupation of the park within a discourse of deficit, the qualities it offers and the functions it performs remain

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329 McKenna (2002):218
unacknowledged. This mechanism resonates deeply with the experience I had encountered when pursuing my earlier research question ‘what objects do Aboriginal people treasure, preserve, hold dear in their homes and community places as a way of connecting with the past?’ The park as a private/public stage for the performance of social engagement, a central feature of this community’s processes of cultural renewal and projection, reminded me again of the way in which objects remain in circulation in the Koori world as a means of maintaining social relationships, leaving them unavailable for inscription as museum objects. It was while on the trail of these ‘missing’ objects that I was drawn into an examination of the kinds of alternative ontological processes I could now see playing out in the park.

During our river picnic, the full impact of the contradictions operating within the townscape hit me. Here Deanna gave me a tour of a rich and idiosyncratic history of the old shanty town community, a fondly remembered time and place for many local Kooris. While material traces of this difficult past have been wiped clean and the ‘natural’ landscape reconstituted, Aboriginal art works have been positioned at the entrance to the Council chambers as a gesture of reconciliation and remembrance – artworks which reference non-local Aboriginal cultures through their shape and dot decorations. The meaning of this knotty combination of contrived remembering and deep disregard is difficult to interpret except as proof of what anthropologist W E H Stanner proposed in 1968 was a cult of ‘forgetting’.\(^{330}\) Despite 40 years having lapsed, it seems that such forgetting is still deeply embedded in the Anglo-settler cultural practices of the entire region of south-east NSW and nowhere more so than in Bega.\(^{331}\)

The mechanism of this forgetting is partly maintained by a histrionic remembering of an alternative settler narrative, as illustrated by the Bega Pioneer History Museum. The massive collection housed in the 19\(^{th}\) century pub provides proof of the hardships and deprivations experienced by the pioneers, with an ancillary tribute to their ability to improvise and innovate. At the same time, through military mementoes, the story weaves into a wider narrative of nation by means of a famously enthusiastic local participation in the two world wars of the 20\(^{th}\) century. The combined assemblage of artefacts anchors the region’s settler history deep in the material

\(^{330}\) Stanner (1969)  
\(^{331}\) See Healy (2008) for a discussion of “forgetting Aborigines”.  

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world and the experience of the museum tells visitors that people of this community care about their past and affix their contemporary sense of belonging to the lineages which this material demonstrates. The vast quantity of objects held by the museum stands in direct contrast to the lack of interest in objects as carriers of history that I had encountered in the Aboriginal community during my earlier research. My experience of the park and the river bank however began to throw a new light on the relationship between Aboriginal people and material culture and directed me towards a concept that Australian archaeologists and heritage specialists refer to as ‘cultural landscape’, an idea incorporated into I develop more fully below.332

Whose country?

The idea that objects can offer unarguable proof of certain historical narratives has not been altogether ignored by the Aboriginal community of the Bega Valley Shire. Moneroo Bubberer Gudu Keeping Place at Jigamy Farm on the south side of Pambula Lake is an impressive building of Tuscan stucco and exposed beams. Built to house the Eden Aboriginal Land Council offices, a restaurant and a function room, it is also home to a small collection of historic artefacts and an archive of papers collected over the life of local Elder, activist and evangelist pastor Ossie Cruse. Cruse considers the Jigamy keeping place to be the appropriate repository for all Aboriginal cultural artefacts within the Eden-Monaro region, including the Snowy Mountains. He would like to see the material currently held by National Parks in their Jindabyne offices, mostly stone tools sent in by local farmers, deposited in the south coast keeping place and for the keeping place to be seen as belonging to the entire Eden-Monaro area. His vision is in accord with the culture of the majority of the south coast Aboriginal community who largely conceive of mountain and coast peoples as one-in-the-same, although there is not much genuine interest in the project of a museum amongst the locals.333 The Jigamy keeping place is kept going by just one or two members of the same family with occasional additional assistance from friends. A local non-aboriginal archivist has taken an interest and offered material and expert assistance

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332 See Brown (2007 ) for a discussion of ‘cultural landscape’ and NSW heritage conservation legislation.
333 Wesson (2002):254-6
The coalition of interests that Cruse proposes is probably in line with the opinions of many Aboriginal people who live in the Bega Valley shire today and the inference from within the Jigamy keeping place is that such a coalition is traditional. But not everyone agrees with him and the people who trace their heritage to the Delegate Reserve (as Cruse does not) are reluctant to have their Ngarigo identity subsumed by the much bigger and more powerful coast mob. While this might appear to be a small squabble amongst the various stakeholder groups, it expresses a problem that is experienced by many traditional owners throughout the country when their interests and the interests of the invariably more powerful local Aboriginal Land Council collide.

Figure 28. Map of Aboriginal Land Council areas for the south coast of NSW

The three Aboriginal Land Councils (ALC) that cross the Snowy Mountains and Monaro region, Merrimans, Bega and Eden, run east-west to intersect the north-south oriented Snowy Mountain range and Monaro Plains area in arbitrary stripes. In a contemporary echo of the 1843 NSW-Victoria state border which forms the southern boundary of the Eden ALC, the divisions pay no
attention to either the traditional country they intersect or the geography of the area, cutting through the mountain range in almost symmetrical east-west bands. Each of the land councils is named for its coastal location and the majority, if not the entirety of their Aboriginal constituents, live within the coast and hinterland areas. More significantly, all registered office addresses and executive position holders are coast-based.

These three political and administrative bodies often work collaboratively such as on the *Old Path Ways and Trails Mapping Project*[^334] which seeks to create a “Koori-managed project extending from the coast to the Monaro and High Country.” Aimed at preserving what remains of the pathways to establish them as heritage artefacts, the project hopes to re-enliven the remnant geographic and cultural links between the coast and the mountains which the ancient east-west trails demonstrate. That this project has been initiated by the three ALCs in conjunction with the Bega Valley Shire as well as the National Parks and Wildlife Service and NSW State Forests sees it develop within not just a state authorised framework but with an impressive cross-cultural administrative imprimatur. Missing from this coalition however is a representative of the traditional owners of the high country. The deference to Aboriginal Land Council authority that such an omission exposes compounds the extinguishment that contemporary Ngarigo are fighting against and conflates the ancient cultural and kin connections between the coast and high country people with a contemporary political reality that is the result of colonisation. That almost all of the Ngarigo these days live on the coast contributes to this conflation.[^335]

Despite its inattention to material traces of a 20th century Aboriginal history, the Bega Valley Shire has a contemporary Koori population that, by its mere presence, disallows total amnesia. The neighbouring Snowy River Shire that lies to the west, but within the same ALC areas, is not so directly challenged. Largely unaware of their post-contact Aboriginal history, the citizens of the Snowy Mountains and Monaro Plains have been able to imagine for themselves a peacefully negotiated transfer of land from Aboriginal to settler control, due in main to the extinction of the

[^334]: Blay (2005)
[^335]: Denis Byrne characterizes places in which deeply uncomfortable histories and contests play out as ‘nervous landscapes’. See Byrne (2003).
Aboriginal population through disease. The 1976 Snowy River Shire commissioned history by Lauri Neal for example, still popular with local historians within the region, accounted for cross-cultural relations with the statement that:

the people of the Monaro were not cruel, they did not set out to hate the Aborigine, harm him, hinder him, shoot him or trap him. Their culture was a different one and in the struggling early days of the colony the average Monaro families were themselves fighting for survival. Perhaps on the whole the settler’s education and breadth of understanding was just too limited to enfold a people of such a different culture and such a different heritage. We are 150 years too late to rekindle the spiritual flame of that far-off dreamtime so important to the well-being of the Aboriginal people of Monaro. 336

That the remnant Ngarigo who live on the coast rarely interact directly with the white high plains community allows such narratives to go largely uncontested. In recent years official recognition of traditional Aboriginal ownership has come in the form of National Parks consultation processes, invitations from the shire council to perform ‘welcome to country’ ceremonies, as well as some rudimentary employment schemes, which all go some way to ‘remembering’ a local Aboriginal presence. Nevertheless the residents of the Snowy River Shire have not had to publicly play out a dysfunctional politics of reconciliation in the way their coastal neighbours in Bega have over the past ten years, nor do they deal with the presence of Aboriginal people in public spaces on a daily basis.

Mountain stories

As is the case in Bega, the local historical society holds custodianship of the past in Cooma, the main town within the Snowy River Shire, which is why I found myself sitting with Deanna and four elderly locals one frosty Friday morning at a back table of the Cooma library. I had spoken to the Society’s President Deidre Clark a couple of days before, explaining that we were looking for references in the archive to Deanna’s grandfather Alex Brindle, who had been a blacktracker for the NSW police during the early part of the 20th century. Deidre was immediately interested. She had not come across any written references to Alex Brindle that she could remember but she

instantly recognised the name, volunteering that he had been a well known man in the town and was “highly regarded, very respected, he used to live in Lambie Street.” She invited us to visit the Historical Society to look through the archive ourselves. Most Friday mornings she spent three or four hours in the library with other society members where they file, catalogue, sift and read the many valuable manuscripts, photos, books and records that fill the shelves of their plywood cupboard, answering queries from the legion of family historians that call on their resources. The making and remembering of history in the town is important and the mostly retired people who run the Society represent many of the significant Monaro pioneer families.

The morning of our visit we met Deidre in a local coffee shop to brief her on our search. She was accompanied by one of her society colleagues, Peter Schaeffer, an elderly man who regularly worked on the archives. Hearing that Tracker Brindle’s granddaughter was across the road, Peter had asked if he could join us. He remembered Brindle from when he was a boy and was keen to meet Deanna. Settling into his cappuccino, he offered us his brief story: as a young lad he had been in hospital to have his appendix out and had shared the room with one of Tracker Brindle’s daughters (from his second marriage to Ethel Pegrum). Peter remembers being terribly impressed when Tracker Brindle arrived at the hospital during visiting hours wearing his long shiny black leather boots.

It was not extensive, but Deanna and I were both excited by his story. It was our first encounter with the conjunction of her lineage and living memory. Having worked for the NSW Police as the blacktracker stationed at Cooma for at least three decades, we assumed we would find mention of Brindle in the archives but neither of us had thought we would find him in personal recollections. With those few words Blacktracker Alex Brindle came rushing up out of the past, a serious young man dressed in uniform, reporting for duty in 1906. Only 18 at the time, he stayed in the force for the next 30 years, tracking stolen sheep and cattle, escaped prisoners and missing children. He raises an Aboriginal family on Delegate Reserve, and when they are taken from him, another large family in a house in the main street of Cooma. He is remembered beyond his lifetime by the old people of the town for keeping law and order, if not lore and ceremony.
Deanna was visibly moved. This was a connection to her past that jumped over her mother’s removal to Cootamundra Girl’s Home as a child and placed her back into a known lineage of mountain people. The historical society members were equally impressed. They had all known of Tracker Brindle but had no idea he had living descendants. By the time we finished our coffee and returned to the library, word that Tracker Brindle’s granddaughter was in town had passed around. We were greeted by a table full of expectant faces, eager to make Deanna’s acquaintance. As it turned out, the warmth of the reception we received was the highlight of the day as, disappointingly, the archives revealed nothing further. There were no mission records – no missionaries ever established Aboriginal reserves or stations on the Monaro – and after the Delegate Reserve community moved away, the Aborigines Protection Board ceased any activity in the area; the Cooma court records of Brindle’s era have been destroyed; the trackers were ignored by contemporary commentators who otherwise made detailed accounts of life in the region; Brindle’s NSW Police service record has been lost, the local police log books are likewise long gone as are the Cooma District Court records. Almost unbelievably, there is no mention of him in the regional newspapers save for on the death of his first wife Daisy in 1923. Yet he is clearly remembered by the old people of the community as an important figure of his day.

The historical society members were as sorry as we were at the lack of material. Looking to offer consolation, Deidre suggested we talk to more of the old people who had grown up in the area and offered us a suggestion – Ossie Wellsmore, the centenarian and patriarch of the Wellsmore family, owners of the vast Paupong property south of Jindabyne. It seemed at this point that collecting oral histories was our only option if we wanted to follow the story of this early 20th century generation.

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In a nursing home in Berridale, just this side of Jindabyne, Deanna and I squatted next to the old man’s wheel chair. Ossie had just turned 100 but despite the stroke he had had a few years ago, his speech was still clear. “Oh yes”, he told us, “I remember Tracker Brindle alright.” Deanna beamed and leaned in closer, brushing away tears as she held Ossie’s hand, overwhelmed at the mention of her grandfather. “What do you remember Oz?” she asked. “I remember he used to police the dances in the hall at Dalgety. Mmmm. Yes. And he was a good writer.” A what? I say to myself. Did he say rider or writer? Ossie continued. “With a pen, not a typewriter. He had a
very good education. Mmmm.” I wonder about the accuracy of his fading memory. I’m pretty sure he’s confusing Alex Brindle and his brother-in-law Billy Rutherford. The two often worked together. Sure enough, he continues; “Billy was the tracker at Dalgety and I spent a bit of time with him. But my brother Cliss knew him better. He went out with him in the bush looking for cattle. There was one time when there was a telephone line down quite a long way off from where we lived and Billy said to Cliss “What’s that wire across the road?” And Cliss said “I don’t know. I can’t see the wire, can you see a wire?” and Billy said “yes I can see the wire from here.” And Cliss knew there was a wire but he couldn’t see it. And he said to Billy “How come you black fellows can see more than we can?” And Billy told him “It’s a supernatural gift.” That buggered him up. Cliss had to look it up in the dictionary to find out what supernatural meant. (laughs) Yes he was a very smart man Billy, not to be disrespected.”

I recognised the story as one told to NPWS researcher Mike Young, transcribed in Aboriginal People of the Monaro. I hear it again several times over the next couple of months from different sources, including Ossie’s son, but we are moved by the effort he’s making, just back from hospital in Canberra and wearing his 100 years heavily. These fragments are precious, not as accurate depictions of historic events, but as shards of evidence where there are no others. He continued through his repertoire of stories but they became less coherent. He was tiring and to push further would have been cruel. The shards have already been collected and published:

[Billy] went up on the range the back of home [Paupong] and he sat down and he looked at all the mountains, hills and he said to Cliss: “If my old dad was here he’d be able to tell some interesting stories... [but] old Gifford the policeman didn’t give him much of a time it was thought. I was standing outside the hall at Dalgety after a dance and a young girl raced up exhausted to old Gifford and said: “Mum’s car’s caught on fire out along the road – come out.” Old Gifford grabbed me and said: “Take us out.” He wouldn’t let Billy Rutherford sit on the seat beside him – he said: “Sit on the floor and put your feet on the running board.” I said: “Oh no, Billy, you sit in here with me,” and Gifford didn’t want that – he thought he was a superior person... I felt sorry for Billy – old Gifford downgrading him – he wasn’t to be downgraded.337

337 Young and NSW Dept. of Environment and Conservation (2005):380
How dare Gifford disrespect Billy Rutherford! The version that Ossie gave us was slightly more confused than the one he’d given Mike Young a few years before, but the outrage we felt 70 years after the fact was fresh. That the story was being offered by someone who had been there made it all the more vivid. We returned to Canberra inspired. Deanna had met a man who knew her great uncle, who remembered him and acknowledged her in context – a mountain woman of deep belonging, whose relatives were still remembered, by him, in place. It was exhilarating.

We wanted to know if any other people had memories of the old trackers and if so how we could find them. Our first course of action was to contact the local paper, the *Snowy Echo*, which we had heard was the newspaper of choice for the elderly residents of the Monaro. Sure enough they were keen for a story and within a week our quest had made it into the press.

![Image of Christine Hansen and Deanna Davison in Dalgety](image.jpg)

*Looking for Tracker Alex Brindle’s History*

Monaro-Ngarigo elder and traditional owner Deanna Davison is seeking information about her grandfather, Alex Brindle, who was the Aboriginal tracker for the Cooma Police from 1906 until the early 1940’s. A well-known identity of his day, Tracker Brindle was stationed at Delegate, Bombala, Dalgety and of course Cooma where he lived with his family in the old slab walled house previously used as the gaol, in Lamble Street.

In October, along with Canberra historian Christine Hansen, Deanna met with the 100 year old local legend Ossie Wellsmore (who sadly passed on this November), at the Snowy Mountains Hostel in Berridale to add a few more stories to her family records.

If you have any handed-down stories or memories of Tracker Alex Brindle or his friend and fellow tracker, Billy Rutherford, (Deanna’s great-uncle), please phone Christine Hansen on 6297 0427.

**Figure 30.** *Snowy Echo, November 2007*
Clarice Ingram was the first to ring, at 8.30 on a Sunday morning. She is in her 80s and lives in Delegate. She had seen the article in the paper and rang to say that she remembered when Alex Brindle and Billy Rutherford came to Delegate to look for the little girl. She didn’t really remember Brindle but she remembered Billy Rutherford well. He could read and write. When he married (although Clarice did not think they were really married but we’ll call it married she said) he used to write letters to his wife in Dalgety when he was away, but she couldn’t read them so she would take them to the lady who ran the Buckley’s Crossing Hotel to read them for her. 338

Lois Crisp from Marlo in Victoria, the town at the mouth of the Snowy River, was next to ring. Billy Rutherford was the son of one of the stockmen, also Billy, who had worked Jimenbuen station, the property owned by her father-in-law. He and his wife had lived in the little cottage in Dalgety that is now the shop. Betty Osborne from Maffra Station remembers Billy Rutherford jnr. well. She loved to hold his hand when she was a little girl. He had lovely soft black hands and she remembers that she loved to put her hand in his. He was a lovely man. Very kind. 339

Here were the traces we’d been looking for. The official unremembering – the disappeared court proceedings that would have recorded evidence given by the trackers, the missing police employment records, the silence in the newspapers, the ignoring by the historians – was countered in the memories of the old white people. Not big memories but animated memories of real people that lived in known places, their lives still traceable in the almost unchanged landscape of the high country villages. Deanna and I had stayed in Dalgety together many times during this journey, had eaten dinner in the Buckley’s Crossing Hotel, bought pies in the cottage which is now the local shop. We’d been tracing their footsteps all along.

338 Telephone conversation: author and Clarice Ingram, 1st December 2007, journal notes
339 Telephone conversation: author and Louise Crisp, 12th December 2007, journal notes
Several more phone calls followed and further shards of memory were proffered, most of them nothing more than a splinter. Many of the callers apologised for the meagreness of their offering, insisting that their parents could have told us much more. They only remembered scraps, children’s recollections, names and places viewed from the eyes of four, five, six year olds. We didn’t care. These scraps were precious. Just hearing the names spoken by people who remembered was a treat.

Two callers however had more than just shards; they had known Billy Rutherford as a family friend, their parents having been particularly close to the tracker and his wife. The first of these was Moira Britten, the daughter of the local school teacher, who rang me one Monday evening:
MB: I was born in ‘23 in Cooma, my brother was born in Cooma in ‘28 so we were in Dalgety in those intervening years.

CH: And your father was the teacher at the school was he?

MB: Yes. Les Constance was his name.

CH: And he knew Billy Rutherford quite well?

MB: Oh yes. They lived not far from the school and they were friends of my parents. ‘Cause I was only four. I had my fourth birthday there and they gave me presents. They gave me a gold bangle and a covered coat hanger. And I wore that bangle until it had to be cut off my arm when I was about 14 or 15. Yeah we’d call in on the way down to the shop and see Mr and Mrs Rutherford. He, my dad, took them to Goulburn once, it must have been on official business, because we had a car when we were there. And also Ginge can remember, it must have been after one of the trips we took them on, we called back into Cooma at my Nan’s place for afternoon tea. Yes she can remember that very vividly. That’s my cousin in Cooma. She’s got a wonderful memory.

CH: Where did they live?

MB: They lived in that little house on the corner and the old school house was not far away see. I was only four when I left but I have very fond memories of them. I used to be going to the shop and I know she used to give me probably a halfpenny or a penny to buy lollies. Oh they were very kind people. Mum used to call round and have a cup of tea. You know, they were friends.

CH: Everyone in the town seems to have fond memories of them.

MB: Oh yes, they were very well respected, highly respected people. I was very fond of them. They must have made a fuss of me. I’m eighty-four and I remember them very well. 340

Moira’s memory of this friendship between her parents and the Rutherford’s begins to flesh out how life might have been for this Aboriginal couple in a small town. The two trackers were by the 1930s the only known Ngarigo men still living in country, with Billy in Dalgety and Alex in Cooma. Given that Billy was often mentioned in relation to his literacy levels (always noting his abilities in this regard) it is perhaps not surprising that he struck up a friendship with the school

340 Telephone conversation: author and Moira Britten, 17th December 2007, verbatim transcript
teacher. The next caller’s story similarly fleshes out how life might have looked for the Dalgety tracker. The speaker is Lance Lowther, son of the local policeman in Dalgety during the last years of Billy’s tenure as a tracker:

LL: My father was the policeman at Dalgety from 1931 and Bill Rutherford was the black tracker. During the holidays they’d borrow a pony and I had to go out with them in the bush. One day I had go with dad, another day I had go with Bill. So I knew Bill pretty well.

CH: How old were you?

LL: Well I was 8 when we went to Dalgety and I was about 13 when we left.

CH: And did he live in the old courthouse in those days?

LL: Yes he did. There was a room at the back and we always called it Bill’s room. He slept in that room, there was a fireplace, but he used to eat at the hotel. I always remember Bill, he walked pigeon toed. He was a lovely man. He used to eat his meals in the pub. He’d go down to the hotel for dinner and breakfast. But morning tea time he used to have with us. He was like one of the family. He was one of us. I’m not too sure if I didn’t have to call him Uncle Bill. I couldn’t say a bad word about him. We used to ride all round the country.

CH: He must have been like one of the family at the pub too.

LL: Oh everyone knew him. Here comes Billy Rutherford they’d say.

CH: Do you know his wife’s name?

LL: When we were there he was by himself. I think he came from round Cooma way.

CH: Delegate maybe?

LL: Delegate. Yes that’s right. Down round Bombala there. There used to be another black tracker at Cooma. His name was Shingle I think.

CH: Brindle? Alex Brindle?

LL: Brindle, that’s right.

CH: Did you know him?

LL: No I never met him but I remember Bill used to talk about him.

CH: And what were his duties as a tracker, what did he used to do, do you remember?
LL: He was more or less a policeman. He’d go one way to investigate one thing and Dad’d go the other. In the school holidays I had a pony and I had to go with him. More or less issuing summonses. All on horseback. The policeman before us was Gifford. But dad and Bill they were real good mates.

CH: I guess they’d have to be, to stick pretty close together.

LL: That’s right. Bill gave a shaving mug and mirror for a tennis tournament one year and my father won it. He donated it as a prize. I’ve got it at my little place in Tumut.

CH: Did you see him after you left Dalgety?

LL: No I never saw him again but my mother and Bill used to exchange Christmas cards.

CH: Were you still in Dalgety when he left?

LL: Yes. Well, round about, well we went there in 1931 and Bill was there about 3 or 4 years and you know, they were getting over the depression and word came through that they were no longer required.

CH: The black trackers?

LL: Yes. The trackers. It was a shame. Well all I can say is that he was a thorough gentleman. He was a good bloke Bill.341

Lance kindly capped this story by sending me a photograph of Billy, dressed it seems for a country race meeting or some other grand occasion – perhaps the tennis tournament for which he donated the prize.

341 Telephone conversation: author and Lance Lowther, 18th December 2007, verbatim transcript
Figure 32.  Billy Rutherford, Dalgety, c1934
Photograph courtesy Lance Lowther
A few weeks after our trip to the Berridale nursing home one of the local Dalgety ladies rang with the sad but not unexpected news that Ossie Wellsmore had passed away. Deanna and I travelled to Dalgety for the funeral, a not overly formal occasion held in Our Lady Star of the Sea, the tiny stone church perched on the hilltop overlooking the town. Later, after we had accompanied the entire Wellsmore clan to the local Boloco cemetery for the burial where Ossie was interred with six generations of his ancestors, we adjourned to the Dalgety memorial hall for the CWA catered morning tea. The ply-wood tables were piled high with home made sausage rolls, jam slice, coconut balls, club sandwiches, and the crowd of younger Wellsmores, appreciative of the hot cuppa on offer, dug in, as did we. The volume of conversation rose with the tea-fuelled fug that began to warm the still chill November mountain air of the hall. No one knew who we were and no one cared. We’d come to pay our respects to their brother/ uncle/ father and we were welcome. A couple of the old ladies joined us at a table and introduced themselves. We returned the compliment, with an explanation of how and why we had met with Ossie not long before. Word went out amongst the crowd – these ladies are researching Billy Rutherford! Oh Billy Rutherford! Now that’s a name from the past. Soon a crowd of five or six had gathered at our table to hear the news. My hand twitched on the recorder I had had the presence of mind to stick in my handbag as we had left Canberra that morning. Would it be gauche to pull it out at a funeral? I whispered to the old lady next to me, Ossie’s baby sister although now in her late 80s – did she think people would mind? Not at all. You go ahead. Ossie would have loved it.

Sheila, Laura and Fred hunkered around the microphone, thrilled to be adding their piece to our collection:

CH: We’re doing a history of Aboriginal people in this area because people said that there were no Aboriginal people but that’s not true.
Sheila: No, that’s not true.
CH: Because people remember the Rutherfords and the Brindles.
Laura: I remember people talking about the Brindles.
CH: What do you remember?
Laura: Well I was only so little. I was so little I didn’t take in a lot of the stuff.

CH: Do you remember Alex Brindle?

Sheila: It definitely was young Billy Rutherford that I remember. You think of it like this. It was Billy Rutherford that went looking for Rachel McCann when she got lost as a little girl. Well if Rachel was still alive she’d be 103 or something. See?

Laura: Yes that’s right.

CH: So what do you remember about him? Do you remember what he looked like?

Laura: Oh he had a round fat face. Shiny. Absolutely gleaming as if it had been polished with boot polish. And shining leggings and buttons.

Sheila: He always had a big smile. He never ever was abrupt.

Laura: He sat up real straight on the horse. And everything was gleaming, everything was polished. Yeah. And he rode along with Gifford. They both had black horses.

CH: And they used to ride together?

Sheila: Yes and they used to go out around the farms.

CH: Do you know what their job was?

Laura: Yes black tracking. You know, checking on stock, stolen stock. Anything at all. You’d remember the black tracker’s kids going to school wouldn’t you?

Sheila: No not really.

Laura: Didn’t they go to school?

Sheila: No. I don’t think they had children. Billy didn’t have children that I know of.

Laura: To tell you the truth we were terrified, well Gifford too, he was the policeman. Gifford the policeman was there too.

Fred: Yeah. When I first came to Dalgety he’d just left. 1938. I was there for 60 years.

CH: Did you ever meet Alex Brindle?

Fred: No. But Constable Small and later Inspector Small told me that he was a beauty. He used to run him see. There used to be a lot of stock thieving. They used to thieve the stock and take them over the river at Burnt Hut, over towards Delegate there. And he was always chasing them up. They might know something more about him if you ask at Delegate. But he had a good name. No he’s a household word as far as I’m concerned. But you’ve got
to drill this into the young people, to remember these people what they done in the early
days.\textsuperscript{342}

Given that Billy was dead by 1937 at just 46 years of age, his place in the memories of these old
talk is extraordinary. After Billy’s death his friend, compatriot, brother-in-law and fellow tracker
Alex Brindle was the last Ngarigo man still living in country. He continued to work as a tracker
in Cooma long after Billy had passed away.

The Monaro is the kind of place where long lineages and long memories hold truths that have
been forgotten elsewhere. It is not just the contemporary presence of the traditional owners who
contest the extinction narrative of the historical literature. These old white people hold important
pieces of the story too.\textsuperscript{343} Quite clearly they value these threads as part of their own distinctive,
located lives and their memories of the trackers place them in what they can see in hindsight as a
last moment of real cross-cultural encounter. Although the Ngarigo have experienced
unfathomable loss since first contact, there has been neither total extinction nor total forgetting
on either side of the cultural fence. That after the closure of the Delegate Reserve only two
Aboriginal men lived in their own country is sad and big.

\textsuperscript{342} Verbatim transcript: recorded at the funeral of Ossie Wellsmore, 23\textsuperscript{rd} November 2007
\textsuperscript{343} Darrell Lewis and Debbie Rose tell how the history of white people in the Victoria River district of the Northern
Territory is remembered – kept – by Aboriginal people who have stayed in country. In the north, perhaps, it is
generally the Aboriginal people who stay while the white people are transient; in the south, the Aboriginal people
were removed to make way for white settlement. See Rose and Lewis (1992)
12. Tracking across the divide

Black coppers

After the last people left the Delegate Aboriginal Reserve sometime during the year of 1928, two Ngarigo men remained on the Monaro. Alex Brindle, son of James and Emily (nee Peters) Brindle and Alex’s brother-in-law Billy Rutherford jnr., son of Lizzie (previously Bradshaw) and Billy Rutherford snr.. Both men worked for the NSW Police Force as trackers stationed in various towns throughout the region before settling into long-term roles at two police stations, Billy at Dalgety and Alex at Cooma.

Alex Brindle is recorded as beginning his police career on 30th May 1906, when the local command registered that “Tracker Joseph Walker was discharged 30-04-06. Tracker Alic Brindle arrived at 1pm from Delegate to fill the vacancy caused by Tracker Walker being discharged.”344 He was 18 years of age. Billy jnr. similarly enters the record at Delegate three years later in 1909 with an entry in the district salary register. He was also 18 years old. Both boys would have been living on the Delegate Aboriginal Reserve, an obvious place for the local force to seek expert assistance from, a strategy of the NSW police with a long history.

As early as 1826 Governor Darling issued a memorandum recommending that “officers attach some of the most intelligent of the natives to their parties.”345 Although the Governor noted that “these People may be made extremely useful, if properly employed, in tracing the Bushrangers

344 Young and NSW Dept. of Environment and Conservation (2005):301
345 Haydon (1911):20 Although much historical and scholarly attention has been given to the Native Police of Queensland who played a controversial role in frontier conflict (see Skinner (1975); Rosser (1990) for example, and Fels (1988) on the deployment of same to Victoria) few sources on black trackers working in the NSW police force exist. Primary sources such as police records for Monaro district have been destroyed. Although the salary registers still exist, the employment records for both William Rutherford and Alex Brindle have been lost or destroyed and are not part of the SANSW otherwise detailed series. Memoranda defining policy in regard to the employment of black trackers are similarly not known to be extant.
and discovering their haunts”, as in so many other instances of cross-cultural economic flow, the terms of employment were not overly attractive. His suggestion was that remuneration be left to “the Discretion of the Officers to Reward the Natives according to their exertions; for which purposes some slop Clothing will be put at their Disposal, and they will be at Liberty from Time to Time to furnish them with such Provisions as they may require when employed.” The suggestion to use the very specific skills of Aboriginal people in the carrying out of regular police work was a novel proposal and one that stood apart from the already common practice of employing men in locations distant from their own country for more nefarious duties than tracking bushrangers. These tracker divisions or ‘black police corps’ were often used in the subjugation of other Aboriginal groups, most famously when Aboriginal men from Queensland were transported to regional Victoria for such a purpose. By contrast, the proposal here was to use local men with local knowledge in regular police duties, not in the service of cross-race conflict.

The first official (although not ad hoc) use of Aboriginal trackers in NSW in this capacity took place not far from the Monaro, when Police Superintendent Martin Brennan of Binalong near Yass employed two men in “recognition of their worth in bushcraft” in 1861. The two trackers employed by Brennan successfully located two small children lost in wild bush after a day long search by 200 townsfolk had failed. So successful was the experiment that the Police Department took up the idea of employing trackers officially, recording them as a named unit in the Police Regulation Act of 1862 where they were designated ‘special constables’, to be issued with a uniform, quarters and horses.

By 1862 the use of trackers in the Monaro region was not only well established but a celebrated addition to local culture. Joseph Kelly a school teacher working on the Monaro, for example, submitted this poem to the Golden Age, Queanbeyan and Monaro Districts Advertiser under the nom de plume ‘Bushman’ in August of that year:

346 Ibid
347 See for example Fels (1988)
348 Hoban (1991):19
The Black Tracker

With eager gaze and piercing eye,
O’er granite hard and leaflet dry,
The cunning, wily, native black
Follows on the robber’s track;
    O’er gully and hill,
    Through brake and rill
Through many a lonesome vale;
    With downcast gaze,
    Through forests’ maze
He follows the winding trail.

A crushed leaf, or broken vine,
To him is a sure unerring sign
That ‘twas press’d by a human foot;
Then following on in swift pursuit,
    With a fleeting pace,
    He keeps up the chase
O’er woody mount and grassy dale,
    O’er range and creek,
    O’er the mountain peak,
He follows the winding trail. 349

Kelly was clearly impressed by the skills of the trackers, particularly those who worked in the granite and basalt country of the Monaro and Snowy Mountains. He may have had firsthand

349 Gillespie (1994):103
experience of their work, but no doubt tales of their extraordinary abilities were also popular in the taverns and kitchens of the district.

By the turn of the century there were more than 50 Aboriginal Police Trackers attached to Police stations, sprinkled across most of the important regional towns of New South Wales, with the men drawn almost exclusively from local camps, missions and reserves. In his 1911 history of the NSW Police Force, A L Haydon described the process of tracker recruitment:

The wild life that developed the blacks’ wonderful faculties of sight and smell is necessary to maintain them at the proper pitch. The best trackers are invariably those who are taken direct from an Aboriginal camp. Any mounted police officer will testify to the truth of this. “When I want a boy for bush work,” says one Inspector, “I go straight to the nearest tribe and pick out the likeliest looking of the lot – one about seventeen or eighteen if possible. After he has served me I send him back, knowing that I can get him again if needful, and that in the meantime he won’t be rusting.”

Given that the local policeman at Delegate, Sergeant George Stutchbury, was on very good terms with the Reserve residents at the time during which both Alex and Billy jnr. joined the force (significantly at the age preferred by the Inspector), this was almost certainly the means by which they too were recruited. By 1900 trackers had been working in the area for at least three decades, on both casual terms and on tenure and there are hints in the records that one or both of the boys’ fathers had been trackers with the police on an ad hoc basis previously. Stutchbury is known to have been particular friends with Billy Rutherford snr. and to have taken an interest in young Billy’s education (see chapter 9). The Reserve clearly offered access to the kind of skilled labour resources that were valuable to the police and, given the subsequent length of their service, both young men took the opportunity seriously.

Haydon’s proposition that the “wild life that developed the blacks’ wonderful faculties.. is necessary to maintain them at the proper pitch” hints at an interesting lifestyle developing on the Reserve during this time. The archaeology report of the reserve site commissioned by National

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350 Hoban (1991):19
351 Haydon (1911):388
Parks and Wildlife Service found evidence of five huts, only three of which were recorded in the APB files.

Figure 33. Delegate Reserve hut and family
From the collection of Margaret Dixon, copied from Santo (2005)

There was also evidence of extensive field works, of sluices and of vehicle tracks across the reserve. Oral history lends weight to the physical evidence that the reserve was a place of industry as well as community, with the residents perhaps taking up small scale farming of potatoes and other crops. While the residents were interested in funding and building their own huts in addition to those funded by the APB, they were also drawing on their knowledge of other building methods. Aunty Margaret Dixon for example reported to the archaeology team that her father “knew how to build a traditional shelter; this must have been learnt at the Reserve as he was born there and spent much of his childhood there.” Haydon’s comment similarly

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352 Santo (2005)
353 Ibid:39
hints at a lifestyle that straddles cultural domains. He elaborated further on the type of education an Aboriginal child received in order to become a professional tracker:

By constant practice from childhood upwards, and the aid of an eyesight that is the keenest of any savage people in the world, he learns to read the story of a bush track as none other can read it… The schooling of an aboriginal in this respect begins very early. As a child he is set to play games in which animals and birds are the principal figures. Footprints of various creatures are drawn by him in the sand, seemingly for amusement, but actually as part of his education. Later on he is taken in hand by the man whom he accompanies into the bush, learning each day something that quickens his intelligence. Nor it is only the boys who thus develop this power. The native girls and women are often quite as good at the game.354

That Billy Rutherford jnr. and Alex Brindle were so highly regarded in the district, both personally and professionally, speaks of the quality of their cross-cultural education. As already seen in chapter 9, Billy Rutherford snr. was interested in his son pursuing educational opportunities within mainstream schools and given that Billy jnr. was later known for his literacy skills, must have found the means for the boy to do so. Literacy was also important within the Brindle family, Alex’s mother having herself received an extensive education from the Western Australian Moravians. Evidently the boys, who by the age of 18 were adept enough at tracking to be given full time employment within the NSW Police Force, had concurrent access to the kind of sustained tutoring in ‘bushcraft’ to which Haydon refers. The lines of cultural delineation which positions Aboriginal people in this era as either ‘traditional’ or not were understandably of little interest to the people themselves.

Horsemanship was as central to the work of the high country trackers, as it was to their stockmen fathers (see chapter 9) and, as Michael Bennett suggests, “may have been one of the aspects of the job that attracted Aboriginal men: there were few days stuck inside the station. Trackers had much outdoor work to do.”355 They were expected to train the horses, keep the stables in working order and give evidence in court, all for which they were paid a wage well under that received by

354 Haydon (1911):389
355 Bennett (2010):9; See earlier reference to examples of literature dealing with Aboriginal workers in the pastoral industry.
their white peers although no doubt better than most Aboriginal people were receiving at the time.\textsuperscript{356} Although the demands of the job would have kept them from their families, it was not uncommon for the trackers to be given quarters within the police station compound “usually found at the back of the police station in the stables.”\textsuperscript{357} Billy Rutherford lived in a small room at the back of the rather grand Police residence at Dalgety where his small free-standing brick room was the original detention cell, renovated into living quarters, while Alex Brindle raised a large family in the old slab walled building in Lambie st, Cooma originally used as the district jail.

![Dalgety Police residence, Jun 2009](image)

The work was hard, the conditions were rough and the pay was low, yet the job called on and honed knowledge of country at a time when the rest of the Ngarigo had been forced to move to other places. It also gave the men status within the wider community as law enforcement officials and the traces of the two Ngarigo trackers still extant within oral history tell of deep social and professional relationships across the region; they were an integral part of small town life.

\textsuperscript{356} Ibid:24  
\textsuperscript{357} Ibid:18
NSW Police Force historian L E Hoban offered a moving tribute to the now defunct tracker division within the force in 1991 with the following:

Examples of the splendid work carried out by the Police Aborigine Tracker.. during the 70 years of their reign are legendary, yet sad to record, there is little documentation existing of their remarkable exploits and past praiseworthy and commendable community services. Police officers who accompanied the trackers on various missions, never at any time attempted to interfere, question or offer opinion or advice, well realising that the Aboriginal tracker always knew his own business best, for such was their implicit and unwavering faith in them. It is therefore a cause for regret that the humble Aboriginal tracker, who courted no publicity, won no recognition, no positive reward, who forged an enduring chapter in the pages of our colonial history should pass into obscurity. Yet to a few who choose to remember, their past skills, deeds and exploits will live on, to be recalled in quiet moments with approbation, astonishment, pride and sometimes wide-eyed wonder.358

Aboriginal people today however are less enthusiastic about the legacy; “proud on the one hand of their work but suspicious on the other of their links to the police.”359

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Billy Rutherford had been stationed at Dalgety for at least 5 years when he married in 1917. He was 25 years of age. The couple were known in the town as “lovely people”, but by 1931 Billy is remembered as living alone at the back of the Police Station. There is no mention of any children and Billy’s death certificate records “Nil issue.” Sometime between 1928 and 1931 his wife had either left or died, most likely the latter. She is fondly remembered as having been generous to at least one little girl, to whom she gave gifts of sweets and small coins. Billy wrote her letters when he was away on assignment, which she would take to the local pub to be read out. Memories of Mrs Rutherford as kind and friendly coupled with this gesture of affection from her husband suggests that the couple did not live in discord and most likely did not separate by choice.

358 Hoban (1991):24
359 Bennett (2010):24
Within a decade of Mrs Rutherford’s disappearance from both the record and living memory, Billy had also left. For reasons not recorded he did not remain on the Monaro beyond 1937 but passed away far from home, and far too young, in the Mont Park Mental Hospital in Melbourne, having been admitted on a warrant, probably while residing in the town of Orbost in Gippsland. In the few short years between his last known residence on the Monaro in 1936 to his admission to Mont Park in early 1938 he had left the police force and moved to the town where many of his Ngarigo compatriots and relatives were living, not far from the mouth of the Snowy River. There are no police records which can shed light on why his employment was terminated but many of the trackers of this era were being made redundant. The presence of motor cars was increasing and the kind of knowledge of country that Billy held the lineage to was less valued, particularly in the metropolitan commands from where such orders were issued.

His final entry in the record is the moment of his passing. The Coroner’s report from 8th November 1938 reads:

The records show that the deceased William Rutherford stated to be aged forty-five years, was first admitted to the mental hospital Mont-Park on the 24th February 1938, on the warrants produced. He was suffering from General Paralysis of the Insane and had frequent epileptiform seizures. He received a course of malarial therapy which was terminated on account of an attack of status epilepticus on the 20th April 1938. He continued to have frequent seizures and on the 15th September 1938 again developed status epilepticus, and with suitable treatment recovered, but he remained in a state of confusion and developed acute visual hallucinations which caused him to roll about on the floor and bruise his head and limbs. On October 2nd he developed some signs of broncho pneumonia and he died at 7.45 am on October 3rd 1938.360

He was interred at Fawkner cemetery on 5th October 1938.

360 Proceedings of Inquest, 10th November 1938, PROV File 1938/1446
Fawkner Memorial Park wishes to advise that the location of the **buried** remains of the late **William Rutherford** aged 45 are located at **Church Of England: Compartment R Grave 1632**.

… for those who might wish to pay their respects.

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That Billy Rutherford and Alex Brindle were close professional companions is well established, with many people remembering them working together. That they were also brothers by marriage tells of the close kin connections between the two men. Alex married Billy’s older sister Daisy sometime around 1908 when she was 21 and he was 20. Both born on the Monaro and both raised on the Delegate Reserve, the young couple may well have been suggested to each other as marriage partners by their parents when still only infants.

The first of their two children, Iris, was born in 1909, followed two years later by her sister Mary. The history held in the family is that the two girls lived on the Reserve at Delegate. By necessity their father would have spent much of his time away from home, with the salary register showing him operating from various towns in the district before settling in Cooma. Once he had received a permanent posting he must have sent for his family to join him, for the next entry in the records is the sad occasion of Daisy’s death from pneumonia on 22nd of September 1915 at the Cooma District Hospital. Iris was just six years old, Mary only four. Who looked after the girls over the next four years is not known. With Alex required to travel from home for long periods on assignment, relatives and friends must have been called on to help. They may well have returned to the Delegate Reserve where the community of family and friends already known to the little girls would have had no difficulty accommodating the now motherless children. Deanna’s memory of her mother’s memories would suggest this to be the case.
Motherless child, a long way from home

As early as 1905 the NSW Aborigines Protection Board foreshadowed the tragic drama that would unfold for the two Brindle girls over the ensuing decades when they made mention in their annual report for that year of the thinking that was gaining momentum within the administration:

The Board view with great concern the fact that a large number of children who are almost white are growing up at the various stations and camps, and consider that, for their own sakes, as well as for the good of the community, it would be desirable to remove them from their present associations. Where they are living with their parents, however, it is difficult to interfere...

This was not the first sign of the Board’s intention. Only seven years after its establishment in 1883 as a body to manage the reserves and stations on which the estimated 9,000 Aboriginal people in NSW lived, the Board had developed a policy to remove children of mixed descent from their families to be ‘merged’ into the non-Indigenous population. As argued in the 1997 inquiry into the ‘Stolen Children’, the report of which subsequently became known as the Bringing Them Home Report:

The Board reasoned that if the Aboriginal population, described by some as a ‘wild race of half-castes’ was growing, then it would somehow have to be diminished. If the children were to be de-socialised as Aborigines and re-socialised as Whites, they would somehow have to be removed from their parents.

In its early decades the Board relied only on persuasion and threats to remove children. Clearly it needed legal power to pursue its agenda fully and fierce lobbying finally resulted in the Aborigines Protection Act 1909. This Act gave the Board power ‘to assume full control and custody of the child of any aborigine’ if a court found the child to be neglected under the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act 1905. It also allowed the Board to apprentice Aboriginal children aged between 14 and 18 years.

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361 Aborigines Protection Board New South Wales (1905)
362 Read (1998)
363 National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (Australia) (1997):49
364 Goodall (1995)
Once custody of the children had been assumed, the Board needed suitable premises in which to house them. The Cootamundra Hospital in central NSW, built in 1887 but abandoned in 1910, was re-labelled as the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls and re-opened in 1911 under the administration of the NSW Aborigines Protection Board, with a similar institution for boys opened on the mid-north coast of NSW at Kinchela. With two institutions in which to train their wards, the Board’s programme of apprenticing Aboriginal children into white society could be escalated. Their plans did not proceed smoothly however, with parents refusing to participate in the scheme.

In response to parental resistance the Board hardened their position on the removal of children. While in 1905 they had found it ‘desirable’ for children to be removed from stations and reserves, by 1912 they were determined to move even beyond the necessity of obtaining a court order. In their Annual Report for that year they declared, “To allow these children to remain on the Reserves… would be… an injustice to the children themselves” and even more tellingly “a positive menace to the State.” The Colonial Secretary entered the debate, complaining that,

… it is very difficult to prove neglect; if the aboriginal child happens to be decently clad or apparently looked after, it is very difficult to show that the half-caste or aboriginal child is actually in a neglected condition, and therefore it is impossible to succeed in the court.366

The Colonial Secretary and indeed the Board refused to allow that the difficulty they had in proving neglect was due to their being in fact no neglect, despite evidence of this being the case. Unsurprisingly, parents continued to refuse the Board access to their children, finding the means of removing themselves and their children from the Board’s view. A common option, particularly in the Monaro region where geography was in their favour, was to cross the state border where the Board’s jurisdiction no longer applied. Such strategies incensed the Board, as did the parents’ refusal to co-operate. The Board were perplexed by what they saw as obstruction, with the Colonial Secretary again articulating their frustration.

365 Mulvaney (1989):199
366 National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (Australia) (1997):41, citing Colonial Secretary 1912
Although great care has been taken to explain at length the many advantages a child would derive from such an opportunity, the almost invariable experience has been that the parents or relatives have raised some frivolous objection and withheld their consent. Consequently the children have perforce had to be left amidst their most undesirable surroundings.\textsuperscript{367}

The Secretary’s complaints were heard and the Aborigines Protection Amending Act 1915 gave the Board power to separate children from their families without having to establish in court that they were neglected. Suddenly

No court hearings were necessary; the manager of an Aboriginal station, or a policeman on a reserve or in a town might simply order them removed. The racial intention was obvious enough for all prepared to see, and some managers cut a long story short when they came to that part of the committal notice, ‘Reason for Board taking control of the child’. They simply wrote, ‘For being Aboriginal’.\textsuperscript{368}

It was in September of this year that Daisy Brindle passed away, leaving her two young daughters not only motherless, but in an extremely vulnerable position in regard to the status of their custody as the APB was reaching its full power. They managed to evade the scrutiny of the Board for four years before the inevitable happened: they were removed from the Delegate Reserve and placed into Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls. Iris was ten years old and her sister Mary was just eight.

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\textsuperscript{367} Colonial Secretary, 1915, cited by Miller (1985):141

\textsuperscript{368} Read (1982):6
The girls would probably have arrived on the train, perhaps accompanied by a Board employee, to be met at Cootamundra by a member of the local police. On their arrival they would have been
assigned a bed in one of the dormitories within the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century brick building. Surrounded by an ornamented front verandah, the main house provided a self-contained flat in the big front rooms for the exclusive use of the matron, with the former hospital wards converted into two long dormitories, each holding four rows of beds with five beds in each row. There were normally between thirty and thirty-five girls in residence. The addition of more children would have been an occasion for the already resident girls. For the new arrivals however, the experience would have proved a traumatic event. Presumably most newcomers came only in the clothes they wore, without any familiar objects so treasured by children such as dolls. Not only was the experience traumatic but the girls were barred from making home visits and all their mail was censored. Some of the girls claim that the letters they so carefully crafted in longing for contact with their parents were withheld. Nor was relief from their longing offered. In theory, parents could visit children once a year. In practice it proved more difficult… If parents managed to overcome official obstructions and to meet the costs involved in getting to Cootamundra, they were not permitted to stay overnight.\textsuperscript{369}

Life in the training school was hard, with luxuries, including hot water, few and far between. The out building which had been re-purposed as bathrooms held only two or three baths and no showers. “Any hot water was fetched in dippers from the laundry copper. As an economy, three or four children used the same bath water. The older girls washed the infants.”\textsuperscript{370} The large main building and the wooden outhouse bathrooms and laundry must have been freezing in the depth of a Cootamundra winter. The daily regime was brutal with the children woken at 6 am. They would wash, make beds and scrub dormitory floors daily before a frugal 7 a.m. breakfast after which lessons for the day would begin. Intended as a convenient placement for girls under fourteen years of age, too young to enter domestic service, the older girls were rostered to learn cooking, laundry and other domestic duties, preparing them for their lives as domestic labourers with white families across NSW.\textsuperscript{371}

\textsuperscript{369} Mulvaney (1989):202-205
\textsuperscript{370} Ibid:204
\textsuperscript{371} Ibid:205
The training of the girls was the real enterprise of the Cootamundra home, and in that the Board had a great deal of success. To 1921 81% of Aboriginal children removed from their families in NSW were female, all of whom, in this era, were sent to the Cootamundra home until the age of 14, then sent out to work. During any one year in the 1920s there would have been between 300 and 400 Aboriginal girls apprenticed to white homes. Aboriginal wards thus represented approximately 1.5% of the domestic workforce at the time. This conjunction between “the half-caste problem” and the shortage of servants in the state was no co-incidence. As historian Vicki Haskins notes:

The participation of privileged urban housewives in the Board’s apprenticeship system was absolutely crucial to its success. In suburban Sydney, unlike the rural districts, white women had little experience of Aboriginal servants, and indeed would otherwise have had no access to Aboriginal labour. Their decision to take an unknown Aboriginal girl

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into their home is indeed remarkable, when we consider the Board’s public justification of its policy on the grounds that the girls came from “contaminating” and “vicious” communities. 373

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Iris and Mary were taken to the Cootamundra Training Home for Girls in 1919. There they lived in dormitories, washed in cold water, and spent their time being prepared for life as domestic servants. Iris was sent from Cootamundra to Sydney to work as a maid in 1923. Mary remained behind for another two years before being sent to a station in the Cootamundra district. The girls did not see each other again until Iris was married and a mother herself. She never returned to her beloved home in the mountains, although she spoke fondly of it to her daughter Deanna throughout the rest of her life.

After leaving the Girls Home at the age of 14, Iris was apprenticed into a kind family in a spacious Sydney apartment, the penthouse of 42 Birriga Rd, Waverley, owned by Mr Keith and Mrs Alice Manion. They were well known people in the area, and according to local knowledge, owned a good deal of property in the surrounding streets, one of them being named in their honour. Mr Manion had built the apartment building as an investment property, reserving the entire top floor, all six bedrooms of it, with a 360º view of the Pacific ocean on the eastern side and Sydney Harbour on the west, for himself and his family. Iris had a pleasant room, straddled between the children’s quarters and the laundry. Notwithstanding that she was in every way subject to their authority, she seems to have had a sufficiently happy life for her to stay on until 1929, an additional two years after her contract officially ended. 374

373 Haskins (1998):166
374 See Glenyse Ward’s vivid account of her life as an Aboriginal domestic servant in Ward (1987). It was not uncommon for domestic servants to not be informed of their right to be released. Given that Iris remained on friendly terms with the Manions and returned to visit Mrs Manion with her young daughter Deanna, this seems not to have been the case here.
It was during her time at the Manions’ that Iris must have met her husband-to-be, Reginald Oswald Walker; a Wambunja man, born at Wallaga Lake. Given that the apartment was convenient to the La Perouse bus line, Iris could have readily found her way to the community that lived on the Mission there, perhaps going to dances and other social events. Reg was living close to Prince Henry’s Hospital at the time, receiving treatment for a badly injured knee. Iris and Reg married at Kiama in 1931. In their early days together he worked in the mills cutting timber, picking peas and beans, and cutting sleepers in the bush, until he bought a boat and began a commercial fishing venture operating out of Wreck Bay.375

375 Davison (2007):2
And there the story begins its journey home, for this young couple eventually moved to Cowra and had their own family. Their first daughter was Deanna and the story is hers to tell from this point on.
13. **Missing objects, absent people**

At the centre of the curatorial strategies employed in ‘new museology’ is the notion of ‘social history’ as the organising principle around which exhibitions are assembled. Here the emphasis moves from objects to people and their stories, where any number of techniques, including new media, might be used in the service of telling history. At the centre of this proposition is of course the assumption that the people whose stories are told know their history or have access to the means of finding it out. Such reasoning moves prematurely towards form, where discussions of method and outcome assume that content will be available through the normal research channels. In the telling of Aboriginal social history however, this approach falls short. Here the problems that have infected the collecting of objects that tell narratives other than those aligned to a pre-contact past have also infected the telling and writing of Aboriginal history.

Aboriginal people who live in south-eastern Australia in particular are poorly represented in large sections of the historical literature, both in local and community derived histories as well as academic and scholarly works. How the record is controlled, however, depends upon what is included in the official texts. In 2003, despite the historical activities of the 1980s, historian Ann Curthoys still referred to Aboriginal histories as ‘hidden histories’, giving an exhaustive account of the way in which Aboriginal social history narratives are missing in Australian historical literature.\(^{376}\) Although Aboriginal historiography relies heavily on oral history and memory, as already demonstrated, the differences between memory and history are under constant scrutiny from observers, including readers of history and museum audiences. In representing Aboriginal people in the NMA, memory, reflection and reconstruction are all called on, all important aspects of asserting identity. But much of this currently displayed material confines the exhibitions within the recent past, still within living memory, or alludes to a pre-contact world. Occasionally a well known and documented historical character such as Bennelong can break through this binary division but generally, Aboriginal history moves between these two familiar tropes.

\(^{376}\) Curthoys (2003)
In looking to social history to inform its exhibitions, the NMA suffers the same problems it has when looking to its vast stores of ethnographic objects: the objects that could tell a social history of Aboriginal life were either stripped of their context at the moment of their entering the collections or were not collected at all, rejected at the first instance as ‘impure’.

**Objects as history or historical objects?**

Notwithstanding the lack of objects that tell Aboriginal social history, as discussed previously a fascination with the material remains of the past had long been part of European intellectual life. As early as the 15th century, Italian antiquarians had been investigating the mysterious and submerged world of the classical Greeks, digging up statuary and other treasures for display in private salons. The buried cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum were of endless fascination to the European elite from their discovery in the mid 18th century and a source of inspiration to a long line of artists from Mozart to Raphael. By the mid 19th century the Danish founding father of archaeology Christian Thomsen had given the European world the three ages system of stone, iron and bronze as a structuring form for the phases of the development of man, while archaeologists of the new world were discovering the heroic classical architecture of the extinct Aztec and Mayan cultures.

The flow of ideas within British and European intellectual circles, although having distinct phases across more than four centuries, passed repeatedly through the narrative which lead man from a primitive state to a civilized one. The pre-historic stone age and the historical record were bridged by a materially rich interlude of a classical and/or biblical era. Its remains were both evidence of a teleological progress and a lucrative treasure trove.377

Unlike their distant European relatives, Australian Aborigines began in the stone age and ended in the stone age. With no classical past to bridge the distance between pre-history and history, there was no material evidence out of which to build a narrative of teleological progression. Despite these absences, or perhaps because of them, the Aborigines were fascinating to European

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377 See Daniel (1975); Russell (2000); Trigger (2006)
collectors of antiquities. Whereas in Europe the stone and wood artefacts which represented the early phases of man were rare, here they were everywhere and easily available. Hungry for material from such a curious source, European collecting institutions and private individuals drove the development of a highly profitable trade in Aboriginal artefacts and human remains.378

While both antiquarian and archaeological attention was focused on a frenzy of collecting and ordering, little if any intellectual consideration was given to Aboriginal people’s adaptive response to changing cultural and material circumstances other than to notice the loss of ‘pure’ forms. As Aboriginal people engaged with imported technology and adapted their own to new uses, collectors and commentators shunned their innovations as ‘contaminated’. European notions of the past dictated that with no discernible agriculture, no classical past and no built heritage, they lacked the traits which could position them within the family of modern man. For them, the loss of the attributes of living stone age remnants as well was to lose the very essence of their identity as Aborigines. Within imported European discourses then, Aboriginal people were historically framed by both a perceived lack of progressive development towards civilisation and, as the impacts of colonisation began to hit, by a lack of uncontaminated Aboriginality.

**Weighty words**

From the earliest reporting, absence or deficiency were the main descriptors for Aboriginal people in the Monaro district. The leakage between social Darwinist thinking and the colonial administration became apparent towards the latter part of the 19th century. The extinction motif, a logical extension of the absence and deficiency descriptors, was evident much earlier. In his first annual report to the Colonial Secretary in 1842 the newly appointed Commissioner of Crown Lands John Lambie refers to the “proposal of appropriating a proportion of the Land Revenue to the civilisation of the Aborigines”, as central to the administration’s endeavours. While his successors would see preserving remnant ‘primitive’ peoples as a priority, these early administrators sought to relieve them of their prehistoric burden by admitting them to civilised society at the earliest convenience. Lambie in particular saw their lack of civilisation as a highly

378 See Fforde, Hubert et al. (2002); Pickering (2003)
disagreeable attribute, reserving his faint praise for those who could remove themselves from their archaic condition through the labour of agriculture.

There is one man who has separated himself from his Tribe and has enclosed a small portion of Ground … which he cultivated as a Garden, but he is the only instance of any attempt being made to adopt the mode of civilised life.\footnote{Watson (1914):491-2 1844}

For all his blindness to the qualities of Aboriginal culture, including their nuanced manipulation of the environment, Lambie at this stage believed that the Ngarigo were capable of being civilised. Six years later that belief was waning in the face of his experience.

The Aborigines are fast decreasing in numbers and it is needless to say that generally they retain their wild wandering and unsettled habits and seem as much as ever disinclined to remain long in any particular place.\footnote{Lambie (1848)}

From that point his reports commonly link their unsettled and uncivilised ways with their decline in numbers.

Lambie’s successors were also concerned with the disappearance of the Aborigines. The next Commissioner of Crown Lands, HH Massie, picked up the theme of extinction in his 1856 annual report when he lamented that

\begin{quote}
In all human probability at no very distant period, this singular and in many respects interesting race of beings will have perished from off the face of the Earth and the place thereof shall know them no more.\footnote{Massie (1856)}
\end{quote}

The motif was reiterated by the following Commissioner, Spencer Bransby, who added speculation to the cause of their demise in his 1859 annual report:

\begin{quote}
They are rapidly diminishing in number from disease engendered by promiscuous sexual intercourse and intemperance. From these causes there are very few births and an infant is rarely seen. In the course of a few years there will be but a small number remaining, they are vanishing as snow melts before the sun.\footnote{Bransby (1859)}
\end{quote}
The press were complicit in perpetuating the extinction narrative, with the *Sydney Mail* reporting on 9th January 1892 two of the last aboriginals of the Monaro tableland appear in connection with the Governor’s trip. These are respectively Murray Jack, king of the once numerous Wolgal tribe, and Mickey. His Majesty Jack died only some two months ago (1891) and is buried in the cemetery at Cooma. Mickey lives at Boloco station, Mr Rose’s property, and is still hearty enough to lend a hand this year with the shearing.\(^{383}\)

The annual census which the Commissioner of Crown Land was obliged to conduct in his role as Protector of Aborigines offered statistical proof of the Ngarigo’s apparent inexorable slide into oblivion, showing a diminishing return each year in all surveyed locations across the region. What the census did not record however is the number of Aboriginal people no longer living in the surveyed locations (chosen for their reputations as blacks’ camps) but living and working within the increasingly dominant pastoral community as stockmen, sheep washers and domestic labourers. That is not to say that the Aboriginal population on the Monaro did not diminish rapidly in this period. Their imminent extinction however seemed to take its time. In 1895, three years after the reporting of ‘Mickey at Boloco’ being the sole remaining aborigine, the dentist, tobacconist, bacteriologist, antiquarian collector and anthropologist Richard Helms gave a paper to the Linnean Society of NSW in which he reported

> The Monaro tribe … is also nearly extinct, and of their once numerous hordes only two or three half-civilised, demoralised individuals remain. [The squatters’] grandchildren will know the blacks only from hearsay and by what remains of their less perishable implements of war i.e. a few stone hatchets that may occasionally be turned up during ploughing or otherwise discovered.\(^{384}\)

The records however show that two years later the Delegate Aboriginal Reserve was gazetted, with as many as 30 or so individuals using it as a camping place seasonally. These people would likely have had a degree of literacy, been employed on pastoral stations and in other local industries such as timber milling and mining, and kept their extant cultural practices to themselves.


\(^{384}\) Cited by Young and NSW Dept. of Environment and Conservation (2005):231
These reports not only recorded the changing nature of the Ngarigo population, they placed both extinction and the lack of civilisation (including the lack of agriculture) in the centre of administrative and intellectual discourses. Thirty-one years after Helms’ paper in 1926, Felix Mitchell, writing in celebration of 75 years since the founding of Cooma, begins his opus with a meditation on the aborigines of his local district. As an exemplary local historian of his era, he paid strict attention to the archives and not surprisingly found that:

Throughout Australia, contact with the white man, has involved the extinction of the aboriginal, and unfortunately the tribes of Manaro seem to have been no exception to this rule.\(^{385}\)

No doubt his close observation of his own surroundings in Cooma confirmed what the records told him, that there were no aborigines left on the Monaro. The people of Cooma however couldn’t help but be aware of the contradictory figure of renowned blacktracker Alex Brindle, who even as Mitchell was writing, lived in Lambie St, the main street of Cooma at the time, with his large family. Employed by the NSW Police Force and having an unusually high standing in the local community as a wise and occasionally lenient upholder of law and order, Brindle did not have the requisite primitive qualities to be considered a ‘real aborigine’ despite being a paid public servant in exactly that capacity.

Mitchell’s small book opens the window on a moment of transition in the historiography of the region. Drawing on both the archival records and his own local knowledge, Mitchell’s history sat in accord with the wisdom of the day. For all its seemingly benign parochial interests however, *Back To Cooma* had an influence way beyond Mitchell’s ambitions. He had created the first secondary source for future historians to call on and in doing so provided a key piece of textual evidence in the 50 years of history writing that followed.

**Still missing**

Thirty-four years after the 1926 publication of *Back to Cooma*, the internationally renowned historian W H Hancock turned his considerable intellectual force to the history of the region. The

\(^{385}\) Mitchell (1926):35
result was the groundbreaking historical/environmental contemplation *Discovering Monaro*. Already a celebrated and distinguished scholar by the time he came to this writing, Hancock spent much of the work investigating questions of Aboriginal occupation and land use in ways that had never been done before.

Even as he was researching *Monaro* in the late 1960s, the popular press of the district and the local environmental administrators were espousing the still extant ‘no agriculture, no built heritage = primitive’ position in an almost direct reiteration of their predecessors’ reporting, for example in this 1967 article by the Kosciusko State Park Superintendent in the *Cooma-Monaro Express*

> They knew no fences, no buildings or permanent improvements. The mountains were theirs for brief summer visits for the weird ceremonies of the Bogong Moth feasts and initiation rites. They had no stock to graze upon the delicate mountain plants … they built no roads, mined no gold, felled no forests.  

In the face of such prevailing attitudes, Hancock was radical in his crediting Aboriginal people with an economy and with having a regime of what Rhys Jones later termed ‘fire-stick farming’. And yet his drive for a grand narrative of the Aborigines blinded him in the way he accuses others of being blinded. Of one of the founding fathers of the pastoral industry in the region whose diaries he quotes he says

> [He] tells us nothing at all about that most conspicuous ecological disclimax and human tragedy, the destruction of the native men who had hunted the native animals.

He then goes on to list the entirety of the considerable primary and secondary sources used to prove the extinction of the Ngarigo, concluding with this lament.

> There still survived two members of the Ngarigo tribe, Bony Jack and his son Biggenhook. In June 1914 [Biggenhook] died, and with him died the Ngarigo.

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386 Gare and Kosciusko State Park Superintendent (1967)  
387 Jones (1969)  
388 Hancock (1972):112  
389 Ibid
His inability to disengage from the idea that Aboriginal people were not just “men who had hunted the native animals” but were active in the pastoral industry about which he was writing, left him unable to fully critique his sources. Alex Brindle the Ngarigo blacktracker died an old man sometime during the late 1960s. He was alive when Hancock first began researching Discovering Monaro and it is a tantalising thought that the two men, had they met, might have made an extraordinary and collaborative contribution to Australian history writing.

Hancock’s reiteration of the extinction narrative demonstrates how powerful the undertow of textual sources can be. It proves the veracity of Paul Carter’s 1988 assessment of Australian historiography when in the year of the Australian bicentenary he wrote.

If Aborigines remain outside white history this reflects, not on the Aborigines, but rather on the essential nature of history… [The] history which most of our contemporary historians practice is essentially a legitimation of selected earlier documents … The fact that history is essentially an act of interpretation, a re-reading of documents, means that it hides our origins from us. For, by its nature, history excludes all that is not quoted or written down.

Hancock excluded not only all that was not quoted or written down, but some of what was. Bounded by the methods of his era, he was not ready for wide inter-disciplinary engagement which limited his ideas of what constituted a source. One of his telling omissions was material collected by linguist Luise Hercus who by the early 1960s had begun recording extant Ngarigo language spoken by people living in Orbost, Victoria. Orbost is a town on the Gippsland coast at the mouth of the Snowy River, not more than an hour’s drive from the south eastern border of Ngarigo country. This material had been deposited in what would become the AIATSIS archive and would have been available to Hancock.\(^{390}\) One of Hercus’ informants was Alec Booth, by then a man in his 70s. He is cited by Hercus for ‘language elicitation’ in southern Ngarigu [sic]. We know he was raised on the Delegate Reserve as he is named by the police sergeant as one of the children asked to leave the Delegate School under protest from the local white parents in 1904.\(^{391}\) He was 12 years old at the time. His recording work with Hercus 56 years later is strong evidence that Ngarigo was spoken on the Delegate Reserve at the turn of the century.

\(^{390}\) Hercus (1964)  
\(^{391}\) See chapter 9
New historiography

Despite the publication of *Discovering Monaro* three years after Stanner’s paradigm-shifting 1969 Boyer Lectures *After the Dreaming*, and nine years after Diane Barwick’s similarly revolutionary PhD thesis *A little more than kin* it was not yet time for a revision of research methods. The following 10 years however saw a new wave of history writing, beginning with the advent of the journal *Aboriginal History* in 1977. 392

Initiated by a group of concerned academics at the Australian National University, the Aboriginal History Journal, from its inception, set out to challenge historiographic practice in relation to Indigenous Australians. Its founders were unambiguous in their agenda and proposals for the establishment of the journal included the following directions:

- considerable importance will be attached to Aboriginal oral tradition, vernacular writings etc.
- the Journal will also serve as a means of recording Aboriginal history from its source
- the Journal should bear witness to the importance and dignity of Aboriginal history and cultural heritage. [We therefore] suggest at least one coloured illustration reproduced as a contribution in its own right
- Care should be taken to consult Aboriginal authorities 393

By 1981 a working group of Aboriginal historians were articulating their own agenda. In an article entitled ‘Why Aboriginal history should be written by Aboriginal people’ they made clear their position:

- We are ‘guardians and custodians of our history and culture, and it is our responsibility to pass on to future generations our set of truths’
- We, as Aboriginal people, can begin to rectify the white misconceptions about our history by writing it ourselves.’

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392 Barwick (1963); Stanner (1969)
Aboriginal people will look at documents and come to quite different conclusions, in the main, from white historians, because we are ultimately responsible to ‘our own mob’ and not to the discipline of history nor the white concept of knowledge.  

Both the writers of history which featured Aboriginal people and the discipline of history itself had been put on notice. Historical narratives in which white text-based sources were privileged over non-text based sources and where ethnographic assumptions disallowed Aboriginal historical agency were no longer acceptable.

Despite this call for a revised historiographic method, the extinction narrative held on in the Monaro. In 1987, Klaus Henueke was still able to preface his history of the high country with a tribute to the lost Ngarigo where he mourned the fact that Diseases brought in by white man, harassment and loss of tribal land led to their demise and by 1914 all the local Aborigines had died.  

This was reiterated perhaps even more shockingly by the renowned writer and thinker George Seddon in his 1994 tribute to the Snowy River, Searching for the Snowy, where his apparently grudging attempt to deal with an Aboriginal presence was capped with

By 1866, there were said to be only two survivors, Bony Jack and his son, Biggenhook, who died in 1914.  

With no other literature to hand and no inclination to investigate beyond written sources, both men were confident to repeat Hancock’s findings, almost word for word.

By the end of the 1980s researchers from related disciplines had begun to call for a review of Ngarigo history. As early as 1987 archaeologist (and subsequent member of the Aboriginal History editorial board) Brian Egloff had noticed how often the Delegate Reserve came up in conversation among his Aboriginal informants on the south coast of NSW and the north east coast of Victoria. In a report on places of cultural significance to Aboriginal people in the southern portion of the Eden woodchip area, he called for urgent research into the Delegate

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395 Hueneke (1987):16  
396 Seddon (1994):120
Reserve while some of the elderly people who were born and grew up there still lived.\textsuperscript{397} Seven years later geographer Sue Wesson similarly came across references to Delegate during her Australian Alps oral history project and, like Egloff, recommended further historical investigation. Neither of these suggestions was taken up and the last of the people who were born on the Delegate Reserve, Uncle Arthur MacLeod, died in 2007 before research of any significant scale was undertaken.\textsuperscript{398}

Notwithstanding the tenacious grip of the Monaro’s dominant extinction narrative, a new generation of writers entered the Australian history scene during the 1980s whose often revisionist narratives bit deep into public culture, including into the politics of engagement between government authorities and Aboriginal people. It was no longer good enough for institutions to perpetuate outmoded notions of Aboriginal history or identity. Administrative protocols began to shift in accordance with the new politic. One manifestation of this engagement was the adoption of Recommendation 315 of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Also known as the Millstream Recommendation after a celebrated negotiation in Western Australia, Recommendation 315 proposed that state and territory governments should amongst other things:

- [Move towards] joint management arrangements between Aboriginal people and national park management agencies;
- Encourage involvement of Aboriginal people in the development of management plans for national parks;
- Facilitate the control of cultural heritage information by Aboriginal people;

By 1997 the Aboriginal ownership and joint management of national parks in NSW had become a legal right under Part 4A of the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (NSW).\textsuperscript{399} This legislated imperative drove a need for the formation of identified Aboriginal groups who could

\textsuperscript{397} Egloff (1987)
\textsuperscript{398} Wesson (1994):MS 3397 (AIATSIS)
\textsuperscript{399} See Escartin and Campbell (2006); Archaeologist Isabel McBryde played a central role in the adoption of this legislation. See Macfarlane, Mountain et al. (2005) for a full discussion on her work up to and including this development.
speak on behalf of country and with whom National Parks could begin to establish relationships. Kosciusko National Park, which at 150 kilometres in length running from the Victorian border to the Australian Capital Territory is the largest park in New South Wales, had no choice but to follow the Act. Stepping away from the extinction narrative, the staff in the Jindabyne National Parks office began the task of finding the ‘missing’ Aboriginal people of the Monaro, a move initiated by Parks Officer Mike Young. Young took an immediate and radical step, one that had been spurned by history writers on the Monaro for the best part of a century, and spoke to an Aboriginal person, namely his Indigenous colleague in the Narooma National Parks office, ranger Chris Griffiths. He asked Griffiths for advice on how he might find information on the Aboriginal people of the Monaro and on Griffiths’ recommendation met with Ngarigo Elder Margaret Dixon and her niece Ellen Mundy. That meeting inspired what would become the modest but myth-breaking NPWS publication *Aboriginal People of the Monaro*. An annotated documentary history which pulls together primary and secondary sources, Young’s work offers an important alternative literature including oral histories, newly found colonial blanket records, birth and death certificates and family photos.

**Power source**

Although *Aboriginal People of the Monaro* makes a significant contribution to the untold story of the Ngarigo, the collecting together of primary and secondary sources does not in itself shift popular perceptions of the Aboriginal past. The Ngarigo homelands were not just invaded by cattle and sheep, they were invaded by stories, powerful stories of origination that have left an indelible mark on not just local identity but on national identity. It is the commemoration of one of these stories, the Snowy-Hydroelectric scheme, which dominates the memorialising of the Cooma-Jindabyne region as an historical landscape.

The story of the Snowy Hydroelectric Scheme begins with an engineering feat: made up of 16 major dams, seven power stations (two underground), a pumping station, 145kms of interconnected trans-mountain tunnels and 80kms of aqueducts, the Scheme, even before it was completed, was named as one of the civil engineering wonders of the modern world. Begun in 1949, it took 25 years to complete and more than 100,000 people from over 30 countries came to
Australia to work on it. The story of its making has many elements of a parable: the majestic yet inhospitable country which yielded to man’s intelligent and fearless intervention; men of many languages united in common endeavour and; a modern vision of the future made manifest through technology. That the Scheme had found its place not only as a provider of electricity but as a symbol of national identity was tested in 2006 when the Commonwealth and the NSW and Victorian State Governments attempted to privatize the Scheme. The massive public outcry which erupted on the announcement of the plan drove Prime Minister John Howard to issue a statement in which he admits his underestimation of the affection with which the Scheme was held. He told the nation that

"There is overwhelming feeling in the community that the Snowy is an icon. It’s part of the great saga of post-World War II development in Australia. It conjures many stories of tens of thousands of European migrants coming and blending with each other and in the process of working on the Snowy becoming part of this country. And people feel that. I have been surprised by the level of public disquiet. It’s turned out to be much greater than I expected."\(^400\)

Although the impending sale of the Scheme tested it as a symbol of national identity, it did not open it to any significant critical examination. Fifty years ago when the rising tide of the dammed waters swamped towns and valleys in the Snowy Mountains, no one questioned it was the right thing to do. Despite the fact that the Scheme currently pulls up to 90% of the water out of the Snowy River leaving it in some places little more than a weed infested creek, the will to save the river outside of the local river communities is nowhere near the will that emerged to save the Scheme from privatisation.\(^401\)

Today the landscape is dotted with reminders of the achievement (aside from the massive dam): a large museum and visitors’ centre offers a detailed account of the story, including a scale replica of the scheme; memorials in parks and car-stops tell of the men who travelled from across the globe to work on the project; and annual commemorative events are the highlight of the local

\(^{400}\) Reported by Channel Nine news Fri June 2nd 2006

\(^{401}\) See Miller and Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2005) for the story of the local campaign to save the river. The campaigns to save the river and stop the privatization of the hydro-electric scheme were linked through their mutual aim to keep decision making processes about the region within public control.
social calendar. That the Prime Minister was moved to involve himself in what threatened to become a nationwide emotional imbroglio demonstrates that the interest is not merely local. The intensity with which stories such as this move beyond their geographic location demonstrates the power of their archetypal resonances.

**The (Koori) Man from Snowy River**

It is not the story of the power station which is the real heart of this mountain country however, but another story of triumph and courage: its hero is a pioneer who through his hard labour and quick wits, his taciturn yet humorous demeanour and his prowess on the back of a horse, not to mention his application of appropriate agricultural techniques, prevailed in a majestic yet harsh environment. The Man from Snowy River is the central character in this story and today he flourishes in the annual Man from Snowy River Award offered at the *Snowy River Festival*. The Festival’s publicity material invites the public to participate in the world of this mythic hero during a weekend in late spring for a two day event that combines cool climate wines, boutique primary produce and extreme horse sports in magnificent surroundings.

On the Banks of the Snowy River, Dalgety, NSW, Australia

‘Where the best and boldest riders take their place’... A B Paterson

BANJO MADE IT FAMOUS, NOW WE MAKE IT FUN

Banjo Paterson was inspired by not one particular man, but all Australian horsemen in their rawest forms. The ‘Man from Snowy River’ was penned to celebrate this unique battler and harness the heritage that all Australians can identify with. The Snowy River Festival is a vision of Banjo’s poem, a weekend full of true Australian Horsemanship, action packed bush festival events, heritage displays and stories, all showcased on the iconic Snowy River, Dalgety, NSW, Australia. ⁴⁰²

Dalgety faces serious competition in its entitlement to The Man from Snowy River from the Victorian town of Corryong. Despite being 160kms from the actual river and the other side of both the mountains and the Victorian state border, Corryong lays claim to something Dalgety cannot: the Man himself, Jack Riley. While Dalgety brushes over this historical figure by

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⁴⁰² Snowy River Festival brochure – from Dalgety Caravan Park, September 2007
celebrating “all Australian horsemen in their rawest forms”, Corryong puts Jack squarely in the centre of the rival event *The Man from Snowy River Bush Festival*. This festival, held in April each year, differs from its contender by citing the long dead Jack as its main attraction with an appeal to his corporeal presence in an invitation to “Visit Jack Riley’s grave at the Corryong Cemetery or learn more about the legend and the mountains at The Man from Snowy River Folk Museum.”

Despite this focus on Riley as the town’s and the festival’s centrepiece, there is no mention of the persistent rumour that he was the son of an Irish father and an Aboriginal mother. Local historians have long said that he was an Irish immigrant to Australia as a 13-year-old in 1851, that he worked as a tailor near Omeo before becoming a stockman, mountain rider, horse-breaker, bushman and tracker of wild horses and that he met Banjo Paterson on a camping trip while working at Tom Groggin cattle station in the Upper Murray Valley as a manager. But this story cannot shake the oral tradition that he was of mixed ancestry and a relative of known mountain people still alive today, a story that persists in Aboriginal communities on both sides of the state border. Spelling changes to Riley’s name do open a possibility for mistaken identity, and Banjo Paterson was known to have created the Man from Snowy River from a composite of mountain men, one of whom may well have been of Aboriginal descent. Any contemporary claim to Jack’s Aboriginality however cannot be satisfied purely by historical evidence, of which there is very little. This shadow story is both a counterpoint to the sublimating myth of The Man from Snowy River and a conversation with it. It is a counterpoint in that it punctures the membrane of a reified past; it is a conversation in that it brings to the fable an important and unremembered historical fact: that Aboriginal men were integral to the founding of Australia’s high country pastoral industry. That this alternative narrative is not widely heard outside of the Aboriginal community is not surprising when the modest historical figure of Jack Riley, his now sadly diminished river or the poem itself do not hold a full explanation of the overbearing cultural weight they are collectively asked to carry.

Banjo’s literary descendent poet Les Murray keenly understands the troughs along which our deep longing for a past flow when he observes that

Australians are said to spend more of their spiritual energy in quests for enshrined symbols of identity than in any other pursuit; worship of the past in Australia is one of the great secular religions.\textsuperscript{404}

Despite its central role in this secular worship of the past, the Anglo-settler myth of the Man from Snowy River not only excludes the Aboriginal people whose country the story was enacted in but those whose ancestors were not part of the originating colonial moment. Big stories such as these are powerful cultural forces and as such serve to reinforce the perceived extinction of the Ngarigo. The momentum of the narrative encourages obliviousness to the fact that other people’s country, other people’s history is being crushed under its cultural weight. Observing this domination is a sobering meditation on the processes which work against inclusion of the Ngarigo in available written history. In this context, the Davisons and other families within the Ngarigo Traditional Owners group, without any self-conscious discussion of history, offer not only a challenge to the truth of their extinction, but a much richer and more interesting engagement with the past. This is not just a contemporary truth but has been so since the beginning. Aboriginal people have had a presence on the Monaro all along but they continue to remain mostly outside of white interests, not just excluded but shamefully extinguished by them.

\textsuperscript{404} Murray (1984):114
14. Conclusion

This thesis has thus far been about things that are missing: the Aboriginal people who are missing from the history of the Monaro and Snowy Mountains; the objects that might tell their story that are missing from the National Historical Collection of the NMA; and the questions which set this research in train, which missed the point. Our collective cultural eye has been conditioned to see the dark shape of these holes, rarely looking at the edges which are crowded with objects and people and other questions not yet in view.

Predictably, it was Deanna who helped me, as she had on so many occasions, to shift my gaze to this crowded periphery. What I saw, much to my delight, was what I had started the project looking for four years previously: her ‘collection’. In the final field work trip of the project we travelled together to Bombala to attend a meeting between the traditional owners and the NPWS staff regarding the placement of the Delegate Reserve site on the national Aboriginal Places Register. The rangers and the Ngarigo families met at the NPWS Bombala office prior to a field trip to the site. We gathered around the table of the conference room to learn about the Places Register criteria. As the ranger talked through the various qualities the site must have for inclusion, the conversation moved enthusiastically to the days gone by on the old Reserve. None of the participants had actually lived there but they remembered their parents’ memories; none more so than Sharon and Deb, daughters of Uncle Arthur McLeod. Uncle Arthur was the last surviving resident of the Reserve. He had passed away a couple of years before. Memories of Uncle Arthur were always fun and affectionately told. He was a dear old chap, sadly missed by his two girls, as well as by his niece Deanna. The girls enjoyed telling the story of their road trip to Delegate with the old man, and their small audience this morning was encouraging. Everyone nodded as they began:

The old man had so often expressed to them how much he missed the mountain home of his childhood they decided to take him back there while they still could. They drove from Wreck Bay, six or seven hours away. As they pulled up at the entrance to the old site, Arthur leapt out of the car with great excitement and began pointing to spots in an unremarkable expanse of bare fields running between the road and the river. All the
disappeared features of the landscape re-appeared with his remembering: there was the old cemetery, that was the place of the cabins, this was the old road. The girls laughed as they told the story; he had bounced up and down on an outcrop of rocks – that’s where I used to play as a boy!

That evening the three of them were in the pub having dinner when they noticed a table of people staring at them. What did they want? The three of them returned to their meal and their conversation but couldn’t help notice when once again the same table was staring at them. This time the oldest of the group rose from his chair and walked over. Is your name Arthur by any chance? Yes it is. You didn’t used to live at the old Reserve did you? Yes I did. Well my name’s Arthur too and I think we went to the Delegate Primary School together. At that the two Arthurs fell into an amazed reminiscing. The families joined their tables together and an unexpected night of storytelling and collective remembering ensued. The local (non-Aboriginal) family wouldn’t hear of anything less than the girls and their dad staying with them at their home. New friends had been made from the old, deep, tangled ties to a shared place and to the shared past.

We all loved this story and the presence of old Arthur was palpable, so much so that Deanna was moved to reveal exactly how present he was. “Bless him”, she said, “I’ve bought him with me today.” With that she reached into her bag and pulled out the Order of Service from the old man’s funeral. Sharon laughed and pulled out her own copy of the same document. Yes, Uncle Arthur was indeed with us at the meeting.

It was only later that I realised the implications of this moment. Over the years I had seen Deanna refer to other Orders of Service she kept stashed, to dig out a birth date or name of a spouse. They are great documents for historians: they come with a photo on the front cover; they record the dates of birth and death; and they list other family members by name (loving father of..., brother to ..., much missed grandpa of...). That they are paper is also important - in that regard they are texts, an archive that can be filed and referred to again, source documents that offer proof and validation. They can be photocopied. They can be sent in the mail to people who

405 Feld notes from a meeting of NPWS staff and Ngarigo Traditional Owners regarding the placing of the Delegate Aboriginal Reserve on the Aboriginal Places Register, 10th March, 2009
could not attend the funeral. Most of all they tell a story central to the historiographic interests of Aboriginal people, at least all those of my acquaintance and, more widely, by those whose lives have been documented by historians and writers of various genres, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. This central interest is undoubtedly family history.

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As noted earlier, when Graeme Davison referred to the survey in which Australians were asked to rank the sources of information about the past that they most trust, he reported that museums topped the poll.406 What he didn’t mention was a point pursued by historian Maria Nugent when she noted that “Aboriginal people interviewed as part of the [same survey] uniformly rated the family, or family stories, extremely highly in terms of trustworthiness as a source about the past.

In contrast, they routinely rated [sources] such as museums and schools much lower, both in comparison to their families and.. with the rankings given.. by non-Aboriginal respondents.”407 She goes on to address the point made by Diane Barwick in the 1970s, which is that “most Aborigines grow up learning two kinds of history: the memories preserved by their families and the humiliating textbook history taught in schools which denies the realities of their past and present.”408 Although Nugent concedes that such dissonant experience no longer “characterises Australian school curricula in the way that it once did”, Aboriginal people still grow up “knowing ‘two kinds of history’: their own, ‘preserved by their families’; and that told in the wider Australian community.” Given that Ann Curthoys still considered Aboriginal histories to be largely ‘hidden histories’ almost 10 years after Nugent’s paper was published, she may have been over-optimistic in her appraisal of school curricula. In this context Deanna’s Order of Service collection can be seen as one of the few written sources that has a reliable provenance.

That Deanna identified her own family history as a principal interest was consistent with the experience of Nugent and other historians in the field, including Aboriginal historians working

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406 Davison (2006):91
407 Nugent (2003):144
408 Ibid. See the quote on front page of this thesis for an example of early 20th century school text book attitudes to ‘Aboriginal history’.

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with the stories of their own families. Allowing this interest to form the centre of this thesis required that I take a chronological narrative approach. This schema did not limit the story to a narrow circle of interest but rather allowed it to open into an examination of the issues faced by each generation in turn. The first generation to which I paid attention, alive in the early to mid 19th century (James Brindle’s mother) dealt with invasion and early dispossession. James and Emily Brindle, from the mid 19th to the early 20th centuries, felt the full power of the early Christian missionaries and the sway of their increasing administrative influence. The Reserve dwellers and pastoral workers of the late 19th to mid 20th century maintained a life in country where they were able to form relationships within the wider community until once again the administration intervened. The 20th century, as for so many Aboriginal people, was a century of separation, in this instance the separation of Deanna’s mother from country and relatives. Each of the generations was touched by the big stories of their time and so provide a window onto a larger history. Again, this is consistent with Nugent’s observation that “Aboriginal family history is always implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, engaged with other historical narratives, both at a local and national level … Doing family history becomes itself … a history lesson.”

Given that these family narratives “always engage with other historical narratives”, and given that family history is clearly the most appealing place to begin a discussion of the past for so many Aboriginal people, the Museum’s interests are best served by acknowledging this starting point as the most productive when initiating research processes. Clearly this is not news to the Museum. Relationships with families and communities are central to the strategies deployed by curators in developing exhibitions which refer to individuals, such as the Mayor Edward ‘Ted’ Simpson display or the Bilin Bilin module within the Resistance exhibition. The imperative of the Museum to tell social history stories that are of interest to an audience beyond the family however, drives a broader approach in developing thematic groupings. The most recent example of this conjunction is the touring exhibition From Little Things Big Things Grow: Fighting for Indigenous Rights 1920-1970. Here the story of the Indigenous civil rights movement is told through the ‘voices’ of the participants and the objects which exemplify their life stories. In this respect the stories were drawn from ‘family history’, with oral history interviews making up a

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See for example Suzanne (2004); Norman (2006); Maynard (2007)

Nugent (2003):144-5
significant part of the exhibition. The compilation of these stories however demonstrates that the individuals were also part of a ‘movement’ and the overall display brought into focus the effectiveness of their collective struggle.

Although a thematic exhibition such as this offers enormous scope in its methodology, it also limits the capacity of the story to travel beyond its thematic boundaries and there is a risk of the narrative falling into polemics. This is particularly the case where the subject matter is inherently political and it is a criticism that has been levelled at exhibitions within the GFA since its opening in 2001, although not in the instance of From Little Things Big Things Grow.\textsuperscript{411}

It is the way in which genealogical narratives such as that of Deanna’s family as told in this thesis “assume broader proportions as local and community histories” which might offer further choices for the Museum to pursue in its curatorial strategies.\textsuperscript{412} The phenomenon of the family history/local history nexus can partly be explained, as Nugent notes, by the “social organisation of Aboriginal people, who … identify themselves not only through kinship but also through place. [It is in this way that] Aboriginal family histories are … also always local histories.” The history of Deanna’s family clearly demonstrates Nugent’s observation. In a similar vein, “given that through the historical processes that confined Aboriginal families together on designated reserves during the protection/ segregation era, it is not surprising that the history of one Aboriginal family often also functions as a community history.”\textsuperscript{413} It is however the contribution of the elderly white people to Ngarigo history, and in this case study to Deanna Davison’s story, which offers an insight into how porous the boundaries are between family, local and community histories. This is particularly so when the engagement moves beyond worn out tropes such as those pursued by ‘local historians’ or historians confined by narrowly defined themes, such as ‘high country pioneers’. By using family/ location/ community as a starting point, the narrative might open thematically in unexpected ways. The Snowy Mountains history I have presented here for example could re-visit the ever-popular ‘high country pioneers’ as a theme, but the story of complex cross-cultural engagement at its centre would be an enriched narrative with moments

\textsuperscript{411} The Fiona Foley installation \textit{The Annihilation of the Blacks} came in for particular scrutiny in this regard
\textsuperscript{412} Nugent (2003):144-5
\textsuperscript{413} Ibid
of shame and celebration, romance and intervention, innovation and oppression that would take the story beyond its current narrative boundaries. Similarly the history of the Delegate Reserve would make a rewarding location for a narrative about community, in all its diversity, and serve to repopulate the country with historical Aboriginal figures. The question the museum might ask is “by what material means can these stories be told?” A clue was offered to Fabri Blacklock by Aunty Patricia Davis-Hurst when she explained that “There’s one thing that Kooris do like looking at and that’s pictures. I mean you write a book with no pictures, people will just put it down and they won’t even bother going through it. But if they see pictures they always go through it to see if there’s someone there they know.”414

Pictures of the past

That Deanna treasured the Order of Service pages from the funerals of friends and relatives was both a revelation to me, and not entirely unexpected. I had noticed documents of this type were cherished by many of the people I had spoken to in the course of this research; caches of newspaper articles, occasionally small locally produced booklets and most often family photographs, were consulted for verification, reminders and beginning points for stories about the old days. The members of this community were not alone in this practice, as Blacklock reported:

Koori people love looking at photographs of their families, extended families, friends, and themselves and seeing who they know in them. [It is] a really good way of stimulating people’s memories and finding out about stories of the past. Every photo has a story to tell of a time and a place and it is fascinating listening to all the yarns from the old days.415

Gaynor MacDonald similarly noted in her work with Wiradjuri people that “tins, cardboard boxes and albums hold one of the most prized and jealously guarded of all ‘material’ possessions, the family photos. They are used to tell and recall stories, introduce people to kin, as items of exchange and as important statements of identity and belonging in the spatial and

414 Blacklock (2003):159 Quoting Patricia Davis-Hurst
415 Blacklock (2003):159
temporal politics of kinship. As soon as I began working with members of the Ngarigo and south-coast community it was clear that photographs constituted the primary means through which their history was given material expression. Framed photo portraits were ubiquitous in lounge rooms and hallways and photos were pulled out whenever I asked about life stories. Cabinets and bedside tables, kitchen dressers and lounge room mantelpieces were variously covered in Pixie studio family portraits, hand-tinted wedding photos, holiday snaps, baby photos, family picnics, dances, 21sts. Similarly the family album was always close to hand and I noticed the way in which looking at its pages was a highly socialized occupation. The photos and the relationships they depict were re-enlivened with each viewing, allowing for an ongoing development of the historical narrative; corrections, additions, discussions and embellished stories were all part of the experience.

Photographs are of no small interest to museums either, both now and in the past. The camera, almost at its moment of invention, became an important strategy in the museum’s project of assembling and categorizing its material collections. Not surprisingly the ‘native’ was a favourite photographic subject, both in landscape and in staged studio settings. The coincidence of new technology which made photographs both cheap and quick to produce and the burgeoning interest in physical anthropology at the turn of the 20th century produced not only vast photograph collections within museum holdings but a lucrative market for ethnographic photographs amongst the general public as well. Many Australian studio photographers turned their craft to producing pages of composite front and profile views of Aboriginal people, re-casting their previously idealized native subjects as scientific specimens. These photographs travelled widely through centres of learning, including university anatomy and anthropology departments. Moving in the opposite direction, ethnographic compositions began circulating in Aboriginal families, read alternatively as portraits and likenesses. Similarly, Aboriginal

416 MacDonald (2003):225
417 See Lydon (2005), Edwards (2001)
418 Historian Heather Goodall offers a potent example of the circulation of ethnographic photographs within an Aboriginal community in north west NSW in Goodall (2006). The Melbourne Museum comments directly on this kind of exchange between museums and Aboriginal people in the Koori Voices exhibition within the Bunjilaka Gallery where both historic and contemporary photographs are arranged for the audience to experience as pages of a photo album.
photographers have contributed important works to museum collections such as Ricky Maynard’s *Mutton Birding* series held by the NMA.

So why were photographs not offered as a ‘collection’ in response to my original enquiry? For Deanna’s family, the photographs come to an abrupt halt somewhere in the 1960s. With no photos of her mother or her grandparents, the oldest people in the album are herself and her husband. This gap depicts the breach of continuity in her family line, silently marking the moment in 1919 when at 10 years of age, her mother, was taken from Delegate Reserve to Cootamundra Girl’s Home. She never returned to her place of origin although she spoke longingly of it all her life. Deanna inherited both the country and the longing but no photos.

**Home coming**

As objects hovering in the periphery of this project, photographs emerged from other collections to fill in some of the gaps. In the making of this story two have been added to Deanna’s family album; one of Emily Peters as a young girl by the Avon River; the other of Billy Rutherford in a tweed sports jacket and hat. Rumours were also lingering in the shadows, waiting for their moment to circulate afresh; the misty rumours around the origins of the Brindle name for example started to swirl as our questions about who, when and where made their way into local networks.

Iris had introduced me to Jim Osborne, the current owner of Nungatta station, during one of our research trips. Jim is not a descendant of Alexander Weatherhead, the 19th century owner of the property purported to be the source of the Brindle name, but is nonetheless a third generation Nungatta man. His family bought the property after WWII and has run cattle on it for 60 years. Unlike his forebears, Jim is not a cattle farmer but a landscape architect and he has turned his craft to the degraded, over-grazed landscape of Nungatta with huge success. His newly conceived sustainable management plan is a blend of old and new techniques that seek to return the station to not only a profitable business but to an intelligent development of animal habitat, eco-tourism, plantation crops and cattle (although the latter mainly for their heritage associations with the property). So innovative is the plan that the station was awarded the Australian Institute
of Landscape Architects NSW Medal, the highest professional recognition available. Part of Jim’s strategy in the sustainable development of Nungatta is a re-engagement with the historical and cultural landscape as well as with the physical. He had been thinking about how he might approach this more conceptual area of the plan when his chance meeting with Deanna’s daughter Iris alerted him to the Brindle story. It was an important moment for both of them.

I was introduced to Jim in August of 2009 and we followed up with several conversations about the Aboriginal history of the area. Then one day he rang me with news.

He’d been chatting to a couple of pig shooters from Bombala who’d been hunting on horseback up round the escarpment area. They’d dropped by the house to let people know what they were doing and no doubt to find out the latest gossip about the place. Jim raised the subject of the Weatherheads and the Brindles. Did they know anything about an Aboriginal child fathered on the property? Oh yes, they told him, that must have been Alex Weatherhead who lived in Alex’s hut with his Aboriginal wife and child.

Apparently one of old Weatherhead’s sons went off with a black woman and lived with her at Alex’s Hut.

Jim knew of the locality still known as ‘Alex’s Hut’. It was just off the Nungatta property boundary. The name has outlasted whatever makeshift building had been erected there, as no remains of a hut are in evidence today.

This news sent me back to investigate the archive. Yes, Alexander Weatherhead did have a son, also named Alex. Born in 1837 he was the eldest son of Weatherhead snr and his wife Margaret. He lived to 61 years of age and died in Bombala in 1898 with no marriage recorded and no named offspring. Was this James Brindle’s father? James was born in 1856, the year Alex turned 19. If Alex jnr. had left Nungatta to pursue a relationship with an Aboriginal woman and take responsibility for the child, possibly thumbing his nose at his cattle farming father in the process, then the story of the boy’s origins shifted from frontier malevolence to frontier romance; young people mutually at the edge of their respective cultural worlds, making a new life and a new lineage. That of course also made James Brindle the eldest son of the eldest son and if

419 NSW BDM Index, V1837727 47/1837
420 NSW BDM Index, 13100/1898
paternity was acknowledged, the heir to Nungatta station. Suddenly the pieces of this story collided with a force. No wonder Alex snr had demanded the child be given another name; he was the successor to the station, in more ways than one. The hints in the story of a genuine cross-cultural relationship are born out in the Brindle family, with James growing up to name his own son Alex as was the Weatherhead tradition – Alex the blacktracker from Cooma and Deanna’s grandfather. Such a tribute hints at a longer term association between James and his father Alex; perhaps the ‘unmarried’ Weatherhead stayed in the Bombala area to pursue a relationship with his common-law wife, maybe even meeting his grandson born 10 years before his death and who lived, after all, just a few miles from Bombala on the Delegate Reserve.421

**Story map**

As these pieces of family history, local history, archival history and gossip swirled through the landscape, a discussion I had been privy to regarding the Aboriginal Places Register came to mind. The conversation had centred on whether the Delegate Reserve should be the focus of an application to the Register or whether the wider landscape that took in Mt Delegate and the other significant sites in the region should be included. There was unanimous agreement that the Reserve could not be separated from its context. It sat in direct reference to Mt Delegate, which was related to a site at Cooma, and in relationship to the entirety of the Delegate River. The routes of travel similarly lead to, from, around and through the Reserve, positioning the 10 acres of the old campground as a node of activity, not an isolated place of memory.

The evolution in thinking among heritage professionals about complex cultural associations in landscapes has been well documented over the past decade as new ideas about the interplay between the tangible and intangible have found form.422 This literature has been particularly attuned to the ways in which material layers of the landscape which record human activity, “landscape as cultural artefact”, to use Isabel McBryde’s term,423 are unable to be separated from “the fact that landscapes are a record of history where memory, symbolism and signs of the past,

421 For other studies of marriage between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people see Owen (2002); Grieves (2004)
422 See McBryde (1997); Morphy (1995); Serageldin, Shluger et al. (2001)
423 McBryde (2000):155
as well as tangible physical remains, are held.”\textsuperscript{424} McBryde traces these interests to the 1993 nomination of the Pilgrim Route \textit{El Camino de Compostela} for inscription on UNESCO’s World Heritage List. It was this moment, she suggests, that marked a significant shift in perceptions of cultural heritage, where the emphasis on the monumental, architectural or archaeological ‘site’ expanded to include “recognition of the social values of related places within a landscape.”\textsuperscript{425}

It is this thinking which informs the criteria for sites eligible to be registered as Aboriginal places in NSW, made manifest in a 2002 legislative amendment. Here the Minister for the Environment can declare an area to be an 'Aboriginal place' if he/she “believes that the place is or was of special significance to Aboriginal culture. An area can have spiritual, natural resource usage, historical, social, educational or other types of significance.”\textsuperscript{426} The Delegate Reserve site exemplifies exactly these qualities in its ability to hold memory and symbolism for the families who trace their lineages to the old Reserve dwellers. Its material characteristics as both pre-contact camping ground and post-contact reserve, give form to the Ngarigo ancestors’ physical context. In that regard it is a place to visit at which the past can be imagined into the present. It also provides a heritage resource from which to draw new information, as demonstrated through the exploratory archaeological survey undertaken by the NPWS.\textsuperscript{427} Its most significant role however is as a place of belonging, a location to return to in conversation, in dreams and hopes for the future, and in longing for lost places. For the families who identify as ‘Delegate people’ it is home.

To confine the story of the Ngarigo to the Delegate Reserve however would be to paint them back into the narrative margins from which they are struggling to emerge. Instead, the story of Alex Weatherhead, Emily Peters, Harry and Lizzie Bradshaw, the Rutherfords and most of all the Brindles of all generations could be used to tell the complex story of people in time and place. Their birth (and birthing) places, routes of travel, camping grounds, places of work and places of death, as well as their complex relationships with the wider Snowy-Monaro

\textsuperscript{424} Lennon (1997), cited by McBryde (2000):155
\textsuperscript{425} McBryde (2000):154
\textsuperscript{426} National Parks and Wildlife Regulation, 2002, under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974
\textsuperscript{427} Santo (2005)
community, draw a web of connections and interconnections through the landscape that shifts contemporary and historical understandings of the Ngarigo and their country. In this way, this dramatically beautiful mountain country might be seen as an ‘open air museum’, to borrow a Danish concept, where the associative linkages that sit within the material plane open into deep cultural and historical meanings, infusing a moribund dominant narrative with new energy and understanding. In such ways, the traditional museum, too, can be freed from a burden of missing history.
Appendix 1

Linkage Project LP0455562

A5 Project Summary

'Indigenous Collectors and Collections' considers Indigenous people's contemporary roles in shaping private and public collections, and the influence of historical circumstances and ideas of communal ownership and responsibility. It therefore subverts the dominant emphasis upon Europeans as collectors and appropriators of indigenous objects. By considering Indigenous people as collectors, curators and presenters of beloved objects, this project will offer major new perspectives on Australian Indigenous history and museology. By exploring the power of material objects in cultural identity and historical consciousness, this project disrupts the stereotype of Indigenous people as purely 'museum victims'.

E2 Aims and Background

Aims

The aims of this project are:

- To investigate the material objects that Indigenous people collect, display and hold dear within their homes and communities, and to consider the personal, family and collective significance of these items.
- To explore whether Indigenous people have used museum collections to rediscover aspects of their past, and how they have worked to reshape exhibitions of precious artifacts.
- To consider the particular issues or problems faced by Indigenous collectors in heavily colonized parts of Australia, whose beloved possessions may be popularly defined as less authentic or valuable.
- To consider how Indigenous people's contribution to state and private collections are shaped by ideas of communal ownership and responsibility.

This research, focusing on the theme of Indigenous people as collectors and keepers of precious objects, both as private and communal custodians and also in collaboration with museums,
breaks new ground in its consideration of this aspect of Indigenous history-making. While the traditional role of museums in dispossessing and objectifying Indigenous people (often discussed by historians) is acknowledged here, this project shifts the focus to examine Indigenous agency and creativity in cherishing and displaying precious possessions and forming more constructive relationships with museums. The research aims to be of practical benefit in strengthening relationships between Indigenous communities and the NMA and ANU, and exploring approaches to Indigenous material culture which are sensitive, collaborative, thoughtful and innovative. The work will also be an important addition to existing historiography on Indigenous approaches to story-telling and history-making, the cultural and political history of collecting and collectors in Australia, and the role of museums in colonial and "post-colonial" societies.

**Background**

Since the mid 19th century, European collectors and museums have been intimately involved in the process of colonization in Australia. Their removal of Indigenous people's possessions (a process sometimes consensual, sometimes forcible) made traditional knowledge more difficult to pass on; their appropriation of human remains and secret/sacred objects caused pain to Indigenous people and reinforced their sense of dispossession; and Indigenous artifacts in museums were frequently displayed in a manner which objectified Indigenous societies and portrayed them as primitive and dying or extinct (Council of Australian Museum Associations 1993; Simpson 1996; Griffin 1998; Casey 2001). While Aboriginal activists voiced these concerns from the 1970s onwards, it is only recently that significant changes have been made in museum policy and practice. The 1978 UNESCO regional seminar *Preserving Indigenous Cultures: A New Role for Museums* signalled a newly respectful and collaborative approach, which gradually (and not without conflict) began to be implemented in North America and New Zealand. Major changes occurred in Australia with the formation of Museums Australia and its 1993 policy document *Previous Possessions, New Obligations*, which recognized Aboriginal rights over cultural property and voiced a commitment to cooperative partnerships. Such policies are now becoming evident within individual museums, including the NMA, which formally states its commitment to the ethical use of artifacts, repatriation of Indigenous secret/sacred objects and human remains, and building constructive relationships with Indigenous communities (NMA 2003).
These changes have been mirrored by growing academic interest in the politics of museums and collecting. Moira Simpson (1996) and Paul Tapsell, for example, have investigated some of the ways North American and Pacific museums have used displays of artifacts from ethnic minorities to convey a range of meanings about primitiveness, colonisation and national identity. They have also considered how minority groups have engaged with state museums on the staging of exhibits and created museums and cultural centres of their own. More broadly, historians throughout Australia, Europe and North America have debated the role of museums in both producing and challenging nationalist myths, objectifying and giving public voices to women and minority groups, imposing notions of "high culture" on the public and engaging with popular art and media, and preserving material objects in isolation from their "authentic" surroundings and placing them within historical narratives (Walsh 1992; Griffiths 1996; Moore 1997; Preziosi 1996; Stell 2001; Thomas 2001). However, while this existing body of work has considered museums' treatment of cultural artifacts and the way that Indigenous peoples in North America and the Pacific have reshaped museum exhibits, the question of how Australian Indigenous people have engaged with museums (other than as opponents or victims of objectification) has yet to be fully addressed.

A vital related topic is the cultural history of collecting. Here, Tom Griffiths' (1996) work is particularly significant, examining how white Australian collectors and antiquarians have produced particular myths about national identity, Aboriginal dispossession and Australians' relationship to their physical environment. Griffiths has also examined how white Australians have thought about the collecting process itself, and the tensions that have existed between academic "experts" and enthusiastic amateurs. However, in this rich historical field, the question of how Indigenous people have responded to this white-dominated collecting process and launched collections of their own deserves more attention than it has so far received.

These bodies of work provide a vital context for the proposed research project, which takes a new approach by going beyond an analysis of white Australian collecting and displaying of Indigenous objects, to consider Indigenous people's agency as collectors, curators and presenters of possessions which they hold dear.
E3 Significance and Innovation

By questioning how Indigenous people have used material objects to express identities and maintain connections with the past, this project aims to disrupt the common stereotype of Indigenous people as simply non-materialistic and only interested in oral (spoken or sung) history. It also aims to invert the dominant image of collectors of material objects as European (usually male and financially well-off), and to ask how the collection and keeping of precious objects is affected by ideas of communal ownership and responsibility. These questions are relevant to collections kept in state museums, community centres and people's living rooms. They apply not only to communities where "pre-colonial" cultures remain strong, but also to urban Aboriginal people, whose valued possessions may be defined by outsiders as less authentic, less important, not "really" Aboriginal. The question of how material histories can be maintained and created in the face of massive colonial onslaught deserves serious exploration.

This topic is a timely one for a number of reasons. It has only been within the last two decades that serious academic discussion has begun internationally about relationships between Indigenous people, collectors and museums, the role of museums in the construction of national identities, and the question of what constitutes "important" or "historical" artifacts and how they should be displayed. In Australia, it was usually not until the 1990s that major developments occurred in Indigenous people's involvement with museums, not just as opponents or external advisors but also as organizers, curators, guides and collectors. Their impact in these roles has so far received little detailed academic consideration, aside from early debates over the issues of repatriation of ancestral remains. The further topic of how Indigenous people collect, hold and display precious objects outside of the state museum system – including within their own homes – has attracted even less academic attention, despite its relevance to discussions of Indigenous history-making and Australian antiquarian movements. We believe it is essential that such research be conducted now, at a time when the role of Indigenous history within Australian identity has become so contested, and when the question of what place Indigenous exhibits should occupy within museums – particularly the NMA – has been the topic of so much public debate. Given the restructuring of some NMA exhibitions and the creation of new ones in line with the Review of Exhibitions and programs released in July 2003, we feel that this is a
particularly appropriate time for this project – with its contributions to Indigenous exhibitions and history-making – to be conducted.

This project, based on primary research in Indigenous communities, will represent a substantial contribution to knowledge in the areas of Indigenous history, museology and the history of collecting. As a doctoral thesis, it will necessarily be limited in scope – a comprehensive national survey of Indigenous collectors would not be feasible, … but the insights developed will open up future fields for research. We anticipate that articles flowing from this project will be of considerable theoretical and applied relevance to individuals and bodies concerned with Indigenous material culture and the future of museums in colonised countries.

This research will extend understanding of Indigenous collecting in a number of ways. The question of how museums, with their history of appropriating and objectifying Indigenous history, might now assist to reconnect Indigenous communities with lost aspects of their past, deserves closer attention. This issue was touched on by Griffiths (1996) at the conclusion of his history of white Australian collectors, when he considered how Victorian Indigenous women had recently used the state museum's "artifacts of a dying race" to rekindle traditional craft skills and make statements about a vital, ongoing culture. NMA Director Dawn Casey also cited this as a potential benefit of contemporary museums – "The givers are now becoming the recipients, as Indigenous people discover just how much of their cultural heritage lies within museum walls and seek ways to benefit from those old collections" (Casey, 2001). The question of what sort of benefits Indigenous visitors and participants can find in museums deserves further analysis.

So, too, does the role of Indigenous people in collecting, storing and displaying objects in museums. Museums have often been criticised for taking objects out of people's lived daily experiences and fetishising them as isolated relics and/or placing them within narratives of "state-sanctioned evolutionary history" (Preziosi 1996. Also Walsh 1992; Thomas, 2001) The question of how Indigenous people have negotiated the "white spaces" (Neale 1998) of galleries and museums to successfully display objects dear to them, whilst acknowledging the cultural and environmental differences that shape their lives and work, has not received so much attention. Simpson and Tapsell have considered this question in relation to North America and New
Zealand, but more sustained Australian work on the topic is needed. Furthermore, discussion of how Indigenous people display artifacts must go beyond the issue of which objects are acceptable for public viewing, to consider how objects endowed with meaning and power can work to construct histories and convey ideas about personal and collective identity.

This is true not only of artifacts displayed to the public in state museums, but also those treasured in more private settings. In some ways, this project's attention to private and community collections represents its greatest departure from exiting historiography. By considering how Indigenous people regard objects which are not for display to a general (predominantly white) audience, but which are kept and shown in ways which prioritise personal, family and local sensibilities, the project will uncover a much greater range of views about what constitutes valuable possessions and how they should be treated. This aspect of the project also presents perhaps the strongest challenge to the stereotype of Indigenous people supposedly possessing no material history or interest in belongings, by exploring the private emotional significance of cherished objects.

This new attention to material history is also evident in the methodologies to be used in this project, which include interviews with Indigenous collectors, photography of artifacts and compilation of a database to organize this inventory of objects. While oral interviewing is a technique of growing importance and sophistication within both Indigenous and general history-writing, the simultaneous photographing and cataloguing of material is less common. Diane Bell (1987) has explored how photographs and descriptions of everyday objects can be interwoven with stories of (multicultural but mostly white) women's lives to create more visual and immediate histories, but this is a technique rarely adopted by scholars of Indigenous history. Within academia, Indigenous material objects have long been considered the domain of anthropologists and archaeologists, but we believe that a historical approach locating precious objects within local and national histories of colonialism, survival, collection and museology, will offer innovative new perspectives.

**E4 Training and Approach**

**Approach**
(Excerpt)

Key questions which might guide the project include:

• What kinds of items have Indigenous people collected in their homes and communities? To whom are these objects displayed? What personal, family and collective significance do the objects have?

• How have Indigenous people used museum collections to rediscover aspects of their personal and collective pasts?

• How have Indigenous people in charge of museum exhibitions negotiated the "white spaces" of museums to appropriately display items? What sort of stories about history and identity do their exhibitions tell?

• In selecting objects for public display, how do individuals and communities use material items to convey particular images of themselves? For example, how do famous Indigenous people engage with their existing public profiles?

• What particular issues or problems are faced by Indigenous collectors in heavily colonised parts of Australia – are their beloved objects defined as less authentic, less interesting, less "Aboriginal"?

• How are Indigenous people's contributions to state and private collections shaped by ideas of communal ownership and responsibility?

E6 National Benefit

(Excerpt)

For audiences interested in museology, the findings [of this research] will suggest new ways of thinking about Indigenous approaches to collecting and involvement in shaping Australian museums. The project will also disrupt a number of common stereotypes about Indigenous approaches to history. These include the notions that Indigenous people are utterly non-materialistic and interested only in oral history, that Indigenous communities in heavily colonised parts of Australia have no precious objects or material histories to pass on, and that the collecting, keeping and displaying of valuable artifacts is a European prerogative. This project aims to promote a better general understanding of the varied and complex ways in which Indigenous people cherish and use valuable artifacts, particularly in relation to identity and history-making. It will also provide a more inclusive and complex examination of the history of
Australian collectors, a history previously dominated by European perspectives. Thus, previously neglected areas of cross-cultural history will be illuminated.
16. Bibliography

Abbreviations

AIATSIS Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
AJCP Australian Joint Copying Project
BDMNSW Office of Births, Deaths and Marriages, NSW
HRA Historical Records of Australia
NAA National Archives of Australia
NLA National Library of Australia
PROV Public Records Office of Victoria
SANSW State Archives of NSW
SLNSW State Library of NSW


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