LOOKING BACK

My Story by Eric Bernard Bell OAM

Ngunnawal elder & Yass community leader

Limited PDF Edition

.....

Looking Back

My Story

Life Story of Eric Bernard Bell

© E B Bell & A J MacQuillan - 2011

This book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted by the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission of the publisher.

Related by Eric Bell

Designed, written and published by Anthony J MacQuillan PO Box 67 YASS, NSW 2582 Australia

ISBN 978-0-9804215-4-5

(XXX Draft) National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry:

Authors: Eric Bernard Bell & Tony MacQuillan

Title: Looking Back, My Story autobigraphy of a NSW Aboriginal elder

ISBN 978-0-9804215-4-5

(pbk.)

Subjects: Family history,

Yass NSW --- Genealogy

Other Authors/Contributors:

Dr Peter Kabaila

Dewey Number: 9XXX Includes Appendix:

"Aboriginal life in southeastern Australia, Wiradjuri and neighbouring regions [including Ngunnawal]"

by

Dr Peter Rimas Kabaila, BSc (Arch), B.Arch (UNSW), Dip.Ed, BA (Hons), PhD (ANU)

Cover illustration by Yass Artist Kim Nelson ©, painted on a dressed flitch of native yellow box

Printed by Industrial Printing Co., Lithgow NSW



Mullion the Eagle

The Wedgetail Eagle known in the Dreaming stories of some Aboriginal people as Mullion, is also a totem bird of the local Ngunnawal people of whom Eric Bell is an elder.

This image is reproduced with thanks to
The New Atlas of Australian Birds
© Royal Australian Ornitholgists Union 2003
and the artist David Lawn

Foreword

Eric Bernard Bell was born in Yass and lived on Aboriginal reserves for the early part of his life. He gained his formal education from both public and private educational systems, but was also an avid reader from an early age.

Eric's life experiences, which he willingly related to me over a period of some two years, will interest his fellow Yass citizens, both Ngunnawal and non-Aboriginal. Eric epitomises for me and everyone who knows him the value of developing positive attitudes in life, being open and caring for others, young and old.

He and I, plus all those who read this story, share the same descent, from East African forebears, because it is from them the entire human race originates. The amusing consideration that I was actually born there, not far from the equator and Olduvaai Gorge in 1935, has little to do with my forebears departing from Africa some thirty thousand years ago and Eric's Australian Aboriginal forebears departing some sixty thousand years ago (well ahead of mine), or so the Human Genome Project convincingly hypothises!

I have had personal experience of South Africa apartheid as well as with Irish and other bigotories during my lifetime, but that all pales into insignificance compared with Eric's experience of growing up, identifying as he does with Australian Aboriginality, and yet moving forward consistently despite many barriers.

It has been a privilige to work with Eric on his story and I thank him, and the many librarians and others who have allowed us to use their material, particularly Dr Peter Kabaila for the Appendix herein, Dr Anne Jackson Nakano for Eric's genealogical research and Dean Alston of "The West Australian" newspaper for the cartoon reflecting the late arrival of my people in Australia from 1788 onwards (see page 12).

My thanks to Eric for his patience and encouragement, to our friend Peter Bindon for his advice, to Yass & District Historical Socy Inc., and Robin Butt for her meticulous help with proof reading, however any glitches are entirely mine!

70ny Mac2uillan

Magpies confirm coaches for 2011 p16

ESTABLISHED IN 1879

Friday January 28, 2011 Registered by Australia Post Publication No. NC 2168

13 1114 24 hours a day 365 days a yea

INCORPORATING THE YASS COURIER, YASS EVENING TRIBUNE AND YASS POST

Yass High traffic changes p11

Pet competition: **Voting extended p8**

Friday Freebie: Shakespeare in the Vines p13





Eric Bell Citizen of the Year

By Alix Douglas

By Alix Douglas

He has conducted the Welcome to Country at countless Australia Day award ecremonies but this year's local celebration will be one to remember for Eric Bell.

The well-known and highly respected Ngunnawal Elder was given the shock of his life when council's general manager, David Rowe, named him as the 2011 Citizen of the Year.

On Wednesday morning Mr Bell performed the Welcome to Country, helped raise the Australian Hag and presented the Senior Citizen of the Year awards, just as he does every year.

Senior Citizen of the Year awards, just as he does every year.

All the while he was blissfully unaware he was next in line; the look of absolute astonishment on his face when he heard his name called said it all.

"It was a hig surprise. I had no idea...no one spilled the beans!" Mr Bell told the Tribune.

"I've been doing the Welcome to Country for as long as I can remember and it has always been a pleasure to come here and do it.
"This [Citizen of the Year] is something I'm very proud of."

Although a most deserving winner, an unassuming and modest Mr Bell will tell you he is no different to anyone else.

It is obvious, however, that those who presided over the Australia Day award nominations thought otherwise; as did those assembled on the lawns in Coronation Park, who loudly and proudly applauded the honour.

Mayor Nic Carmodly captured the essence of Mr Bell's enormous contribution to the town by describing his good friend as "the quintessential Yass-ite".

"Eric is someone who stands for everything that is good in this town," mayor Carmody said.
"He is a gentleman, a person

who puts the community ahead of himself every time, someone who would do anything for anyone."

Many in the crowd paid the Aboriginal Elder the highest of compliments by exclaiming their surprise he had not already received the award. "Well overdue" one resident was heard whispering to another. It was a sentiment that will be echoed throughout the community.

Mr Bell was nominated for Citizen of the Year for his outstanding contribution to the creation of greater opportunities for his people in Yass and surrounding districts.

"Eric is known throughout the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and has gained the respect of everyone he meets," Mr Rowe told the crowd.

"People quickly recognise Eric's selfless, quietly spoken yet unwavering dedication to providing greater understanding of the issues and inequities surrounding Aboriginal health and meaningful employment opportunities for Aboriginal health and meaningful employment opportunities for Aboriginal people."

Mr Bell has been a member of the Ngunnawal Aboriginal Corporation since its inception some 12 years ago; as chairmanhe has steered the implementation of several government fundehealth programs to improve the health and wellbeing of elderly Aboriginal people."

Mr Bell has been a member of the individuals in the area, the program has expanded to now support over 100 residents.

Mr Bell has bread has to ensure the program is reaching out to those most in need.

"Eric personally, without thought for reward, drives many of the older people to and from hospital or doctors at any time of the day or night, whenever called upon or wherever they need to go." Mr Rowes said.

He is also a member of the

Buranya Aboriginal Corporation, formed to create sustainable and meaningful employment oppor-tunities for Aboriginal youth and has been a driving force behind council's Indigenous council's Indig Consultative Committee

Consultative Committee, and now the Yass Valley Aboriginal Advisory Committee.

A champion of the natural environment, Mr Bell has done much to improve the economic, social and environmental viability of the land adjacent to the Yass River and his efforts have been recognised by Landcare Australia on more than one occasion. on more than one occasion

He has been a regular point of contact for council staff when seeking a way forward on numer-ous local issues, according to the

general manager.
"When I contact Eric seeking "When I contact ELE SCANGE a direction on a particular issue, he usually gives me his opinion on the matter but tells me "I will get back to you with an answer"," Mr Rowe said.

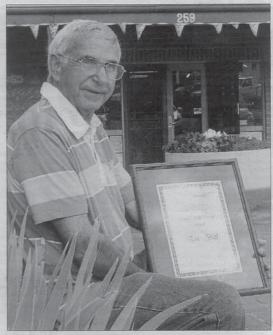
"Sometimes 'the answer' would be different to his original opinion. To me, this demonstrates Eric's strength of character and why he is so well respected in our community."

Deputy mayor Judith Williams also took the opportuni-ty to congratulate the Yass Valley's newest Citizen of the

Year.

"Eric is a quiet, unassuming person who really enjoys the respect and admiration of the wider community," Cr Williams

said.
"Under that gentleness is a steely determination and a real willingness to make life better, not only for his Aboriginal com-munity but also the broader com-



Well-known and highly respected Ngunnawal Elder, Eric Bell, with his 2011 Citizen of the Year award in Coronation Park on Australia Day.



* The 2011 Yass Valley Australia Day award recipients: Young Citizen of the Year Brett Foran, Community Service Award winner Phillip Langworthy, Senior Citizens of the Year Bruce and Nancy Hook, Lifetime Community Service Award recipient Gwen Sykes and Citizen of the Year Eric Bell.

Other award winners

Senior Citizen of the Year Award: Nancy and Bruce Hook Young Citizen of the Year Award: Brett Foran Lifetime Community Service Award: Gwen Sykes. Community Service Award: Phillip Langworthy See pages 2 and 3

© Yass Tribune 28.1.2011

Introduction

Readers will find in Eric Bell's life many of the qualities usually attributed to Australian Aboriginal People; like their attachment to family and their community, their affinity with the land and their loyalty even in challenging and adverse situations.

Eric's story records an enduring sense of personal dignity that could not be either diminished or destroyed by encounters with white bureaucracy or by the hardships of his youthful days. It is the story of a man's life, largely manufactured by himself and starting with hard beginnings, but one which made the most of opportunities offered. In telling this story he generously acknowledges the support extended to him by his partners, his children and his wider family.

Eric says that this project was embarked upon to provide a record for his family, and so it does; but beyond the family audience I believe that Eric's story will provide a tremendous inspiration for all readers. Despite being so badly treated by authorities, Eric stood by the values instilled in him by his parents and grandparents. His is the story of a true community leader, well deserving of the public acknowledgements he has received because of his generous nature.

2011 has been yet another year of achievement for our Yass fellow citizen Eric Bell. On Australia Day he received the "2011 Yass Citizen of the Year Award". The citation read, inter alia:

"Eric has also been a driving force of Council's local Indigenous Consultative Committee for many years.

Eric is known throughout the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Communities and has gained the respect of everyone he meets. People quickly recognise Eric's selfless, quietly spoken yet unwavering dedication to providing greater understanding of the issues and inequities surrounding Aboriginal health and employment opportunities.

Eric should also be recognised for his outstanding contribution to the improvement in Aboriginal Health and Aged Care. As Chairman of the Ngunnawal Aboriginal Corporation, Eric steered the implementation of several Government funded health programs to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal older people. Initially funded to provide Care programs for ten individuals the programs have expanded to support over one hundred needy recipients. Eric without any thought for reward drives many of the older people to and from the hospital, or the doctors, at any time of the day or night whenever called or wherever they need to go.

This award acknowledges Eric's selfless dedication to improving the quality of life for so many members of the Aboriginal community."

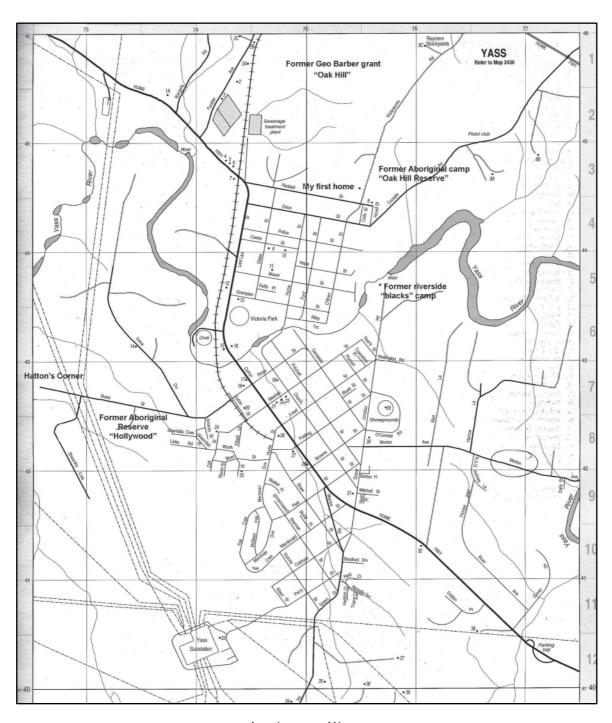
In the Queen's Birthday Honours List on 13 June 2011, when he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia, OAM, the citation read:

"For service to the indigenous community through age care, the environment and employment organisations."

Well done, Eric.

Peter Bindon

Yass, NSW 2011



A modern map of Yass © Yass Valley Council

Contents

		Page
	Foreword	5
	Introduction	7
	Thanks	11
CHAPTER 1	Aboriginality from My Perspective	13
CHAPTER 2	What I have Learnt from Academic Friends	19
CHAPTER 3	Yass Aboriginality	23
CHAPTER 4	Yass 1940	31
CHAPTER 5	The War Years	37
CHAPTER 6	Sorry	55
CHAPTER 7	Memories	61
CHAPTER 8	Early Education	67
CHAPTER 9	Led Astray	71
CHAPTER 10	Making Do	77
CHAPTER 11	THE LATE NINETEEN-FIFTIES	85
CHAPTER 12	THE NINETEEN-SIXTIES	89
CHAPTER 13	The Nineteen-Seventies	93
CHAPTER 14	Return to Yass	103



This book is dedicated to my grandmother Charlotte M Cooper, nee Carpenter (1886 -1975) R.I.P.

to my dear wife Kay, all my children, grandchildren & great grandchildren

Thanks

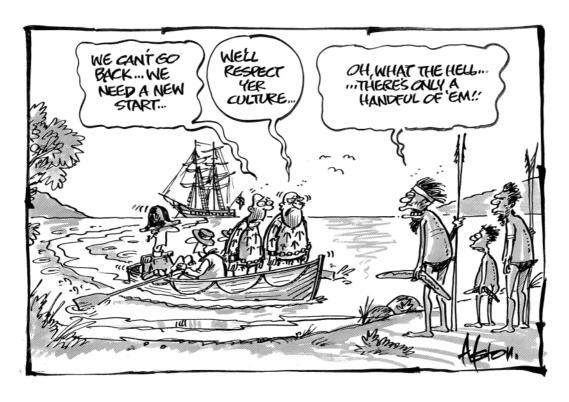
I met my friend Tony MacQuillan in the Yass main street one day in 2008 and while passing the time of day with him he told me what he was up to in his spare time – helping people write their life stories! He had recently finished helping Lorraine Legge with "Legging It Through Time", her husband Terry Legge's autobiography, which reflects the influence of the some 400 people, workers and their families, who came to Yass with the Electricity Commission in 1959 and the changes they wrought on Yass culture. Terry's book had just been published and happily this coincided with his award of the Order of Australia Medal for service to the Yass Community. Both were appropriate tributes to Terry for his outstanding community work of fifty years.

As Tony says, "I married Yass lass, Diana Merriman, in 1959", they then spent the next forty years living in Sydney before retiring to Yass in April 2000. Starting with helping Diana publish a couple of family histories relating to her Yass families, he got the bug and privately published his father's autobiography, then his own, followed by the autobiography of former "Yass Tribune" director and journalist Betty Howard, before she died in 2008. This covered the influence of her family on Yass from 1927 when Betty's father, Bert Mudge, bought the "Yass Tribune". Betty, an A-Class journalist, was a Yass icon. Now he has me from 1940!

"Several people I have met have suggested that your story should be recorded, Eric", Tony said. "I don't suppose you are a candidate for a personal bio?" I thought about it for a while, thinking it was probably a good idea for my kids and and my grand kids, at the very least. So, soon we started meeting at his place, once a week in my lunch hour, and this book is the result.

I thank Tony sincerely for his research capabilities, his editing and the publishing skills he brought to bear in recording my memoir. Thank you Tony!

> Eric Bell Yass, 2011



© Dean Alston and The West Australian (republished with kind permission)

Aboriginality from My Perspective

his book is written primarily for my children and grandchildren, but also for anyone else who may be interested in my story and my view of history.

I have had a rewarding life and much of the better parts are due to attitudes instilled in me by my parents and grandparents. Their whole ethos was "be positive, work hard and don't whinge; just get on with life and be loyal to your origins". I also have great kids and grand-kids and pay tribute here to their mothers, my wife Kay and my former partner June. We could not do without our mothers, especially when we are young, eh kids?

As you will find in a later chapter, my editor Tony MacQuillan was not born in these parts. He says he is not a ghost-writer, because he doesn't believe in ghosts! But if some of my published words don't sound quite like me, it cannot be helped – that is what editors are for, to make sense of oral history. However, I sometimes feel a bit like Terry Legge when he started with Tony who said "you have put words into my mouth, some I don't even know the meaning of, but they sound okay!"

I identify myself as Ngunnawal and remarkably, because of meticulous genealogical research by Dr Ann Jackson-Nakano, I am able to confirm positively where I fit into the Ngunnawal family tree, at least back to my great grandfather. In many cases I have names, dates and places of genealogical events, church registry entries and some birth, death and marriage certificates, mostly thanks to Ann. This is very unusual for an Australian Aborigine.

My first language is English and my lifestyle is that of a typical Australian urban person. I live in a comfortable house in Yass and I have modern conveniences of life that hard work and prudence have brought me. I read a lot and meet all kinds of people in my so-called "retirement job" as a Ngunnawal elder in Yass, a director of the Ngunnawal Aboriginal Corporation

and as a Yass community leader. Apart from keeping in close touch with my people, day to day, and doing my best for them, I am active in the wider community and enjoy the trust and friendship of many people. Ngunnawal by the way was the language spoken by my Aboriginal forebears, who in broad terms identified with the territory between Canberra and Boorawa, including the Yass Plains. Ngunnawal people who occupied the northern part of this territory belonged to a band named Wallabalooa, from whom I am descended. Anne Jackson-Nakano has written extensively of the Wallabalooa in her "Aboriginal History Monograph No. 9 The Pajong and Wallabalooa – A History of Aboriginal Farming Families at Blakney and Pudman Creeks". At page 119 "1840s-1850s", she describes the interdependence of the Wallabalooa band and the early settlers particularly the Humes, Broughtons and Kennedy families, but also the Corcoran, Ryan, Hassall and Howell families. I commend her book to my family and other readers.

In the course of my life and speaking with others, I find I learn something new every day. I try to be open to others, a trait I inherited from my grandfather, Alec, and it amazes me, how positive the responses can be. Some of the best have been from academics, particularly historians and archaeologists whom I have met, contacts that have proved invaluable to me, since through their academic disciplines they can tell me about the history and even the lifestyle of my forebears, both black and white; since I have both in my tree. This is obviously important to me, because although my grandfather may well have been an initiated Aboriginal man, he was unable to pass on much Aboriginal lore to me. My father, rarely if ever, spoke Ngunnawal with me and although my mother often spoke in her Yuin tongue, I did not pay much attention and regrettably I remember only a few Yuin words today. I know

some Ngunnawal, but I am not fluent. This is a great pity as I would like to better inform my children and their children what Wallabalooa Aboriginality is about, how to speak our native language, respect the memory of our forebears and be comfortable about who we are as individuals. This is a privilege any father, or grandfather, aspires to and I am no exception.

I am amazed at the generosity and helpfulness of some of my erstwhile academic friends; for example two have given me free access to the digitised text of two of their books and said "don't worry about copyright, just help yourself!" But of course I shall provide the usual attributions. I am also amazed at the anecdotes about my grandfather Alec that are remembered and recounted by all sorts of Yass people who encountered him during his lifetime. Samples of these will follow later.

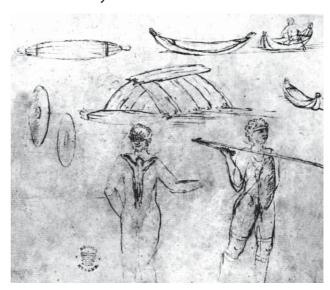
So before I get into my personal story, I want to cover a bit of Aboriginal background to provide some context for my story. This is proffered in good faith because I am not an initiated Aboriginal man, I am not an archaeologist and I am not a historian. However, in response to the aforementioned offers, I shall use some of my academic friends' material to throw light on Aboriginal history, especially about the parts around Yass later.

What did white people from across the seas think of us initially and what can their thoughts tell me about my ancestors at the time?

Apart from referring to us as Indians and remarking that we were black, naked, able to light fires and that our protection from the elements was confined to simple structures, more wind breaks than shelters, their comparative remarks judged against their own supposedly civilised standards were not very complimentary. However, three commentators at least, are worth reading because of their influence on English attitudes to our continent. They are William Dampier, an English buccaneer who initially visited the north coast of Western Australia in 1688, Sir Joseph Banks, botanist, scientist and later Fellow of the Royal Society and James Mario Matra, a midshipman, both of whom visited Eastern Australia with Lt James Cook RN in 1770. All three were keen observers and committed their thoughts to writing, as it were - on location. These are important to us of

course, because although my Aboriginal forebears had a rich oral tradition, much of it has been lost, not to say has died out.

I have distilled from these three early visitors' accounts that aborigines were often courageous in their, albeit futile, efforts to discourage the interlopers from landing and also that their weaponry at the time surprisingly was much the same on both sides of the continent e.g. "lances and wooden swords/sabres1" (perhaps the entire continent shared this technology). Matra2 gives a typically succinct word picture of the first encounter in what is today Botany Bay, which interests me because my mother came from coastal territory on the south coast:



From Sydney Parkinson's sketch book April 1770

© British Museum

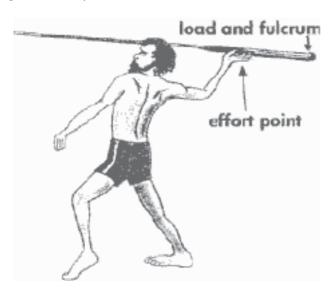
"Their huts...consisted of nothing more than a piece of bark of trees loosely spread over a few cross spars, about four feet above the ground. The inhabitants were intirely [sic] naked and black, but they differed from the negroes of Africa in having long straight hair instead of wool on their heads.

^{1.} Some later speculated that the latter were boomerangs.

^{2.} Matra was actually an American loyalist whose inheritance was destroyed by the American Civil War. He was a protégé of Banks and indeed corresponded usefully with Banks for the rest of his life, most tellingly when he was British Consul in Morocco. He was a vocal proponent of colonisation of Australia, partly as a haven for dispossessed fellow American loyalists. (Quoted from "The Precarious Life of James Mario Matra – Voyager with Cook – American Loyalist – Servant of Empire" by Alan Frost 1995, Miegunyah Press, Melbourne University). Matra is believed to be the author of the first published account of Cook's first voyage, albeit illegally.

On their breasts we observed rude [rough] figures of men, darts, &c, done with a kind of white paint; which was also daubed irregularly on other parts of their bodies. Their arms or weapons, [some of] which afterward fell into our possession, were spears made of a kind of light wood, and acutely pointed with bones barbed on different sides, to render their wounds more deleterious: in these spears we sometimes discovered junctures, united by a kind of resinous cement. They had other kinds of spears for striking fish, which were forked at the points.

Their shields were oval, about three feet in length, and one in breadth, being concave within, and provided with handles. In some of them we observed small holes or apertures, designed to afford a prospect of the movements of their enemies when the shield is employed for quarding the head. They likewise have a kind of swords, made from a very solid compact hard species of wood. In retiring to the woods they left behind two or three canoes of a very simple structure, being made from the bark enclosing one side or half of the trunk of a tree, which they had tied together at each end by a kind of flexible withy twig, and spread or separated in the middle by pieces of wood placed across from side to side: these canoes being about ten feet in length, and their paddles two feet long, and at the blades three inches broad: one of them being held in each hand, they pull themselves forward with great celerity...



© Department of Education, Training and Workplace Relations (Australian Government)

The natives apparently subsist chiefly on fish, of which there is a great plenty, especially of the sting ray-fish, weighing between two and three hundred pounds; and as they commonly swim in shallow water, they are easily taken: of these and other kinds we caught great quantities."

Sir Joseph Banks wrote of the same encounter:

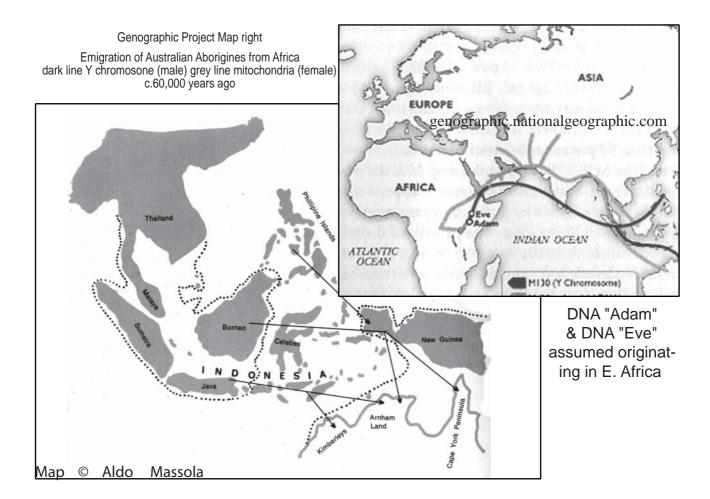
"After dinner the boats were mann'd and we set out from the ship intending to land at the place where we saw these people, hoping that they regarded the ships coming into the bay so little they would as little regard our landing. We were in this however mistaken, for as soon as we approached the rocks two of the men came down upon them, each armed with a lance of about 10 feet long and a short stick which he seemed to handle as if it was a machine to throw the lance³."

An intriguing aspect of early contacts was the observation that when pre-occupied with fishing, or food collection for example, our native people having perhaps concluded that the strange visitors were either far enough away as not to be an immediate threat, or they were simply images best ignored, or even not believed; they often nonchalantly got on with the task in hand and ignored the interlopers!

We are all familiar from our school days about Captain Arthur Philip and his First Fleet ships loaded with convicts, who eventually landed at Farm Cove on 26 January 1888 and started the process of colonisation of what we now call Australia. His arrival spelt doom for the traditional life style of Aboriginal people, who had occupied much of the continent since antiquity. Just how long is debated, but human skeletons found at Lake Mungo⁴ have been scientifically dated to between 45,000 and 50,000 years ago, making them the earliest modern humans found outside of Africa and predating the evidence in Asia by roughly 10,000 years. The Human Genome Project may refine these dates from on-going DNA testing, but already this confirms suppositions that we are part of the Out-Of-Africa migration of

^{3.} Concise description of a woomera spear thrower.

^{4.} Located in far south-western NSW to the NW of Hay.



some 50,000 to 60,000 years ago. In his book on the subject⁵ Spencer Wells states "Humans migrating from Africa may have passed through India en route to populate the rest of southern Asia and Australia. [Land masses were much larger 50,000 years ago due to water locked up in the ice caps – see maps above]. The western coast of India would have been as much as 200 kilometers west of where it is today. Overall the coast would have been very different. It is likely that this is the reason that there is no [archaeological] trace of modern humans along the early route to Australia. Their camps are underwater today, subsumed by the rising sea levels of the past 10,000 years".

It is of course ironic that many Aborigines today know more about the Eur-Australian history and beliefs than they do about their own. How did our people view these strange people from the other side of the world, when they arrived on our shores and inexorably displaced us in our land? We know apocryphally that Aborigines thought the white people were relatives returned from the dead! Although later harassed by the whites, initially they did not

worry too much - believing that the interlopers would soon return from whence they came⁶. Initially some white men were treated hospitably, lead to new pastures and water, helped to strip bark to build their huts and to cut timber to make yards for their stock. At times Aborigines also offered their women in a spirit of "inviting trade". And, wrote Aldo Massola⁷, "therefore according to Aboriginal law the goods the white man brought with him should be shared in exchange. They soon found that his property was not to be touched and that [Aboriginals] were expected to be grateful for handouts of flour, sugar and worn-out articles of clothing".

The maps on this page depict assumed Australian migration routes. Dotted lines, below, denote land contours in the last ice age when the sea level was 180m lower.

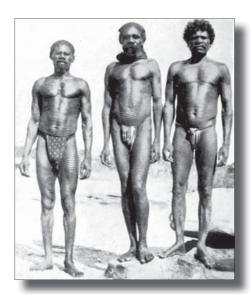
6. Aldo Massola (1910 – 1975) p 148 "The Aborigines of South East Australia - As They Were", a book written as a basic reference for use in schools.

7. Curator of Anthropology at the National Museum of Victoria and an Inaugural Panel Member of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Fellow of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland and Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society.

^{5.} Deep Ancestry - Inside The Genographic Project (The Landmark DNA Quest to Decipher Our Distant Past) 2006, published by The NGS, Washington DC.

Publisher's note: Aboriginal Initiation and Bungaree (d.1830):

The first Aboriginal circumnavigator and an explorer with Flinders & King



Three west Kimberleys warriors showing keloid scarring Image © Ion Idriess 1952 (courtesy of the publishers ETT Imprint, Sydney)



Published with permission of National Library of Australia nla.pic-an8953976-v

rom Aldo Massola's book we know that specific forms of initiation were not universal, but they usually constituted a form of ordeal to signify transition from boyhood to responsible adulthood. He also mentions preliminaries like having the initiates walk over hot coals! Some groups extracted a single front tooth, some two, while some did so from the upper teeth and some from the lower teeth, while for others no teeth were removed at all, but perhaps the young male initiates underwent a depilation ceremony where all of their hair was plucked including facial, genital and underarm hair, but not head hair. Later ceremonies included cutting with a sharp stone or shell leaving keloid scars on parts of the body denoting progress through the ranks, so to speak. By the way, initiation did not always include circumcision. We know from Ronald M Berndt and Catherine H Berndt of the University of Western Australia¹ "although it is one of the most important rites, a few 'tribes' did not practice it even when surrounded by circumcising tribes".

Lt. Phillip Parker King RN, who continued

1. "The World of the First Australians" Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra 1996. Professor Berndt was Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at UWA and both he and his wife were Honorary Research Fellows in Anthropology there. the survey of the Australian coast begun by Lt Matthew Flinders RN, wrote in his 1818 journal that Bungaree², a Port Jackson Aboriginal, although initiated and bore cicatrices on his chest was un-circumcised and had all his teeth.³

^{2.} Bungaree, from Broken Bay, was for many years the best known Aboriginal person in Georgian Sydney. As soon as any ship dropped anchor in Port Jackson, Bungaree arrived in his fishing boat rowed by his two wives. Dressed like Napoleon in rags, in a cast off military dress jacket with shiny brass buttons, tattered trousers and bare feet, he climbed on board to welcome newcomers to 'his' country. His trade mark was a stiff black bicorn hat decorated with gold ribbons and feather plume. Doffing his hat, bowing deeply and grinning widely he would ask to drink to the captain's health in rum or brandy. Afterwards he inspected the ships pantry and levied his 'tribute' in the form of 'presents' or 'loans'. On his chest hung his treasured brass gorget shaped like a crescent which had been presented to him by Governor Lachlan Macquarie, it was inscribed 'Boongaree, Chief of the Broken Bay Tribe, 1815'.

^{3.} In an encounter with Aboriginals in islands north of North West Cape, who were uncircumcised, Bungaree was unable to communicate orally with them because of the language difference, but they were fascinated with his chest markings which were similar to theirs. (Bungaree circumnavigated with Flinders and joined King on his first expedition to North West Cape and Arnhem's Land).

My family- Descendants of James BELL

1 James BELL 1856 - 1888
. +Frances (Fanny) LANE 1860 - 1923
2 Alexander James (Alex) BELL 1881 - 1954
+Stella FREEMAN 1902 - 1928
*2nd Wife of John James Ferdinand (Ferdie) BELL:
+lvy Lillian BROWN 1909 -
4 Rex John BELL 1945 - 1946
+Wallace Peter John BULGER
4 Linda BELL
+? Baker
4 Loretta BELL
4 Laurel BELL
4 Letty BELL
4 Lillian BELL
4 Laura BELL
4 Lynette BELL
4 Lola BELL - 1943
+Louise (Lucy) COOPER 1911 - 1981
4 Walter James BELL 1940 - 1945
4 Eric Bernard BELL 1940 -
+June Maree FREEMAN 1940 - 2010
5 Daphne BELL 1958 -
5 Carol Anne BELL 1959 -
5 Eric John BELL 1961 -
5 Denise BELL 1962 -
5 Judy BELL 1964 -
5 Erica BELL 1966 -
*2nd Wife of Eric Bernard BELL:
+Kay WEEKS 1947 -
5 Vicki Leanne Weeks 1969 -
5 Colin BELL 1970 -
5 Darren BELL 1974 -
+Paul RITERS
*2nd Husband of Bertha BELL:
+Russell THORPE
+ Dapine BELE
+Christine Mary BROWN 1904 -
3 Jean Melinda BELL 1916 -
+Oswald (Ossie) Wilfrid BROWN 1895 -
4 Dorothy Stella BROWN
+Bruce Alfred MERRITT
5 Denise Ann MERRITT
4 Ellis Robert BROWN
+Margaret Grace BULGER
+lda GRAY 1907 -
+Alice Margaret STEWART
2 William BELL 1882 -
2 Joseph Ferdinand BELL 1886 -
2 Walter Edward BELL 1887 - 1895

Note: This tree is a work in progress (insofar as some data is concerned) but I shall be grateful for any input from family members and others, so that my children and grandchildren may have copies of the computer file for their own updating in future.

What I have Learnt from Academic Friends

Aboriginals came to Australia in a number of waves, some well before the end of the previous ice age, twenty thousand years ago, when the sea levels were 600 feet (182m) lower than at present, see earlier pages. Apparently we were still joined to New Guinea and the sea passages between us, Indonesia, Borneo and the Philippines were navigable even on primitive canoes and rafts. What drove people here was perhaps typically human: beset by more powerful tribes, famine due to changes in the climate and perhaps the availability, or lack of, food or water.

Academics take this all seriously, as they should do, and those I have met and befriended, work with balance and goodwill. I have worked with a few professional anthropologists and a few historians in recent times, I have even gone on interesting field trips with them, which have opened my eyes, but I am no expert on history or Aboriginality. But, if one does not learn from new experiences, one may just as well be dead! Working with academic researchers on Ngunnawal genealogy has led me to one or two conclusions about the Ngunnawal, our recent history and our inter-relationships with white people. Basically I am comfortable with these academic theses.

In recent times I have befriended and spent a lot of time with an English born writer, journalist and historian, Ann Jackson-Nakano. Ann worked as a journalist and foreign correspondent in Japan for eleven years until she arrived in Australia in December 1984. She moved to Canberra in 1986 and became interested in the Lake George area and its indigenous people. Between researching and writing, she has advanced her education with amazing dedication and passion. In 1994 she was awarded first class honours for her Master of Literature thesis by the Australian National University for "The death and resurrection"

of the Ngunnalwal: a living history". Since then she has been awarded a Ph.D from Wollongong University. Ann has a number of academic publications to her credit. She has also been an Honorary Harold White Fellow with the National Library of Australia and a Native Title Researcher in the Native Title Unit of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

I pay tribute to Ann here because without her work we Ngunnawals, let alone Bells, would all know much less about our mob, not to mention the genealogy of our wider family. Typically, as a ground breaking researcher and author of Aboriginal subjects, she has suffered the slings and arrows of ignorance from some quarters, which are undeserved. For my part and that of my immediate family however, I thank Ann Jackson-Nakano for her amazingly detailed work, often performed for no personal benefit and at considerable personal financial cost.

On 3 June 1992, after a decade of litigation, the High Court ruled that the land title of the Indigenous Peoples, the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, is recognised at Common Law. This ruling was of course due to the application to the High Court by Eddie Mabo who asked the court to rule that he and his fellow Murray Islanders held native title to land in the Torres Strait. This was a complicated process, whose entirety I do not begin to understand, but one of the effects was that many land title applications soon appeared before the courts for determination. Courts need evidence and where our Ngunnawal people were concerned a claim was made in the ACT jurisdiction by the Ngunnawal and District Indigenous People's Corporation. In 1998, I participated with many others in that hearing, supplying information and as a witness, and I got to know some impressively expert witnesses from the world of academia.

Amongst these were Nicolas Peterson, Professor of Anthropology in the ANU School of Archeology and Anthropology, who with his colleague, Felicita Carr, used genealogical records compiled by Ann Jackson-Nakano to form part of our submission. An Appendix to the documentation was a large tome entitled "Ngun(n)awal Genealogical and Social Mapping Research Project. Volume 2", a copy of which I have. This is an amazing document which sets out the relationships of Ngunnawal people over several generations, indeed it is a Ngunnawal family tree. My editor and his wife are family historians and genealogists of many years standing and have worked up detailed genealogies of their respective forebears with much labour and expense. Both attest to the enormous work evident in the Ngunnawal documentation, particularly the genealogy. When this information is taken together with Ann's "Weereewaa History Series Volume 2 - The Pajong and Wallabalooa, A History of

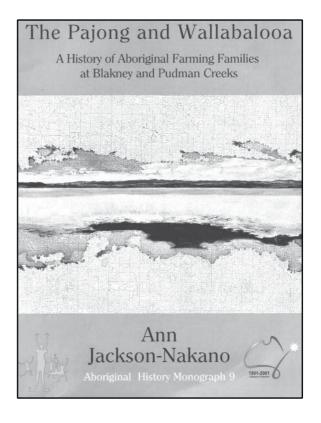
Aboriginal Farming Families at Blakney and Pudman Creeks", both Tony and Diana have said to me "Eric, you are really lucky on the genealogy front; Ann has done most of the work for you!" What they admire is my ability now to trace my Bell forebears back in considerable detail: names, births, marriages and deaths, this is virtually unique for Aboriginal families.

Although there is little information so far about my European ancestor, James Bell, we are working on it. Apart from spending hours in libraries, museums, historical societies, church registries and the NSW Government Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Ann has travelled extensively to Ngunnawal sites and interviewed countless people.

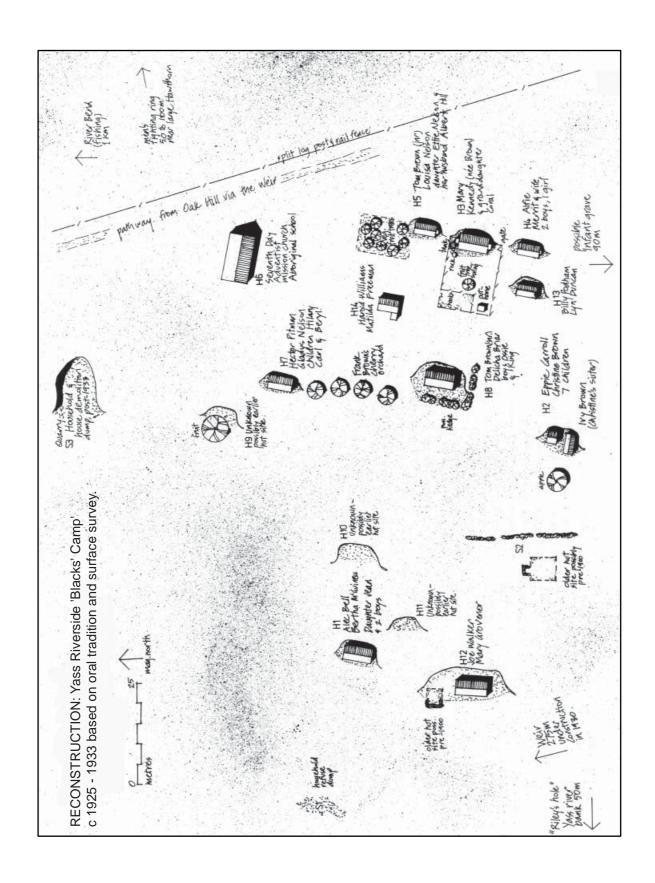
All I can say is "Thank you, Ann, I hope you are rewarded by my people's deep appreciation of what you have achieved for us".



Dr Ann Jackson-Nakano







© Kabaila, P. 'Survival Legacies - Stories from Aboriginal settlements of southeastern Australia' with kind permission. (See arrow marked 1 on previous page)

Yass Aboriginality

(A Summary of the White & Cane Report 1986)

In 1986 The Public Works Department of New South Wales was planning to augment the Yass water supply. The work to be on the Yass Shire Council's preferred site. A study by Anutetch Pty Ltd, the commercial arm of the Australian National University, was carried out by Ian White and Scott Cane, who consulted widely with local Aboriginal people, The Yass Shire Council and the Yass public before lodging their report with National Parks and Wildlife Service in Queanbeyan.

I have had access to a copy of the final report, held in the Yass & District Historical Society Inc's archives, courtesy of the archivists and have found it illuminating. On reading the report, I discovered that it is a mine of historical and archaeological information relating directly to Yass. It has expanded my knowledge of events following the settlement of the area, initially by squatter graziers from the eighteen-twenties and like Peter Kabaila's account in the Appendix to my book is thoroughly professional, even handed and readable. I do not intend to address the main subject of the study i.e. "water works augmentation" but I do wish to refer to and quote some of the historical material, because it constitutes an excellent summary of the historical events in which my family were involved: my grandparents, parents, siblings and me.

At 3.1 (p 22) the authors writing about "History of Yass Aboriginals" remark:

"This history will be considered from the point of view of movements of Aboriginal populations in the face of European settlement patterns, economic aspirations and European attempts to disperse the Aboriginal population. In the course of this history a marked change in Aboriginal society is apparent from an autonomous and traditionally oriented pattern of subsistence to an economic dependence on, and enforced settlement by, the white community. Three phases can be delineated:

Phase 1 – Following Traditional Movement Patterns 1820's to 1860's

Phase II – Gradual Accommodation with Europeans 1865 to 1885

Phase III – Enforced Movements and Eventual Dispersal 1885 to 1955"

The authors go on to remark that only occasional glimpses of Aboriginal society and their responses to European settlements emerge in historical literature, but those that are available "reveal a resistance against European settlement".

An often quoted example of local resistance relates to the commencement of work on St Augustine's Church when "1400 warriors of the Wollabalooa tribe [sic] contested the site, as the tribe's camping ground". Actually, Bishop Polding had applied to the Government for a grant of land in 1837 and by 31 March 1838 a site in Meehan Street had been fixed upon and surveyed, according to Rev Brian Maher⁸ and a foundation stone was blessed⁹ by the Bishop on 27 August 1838. However, "building was hampered by the drought¹⁰ which lasted from [18]37 to [18]43 " and Fr Lovatt who is cited, perhaps apocryphally, as the priest who negotiated a peaceful settlement in 1838 with Jacky King, did not arrive in Yass until 1841. Nevertheless, George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector of Aborigines in Victoria, who toured through the Yass area in 1844 and stayed with Hamilton Hume, commented "The Yass and Bathurst Blacks in the early

^{8. &#}x27;Memories of Yass Mission' St Augustine's Parish, Yass NSW – Sesquicentenary 1838-1988.

^{9.} Fr Brian Maher op cit observes "a foundation stone ceremony in Catholic circles of the time more often was a declaration of intent, an opportunity for fund raising and an announcement of the chosen site".

^{10.} Fr Frank Mecham biography of John O'Brien aka Patrick Hartigan suggesting that donations were affected.

settling of the Colony were said to have been troublesome, and that in consequence Commandoes had gone out against them", White and Cane repeat this. They also mention "one of these encounters involved the colonial government sending a detachment of soldiers in 1826 to disperse a large and hostile gathering of Ngunnawal Aborigines at Lake George". My friend, Dr Ann Jackson-Nakano, who has made a close study of the Lake George communities gives a detailed background to this hostility. "Communities banded together in large numbers to avenge the taking of their women by European stockmen at Lake George and Lake Bathurst. It incensed these groups enough when their Indigenous neighbours stole wives, as Govett and others described it, but they would not tolerate their women being taken by Europeans." (p 25; Weereewa History Series Volume 1).

Another glimpse is provided by G A Robinson in 1844 while staying with Hamilton Hume:

"Arrived on the 15th [October] on the Yass River where a large and unusual number of Natives had assembled, fourteen half Castes of different Sexes were among them, some were married and had children, the Yass Natives are in general a fine race, intelligent, Athletic and well proportioned, I remained three days with these People; three hundred natives at least were present ..."

White and Cane note that by the 1860's the breakdown of tribal and religious structure was almost complete in the face of increasing economic dependence on European society:

"The passing of the Robertson Land Acts (NSW) in 1861 made free selection of Crown land possible for anyone. The Crown Lands Alienation Act 1861 (NSW) dealt with the sale of land and the Crown Lands Occupation Act 1861 (NSW) dealt with leasing. The Occupation Act permitted any person to select up to 320 acres [130ha] of land and purchase the freehold (with the exception of urban land). Prior to this, powerful squatters had managed to acquire vast amounts of the colony's prime land through initially illicit occupation. The Occupation Act opened up these squatter

held lands for selection by anyone in the colony." (Source NSW Government website)

Historians have noted that relationships were reasonable between white and black on the large spreads mentioned in the foregoing Lands' Department article, because of sheer interdependence. Transportation of convicts to New South Wales was suspended by 1840 and assignment of convicts to private settlers ceased in 1841. The large pastoralists needed labour and in general terms they had the room to accept the presence on their lands of Aboriginal people, who continued to come and go with relative freedom until the 1860's. Examples of relative harmony are to be seen in accounts about the Humes, Broughtons and others, and indeed family historian Stuart Hume¹¹, Ann Jackson-Nakano and others are able to trace descent from some of these squatters to both white and black people of the current generation. Furthermore, many of the current European surnames among Aboriginal people stem from this era; from largely what genealogists refer to as non-paternal events, but there were inter-racial marriages too.

Even Robinson avers that Hume and Sturt, amongst others, had kind if not benign attitudes to the indigenous people with whom they were in contact, but by the middle 1860's White and Cane's next "phase" was nigh:

Phase II – Gradual Accommodation with Europeans (1865 to 1885)

Closer settlement brought white people who could not assimilate Aboriginal culture and who did not want Aborigines around, especially near white settlements. A group of parents of children attending the Yass Public School in 1881 were instrumental in having fifteen Aboriginal students excluded from the school.

The whites, say White and Cane, did not extend Aboriginality to anyone but "Full bloods", who by 1883 the whites believed were nearly all gone. The Aboriginal population of Yass was, they say, recorded as 12 'Full bloods' and 84 'Half-castes' (Aboriginal Protection Board Report 1883). As their presence in Yass 11. Co-lateral descendant of Hamilton Hume, the explorer - 'Beyond the Borders' 1991 © Jennifer Hume Macdougall and Prudence Grieve.

town dwindled, so did the fears of the Yass townspeople abate and Yass newspaper scribes took to writing patronising memorials of some of the more colourful Aboriginal characters (descriptions that today make us feel embarrassed). However, Tony reminds me this was a time for so-called purple journalistic prose and unreined sentimentality. White and Cane quote from the "Town and Country Journal" of 2 January 1886:

"the Yass tribe of Aboriginals is now extinct. The last of the tribe, Jacky Leather died on one of the camps of the half-castes near Douro¹² paddocks last week."

The next "phase" described by White and Cane was:

Phase III – Enforced Movements and Eventual Dispersal (1885 to 1955)

This is the phase that affected people I knew in my family (in the flesh so to speak), in other words apart from me: my grandparents, parents and siblings. I remarked earlier that my parents and grandparents instilled in me qualities that have equipped me to think for myself and survive ("be positive, work hard and don't whinge; just get on with life and be loyal to your origins"). As I have said before, I am open to the views of others and I am a good listener. Generally I keep my mouth shut and I do not to judge others by their outspoken opinions, sometimes uttered rashly in the heat of a moment; on the basis that life is all about perception and rarely do two people share an identical view of the same event. Your perception of a shared event and mine may well be entirely different. I respect that, but I reserve my right to have a different opinion to that held by you.

Since intellectual discrimination and memory kicked in for me, probably when I was about six and a student at Hollywood "mission" school in Rossi Street, Yass, I have had a steep learning curve. How I approached finding some answers is a typical human journey.

Some of my solutions to life's challenges appear in later pages and you will soon realise that I have developed a philosophical bent, but I am getting ahead of myself. What happened between 1885 and 1955? Back to White and

12. Belonging to settler, local magistrate and one time MP for Yass Plains - Henry O'Brien.

Cane (3.4 p 31):

"By the late 1880's Yass had become more prosperous and established (see Bayley 1973)¹³ and members of the white community began to demand that the government should move to control the Aboriginal population around the town. The Aboriginal Protection Board (APB), had been established in 1883 and was initially non coercive. Thus the Aboriginal farming communities in the Rye Park and Blakney Creek areas [near Yass] remained secure (by 1889 there were five farming reserves with Aboriginal families living in each). Inevitably the attitude of benevolence hardened under pressure from the townspeople."

Thomas Colls¹⁴ MLA [Yass publican, councillor, church leader & pioneer Yass Freemason], the member for Yass Plains [1886-1894], addressed Parliament in June 1888 and stated that when he arrived in Yass 42 years previously (1846) there were 600 blacks and now there were only 50 or 60. He observed that these were "bandied from one paddock to another".

Colls had approached "the Minister" and an area of "6½ acres" had been set aside "opposite the P & A¹⁵ Association grounds" in North Yass near the top of the hill near the present waterworks. Thirteen houses had been built by the Aborigines by 1888. These were constructed by the Aborigines of timber and corrugated iron supplied by the APB. James Ebenezer Tonkin MLA [a fellow pub owner from Bathurst] speaking in support of Colls described it as a "little town of their own".

"Included amongst those living there", according to Yass Courier of 27 April 1888, "were Mrs Lexta Bell, Sarah Brown, Ned and Lucy Carroll, and Mrs Mary Ann Cooper. Again we see

^{13. &}quot;Yass Municipal Centenary History", W A Bayley Fellow of the Royal Australian Historical Society was a school master and author of numerous books on local history in Australia.

^{14.} Commissioned as a Justice of the Peace. Committee member and Trustee, Yass Hospital. Founding member, Mechanics' Institute and Agricultural and Horticultural Society. President and Trustee, Pastoral and Agricultural Association. Warden, St Clement's Church of England where he was responsible for many improvements. Member of the Aborigines' Protection Board, (appointed 11 November 1891).

^{15.} Pastoral & Agricultural.

direct descendants of these families, Bells, Browns and Carrolls, still living in Yass today and further descendants in other nearby country centres with family ties in Yass".

The NSW Aborigines Protection Board was established in 1883, but was not afforded legal powers until 1909, when the Aborigines Protection Act was passed. This gave the Board wide ranging control over the lives of Aboriginal people, including the power to remove children from families. As I will relate later this included members of my family, indeed my two sisters who were taken in Yass.

The Aborigines Protection Board was renamed the Aborigines Welfare Board in 1940 with the Aborigines Protection (Amendment) Act 1940. A clear intention of the Act and the Board was the forced assimilation of Aboriginal people, most notably through the separation of children from their families¹⁶. Peter Kabaila has written extensively about the Board's activities in Vol 1 of his "Wiradjuri Places" a book which I commend to my readers. He provides an objective view through his archaeological field work, his interviews with former residents and his exacting research. Peter's illustrations and

16. From New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs website 2001.

maps give insights into the lives of people living in various New South Wales establishments organised and run by the Board.

In the "Yass Waterworks Report", White and Cane have provided a useful timeline, 1888 to 1963 which provides the historical context against which my story and the writings of others may be compared. Again I have taken the liberty of copying their work. See timelines overleaf covering the NSW Aboriginal Protection Board's influence on the dispersal of my people.

Those of us who watched the SBS serial "The First Australians" on television will recall the controversy surrounding the publication of the General Certificate of Exemption awarded to "Joseph Edwards" in 1952. Firstly, there was the matter of exposing a photographic image of a deceased person to the light of day, which is an important matter for many Aboriginal people. Secondly, there was the matter of the invasion of the privacy of the Edwards family. I do not discount these factors, but it later turned out that the image and details were entirely fictional.

As a matter of fact, "Joseph" was not alone in being patronised in such a cruel manner,

L-DAY Passed Without Incident

POLICE AND HOTEL-KEEPERS PRAISE ABORIGINES' CONDUCT IN BARS

L-DAY—Saturday, March 30, 1963—the day liquor became available legally to all aborigines in New South Wales, passed off with hardly a single incident throughout the State.

Aborigines and white people mixed freely in bars and the quiet introduction of the new scheme went as smoothly as predicted by the Aborigines Welfare Board.

The fruits of a campaign to prepare Aborigines for equal drinking rights—launched by the Welfare Board as soon as the Aborigines Protection (Amendment) Bill was introduced into State Parliament in February—were evident on all sides.

The Board Chairman, Mr. A. G. Kingsmill, said welfare officers, station managers and reserve supervisors counselled individually most of the State's eligible Aborigines.

The field staff had informed Aborigines of their rights under the new law and warned them that if they were refused service in hotels they should not cause trouble but report the matter to officers of the Board or to Police.

It had been pointed out that the Liquor Act did not compel a publican to serve any person, even if the person was orderly.

DAWN, May, 1963

This interesting article in Dawn Magazine of May 1963 showed a photograph of a cousin of mine, neatly dressed, fronting a pub bar with a glass of beer in his hand. Other drinkers appeared to be oblivious of the seminal event. The photo caption read "Novelty Now - But Not For Long." EBB.

because most Aboriginal people suffered assaults on their dignity as a matter of routine and still do. When I saw this photograph, I was reminded how a well meaning Yass policeman, John Perrin, took me aside in the Royal Hotel, Yass and advised me that as an Aboriginal I was breaking the law by being on licensed premises. John knew me from work we both did with the local boys' club. He said I was entitled to apply for an exemption certificate which, if granted, would save me a lot of trouble in future. The pass would correct my incidental infringement of the law, by permitting a publican to serve me in his hotel. It would also improve my standing with the local police should they wish to know what I was doing on licensed premises.

I duly followed his suggestion, found two referees and in due course received my license. In the meantime however, after a small lapse of time one of my police acquaintances in the street one day informed me"You're okay to drink in any pub now, Eric. There is a copy of the notice from the Government Gazette now in the Police Station, so you won't have any problems with the police any longer".

Readers should be aware that at this time Aboriginals virtually had no rights, although surpringly in some States we could enrol to vote, however we could not be served in an hotel nor in some shops, and in cinemas for example we were segregated. Bureaucracy and its servants, as well as the so-called manin-the-street, often had their little ways of often diminishing our dignity. I had to learn the hard way, to be ultra-careful of my conduct in public. So I thanked my policeman informant and waited for my license to arrive. It eventually did, a neat little cardboard folder, a bit bigger than a credit card, which had my name and a photograph of me under the official title of the document.

Looking back, I am proud of my caution. It paid off, because I discreetly informed the Royal Hotel publican of my changed status. Being of American background, he was empathetic and told me all of his staff would be informed, in this manner I avoided any further embarrassment, being asked for proof of license before being served by bar staff. That was the only time I ever showed the document

to anyone, such was my feeling of shame, but by the way I gave the Royal Hotel my exclusive patronage thenceforth, modest as it was, until this restriction was removed later for any Aboriginal.

Most of my white friends are as offended today by the terms of "Joseph's" certificate and my license-to-drink, as I am, but we cannot turn the clock back and rectify what for most people is now a matter of regret. We can only move on and determine to mould our democracy in such a way that community policy in future mitigates against oppressing minorities.

Finally, through tough democratic action a referendum was passed by 97% of enrolled voters:

"In 1967, after ten years of campaigning, a referendum was held to change the Australian Constitution. Two negative references to Aboriginal Australians were removed, giving the Commonwealth the power to legislate for them as a group. This change was seen by many as a recognition of Aboriginal people as full Australian citizens.

The referendum campaign effectively focused public attention on the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians were second class citizens with all sorts of limitations - legislative and social - on their lives. This decade-long campaign to change the Constitution came to symbolise the broader struggle for justice being fought during these years. Activists presented the case for a Commonwealth government which would be prepared to take responsibility for Indigenous citizens wherever they lived, for the first time."

(from National Museum of Australia website.)

New South Wales Aboriginal Protection Board (APB) actions p1.

Forced movement of Yass Aboriginal Population and Eventual Dispersal 1888-1963 (Table after White & Cane 1986)

	1888	29½ acres gazetted for reserve in North Yass. "A little township of their own".
	1889	Reduced to 2½ acres.
N O R T H	1890	Further reserve gazetted of 2½ acres, opposite above. Population 78.
	1899	Townspeople pressure APB to remove Aboriginal population from Yass.
	1900	Local representative of APB recommends removal of the Aboriginal Camp popula tion to Pudman Creek.
	1901	APB finds need to offer "special inducements" to Aborigines to remove them to Pudman.
S	1903	Intention announced to "break up" North Yass Camp when Aborigines removed.
	1905	New site for Aborigines next to proposed school at Bango Creek refused.
	1909	"Edgerton" [Yass River Road 20 kms from Yass] selected by APB.

	1910	Some Aborigines removed to Edgerton. Aborigines petition APB to be allowed to remain at North Yass, refused. North Yass reserve revoked.
E D	1912	Ned and Lucy Carroll forced into "Edgerton". Ned dies there.
G E	1914/15	Aborigines "walk off" Edgerton. Men get work on Yass Junction railway reduplication. Camp there with their families.
R T	1916	Only nine people left on "Edgerton".
O N	1917	North Yass "unofficial camps" at Oakhill and Yass River.
	1919	"Edgerton" reserve revoked.

New South Wales Aboriginal Protection Board (APB) actions p2.

Forced movement of Yass Aboriginal Population and Eventual Dispersal 1888-1963 (Table after White & Cane 1986)

NORTH YASS)	1925 1926	Yass Waterworks announced; pressure to remove Aborigines from the hill and riv erside. APB requested by the townspeople to find a new reserve, preferably out side the municipality.
		1920	"Old sanitary depot site" suggested.
		1927	APB announces it will try to persuade Aborigines to go to Brungle near Tumut.
	7	1928	Council deputation to Sydney—that Aborigines be moved out of the municipality.
	A	1929	New reserve (Hollywood) announced - out of sight of the town, behind the cemetery
	S	1933	Aborigines resisting moving to new reserve, protest at "being hunted and shifted from place to place.
		1934	North Yass residents moved to Hollywood.
HOLLYWOOD	•	1937	Police Inspector reports to APB that "Hollywood" unsuitable for proper control of the population.
	T	1938	Some residents leave Yass altogether, some move back to North Yass. Alternative reserves sought. "Sunnyside" investigated as possibility.
	V	1945	Oak Hill Estate site investigated as possibility.
		1946	"Old Slaughter Yard" site investigated (44 acres). Protested against by 180 whites.
		1948	Rumours that "Hollywood" to be broken up. A number of houses empty.
D I S P E		1950	Evictions from "Hollywood" begin, and compulsory resettlement elsewhere.
	. E	1955	6 houses available in Yass, twice as many applicants. Those without homes to Cowra, Tunut, the South Coast, or camps on the water works reserve North Yass. Empty houses in "Hollywood" have their roofs removed to prevent reoccupation.
R S A	\$	1963	"Hollywood" reserve revoked.



Yass Township c.1927 before establishment of "Hollywood"

Yass 1940

Where I was born

was born on 17 March 1940 in my parents' home in North Yass, shortly after my elder twin brother, Walter James Bell. They lived at the corner of Redall Road and the extension of O'Brien Street, Yellow Creek Road. This was on land near a favourite camping spot for our Ngunnawal people prior to the colonising of New South Wales by the British people and their occupation of the land on either side of the "Yhar"¹, which they called the Yass Plains from about 1821. My grandfather, Alex, lived on part of the original British Crown land grant of 1920 acres, dated 20 May 1840, in favour of George Barber² (which was for 1920 acres), which he called "Oak Hill". The property later passed to Noel and Olive Barber, nee Merriman.

My grandfather Alex and some of his brothers worked for various graziers around Yass including the Barber and the Merriman families, both of whom were involved in sheep grazing in a big way. Anecdotally, my grandfather saved a Merriman family member from drowning and George Merriman gave him a block of land on which he built his home at "Oakhill". I do not yet have any evidence that this story is true, but it has been told often enough for there to be some basis for it³. Nevertheless, we know that my grandfather worked for the Barber family on "Oakhill" and it was the Barbers that transferred a small block to Grandfather Alex and Grandmother Bertha. which I eventually inherited and sold.

Jackie Longley, nee Merriman, has recently confirmed that there was an affinity between her father, Frank, her grandfather, George, and my grandfather, Alex, because she remembers her mother telling her that my grandfather and grandmother, never forgot Jackie's father and grandfather at Christmas. Each would receive an Irish linen handkerchief of the very best quality as a Christmas present each year. Perhaps the Barbers were recipients too.

Alex and Bertha Bell's block4 was in the general area of an historic Aboriginal Reserve of the same name, "Oak Hill", 29.5 acres with access to the river, set aside in 1888 for the use of Aboriginal people. The reserve waxed and waned in size with the varying moods of the politicians and their bureaucrats. The inhabitants of the reserve, unlike my grandparents who lived on the Barber/ Merriman land, had no security and lived there subject to the ever changing whims of the authorities. They were eventually forced to move away, some going to "Edgerton" on the Yass River near Murrumbateman and some eventually to the south side of the Yass River to a reserve ironically named "Hollywood".

My parents, Esmio Eric Bell and Lucy Bell, nee Cooper, married on 4 April, 1939 at St Augustine's Church in Yass and initially lived next door to my grandparents, in a similar self-constructed abode.

My mother was attended by Sarah Freeman, whom we all knew as "Grannie Sal", an experienced local midwife and a neighbour. The happy twin births were promptly registered on 23 March 1940 at the Yass Court House by my father. Grannie Sal was with him and signed her name, Sarah Freeman, as witness to our births. My Dad was aged 31, a trim, good

^{1.} We believe "yhar" to mean running waters in Ngunnawal, but we do not know the origin of the word "Yass", however it may have arisen from mishearing an answer to the question "What do you call this river?" This is somewhat like the more famous English misnomer "kangaroo" which originated from the Endeavour River in 1872, now for ever kangaroo!

^{2.} Hamilton Hume's brother-in-law and co-discoverer of the Yass plains in 1821 for the colonists, granted to George Barber on 20 May 1840 (1920 acres, i.e 3 square miles).

^{3.} Some stories state it was George Barber and some that it was George Merriman. We may never know for sure.

^{4.} Parish of Yass, County of King being Lot E in deposited plan No. 28673 and being part of Portion 15 granted to George Barber on 20 May 1840 (37½ perches i.e roughly 50m x 40m or 200 sq.m.)

looking, fair complexioned man who already had a receding hairline. By the time the accompanying photograph was taken eight years later, he was becoming distinctly thinon-top, but he kept fit by hard physical work as a seasonal farm worker in the Yass district and if necessary beyond, including being a member of a NSW Railways "extra gang". This gang was responsible for laying sleepers and rails, which would later be maintained by full time fettlers. Being one of the "extra gang" meant he was one of thirty/forty men who did the heavy work, preparing the road bed, laying ballast, sleepers and rails, and replacing old sleepers. The fettlers did the maintenance work. Many of my family were involved in railway work and indeed this line of work was in my future too, but I am jumping ahead.

Dad was well known about Yass as an honest, reliable man who enjoyed the respect of the Ngunnawal people and of his various employers. Apparently he was welcomed back by employers "next time around". Although he was nearly forty when he played for "The Yass All Blacks" rugby league team in the accompanying 1948 photograph, I remember him as being quite able to cope physically and keep up with the mostly younger men, with whom he played.

Grandad Alex was also respected in Yass

and indeed my cousin, Loretta Bell Halloran, recording her memories in "Stories of the Ngunnawal" ⁵, wrote how the staff at Doyle's Pharmacy in Yass knew her from the time as a young girl she worked at the Yass Hospital. Returning to Yass in later life she recounts how Pharmacist Peter Doyle when asked by her if he remembered Grandad "Piggy" Bell, "they used to call him Piggy because he lost a finger, I think." Peter asked her who she was in relation to Grandad and she replied "I am his granddaughter". Peter then remarked "That man, was a living legend around here. Yes, he was a living legend."

Jackie Longley, whom I mentioned earlier, remembers how as a young girl aged about seven, she was walking down Comur Street with her mother and Mrs Kate Merriman of "Merryville", her aunt, when they stopped to speak with Grandad Bell, with whom they appeared to be on friendly terms. After a while and as they were about to break off the conversation to continue their separate ways, Jackie's mother, Mrs Lillian Merriman of "Vale View", said "Say hello, to Mr Bell, Jackie". Jackie says she responded familiarly with "Hello, Alex!" For this she received a quick cuff about her ears and a reminder from her mother that "Alex is Mister Bell to you and don't forget it!"

5. Published by Journey of Healing (ACT) Inc, 2007.



"Hollywood" All Blacks Rugby League Team 1948 (I - r)
Rear: Abe Russell, Ron Walker, Douglas Williams, Alex Bell, Stan Russell, Jack Carrol
Middle: Norman Connors, Harry Williams, Peter Bulger, Vincent Bulger
Front: Eric Bell (my Dad), George Williams, Don Bell, Ferdie Bell



Yass 1933

Believed to be my grandfather and grandmother (centre) doing their bit for a local show with unnamed fellow Aboriginals. I remember my grandmother Bertha Bell, nee McGuinness, as being quite fair, so war paint must have been liberally applied to all!

Photograph by Bobby Moet.

Mrs June Comins, nee Eedy, who was born and brought up at "Blackburne", near Blakeney Creek, with whom I have been acquainted for many years, recounted to my editor Tony a neat story which confirms my memory of Grandad's wry sense of humour. Grandad, who although he could read he was not a confident writer, asked someone to write a letter for him and when it was read back nodded and said "Yes, that is what I want to say, but perhaps you should add, I am sorry for the poor hand writing!"

June also remembers that her father Noel Eedy was a keen supporter of boxing tournaments at the Yass Memorial Hall in the old days. He was a very correct and upright citizen, not to say entirely incorruptible! He and Grandfather and were on friendly terms and the story goes that greeting each other before a competition, Grandfather said "Oh, hello Mr Eedy, it should be a good competition tonight, especially with that boy of mine, Don. He's a champion you know and if you have any other ideas I have two bob here for you to change your mind!"

The Bell family had a reputation as good amateur boxers and some may even remember the Roy Bell boxing tents at country shows, although he was not related some of my family boxed for him. I gave boxing a try in my teens too and even had a try-out for the Melbourne

Olympics, unsuccessfully however. See "The Boxing Bells" in later pages, Chap 11.

There is a thread in some of the old-timers' minds when one mentions the Yass Bells that causes them to recall anecdotes about the Bells and boxing, especially the show ground boxing tents. Indeed they still repeat them and some of the stories have become quite fanciful. However, two of my father's brothers had deserved reputations. Anecdotally, my mob was hard to beat down at the river bank, but that relates more to my uncles than my Dad, who was a peace loving man with a good attitude. I remember people, from all walks of life, liked him, so he did not get into too many arguments. As a result, deep down, I try to emulate him. Although I respected him for this I knew that if I stepped out of line, I was in serious trouble, but he was invariably fair.

Allegedly, more than one dispute was settled between protagonists (when my parents moved from "Oakhill" to the "Hollywood Reserve") by going a round or two. The usual procedure if one had a gripe with another man, drunk or not, was "I'll see you in the morning and we'll settle it then". This was a challenge that could not be refused and usually meant rising at 4 a.m., before any work commitments.

Accompanied by others, to see fair play, the combatants would turn up at a prearranged

spot, well away from the Reserve and out of sight of the women and children. Initially this meant bare fists, or like my Dad - fists wrapped around with cloth, but eventually proper boxing gloves came into use and thus prevented broken bones. I knew one or two of my Dad's generation who had severely damaged hands through fighting, which of course limited their capacity to work and caused them a lot of grief. Whatever happened, the boxers often ended up better friends than before; regardless of who had won. Looking back now, I suppose it was a useful way of letting off steam, but I remember there was a code of behaviour, which minimised the risk of someone being badly, or even fatally, injured.

I recall in more modern times two big bruisers beginning an argument in a local pub. It looked pretty dangerous to me because anger was written all over their faces. I remarked to a mate I was with "Why don't they just go out the back and sort it out, like we did?" He responded saying "Don't be stupid, each of them has an AVO against the other and the cops would become involved in no time flat!" When in a rage people today either resort to knives and other dangerous implements, like bottles or glasses, and are often caught by the law and go to prison. There is no code these days, a man when he is down is often kicked, which was not in our code, or several of them will attack one man. I think this is pretty gutless behaviour. In former times, we never involved the authorities in our arguments, but that is how things have changed. I just cannot believe a grown man would feel compelled to go to court and take out an official Apprehended Violence Order against another man.

Both my father and my mother had European as well as Aboriginal genes, as of course I do, but partly through circumstance and partly through choice we have continued to identify as Ngunnawal. This has not been easy, because people often express opinions about identity and race much too easily, frequently with no knowledge of the circumstances. Aboriginal identity is of course a rich vein for anthropologists, historians and politicians to mine, but not for me. I have come just to accept the way things are; I think of myself as Ngunnawal and that's that. I will of course

explore parts of this topic further in my story, but basically I believe that dwelling on a myriad of hurts from the past can be toxic to anyone's well being, so it is best to move on and as the moderns say "get a life, man". Nevertheless, I am realistic about the enduring trauma for people that have been deeply damaged, through no fault of their own, by ill conceived social engineering; particularly my two sisters and my mother.

As far as my research goes, my Bell antecedents for at least three or four generations have been associated with this part of New South Wales, although my Mum came from the south coast, near Nowra, when she met and later married Dad in Yass. It would be interesting to know how they met, although typically my Bell forebears were great travellers as were most Ngunnawal people. My mother used to speak to me in her Yuin language, spoken by her people around Nowra. Unfortunately, I have forgotten much of that language through want of practice. I am able to speak some Ngunnawal, but I am hardly fluent, as I have remarked before.

My friend and editor, Tony MacQuillan, and I enjoy an occasional joke as we record my story, which is primarily for my family, but also for anyone else who may be interested. Tony was bornin"darkest Africa", actually East Africa, where as we all know, the anthropologists reckon we all came from originally. He has written his own story and understands what motivates me, because his past is almost as incomprehensible to his children and grandchildren as mine is to my grandchildren. However, he reckons my mob beat him to Australia by many, many millennia, because he only arrived here in 1959. Nevertheless, there are a few ironic similarities in both our lives about encounters with ignorance and prejudice. Tony, by the way, identifies with an Irish clan, although he has never lived there and does not speak Gaelic. Recent DNA testing suggests his bloodlines are Welsh, German, Gaul, etc, well perhaps "Celt"⁶, anyway. His forebears in the thirteenth century

^{6.} Celt means more a culture and a language than a race, because Celts were represented by diverse tribal societies, who by the 3rd Century BCE occupied a swathe of country from the Black Sea to the Atlantic and included the British Isles. This resonates with me because Ngunnawal is more a culture and a language than a race.

were apparently mercenaries hired out to the constantly warring Irish kings trying to rob one another of land, cattle and women. And according to the history books they did not have a great life expectancy, so a lot of kids were fostered, or adopted, by the surviving members of the mercenary band. This is all a bit different for a guy who was born and enjoyed his early life on either side of the Great Rift Valley in Africa and the Olduvai Gorge, not in Ireland! Olduvai turns out to be the most important prehistoric site in the world for understanding early human development according to Wikipedia, which we looked up. It was where the famous paleoanthropologist Louis Leakey (1903–1972) and his colleagues performed their seminal archaeology, which eventually proved Darwin right about the evolution of mankind and most important of all: that humans are all related.

However, related or not, as anyone knows there is an extensive English literature about "Aboriginal problems and how to solve them" going back soon after the arrival of the British on our shores in 1788. More recently, the voice of Aboriginal people is being heard and there is a growing literature recording Aboriginal peoples' experience from their point of view.

It is hard to be philosophical about the rubs at the margin between two entirely different people occupying the same piece of dirt and both endeavouring to survive in this harsh environment. As far as we are told, my people were even more diverse than the English who came here after 1788. We Aboriginals covered the entire continent, wherever life could be sustained, and were probably far more numerous than Captain Cook could possibly have conceived when he took possession of the continent for the British Crown on Possession Island, between Cape York and Thursday Island, on 22 August 1770.

I imagine my grandchildren are disappointed that I am unable to tell them more about our Aboriginal origins. However, my first language is English, I have largely lived my life in urban, or semi-urban conditions and I did not receive from my parents and grandparents much education in Aboriginal traditions and lore, they had other things on their minds. This was unavoidable in the circumstances our people found themselves in and although I regret this - there is nothing I can do about it now, except try to inform myself by reading and talking to people who know a thing or two.



Gathering of Yass Aboriginal people in traditional attire at Victoria Park c. 1933

© Russ Whitehurst





Brown's Flat¹ c.1952 (near Nowra) (when I was about 12 yrs old) (I-r) Evelyn Cooper, her daughter Margaret, Uncle Frank Cooper,

(I-r) Evelyn Cooper, her daughter Margaret, Uncle Frank Cooper, Daphne Bell, Tommy Bell, Jack Cooper (in d'way), Bertha Bell & our Mum, Lucy Bell.



100 years earlier. Dwellings built for the Aborigines at Roseby Park, Orient Point, New South Wales, c.1855 nla.pic-vn4609199
PIC/12958/1 LOC Box PIC/12958

¹ Aborigines have an ironic sense of humour. Brown's Flat was also known as Bloater's Flat, because of the many skinny dogs in the village. People would say "look at them, bloated from over eating, which of course they were not.

The War Years Unsettled times for my family

Although we were nominally Yass people with an Oakhill address, after I was born we alternated for years living in Nowra at Greenwell Point, Nowra, where Mum's family lived, Oakhill and Hollywood "Mission", Yass (where at some stage before I turned six Dad was able to acquire a house). Until my Dad joined the Army in January 1942, he was able to find casual seasonal cropping work around Nowra when nothing was offering in Yass and my Mum had the support of her family when he finally went away for two years in uniform.

Despite disruptions in my family's life, the family grew steadily. My brother, Alec (b.1943), and my two sisters, Bertha (b.1945) and Daphne (b.1948), were all born in Nowra, whilst my brother, Tom (b.1950), was born in Yass. We lost my twin brother Walter when he died aged eighteen months, in Nowra in 1942, and later my sister, Dulcie (b. at Nowra in 1949) also died young. This paragraph encapsulates an unsettled state of family affairs and a lot of tragedy with two such young deaths.

Dad's brother Don enlisted in the Australian Army in Yass on 20 March 1941, when Walter and I were a year old, he was followed by my Dad who enlisted on 20 January 1942 and another of Dad's brothers, Alex, who joined up on 10 February 1942. All three had different postings, so they did not serve together, which is a pity in a way because they would have supported each other in times of loneliness and stress. My Dad spent most of his time with the 1st Army Service Corps Training Battalion and I have a copy of his service record, which does not reveal a lot. I have the impression he had a boring job as a Private in the Service Corps, resented the lack of freedom and being parted from his family. The Army asked him a number

of questions about his acquired skills, to all of which he answered "No". For example: "Can you - Drive a Motor Car, Motor Lorry, Motor Cycle or Make Running Repairs?" or "Can you - Cook, Use a Typewriter, Write Shorthand, Play a Band Instrument?" Dad was a labourer in real life, he could fix fences, lay railway sleepers and rails, he could fix buildings using limited resources, read and write, work harmoniously with other men and was a supportive family man. The Army was all a bit strange. He spent time at Goulburn, Sydney and Bonegilla in Victoria, but his papers do not spell out what he did, and eventually he went absent without leave (AWL). When the law caught up with him, he was asked why he had gone AWL, he replied that he was missing his wife and family. I remember he later told me that the Army response was "You don't have a wife in the Army, soldier, your rifle is your wife!" He stuck it out until 13 January 1944, when he obtained his discharge. Some kids want their fathers to be war heroes, but all I wanted, aged four, was to have him home again.

So these are the bare bones of my early family life because typically I remember only a few events from this time. One that seems burnt into my subconscious has to do with Walter's burial at Greenwell Point. I have this image of my Dad and Uncle walking towards me from the cemetery through the trees surrounding the burial ground. The atmosphere was palpably sombre and the memory keeps returning to me. Was it an over-active imagination? I do not think so.

In the following pages I will try to put some flesh on my story and set down some of my thoughts and attitudes. We moved back to Yass to Hollywood¹ Reserve when I was about five.

¹ Refered to as the "Mission", but it was a Reserve.

I cannot be too sure when we moved, but I have a copy of an Army Records' envelope addressed to my Dad at Hollywood Reserve dated 11 February 1944, which may have enclosed his discharge papers.

Housing for my extended family was short in the Depression and the War years, so virtually any shelter was better than none. Grandfather Alex's block was small, with room for only two modest, albeit comfortable, huts. The residents of the nearby Oakhill Reserve had already been forced to move to Hollywood from 1934 and their huts at Oakhill demolished.

One of the only plusses of living at Hollywood, situated on hard, stony and infertile ground, was a sense of community as many of my Dad's extended family lived there and there was no manager (unlike some of the so-called Aboriginal reserve stations, like "Edgerton"). So there was an inbuilt support group, one may say, and people were mostly very generous and helpful to one another and tried to make the best of life. Tony tells me that his Irish family, five generations back, were illiterate farm labourers, who had been hunted off their ancestral lands and were bound to seek work wherever they could, as farm workers - there being nothing else. A bit of a come down, because like my ancestors his forebears were warriors too. Being poorly housed, driven by the Irish wet, Tony's mob became adept at fixing up their houses, so as to at least keep dry. We were good at making do too, but our problem was affording any good construction materials, which through the Depression and World War II were in short supply and expensive. But we were great salvagers and became adept at fixing up our accommodation to deal with the extremes of Yass weather. I well remember Dad finding some corrugated iron and bringing it back like a hero.

My Mum was a slim, nice looking woman and to my mind certainly equal to those of our neighbours about whom, apocryphally, visitors from the virtually all male Burrinjuck Dam worksite camp in search of female company may well have referred to as "stars, Hollywood stars"! This is one of the legends that is supposed to explain the derivation of the name "Hollywood". Some also say it was something to do with the Philips family who brought Hollywood films to Yass and actually had a home in Shaw Street of that name,

but I cannot follow the logic of this. On balance I think it was just an ironic name because most of the town folk did not understand us and our living circumstances, particularly our poverty. Remember, this was the hey-day of people going to the movies, many if not most, were made in Hollywood and reflected the great American dream of owning a bit of dirt, a comfortable home and having a good lifestyle. We surely did not reflect that.

My friend, Peter Kabaila, writing in his book "Wiradjuri Places" states that "Hollywood² had something of a reputation as a hell-hole settlement. Its overcrowding and poor housing are well known." However, I have many happy memories of my childhood in spite of the disadvantages of living on the Reserve and the poor housing conditions there. Looking back, they did not seem poor to me at the time and certainly not a "hell-hole", but with the benefit of hindsight the buildings were inadequate, mainly clad in "ripple iron"³, unlined and painted maroon red, but at least the floors were raised above the ground, unlike at Nowra where we lived on dirt floors. But the Hollywood house walls were unlined and we felt the extremes of temperature acutely, the annual range being - 6°C to + 40°C. So much so, that one of my remembered childhood tasks was salvaging hessian bags from the rubbish tip, smearing them with white clay and attaching them to the walls inside as a form of insulation. Life was not without its dramas too at times, as I well recall a wind storm blowing off our roof. Fortunately, there was an unoccupied hut in front of us at the time and we moved in there. Ablutions were very basic too, with two shower huts - one for men and one for women. Water had to be carried from the communal tap to the houses and as for toilets; we had the usual outhouses then endemic to much of the Yass outskirts. This was a bucket system that was serviced by the Council's sanitary department, giving rise to newspaper articles complaining about unpaid sewage rates at Hollywood. In practicable terms if there was a risk of the bucket overflowing in the meanwhile between collections, well, we

^{2.} Built by the NSW Aboriginal Protection Board

^{3.} Ripple iron was a form of corrugated iron, examples used in house construction are common in the City of Broken Hill. I have deposited an example with the Australian Museum in Canberra as an archaeological specimen.



My brother John Stewart at Walter's burial site near Nowra

just had to dig a hole and "bury the dead" as the saying was.

Life was far from one sustained idyllic period for me as a child, although as I have already remarked, I had a happy childhood. I do remember the feelings of unease however when outsiders and particularly government officials happened by, such as the inaptly named Aboriginal Welfare officers and of course the police. Some of my siblings and I were comparatively fair (complexioned) and this constituted a problem for my parents, particularly my mother, as I will relate later, but frankly mixed blood children were seen as being in moral danger. And above all my Hollywood neighbours and I constituted an unresolved and complex problem for white society because we were so visibly different in our ways and attitudes. I will address that topic in later pages too.

I have thought a lot about our movements as a family in the early 1940s, but of course I was very young and consequently my memories are unreliable and confused. My Mum had two small children to care for initially, my twin Walter and me, but Walter died of pleurisy and double pneumonia when he was about 18 months old at Nowra. My Dad joined the Army soon after, in January 1942, which was obviously disruptive for Mum, but she was able to rely on her Nowra family for support. The Coopers were a close knit family despite their poor circumstances, easily identified from the photograph at the start of this chapter.



The nearby community - today "Jerinja".

Throughout the years, I have harboured a sad memory of my twin brother's burial in the former Roseby Park cemetery, at Orient Point. It is debatable whether a child of barely eighteen months can remember anything at all, but if the circumstances are subconsciously piercing who knows? I have the mental picture of my Dad and Uncle Ted (Mum's brother) looking for me in the cemetery area, which may suggest I had wandered off to visit Walter's grave independently, some time after he was buried and I had become temporarily lost. It was a fair toddle from our home, so who knows what drove me? Anyway, this has troubled me for a long time and recently I did something about it, visiting the cemetery site with my brother⁴ John Stewart, who being older than me fortunately remembered the circumstances well. Obviously my visit with John was prompted by unresolved grief, but it proved worthwhile because he was able to confirm the circumstances.

As the accompanying image of the area of Walter's unmarked grave shows, it is a peaceful place and well cared for today by the local Aboriginal people, who live nearby in what is known today as the Jerinja Aboriginal Community. I have resolved to place an appropriate memorial to Walter there as soon as I can and thereby show that he is not forgotten.

It is not at all clear to me what our movements were while Dad was in the Australian Army. Certainly, we spent most of our time in Nowra, but I have a clear memory

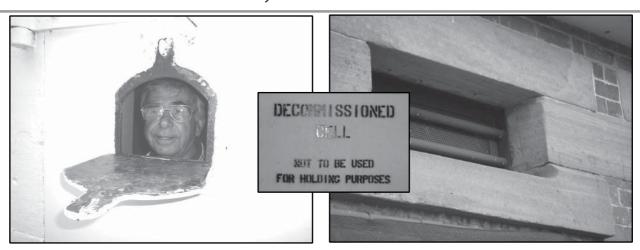
⁴ Mum's youngest from her first marriage to Charles Stewart (d. 1937)

Note: I have been able to obtain copies of my Dad's War Service records from the Australian Archives which reveal aspects of him that I did not know. Typically the various reports are unembellished and do not reveal that he was probably bored and lonely being sent away to Goulburn, Sydney and Bonegilla in Victoria to perform what must have been menial work (as he did not have any skills which the Army could use other than labouring).

As I remarked in the opening of this chapter Dad's brother Don had enlisted in the Australian Army in Yass on 20 March 1941, when Walter and I were a year old, he was followed by my Dad who enlisted on 20 January 1942 and another of Dad's brothers, Alex, who joined up on 10 February 1942. All three had different postings, so they did not serve together, which is a pity in a way because they would have supported each other in times of loneliness and stress. My Dad

spent most of his time away with the 1st Army Service Corps Training Battalion and eventually it appears it was more than he could bear and he absented himself 'Absent without leave' AWL between 16 and 19 January 1943. He was duly arrested by the Yass Police when he showed up in Yass and was locked up in the Yass Jail. I have a clear memory of this, so Mum and I must have been back at Hollywood at the time and we both went there with some shaving gear which he had requested. I can still see him in my mind's eye speaking to us through the cell door hatch. He did not look at all happy and I do not recall what was discussed between him and Mum.

Nevertheless, through my friendship with Yass Police they recently allowed Tony and me to visit the now decommisioned jail and I experienced some of what Dad must have felt being locked up, see photographs.



2010 reflective pose by me peering through the jail door hatch (like my father did in January 1943).

Dad's cell window from outside



No getting out of here! The small exercise yard roof decommisioned Yass Jail.

World War Two Service



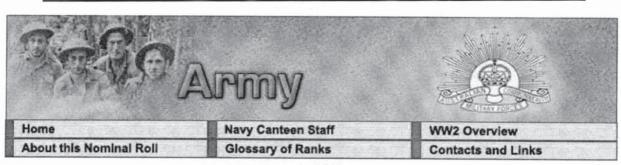
Service
Date of Birth
Place of Birth
Date of Enlistment
Locality on Enlistment
Place of Enlistment
Next of Kin
Date of Discharge

Posting at Discharge

Private ERIC BELL N339911

Australian Army
27 September 1908
YASS, NSW
20 January 1942
YASS, NSW
YASS, NSW
BELL, LUCY
13 January 1944
AUSTRALIAN ARMY SERVICE
CORPS TRAINING DEPOT





		The state of the s	
NAME	SERVICE NUMBER	HONOUR	PLACE

Service record

In addition to viewing this service record, you can also

- · produce a certificate of this service record
- · get help with the certificate
- · view an explanation of the service record details
- · request a full service record from the National Archives of Australia

Service Record	
Name	BELL, ERIC
Service	Australian Army
Service Number	N339911
Date of Birth	27 Sep 1908
Place of Birth	YASS, NSW
Date of Enlistment	20 Jan 1942
Locality on Enlistment	YASS, NSW
Place of Enlistment	YASS, NSW
Next of Kin	BELL, LUCY
Date of Discharge	13 Jan 1944
Rank	Private
Posting at Discharge	AUSTRALIAN ARMY SERVICE CORPS TRAINING DEPOT
WW2 Honours and Gallantry	None for display
Prisoner of War	No
Converight Commonwealth of Austr	alia 2002

Copyright Commonwealth of Australia 2002.

Acknowledgements | Disclaimer

of visiting him in the Yass lockup (see previous page) after he was arrested in January 1943 for being AWL for which, according to his records, he was fined £4.00! Were we back in Yass to live? I do not know, but when Dad was finally discharged in January 1944 his papers were addressed to Hollywood.

From the age of six I have good recall of many events and certainly of us living in Hollywood and me attending the small school there.

Fortunately, I was afforded an opportunity to get some education, because there was a school for Aborigines on the Hollywood Reserve, within easy walking distance of my home. But I also went to school in Nowra whenever we were there. I remember the Hollywood school well from when I was six. It was an unlined one room affair, and it was some time before toilets were built for the teacher and the kids. The school only went to grade 4, but all four grades were housed in one room, between twelve and twenty kids. I started aged six, as I have remarked, and at that time there were twelve children ranging in age from six to fifteen. My first teacher in 1946 was Miss Grace Emily Tester. According to our research she was born in 1892 and, aged forty in 1938, she joined the NSW Department of Education. She was appointed to Yass soon afterwards. We had a separate school because way back in 1883, fifteen aboriginal children were expelled by the Yass Public School because of complaints by non-aboriginal parents⁵.

An interesting item appeared in the Yass Courier in 1888 at the laying of the Yass District Hospital foundation stone. "The Governor was met at the entrance by the President, committee, and medical officers, and as he was being conducted to the dais, the band played the National Anthem. The public school children who marched from their school in charge of Mr. Brierly and other teachers, and the children of the convent school and the thirty aboriginal children from Dean O'Keefe's black school, bearing banners of their respective schools, who also marched from the convent grounds, 5. "No child whatever its creed or colour or circumstances ought to be excluded from a public school. But cases may arise, especially among Aboriginal tribes, where the admission of a child or children may be prejudical to the whole school." (Minister for Education, George Reid, 1884). From the NSW Government Aboriginal Board of Studies web site.

were assembled around the dais, and made an imposing appearance." So it appears to me that the Catholic clergy tried to take up the slack, or words to that effect. (See also Rev Brian Maher's book ref. later).

Separate schooling was subsequently provided on some Aboriginal Reserves too, such as Hollywood Reserve. But official government policy from the 1880's restricted Aboriginal students from being taught in the same class as white children and this lasted until well after World War II.

I said earlier, it is not at all clear to me what our movements were while Dad was in the Australian Army between 1942 and 1944. Certainly, we spent a lot of time in Nowra, even after Dad left the Army, because my brother Alec 1943 and my sisters Bertha 1945, Daphne 1948 and Dulcie Ann 1949 were all born there. However, my brother Thomas John Bell was born in Yass on 31 March 1950, so clearly we had returned by then and as the photograph overleaf bears out, I was attending St Augustine's School in Yass when I was eleven in 1951. Therefore my favourable memories of Norman Gilchrist relate to when I was about eight to ten. But I had a surprise recently in 2010, when some documents came to light, see below.

Miss Tester was succeeded at Hollywood by Norman Gilchrist, an enthusiastic man who tried to make school an interesting and happy place. In some literature he and his wife are described as "managers", but this was not so and anyway they did not live on site, as managers commonly did on Aboriginal Reserves. He was highly innovative and amongst other things tried to encourage sound shopping practices in the girls by setting up a make-believe store, complete with empty packets of grocery staples. The girls loved playing at shopping and shop keeping. Nature studies and sport were also big on Mr Gilchrist's agenda and I remember how he used to encourage us in both activities. It was not all work though, as he would take us down to the Yass River for swimming in the summer months too, to cool off. Each morning before going into the classroom, we had a respectful flag raising ceremony and perhaps surprisingly sang "Advance Australia Fair" and even more surprisingly "The Maori Farewell" 6.

6. Note: "Advance Australia Fair" was not adopted as the National Anthem until 1984 and replaced "God Save >

I have searched everywhere for an image of our home at Hollywood to provide some background to my story, but to no avail so far. Nevertheless, the librarians at AIATSIS in Canberra pointed out a copy of Dawn Magazine dated August 1955. Dawn and New Dawn were magazines produced by the NSW Aboriginal Welfare Board between 1952 - 1975. An image of a Hollywood Reserve home c. 1950s appears on page 42 and is from the August 1955 issue of Dawn Magazine, which may give some idea of the type of construction.

Meanwhile, I happened to be visiting Yass High School recently, where I had been asked to address some of the students and was speaking with the Principal, Paul Bills. "Have I got a surprise for you, Eric," he said and produced a facsimile excerpt from the "Yass Abor. School Punishment Book" [sic]. Two pages were included covering the period 1948 to 1950 when Mr Norman Gilchrist was in charge. They record amongst other matters that Eric Bell, aged 8, was dealt two strokes with another student, aged ten, "for using trees of the playground as a lavatory".



Mannequin Pis, Brussels (see above)

I have no recollection of this event and can

the Queen". According to Wikipedia it was written by Scottish born Peter Dodds McCormick and was first performed in 1878. "The Maori Farewell" is a very emotive song, much heard during the war years, when our military were leaving Australia to sail into the unknown and still brings a tear to the eyes of some older people, I know.

only now reflect that, like Brussels, Yass now has its own *mannequin pis*, which I have never seen, but Tony has:

On 9 February, 1950, I again received two strokes, this time for "willful disobedience", my parents would not have been impressed, but again I have no recollection of this event either.

Paul Bills also provided type-written copies of the school curriculum for the Hollywood Aborigines' School at Yass from those times, which are clearly of historical importance and I am happy to reproduce a typical week's work overleaf. According, to these sheets, opening and closing procedures were as follows:

Hollywood School Morning:

1st Bell - 8.45

2nd Bell - 9.00

All fall in at ease before flag.

Attention

Right Dress (in 2 teams)

Attention

Raise Flag (Raiser detailed by notice and falls in

before flag separately)

Salute (Follow teacher)

Stand at ease

Inspection in Teams

Attention - Comments on Inspection

Stand at Ease, Attention, Rt. Turn, Quick March.

Hollywood School Afternoon:

3.00 All fall in.

[Flag] Lowerer separately (according to notice).

Attention - Lower Flag

Salute (Follow Teacher)

Rt. Turn - break off.

Yass High School archives also has a manuscript copy of the 1951 Programme and Register of Lessons, when the teacher was Neil McKilligan, who must have succeeded Norman Gilchrist, but by then I was attending St Augustine's School, Yass, so I do not recall making his acquaintance. The detailed programme covers Grades 1 to 4 and usefully a synopsis for each grade is also provided:

Grades 1 to 4

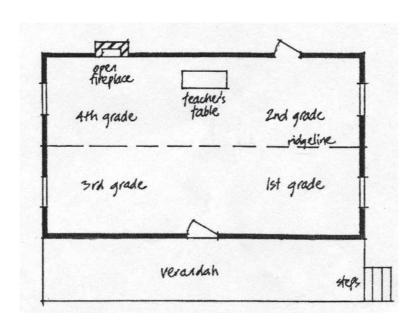
Numbers, Reading, Writing, Spelling, Speech, Music, Solfah [do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti.], Physical Training, Sport, Civics and Morals, History, Geography, Scripture, Story Telling, Expression, Poetry, Hygiene, Handicraft, Nature Study, Loyalty Training, Composition, Formal English.

I am gratefull to Paul Bills for sharing this detail with my readers and me, because it does afford an understanding of what was being attempted, educationally speaking, at Hollywood Reserve School at the time by the NSW Department of Education.

It should be no surprise that opening and closing procedures were so overtly militaristic: fall-in, attention, stand-at-ease, etc., Australia, including many of my people had been at war and terms of discipline were carried over into school life. Respect for the King, the then national Anthem "God Save the King" and the Australian flag was part of post war life. The National Anthem was played for example at the cinema and woe betide anyone who did not stand!

It is a moving experience for me to visit Tony at his home, which I do regularly as we put our minds to recording my memories. His home overlooks the Yass River and Hattons Corner, just over the hill from the former Hollywood Reserve, the scene of many of my early adventures: trapping rabbits, rambling and going down to the river to swim and fish.

I was reminded the first day I visited him of one memorable adventure. One foggy morning I was returning home with a mate from inspecting our rabbit traps and on the way back past, where Tony's place is today, we set our course for Hollywood (which was less than a kilometre over the hill to the north east). We trudged on unconcerned, down through a valley and up over the hill, but we missed Hollywood entirely and ended up somewhere near Laidlaw's grave. I do not recall whether I was more embarrassed than concerned, but is funny how things come back to one.



Hollywood Reserve Aboriginal school layout c1930s-1940s as remembered by Agnes Shea © Kabaila, P. 'Survival Legacies - Stories from Aboriginal settlements of southeastern Australia', with kind permission.

Aboriginal School at your. Leocher in Chorge : Neil Myhllyan 1950

PROGRAMME AND REGISTER OF LESSONS.

This record takes the place of the Programme and Lesson Register formerly in use.

The term's work should be divided into approximately three equal sections. It will be sufficient if the work of each section be planned and written up in advance. As soon as the School Magazine has been received the treatment of the proposed activities based on it should be set out in the programme. Each section should be initialled and dated by the head teacher as an indication of his approval.

The programme should be sufficiently detailed to ensure a well-graded scheme of instruction, showing the matter to be taught, the teaching units into which it falls, the order of their treatment, and the activities involved in their mastery. In many subjects a brief and specific example is the best form of entry.

Variations either by way of substitutions, omissions or additions and the reasons therefor are to be indicated in red ink in the columns provided, or elsewhere. If no variations are shown, it will be assumed that the work planned has been carried out. Thus this book in addition to being a programme of work to be done becomes a record of work actually accomplished.

In one-teacher schools a book will be supplied for each division.

HOLLYWOOD RESERVE ABORIGINAL SCHOOL - Typical Curriculum c. 1950s

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9.00 Introduction 9.15 Reading 9.45 Spelling	9.00 Introduction 9.15 Arithmetic 9.45 Writing/Arith	9.00 Introduction 9.15 Spelling 9.20 Writing/Arith	9.00 Introduction 9.15 Reading 9.35 Arithmetic	9.00 Introduction 9.15 Arith. Test 9.45 Dictation incl.
10.20 Writing/Arith. 10.30 Phys. Ed	10.00 Reading 10.30 Phys. Ed	10.00 Arithmetic 10.35 Phys.Ed	10.25 Spelling 10.30 Phys. Ed	10.15 Reading Test 10.30 Phys. Ed
10.55 Recess	10.55 Recess	10.55 Recess	10.55 Recess	10.55 Recess
11.25 Grammar 11.40 Hygiene 12.15 Poetry	11.25 History 12.00 Geography	11.25 Listening/Oral 12.00 Nature Study	11.25 Human Geog 11.45 Tales/ M Lands 12.10 Scripture	11.25 Aust History 12.00 Art
12.30 Recess	12.30 Recess	12.30 Recess	12.30 Recess	12.30 Recess
1.30 Oral Comp/Wrtg 2.00 Nature Study 2.25 Scripture 2.45 Adventures in	1.30 Craft 2.30 Music	1.30 Craft 2.30 Art 2.55 Story	1.30 Civics, Drama Morals, Social Actvty 2.30 Library, Supplm Reading	1.30 Craft 2.30 Games
Bookland 3.00 Dismiss	3.00 Dismiss	3.00 Dismiss	3.00 Dismiss	3.00 Dismiss

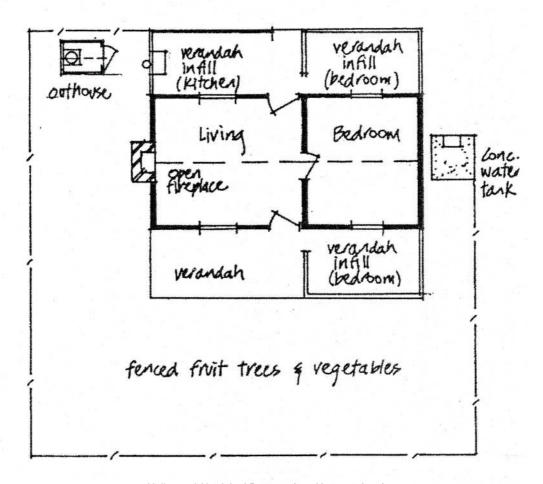
Hollywood "mission", Rossi Street, Yass an Aboriginal Welfare Board gazetted reserve 1929 to 1963



Hollywood Reserve home c. 1950s from Dawn Magazine August 1955. The picture's caption stated this was a typical "Slum Type" house in Hollywood Ave. (sic), Yass. "These houses will shortly all come down".



2009 display at the Australian Museum, Canberra with the theme "Memories of Mission Life". The image (left) is part of the Hollywood display incorporating a sheet of ripple iron, used to clad the Hollywood houses. (Donated by me to the museum earlier in the year).



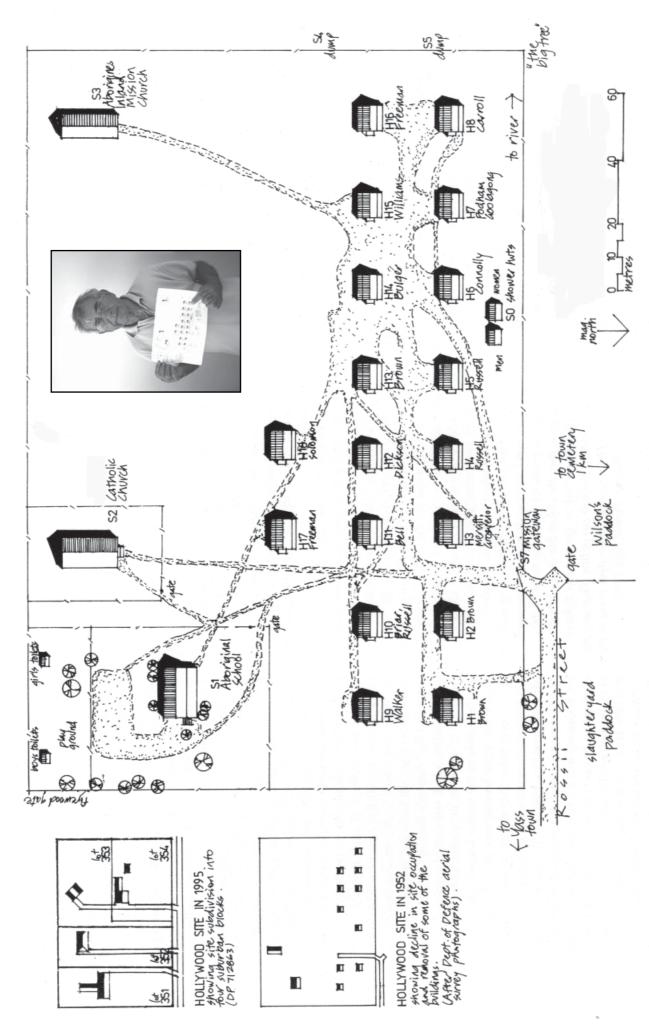
Hollywood Aboriginal Reserve (see H1 opposite >)

Thomas Brown's house layout c1934-1950 as remembered by Hilary Crawford in 1995 © Kabaila, P. 'Survival Legacies - Stories from Aboriginal settlements of southeastern Australia', with kind permission.

Opposite >

RECONSTRUCTION: Hollywood 'Mission', Yass c 1934 - 1950

© Kabaila, P. 'Survival Legacies - Stories from Aboriginal settlements of southeastern Australia' with kind permission.



Childhood memories







ooking back, a major activity at Hollywood for my mates and me was rabbiting. It provided a sense of adventure, a challenge, pocket money and more importantly an occasional nutritious meal for my family. Rabbits were in plague proportions in much of Australia⁷, so we were doing our bit for the environment too!



The routine we developed was to set our traps after school on the other side of the Yass River at Hatton's Corner, in the late afternoon. Each of us had at least a couple of sprung metal traps, like the one that follows, with a length of chain and a pin to be driven into the ground.



When we visited them again in the early morning before school it was rare for us to find nothing in the trap. We usually managed to catch at least one each and we would immediately skin and gut them, washing them and ourselves clean in the river before heading home. This was an acquired art, but we soon 7 Rabbits, like most other pest species, were introduced when Europeans first settled in Australia. Rabbits were introduced from two main sources; the domesticated rabbit which provided early settlers with a

Thomas Austin is credited with releasing 24 wild rabbits at his Barwon Park property near Geelong in Victoria in 1859. This small population exploded to cover Victoria and New South Wales by 1886. By 1900, rabbits had reached the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

ready source of meat, and the wild rabbit introduced

later for hunting.

In some other areas, feral domesticated rabbits also established populations. Typically, these rabbits have different colourings compared to the wild rabbits released by Thomas Austin. ACTA webpage.

became adept and the job took little time. Back home the carcass was offered up to Mum and the skins were expertly wired and stuck in the ground to dry. Then it was off to school, initially to the Hollywood School house and later when I was eleven or twelve I would walk with mates down Rossi Street to St Augustine's School. On non-school days we would somtimes embark on more serious rabbiting with the help of our pet dogs. I had a fox terrier named Flossie who was good at sniffing out resident rabbits in their burrows. If the hole allowed she would even dive in and drag the rabbit out, otherwise we might feel for the rabbit with a stick and reach in with an arm and pull the rabbit out ourselves. Rabbit warrens were quite common near the river cliffs and if we were really serious we might resort to even digging them out with a mattock.

All in all, it was fun and definitely profitable because the skins brought ready cash from Hancocks Skin Merchants in Lead Street. Later when we were older and really skilled we might merely gut the rabbits and sell them to the freezer merchant in town, a pair brought 2/6 (25°) and retailed for 5/- (50°) through local butchers.

Not only was this sort of activity a survival tactic, underpinning the household economy, it allowed a few luxuries such as going to the movies at the Liberty Theatre and perhaps even a bottle of Brookers' cordial, or a bag of sweets, to be enjoyed during the performance.

Rabbit fur was sought after for fur apparel and also for making hats. When I was young practically everyone wore a hat and they were commonly made from rabbit felted fur. Some of the finest men's hats were made in Sydney by Akubra and there were many milliners supplying hats of all descriptions to women. So the demand for rabbit skins was good. Failing our rabbiting activities, we might collect cordial bottles and return them for cash to the shop. But competition for empty bottles was strong in the

town as no skills were needed and any kid could participate. I recall a returned bottle yielded 6d (5°), so the incentive was there alright.



" Hi, ho Silver!"

Going to the Liberty Theatre was important to us. Thursday night was what we referred to as "bargain night" when a ticket cost only 6d (5°), but attendance on Saturday afternoon was not to be missed because of the serial before the main film. We felt compelled to find out what had happened to the heroine after the conclusion of the previous week's episode, had she been sawn in half, run over by a train while tied to the rail track by the villain, or what?

Segregation still applied in Yass in many ways and indeed Aboriginal kids were expected to sit in the front rows only of the Liberty Theatre, down stairs. That was the way things were and we did not question, we just enjoyed the whole film culture of those times. We kids just loved the Hollywood westerns with their memorable stars Hopalong Cassidy, Gene Autry and Roy Rogers, to name a few. The irony of us coming from an entirely different Hollywood (to the actors) did not escape anyone.





I also enjoyed playing rounders⁸ about this time, because memories of playing with my mates, both boys and girls, at Hollywood Reserve came back to me the other day while watching kids playing various sports at the Yass High School. Our rules were very much "home rules" and they are not easily forgotten. We batted with any handy tree limb and our ball was a tennis ball. Any vacant bit of dirt served as our diamond but we had a well worn one near the Hollywood school. "Out" was called

if a ball was caught on the bounce after being batted, a batter not reaching a sanctuary (or base) was out too, but a batter could also be thrown at with the ball while running and if hit, was "out". This made for an interesting game because a batter might well be missed by the thrown ball and thus better enabled to reach a sanctuary, or even complete a round. Interestingly, Hollywood rules provided that a ball caught on the full meant the entire team was out, which still makes me laugh, like the image above copied from 'The Origins of Softball'9 (which developed from rounders).

Another memory that came back to me this spring when the plum trees were in blossom, was how few there are today compared with when I was a child. I know everything seems bigger or more plentiful in our memories, but I am sure there were more than enough to give us an occasional sweet treat without having to raid an orchard. We sometimes arrived home with the fronts of our shirts full, something one would not be able to do today. We also feasted modestly on orange coloured briar berries which have such a distinctive taste some winemakers today use small amounts in their wine-making, or so I am told. Another treat from this plant was the asparaguslike shoots which we cut out with a pen knife and ate with a sprinkle of salt - delicious!

Young boys are always hungry and anecdotally are capable of eating a horse! But by the way, to own, or have access, to a horse, was more important to Aboriginal people than eating one. Together with a two-wheeled sulky it was more valuable than a car as it did not need petrol or a license. But typically I was always on the lookout for something extra to eat; although my parents provided plenty of basic food and I never starved. Rabbits provided handy camping type snacks when thrown on the embers of a camp fire, which we did sometimes.

Occasionally, we would harvest quinces from some old quince trees growing around a derelict cottage near the Yass cemetery and take them down to the river. When we set our traps we left a pile of firewood and the quinces for the next morning. Having skinned a couple

⁸ Rounders is the sixteenth century British version of a bat and ball game that dates back to "the dawn of time". In theory, it is a descendant of the bat and ball games played by our "cavemen" ancestors. © 1995 ChaosMedia by Chris Monser.

⁹ Cartoon © Westlake High School, Ohio USA.

of rabbits, we would cook them on the fire and luxuriously cook some of the quinces too. I can still taste them both!

Peter Kabaila's reconstruction of the layout of the Hollywood 'Mission', (1934 - 1950), which he has kindly allowed me to copy, appeared page 49. It shows that at its peak there were eighteen houses spread out over the site in Rossi Street. House No.11, in the second row from the street, is denoted as Uncle Ferdie Bell's house. Behind is Bubboo Fred Freeman's daughter's home and behind that the school and the Catholic Church. Hollywood for all its apparent drawbacks was virtually a village and there was a great sense of community, as I have remarked before.

I do not remember how many people lived there in 1950, but taking an average of six per household one would guess a community of about 100 people. There were old people, working people and of course many children, perhaps twenty judging by attendance at the school when I was there. Philosophically one may well suggest that any population of a hundred people would encompass all sorts of human behaviours. Remembering the socioeconomic background of this group of people, some behaviours brought visits from the police and the Aboriginal Welfare Board officers and resulted sometimes in severe action being taken against them. At one extreme some people were arrested and brought before the courts and jailed. Some people, like my unfortunate parents, were judged by the Welfare Officer "incompetent (sic) as parents" and my sisters were removed and sent to State institutions. This applied to my two sisters and is a subject I will address separately later.

At the other extreme of human behaviour was the loving care residents showed towards one another and the general effort to be friendly and to socialise. I well remember that Bubboo Fred Freeman, visiting from Brungle, brought great joy to all of us through his violin playing. He had a wonderful knack of making his instrument sing, playing all sorts of popular music to our great pleasure. A neighbour, Auntie Violet Bulger, could play the accordian well too, and a man whose name has escaped me played the guitar, while another man had developed uncanny skill with a gum leaf. Combined, this

group could occasionally be organised to play when someone wished to host a party and a dance. Whether or not we knew the dance steps did not matter and I for one was never afraid to shuffle around the floor, as I still do when urged by younger partners to join them on the floor! I remember these parties with joy and there is little doubt that they cemented relationships for life.

Earlier I mentioned about my family and its boxing prowes and contests between adult men (for a variety of reasons, not always sport). When I started going to St Augustine's School I soon discovered the nuns had roped off a part of a room they used for gym activities and they encouraged us to don gloves and box each other, strictly supervised of course. I recall boxing my friend Tony Smith and as a result, typical of young boys, cementing a lasting friendship.

The nuns from Mt Carmel Sisters of Mercy Convent in Yass, took a caring interest in Hollywood people. Many, like my parents, had been married in the Catholic Church, and many of us children had been baptised Catholics. Nominally most of us are still Catholics. Whether we practice the faith today or not we retain an affection for the nuns who taught us and indeed for some of the Yass priests (including Bishop Young who later became Archbishop of Hobart). They did their best with scarce resources and not much encouragement from other citizens or the Government.

In 1988 the Yass Catholic Church celebrated 150 years since its establishment and a history was written by the Rev. Brian Maher, a noted local historian. I have had access to his book from which I have copied the photograph opposite with permission. It shows Bishop Guilford Young (centre) and (left) my grandparents Alex and Bertha Bell with Sister M Alocoque. This picture also graces the cover of "Stories of the Ngunnawal" a 2006 book published by Journey of Healing (ACT) Inc. My sister Bertha was one of its contributors. The book which is copyright also has an article written by my cousin Loretta Bell Halloran which repeats the photograph and names most of the people portrayed, a copy of the book may be viewed in the Yass Library.



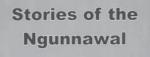
Group photograph taken at Hollywood about 1950 and much copied. See remarks opposite.

Grandfather and Grandmother Bell left behind Sister Alacoque, Sister Pauline extreme right and Bishop Young centre.

THE ABORIGINAL SCHOOL (article from Rev Maher's book 1988)

"Tradition has recorded that Father Lovat [Yass 1839-1848] developed friendly relationships with the local native people and his register entries record the baptism and marriages of some of these people. When the Sisters of Mercy were first received at Yass on 29th December 1875 a group of Aborigines assembled in the church grounds and after the Bishop's address, an Aboriginal woman, dressed in white, stepped out to welcome the "sacred ladies" on behalf of her people. The Sisters began to visit the black people in their homes and to instruct their children. In the early 1880s a government directive restricted Aboriginal children from attending school with white children, so Dean O'Keeffe opened a separate school for them in the church grounds, and one of the Sisters taught them. Sr M. Alocoque did this work for a time. In later years, this school was conducted in the old St Augustine's Boys' School.

The government later built homes for the Aborigines at a reserve called "Hollywood" on the town perimeter. There a church hall was made available from about the 1930s and Mass was regularly celebrated there. The Sisters of Mercy, including Sr Loretto and Mother Xavier, carried on the teaching work. Bishop Young made regular visitations to this black community, when he was parish priest [1948-1954]. In 1952 the Education Department closed the 'mission school' at Hollywood and the children began to attend town schools, including the Catholic schools, where requested."





Carl Brown Dorothy Dickson Loretta Halloran Fred Monaghan Bertha Thorpe Agnes Shea Sandra & Tracey Phillips



THIS CROSS WAS USED IN THE CHAPEL
OF THE INDIGENOUS SETTLEMENT 'HOLLYWOOD'
AT THE TOP OF ROSSI STREET UNTIL THE 1950s
WHEN IT WAS CLOSED DOWN

Sorry

"We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were stolen generations - this blemished chapter in our nation's history." Kevin Rudd, PM, 2009

n relation to my earlier remarks about the historically perceived "Aboriginal Problem"; like any person of goodwill, I have trouble understanding "power" in human relationships, particularly when power is exercised by one person over another, or by people over other people. I have trouble understanding politics, which I am told is the very root of our existence, particularly as it relates to our physical security. I know that politics is defined by some dictionaries as the "total complex of relations between people living in society". I am also told that today politics is a science and can be studied at university; I sure hope the graduates do a better job than some of their predecessors. Some of the meetings I attend as a committee person involve politics and often they seem over-endowed with people who behave "politically" in very complex ways, making me regret that there is not more goodwill about.

Many people, not only Australian Aborigines, suffer at the hands of politicians (and their servants) but obviously as a society we also benefit in many ways when public policies are sound. Most of us approve of social safety nets designed to afford comfort to people who are disadvantaged by life's circumstances. I have had a little to do with putting some public policies into effect at the client end (so to speak) because I am a community leader. Although I am seventy, I spend the working week endeavouring to advance the interests of my people and to care for them - that is my job.

Now, I will deal with some of the cruelty of the past and try to convey to my kids what little wisdom, if any, I have about the sort of public policy, for example, that resulted in my sisters Bertha and Daphne being taken from our parents and sent to an institution. That event more than any other, has affected me deeply and still does. And like all Aboriginal people I am confused in my feelings: should I grieve; be

angry; be guilty, or what? I have gone through what, why, when, where, how?

I have copies of some official documents, I have some facts. I have also spent time in the AIATSIS library and read accounts of people who were taken, including my sister Bertha's account¹:

"I was eight, and my sister was six when we were taken to Cootamundra. I can't remember much, it's that long ago. I remember walking, going to school with my brother, and we were taken by the welfare coming along. We got picked up walking along going down to school, in Hollywood there. His name was Septin, a welfare lad. I think he's probably passed away by now. He was a lot older than me.

They just took us down to the Court House. My Dad was crying, and my Mum, as they were taking her girls away. Then they took me and my sister away to Cootamundra. They just took us. I was there for seven years, until I was fourteen. My sister was there longer than me, until she was sixteen. She was put out to live-in jobs too. Mum used to come up and see us, to visit with my brothers."

These are the bare facts of what confronted Bertha, Daphne and our family on that fateful day.

For Aborigines this experience above others is a topic of constant debate and in the AIATSIS and other libraries, as well as on the internet, the subject has wide coverage. Typically, the topic is dealt with in detail on Wikepedia under the title 'Eugenics', which I quote in part:

"The policy of removing half-cast Aboriginal children from their parents emerged from an opinion based on Eugenics theory in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century

¹ Stories of the Ngunnawal 2006, Journey of Healing (ACT) Inc.

Australia that the 'full-blood' tribal Aborigine would be unable to sustain itself, and was doomed to inevitable extinction, as at the time huge numbers of aborigines were in fact dying out, from diseases caught from European settlers. An ideology at the time held that mankind could be divided into a civilisational hierarchy. This notion supposed that Northern Europeans were superior in civilization and that Aborigines were inferior. According to this view, the increasing numbers of mixed-descent children in Australia, were labeled as 'half-castes' (or alternatively 'crossbreeds', 'quadroons' and 'octoroons'). In the first half of the twentieth century, this led to policies and legislation that resulted in the removal of children from their tribe."

One would have to be an anthropologist to absorb all the information that has been generated in more enlightened modern times, but the message is clear to me. The British at the time of their arrival in Australia were imbued not only with Christian dogma but semi-scientific ideas thrown up by the European Age of Enlightenment as well. They were beginning to question very slowly their traditional institutions, their customs, as well as their very morals, but they still thought they were right in relation to lesser peoples (after all they had conquered half the world, so how could they be wrong?)

At about the time Governor Philip landed on these shores, the colonists' leaders were being impacted increasingly by entirely new ideas about the Earth's history, the history of human life, evolution and human development, and of course genetics. The straight forward ethics instilled in them by their Christian ethics ultimately became undermined by the new sciences, which gave rise to ideas such as eugenics (which spread like wild fire through European thinking until it reached its zenith in Nazi Germany in the 1930s; promoted there as racial purity with an "Aryan" ideal).

I have asked myself about the people "in charge" who impacted my people so cruelly in Yass. Who were they, did they need to be so cruel, were they misguided, ignorant and were they culpable? On the AIATSIS library website is a collection of annual reports from the NSW Board for the Protection of Aborigines which goes some way to answering some of these

questions. One report I selected for closer study was the 28 February 1912 report, digitised by AIATSIS Library, a comprehensive document, full of interesting detail. I picked this particular report intentionally because the Board in 1909 had selected the grazing property "Edgerton", on the Yass River and subsequently all our people who formerly lived at "Oakhill" in north Yass were forcibly moved there in 1911. Why?

The 1912 report was prepared by R H Beardsmore, BA, Board Secretary, a senior servant of The Chief Secretary's Department in New South Wales. It is very informative. In its appendix is a detailed list of the Board members and a list of the members of the Local Committees of which there were twenty-one (committees) spread throughout New South Wales. The names of the Main Board Members however were as follows:

ABORIGINES PROTECTION BOARD 1912

Chairman: Ernest Charles Day, Esq., J.P. (Inspector-General of Police).

G. E. Ardill, Esq., J.P. (Vice-Chairman).

Henry Trenchard, Esq., J.P.

Robert Scobie, Esq., M.L.A.

Robert T. Donaldson, Esq., M.L.A.

G. H. Varley, Esq., J.P.

Peter Board, Esq., M.A. (Undersecretary and Director of Education).

Robert McDonald, Esq., J.P.

Robert T. Paton, Esq., M.D. (Inspector-General of Hospitals and Charities).

M. F. Morton, Esq., M.L.A.

Thomas Garvin, Esq., I.S.O., J.P.

Secretary; R. H. Beardsmore, Esq., B.A.

The list comprises three Members of the NSW Legislative Assembly at the time, five Justices of the Peace, three senior serving members of government departments and a former senior public servant (Thomas Garvin, retired Inspector-General of Police). A more powerful and administratively experienced board it would be hard to find, even today. The Board met once a week on Thursday afternoons and had access to Parliamentarians, the Police, the

Department of Education and the Department of Health. It was administratedly served by the Chief Secretary's Department.

Many included in the list above appear in the Australian Dictionary of Biography, or in the archives of the NSW State Parliament, or both. They are an impressive group by any measure. But one in particular; G E Ardill, Esq., J P (1857 - 1945) is interesting, because he scores in the Australian Dictionary of Biography (together with his two children) not numbers of paragraphs, but numbers of pages (3) . Furthermore, his son, George Edward Ardill, a grazier and former resident of Gunning, active in pastoral politics, later became the MLA for Yass in 1930 and served until 1941. In 1936 George Jnr joined the Aborigines Protection Board and as an MLA gave strong support in Parliament to the Amending Act of 1936, that extended the Board's control over Aboriginals, a long held ambition of his father's who consistently complained about the lack of powers of enforcement for the Board's officers in the field. Coincidentally, it was from 1933 that my people were forcibly moved again, this time from "Edgerton" to "Hollywood" (despite active resistance by them at the time).

According to the aforesaid Dictionary, Ardill Snr was a Baptist, an evangelist and social worker of extraordinary energy and persistence, for which he was eventually awarded an MBE in 1934 for his community service. Throughout his life he promoted the interests of the poor and disadvantaged. How much influence did he have, I wondered? For one thing, he is recorded in various Aboriginal Protection Board's reports as being the most active visitor to Aboriginal Stations, so one cannot deny his dedication to his role as a director.

As at April 1911 there were reported to be 7,329 Aboriginal people, both "full blood" and "half blood", in the State of New South Wales and the Board's expenditure for the year to December 1911 was £24,565 (\$49,130). It noted that in 1882 there were 6,540 "full bloods" but that number was now 2,078.

In addressing the Act under which the Board operated, in 1912 the Board noted:

ACT AND REGULATIONS.

The "Aborigines Protection Act, 1909," with Regulations thereunder, has now been in operation since the 8th June, 1910, and while it has, in a measure, been effective in meeting a number of requirements, the Board are assured that many of their aims cannot be accomplished unless they are clothed with much fuller powers in dealing with the aborigines, and that the early amendment of the Act in this direction is very necessary. This is more particularly the case with regard to the training of the children. A number of boys and girls have been apprenticed under the existing law, but, although some of them are well spoken of by their employers, and places can readily be found for them, the Act does not give the Board power to either train or effectively bind them without their consent.It must be admitted that the problem offers many difficulties. The day is long past when it was possible to segregate the aborigines. So far as the full-bloods are concerned, the Board have done much with the limited funds at their disposal, to make their lot as easy as possible by providing suitable dwellings and supplying them with rations, clothing, and blankets, and it is not proposed to interfere with them; but by far the greater number of those the Board have to deal with are half-castes, and others with a lesser degree of aboriginal blood. With regard to the adults, it would be obviously harsh to turn a number of those who have families dependent upon them, and who have for years been taught to look upon themselves as aborigines, away from the Reserves. On the other hand, unless some prompt measures are taken, the children who are now growing up, will, in a few years, be in the same position as their parents. Of these children, a number who are halfcastes, quadroons, and octoroons, are increasing with alarming rapidity. To allow these children to remain on the Reserve to grow up in comparative idleness, and in the midst of more or less vicious surroundings, would be, to say the least, an injustice to the children themselves, and a positive menace to the State, The only solution of the problem, therefore, is to deal effectively with the children; and, while not unduly interfering with the relationship between parent and child, to see that they are properly trained to spheres of future usefulness, and once away from the Reserves not to allow them to return — except, perhaps, in the case of those who have parents, on an occasional visit. Past experience has shown that the children cannot be properly trained under their present environments, and it is essential that they should be removed at as early an age as possible to ensure success.

THEN WHAT HAPPENED TO GOVERNMENT POLICY?

What happened in the intervening years? It was to be another fifty years before the Aboriginal Reserve's license at Hollywood was revoked (1963) and people in New South Wales began gradually to be better housed and treated. Shortly after this in 1967 the Federal Government held a National Referendum, which finally allowed Aboriginals to be recognised as full citizens under the Australian Constitution. But it took a hundred years after the promulgation of the Aborigines Protection Act 1909, for the Australian Federal Parliament to decide to apologise to my people, amongst other things enunciated in 2009 by Prime Minister Rudd:

"We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were stolen generations - this blemished chapter in our nation's history."

I reached adulthood in the late nineteenfifties and became a parent for the first time in 1958. What was the tenor of the Aboriginal Welfare Board's annual report about that time? I have copies of the reports for 1957 and 1959 too. The policy statement for 1957 has an entirely different tenor to that of the 1912 mentioned on the preceding page. The 1957 report stated under the heading of Policy:

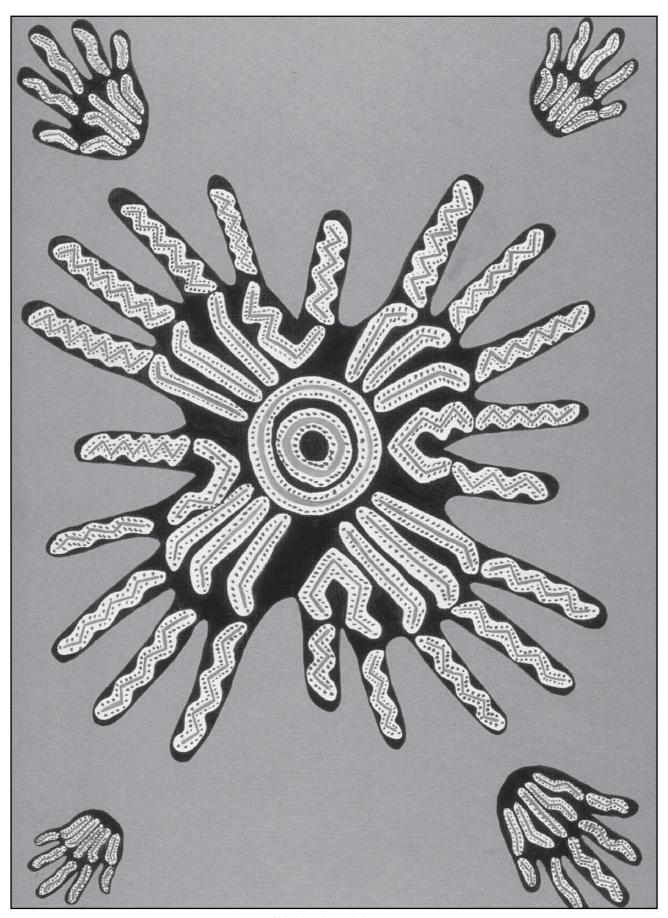
"The gradual, and ultimate assimilation of the aboriginal people into the general life of the community, has been and will continue to be the policy of the Board. This policy has been adopted in all States of Australia and by the Commonwealth Government.

The measures adopted by the Board, for the improvement in the housing, education, health and employment of the aborigines are directed towards the preparation of these people, to enable them take their place as worthy and accepted citizens in the community." The 1957 report went on to record that twentyeight homes had been erected in various country towns in New South Wales during the year. [Some of these were in Yass.]

Something had changed in Australia after World War II. Tony points out it had in South Africa too, albeit in a different direction. Following the loss of the postwar election by the South African Smuts government, which was accused by the pro-white Nationalists as "being soft on racial assimilation", South Africa adopted a policy of apartheid (separate development), which would ultimately bring about South Africa's international condemnation and for many years its isolation and pariah status. What happened in Australia, was influenced persuasively by Professor A P Elkins, an Aboriginal Welfare Board director (at the time) and the Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, "the gradual and ultimate assimilation of Aborigines into the general life of the community".

There is no doubt that the emphasis of Australian policy has been "gradual" and it still is. There is a long way to go yet.

We, as a Nation, may think we have closed that far too lengthy "blemished chapter in our nation's history" enunciated by then Prime Minister Rudd, but the next chapter on which we are now embarked, does not inspire Aboriginal people with much confidence. We Aboriginals continue to represent an unresolved problem for policy makers and all Australians must be alert to the backsliding of their representatives. There is much work to be done and I do not exclude Aboriginal people from ownership of the challenge.



"Uniting Hands"

A picture I own at home, that I bought a long time ago and that appeals to me.

(© Note: attributed to Canterbury Boys' High student David De Fretes, whom we have been unable to contact for permission, apologies David)

A fleeting (temporary) fast forward to 2009

I hope readers will forgive a break in the chronology here, there is something about Hollywood and my past that I wish to transmit right away. Recently, indeed on Saturday, 17 October 2009, I went thoroughly into reminiscising mode when my five daughters and their families visited Yass and I was able to show them some of my boyhood haunts. In the following pages are snaps we took to record the happy event and our visits to sites that are historically important, not only for my family, but other Ngunnawal people too. This was the first occasion in many moons that we had been together, making it a very special day for me.

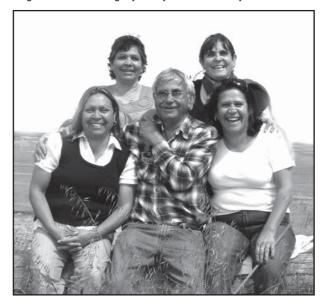


Me, aged 11
St Augustine's Church School
Yass
1951
(earliiest surviving photograph)

Memories: introducing my family to old Yass haunts

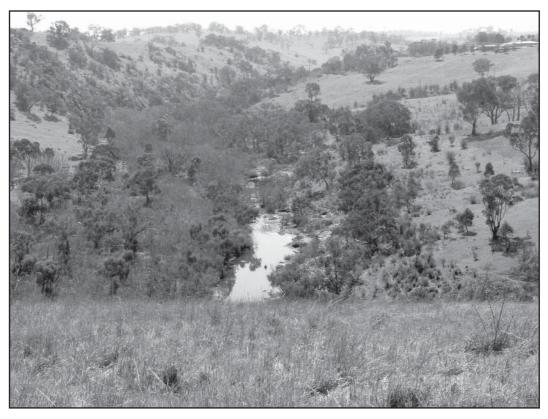


Moments of reflection at Hatton's Corner on a fine spring day in September 2009 & determing that I should bring my family here when they visit Yass in October:



"A good thought Father!" With four daughters, same spot.

Daphne, Carol, Judy & Denise (I-r)



The Yass River, Hatton's Corner, where my mother and other women, in the 1940s, used to wash our clothes and dry them on bushes.



Most of the October 2009 visitors - "my mob".



At the start of the memorial track to the original Riverside Blacks' Camp front I-r Daphne, Eric & Judy, rear I-r Denise, Erica & Carol



Some of the ladies of the Bell Family



Some of the gentlemen of the Bell Family



Eric & Kay Bell (front) with three of Eric's daughters ((I-r) Denise, Carol & Erica 17.10.2009

Absent Family Yass Aboriginal Cemetery



Edging (lower left) marks the divide with the rest of the Catholic Section. The location of Hollywood is directly through the trees (centre).

Frank Broughton	PL Merritt R Brown	M A 'Alex' Bell	Res: D & R Bell	Raymond Bell	Walter R Bell	Christina M Bell	Eric Bell	Norman D Collins	Harold Williams	Josephine Bell	Alex Bell	Bertha Bell	Donald Bell
65	64B 64A	63	62	61	60	59	58	57	56	55	54	53	52
		May Broughton 510	Kathleen M Bell 51B	Donald R Bell 51A	Matilda A Connors 51	Matilda M Williams 50	Harry D Williams 47	I homas VV Brown 48	Unknown 47	Ron Walker 46	Lilly Goolagong 45	Rachel Walker	Ro Grosvenor





My Grandfather Alec Bell



My Grandmother Bertha Bell



St Augustine's School, Yass c. 1951

Back row: Keith Patrick, John Bolger, Eric Bell, Peter Vitler, Terry McGann, Ken Smith, Bob Nash, Cedric Smith. Centre Row: Kevin Brennan, Kerry Horton, ??, ??, John Reardon, Peter McGann, Garry Hall, Kevin Smith. Front Row: Terry Feint, Bill Goode, Lawrence Hooper, Noel Battye, Nicholas Meagher, ? Williamson, ? Walker.

2010

Me

Control Contro

A bit of role reversal, I present a Yass Community Award to Sr Margarita, Sisters of Mercy, Yass, to mark their 100 years of service to the Yass community, Australia Day 2010.

Early Education

St Augustine's School & Boys' Town

have retained a sense of respect and affection for the Yass Sisters of Mercy in Yass, ever since I came across them when we lived on Hollywood Reserve and serendipitously on Australia Day 2010 I was delighted to be asked by Yass Mayor Nick Carmody to present them a Certificate of Community Service at the annual Australia Day celebrations in Coronation Park (see photograph). The Sisters of Mercy Goulburn Congregation recently celebrated their 150th Anniversary in Goulburn and produced a well illustrated book to mark the occasion. A page is devoted to the foundation of the Yass Congregation and how Father McAlroy brought this about. It describes the arrival of the Yass Sisters on 29 December 1875, a "very joyful occasion for the townsfolk. Mass was followed by a banquet and speeches of welcome. Included was a group of Aboriginal people who welcomed the sacred ladies".

The Mercy foundation in Yass had been made at the request of Bishop Lanigan after Father McAlroy's visit to Ireland. There was a Catholic school in Yass at the time, but the Bishop saw a need for the Sisters' presence in Yass too. At the time it seemed that State Aid to denominational schools was about to be abolished.

The book article goes on: "The ministry to the indigenous people of Yass was to become very special for Mother Paul Fielding, their Superior, and the Sisters. In the early days there was a school for Aboriginal children, the first of its kind in Australia. When under government policy the Hollywood Reserve was set up on the outskirts of Yass, the Sisters gave Sunday School lessons to the children. Many of the Aboriginal children came to Mount Carmel School and the Sisters provided pastoral care to their families."

My parents were married in the Catholic faith in Yass and my twin Walter and I were baptised Catholics soon after we were born. Today

most of my family and I would be described as nominally Catholic. Religion is a private matter and individuals have to work out their own attitudes, as I believe I have, but that is not a subject I wish to expand on here. Let me merely state; I am a spiritual person, but I do not attended church on a regular basis.

Aboriginal people living on Hollywood Reserve were open to any help and understanding they could get, because they did not get much understanding from the Aboriginal Welfare Board, the Police and other citizens, just supervision. Why did the local Catholic clergy have anything to do with us? I was later taught it was their vocation; part of being a Christian spreading the word to unbelievers. I had no reason therefore to question what the priests and nuns did for us, but looking back I am grateful for their efforts.

We saw a fair bit of the nuns, who visited us from time to time in our homes. Catholic Mass was a regular Sunday morning event in the little Catholic chapel at Hollywood. It was, I remember, generally packed with people and the hymns were sung with gusto. On religious feast days the priests and nuns would celebrate with us in meaningful ways, particularly at Easter and Christmas, when there were the usual gifts and treats enjoyed by most children. For us kids this attention was much appreciated and there are many of my people who like me have enduring respect for what was done for us.

On Sunday afternoons there was Sunday School in the Australian Inland Mission chapel which most of us children attended. It was built earlier than the Catholic chapel and is identified on Peter Kabaila's map of the so-called Hollywood mission. I am also not too clear how long the Inland Mission chapel operated on the Reserve too, but it appears it was part of the mission established by Rev. John Flynn (the Flying Doctor), today known as Frontier Services.

As a young doctor he had worked in rural and remote areas of Victoria and was later commissioned by the Presbyterian Church to look at the needs of Outback people. Apparently his report to the Presbyterian Assembly in 1912 resulted in the establishment of the Australian Inland Mission (AIM), of which he was appointed its first Superintendent.

Later when many of us attended school away from the Reserve, down the hill in town at St Augustine's Catholic school, the nuns there made great efforts to help us fit in with the other kids and to make us feel welcome. The last time Aboriginal and white children had been educated together was, as has already been observed, 1881. The Sisters even provided us with uniforms, one of which I am wearing in the St Augustine's Boys' School photograph.

I attended with other boys from Hollywood, including Tommy Philips. Incidentally, he was a very bright student and looking back I think he could have done almost anything in life had he wanted. Unfortunately, he appeared to be unable to link cause and effect and I thought he had little common sense. Tommy was always in trouble with the teachers and the other kids. Even at Hollywood if we were playing some game or other, Tommy would disrupt it, very frustrating for me, because I looked upon him as one of my mates.

Tommy and I had the close attention of the nuns at St Augustine's and they were friendly to us. I remember gratefully how they made sure we had enough to eat and a visit to their kitchen was always a delight, because they usually managed to find a treat or two for us. In due course they called our parents down for a discussion about Tommy's and my school progress, which they said was "encouraging". They told our parents there was an opportunity for both of us to participate in Boys' Town at Engadine (where in 1939 the Salesian Order had established a school for boys). Not only would we benefit from the teaching, but as it was a boarding school we would benefit from the discipline too. Today, any parent would immediately look it up on Google and inform themselves, but our parents accepted what the nuns told them - it would be good for us. Today one knows from the Boys' Town website that it is "a comprehensive service to adolescent boys and their families

who are at risk of family breakdown, but who want to restore their relationships. Boys' Town provides family and individual therapy, academic and life skills education, and residential care for the boys".

I do not know whether this description applied in 1952, but I soon found out there were kids there who had personal problems. Looking back, I do not believe that either Tommy or I had any particular problems, except we were poor and lived on an Aboriginal Reserve.

Two people, appointed by Boys' Town, duly collected us in 1952 and took us down to Sydney by train. I seem to remember it was in the cricket season, so it must have been after Christmas. I thought when I arrived "It's all a bit strange here, but at least I can play cricket with proper gear for a change, in a proper team and on a proper cricket pitch". I was nearly thirteen.

I had never slept in a dormitory before and it was a bit scary because I was amongst strangers. There was a strict routine to be learnt in the dormitory and the school. If one erred there was the dreaded strap, across the palm of one's hand. And I remember painfully the staff did not muck about if one did not live up to their routines. This was discipline apparently.

Unfortunately, after a short holiday at home in the autumn, the cooler weather set in at Engadine and I became sick and required medical attention. I guess kids like me from the bush were exposed to a range of infections at the school, for which we had little resistance. At any rate, I developed fairly serious pneumonia and was transferred from the dormitory to the school hospital. After a while I recovered enough to attend classes again, but they still made me sleep nights in the hospital ward, which I found pretty boring and isolating. So, here I was, apparently in an "institution" for disaffected boys and bored. Ask any twelve or thirteen year old who has been separated from his family and friends what he feels about it and he may admit to being home sick. This is of course not an illness but a sort of grief for being away from home and family. I sure was homesick and apart from being disgusted with the thought of being in an "institution", a word I did not like, I did not like the strict discipline either. I was used to a lot of freedom at home and there was none of that at Boys'Town.

Tommy's mother and my sister Jean visited us about this time, which was a joy but unsettling for us both. Eventually, we decided to run away to his aunt's place in Elizabeth Street, Waterloo, an inner Sydney suburb, where Tommy's mother and my sister, Jean, were still staying. We knew they were there, so it was not done entirely on the spur of the moment. I remember after walking miles we turned up at Sutherland railway station probably looking a bit lost. Coincidentally, there was a man working there, a railway employee, who recognised me, "Aren't you Alex's grandson?" he asked. It turned out that he had worked with my grandfather at some stage and was friendly. "What are you two up to?" he enquired, probably thinking the worst. I believe we explained we were trying to get to Sydney, but did not have any money. "Don't worry", he said "just jump on the next train. The inspectors aren't very active on this line." So we did and got to Central without being held up. I do not remember how we managed to get through the ticket barrier with no tickets, but we did. Then we legged it to Waterloo to Tommy's auntie's place, where as I wrote earlier his mother and my sister were visiting. They certainly made us welcome and it was a great relief to be out of the clutches of the Boys' Town staff for a while. But I was apprehensive and expected a call from the police any time, so I didn't relax much. Tommy on the other hand was with family and felt quite secure, but that didn't help me.

Sure enough, it wasn't long before there was a knock at the door by people from Boys' Town who had come looking for us. "The boys do not want to go back", Tommy's mother said and after some argy-bargy Tommy was allowed to stay with his mother and go back to Yass, but I was forced to go back to Engadine because I did not have the necessary parental authority and my sister thought I should anyway. So back I went and incurred the sort of punishment dealt out to bad boys. In my case, amongst other things, I was told to sit with my back to the weekly movie and not look round or I would get of the strap. Petty things like that they did to one, just to show their disapproval.

Eventually the holidays came and my Dad came down to get me and take me back to Yass for a couple of weeks. One remembers odd things looking back; one was arriving in Eddy Avenue near Central Railway and waiting for

my Dad to finish a smoke. I stood waiting near a newspaper stand, looking at the newspaper headlines. A man came rushing by, picked up a paper and pressed two pennies into my hand. I was quite shocked and thought if the newspaperman found out I would be in trouble, so I pocketed the coins and rejoining my Dad I told him what had happened. He said "You shouldn't have done that, but it's too late now, we'd better get moving"

Soon we were on the train and off to Yass - I couldn't have been happier. The two weeks went by in a blur, as they do when one is on holidays, but no matter what; my Dad insisted I go back to Boys' Town. So he took me back. Dad in his wisdom thought it was an educational opportunity for me. He had already noticed that I seldom went anywhere without something to read, a comic book, or any kind of book I could lay my hands on, and he sometimes remarked that I was a clever kid. Probably, he thought of himself as not so clever and therefore destined to be just a casual labourer. Perhaps he hoped I would do better in life, I don't know. Anyway it was back to Boys' Town for me.

At Boys' Town it was back to the "sick bay" away from the rest of the kids at night, but my clothes were still stowed in my locker in the dormitory and I bathed and changed in the dormitory. I was really miserably unhappy and I determined I would escape. I did one chilly morning before sun-up, with what warm clothes I had managed to secrete, an extra jumper under my shirt the day before. Out I walked, moving briskly through the bush and then onto the Prince's Highway. I walked and walked, and I did not dare look back in case someone was following me. I did not have any money or any food, but I was desperate.

After a while a motorcyclist stopped and asked me where I was off to. I told him Nowra and he said "Jump on, I'll take you as far as Wollongong." I had never been on a motorbike before and I did not know that passenger footrests fold up and down. His were definitely folded up because I survived the whole journey holding my feet up, away from the rear wheel. It must have made a comic sight, but I was not laughing. It was very uncomfortable.

Finally we were in the main street of Wollongong and he dropped me off. I kept on walk-

ing south through the town, intent on my goal which was my grandmother's place near Nowra. At one stage, by then feeling tired and hungry, I passed a bicycle leaning against a gate post. Will I take it I wondered, tucking my trouser leg in to my right sock, but I immediately thought I was in enough trouble as it was, so I just kept on walking, trying to ignore my rumbling stomach, rumbling away with hunger. Thirteen year olds need to eat often, especially when subjected to vigorous exercise, like my long walk.

Eventually, outside of town a man driving a truck with livestock in the back stopped and asked me where I was headed. "Hop in" he said "I'm headed for Nowra with this lot," and off we went. By the time we reached Berry it was dark and I was dying of starvation. Fortunately, he pulled up at a friend's place and asked "Want some tea?" I didn't have any money and said so. "Don't worry", he replied, 'they'll have plenty of food". We had already had a good chat in the cab and he seemed to enjoy talking to me. I had marked him down to as a good Samaritan, but also thought he was probably glad of some company. His friends were very accepting of me and gave me a good meal. Then we were off again.

By a strange coincidence, he was actually delivering his livestock to a place off the Greenwell Point Road, which was not far from where my grandmother lived. By now it was getting on for dusk and already I was wondering what reception I would get when I turned up. My erstwhile friend duly dropped me off. It was near the cemetery. It was already dark and I was really scared because I had to walk past it, but scared or not I had to forge on. Finally, I was at Grandmother's place. She didn't seem particularly surprised, but my Mum was and typically made a fuss of me, so I thought "at least she will protect me". Then Grandmother said "Well, Eric, your Dad is down here pea-picking. He'll be home soon and he sure will be surprised." That was what I was scared of. Anyway I was exhausted and as soon as I had swallowed a drink of tea, I flopped down on one of the beds and fell asleep.

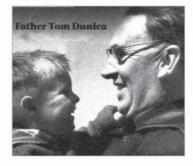
It was not long before I awoke to Dad's voice and I thought now I'm in for it! "Don't let him hit me Mum," I yelled out a few times in terror. My Dad was not one for beating his kids unless we had done something really bad. How was he going to take this surprise?

Instead of the expected beating, he just asked me quietly what was going on and I told him. He just shrugged his shoulders in resignation and suggested I should go back to bed as I must be exhausted. That was the end of that, so much for getting a boarding school education, discipline and all that.

§§§

About Boys' Town Engadine

From the Boys' Town Engadine website



Fr Thomas Dunlea (1894-1970) founded Boys' Town at Engadine, in 1939. His immediate source of inspiration was the movie about Fr Edward Flanagan (1886-1948) who founded the original Boys' Town in 1917 at Omaha, Nebraska, USA. Both Fr Flanagan and Fr Dunlea drew inspiration from St John Bosco (1815-1888), whose work with disadvantaged youth began in Turin, Italy, but has since spread world-wide.

St John Bosco is the Founder of the Salesian Society of Priests and Brothers who, since 1952, have been responsible for the work of Boys' Town.

Boys' Town has undergone many changes over time as it has continued to respond to changes in society and the emerging needs of youth and families. Today it is a comprehensive service to adolescent boys and their families who are at risk of family breakdown, but who want to restore their relationships. Boys' Town provides family and individual therapy, academic and life skills education, and residential care for the boys. Family Preservation and Restoration is the focus of the Boys' Town program. Boys' Town is also an out of home care service and boys live-in from Monday to Friday, thus allowing the boy and his family some space to bring about necessary changes.

Led Astray 1953

Naive Street

After being with Mum's family in Nowra for a while, we all returned to Yass to live and I met up with a couple of cousins, about my age, from Hollywood Reserve and together the three of us attended Mt Carmel school. I was glad to be back in familiar territory and back at Mt Carmel, but things were not quite the same. Looking back, I feel I was not in control of my life at that time, call it naiveté, peer pressure or what; it is easy to blame another for the misfortune that was about to overtake me. "Peer pressure" certainly was not something of which I was aware at the time, but life is a learning curve and I was soon to learn the hard way - one must be loyal to one's innate nature and not be led by others. And if one is led into a situation that one feels uncomfortable about - one cannot blame others if things go wrong.

I should have known better because both the cousins' parents and mine had warned me that the three of us would get into trouble. My Dad had even told me to keep away from these two even if they were cousins, especially after school, inferring that the elder of the two had already been in trouble.

Nevertheless, I had a innate sense of fun and daring then, and I still do despite my seventy years, but in 1953 "fun and daring" led me into trouble with the police. Our ringleader was two years older than his brother and me, thus fifteen, and a boy with no sense of responsibility for his younger companions, or the consequences of what he finally got up to; breaking into someone's house and helping himself to trivial things that he and we did not need. Well, he got caught and serves him right.

Unfortunately, his brother and I were implicated because although we had not broken into the house with him, we kept company with him. The police were not in the least amused about my younger cousin's and my protestations of innocence. They certainly did not put

our behaviour into the category of having fun either, neither did my parents. The three of us were arrested within twenty-four hours and locked up. When he was called down to the lock-up and confronted me, Dad appeared more disappointed than furious. I had let him down because he had always been insistent that I keep well clear of behaviours in which the police might be interested. Too late now!

My blood runs cold when I remember the day we fronted the court. I was scared stiff and full of shame, but I was determined that because I had not committed the actual break in, I was not at fault. I said so to the magistrate, when he asked each of us in turn whether we had anything to say. The police had presented their evidence dispassionately and were convinced we were all knowingly involved. There was nothing we could do to gainsay their opinion. It is so easy to be typecast, in our case we were typically seen as "young Aboriginal troublemakers".

The magistrate ordered that we all be institutionalised. There was that word again, the one I had associated with Boys'Town; I knew only too well that "institution" equals "shame" and I had harboured that sense of the word long before I had gone to Engadine. "Institution" must have been in our childhood vocabulary as something to be feared and avoided at all costs; "if you are bad you will be institutionalised". Now I was going to experience what it really meant.

I still remember my poor Mum standing at the Court House entrance weeping. It was something I never wanted to see again.

The three of us were sent to the Yasmar Boys' Home for two weeks. We were assessed there and my cousin and I, being the younger ones. were sent to Mittagong Training School for Boys, as it was then called.

The following historical information from



Typical cottage at Mittagong, similar to the one in which I lived in 1953

Mittagong Training School for Boys

© Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

the NSW Archives puts into context the seriousness of our situation and provides some background to the institution I was to live in for the next seventeen months.

"On 5 June 1906 in accordance with the provisions of the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act, 1905 [Act No. 16, 1905] the Farm Home for Boys at Mittagong was proclaimed an Industrial School. The School opened on 17 October 1906 as a Probationary Training Home for boys aged 8 to 17, convicted in the Children's Courts of less serious offences including truanting, being uncontrollable, being neglected and wandering, breaching probation, stealing, and breaking and entering. 81 boys were admitted in the first six months. The Home was situated on land already used as cottage style accommodation for state children who were sick or invalid.

The boys were in the charge of an attendant and matron (usually a married couple). Boys under 14 (and older boys with a low standard of education) attended lower Mittagong Public School. The older boys, under the supervision of the attendant worked on the farm lands adjacent to the Home cultivating fruit and vegetables, dairying and raising poultry. Most boys stayed at Mittagong for short periods. Boys who were responsive to the program at Mittagong were re-

leased on probation to a relative, boarded-out, or apprenticed out, and those who showed no evidence of reform were sent to the Farm Home for Boys, Gosford [today known as Mt Penang]".

From 1947 the Institution was called the Mittagong Training School for Boys. The Mittagong Home was divided into cottages with twenty to thirty boys in each cottage. The average stay at the institution was apparently four to five months.

The Mittagong Training School for Boys was gradually phased out as a "Home for Delinquent Boys". Subsequently Mittagong Training School for Boys was established as a home for dependent children and became part of the newly named centre, "Renwick." But that was long after I left.

In my memory there is nothing really remarkable about Mittagong, I would far rather forget it, but it was an important and formative time of my life and for me it worked. Time was occupied by going to school and playing sport, it was much the same as Boys'Town, very strict and one broke the rules at one's peril. Life could be made very miserable if one did not learn that making a mistake more than once is just plumb stupid. My house "parents" were Mr & Mrs Links,

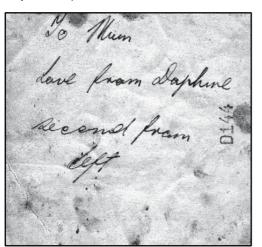
who ran Home No 11. For those who have been in the defence forces the regime would be all too familiar "be tidy, clean and obedient, or else!" Mr & Mrs Links were strict about religion too and ensured I went to Mass regularly and learnt to say the Rosary, amazing really - viewed from the perspective of today's culture. I think looking back that they were pretty good people, doing what they thought was right for disaffected youths.

After a while my cousin went home, well before me, and I always wondered why; because on reflection I was "the model boy", determined to keep out of trouble and get something out of the experience. Mr Link, the "Boss", must have been impressed because he said he could not understand why I was still there after several months. But in point of fact there were events going on in Yass which provided the main reasons for me being kept at Mittagong beyond the usual period.

Mum used to visit me as often as she could with my siblings, particularly my sisters. Dad also came to visit when he could. Then family disaster of all family disasters; my two sisters were institutionalised in 1954, they were taken away to Cootamundra and I felt the grief suffered by my family acutely. When it occurred I somehow blamed myself. I reasoned that if I had been at home, I would have been able to protect them, but that was self pity. About this time the Aboriginal Welfare Board's officer had taken a slant against my family; I was in an institution, my father was often away working and goodness knows how my Mum coped financially, or any other way, but she was adjudged a poor mother, indeed most hurtfully of all she was officially adjudged by the Board as an "incompetent mother". The upshot was, with police assistance, my sisters were picked up on their way to school one day during 1954 and brought before the court. My mother was brought down from Hollywood in an understandably fraught state of mind and had to hear the official describe her inadequacies in graphic detail and learn that she had been adjudged incompetent of caring for my sisters, Bertha and Daphne. The court duly committed them to Cootamundra Girls' Home.



My sister Daphne at Cootamundra Girls' Home



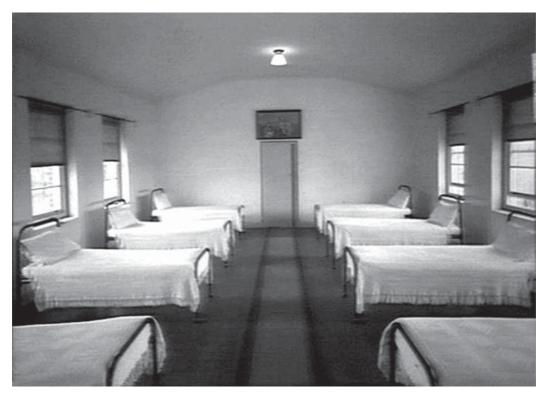


My sisters Bertha and Daphne in later life c. 2005

"I was eight, and my sister was six when we were taken to Cootamundra. I can't remember much, it's that long ago. I remember walking, going to school with my brother, and we were taken by the welfare coming along. We got picked up walking along going down to school, in Hollywood there. His name was Septin, a welfare lad. I think he's probably passed away by now. He was a lot older than me.

They just took us down to the Court House. My Dad was crying, and my Mum, as they were taking her girls away. Then they took me and my sister away to Cootamundra. They just took us. I was there for seven years, until I was fourteen. My sister was there longer than me, until she was sixteen. She was put out to live-in jobs too. Mum used to come up and see us, to visit with my brothers."

Bertha Bell Thorpe "Stories of the Ngunnawal" excerpt Bertha died 2005 RIP



Mittagong cottage dormitory, similar to the one in which I lived in 1953

Mittagong Training School for Boys

© Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales



Mittagong cottage dining room, similar to the one in which I lived in 1953

Mittagong Training School for Boys

© Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

1954 was a really bad year, because beyond the disasters already mentioned my grandfather, Alex Bell, died. The man we all called "Old Dad", the man we loved and who was our family's leader and sage was gone. Grandmother Bertha, our other sage, had predeceased him, so as a family we were now essentially rudderless. Then as if nothing could get worse, I learnt my parents had separated. This all weighed on

me at Mittagong and gave me a lot of sleepless nights, but fortunately I was able to forge on and develop the fortitude we all need for bad times.

Eventually after seventeen months, arrangements were made with generous relatives in Yass, Buddy and Margaret Brown, which allowed me to return to Yass, to try to get on with life, keep out of trouble, learn to be enterprising,

and become self disciplined and self supporting.

What does a nearly fifteen year old do to be self supporting? Fortunately, the wool industry was still enjoying prosperity and graziers were still able to employ people. As I have remarked before, there was some affinity, really mutual respect, between my grandfather and the Barber family. In early December 1954 my Dad, then back in Yass, was working for H. H. Barber, known as "Mil", burr cutting. So just before Christmas, I started work doing the same. I earned perhaps £2.00 or £3.00 a week and the job lasted until the end of January 1955. Dad and I either walked out to "Humewood", or if we were lucky we had the loan of a horse and sulky from a friend at Hollywood.

Somehow, through Buddy Brown, I found after January 1955 that I had a permanent job working for Mr Alan Waters at "Bellevue Hill" near Conroy's Gap, just off the Hume Highway south of Yass.

I was paid £7.10.00 a week, with keep, which was pretty good for those times. I worked on the Waters' place as a farm worker, doing whatever work arose. I fed well and worked hard, so I was soon tough in body and spirit; ready to grasp the future with both hands, or so I thought. I even had spare time to carry on my rabbiting enterprises and make some useful pocket money through selling the skins again in Yass. Initially I spent most of my time at the property, but the Waters had a house in town and I sometimes stayed there, which was good, because I was able to visit with family and friends around

Yass. Looking back, the Waters were decent people who treated me as one of their family.

I turned fifteen on 17 March 1955 and about that time Hollywood closed down and those remaining there either moved into town or went elswhere (the Reserve was finally revoked in 1960).

I remember one weekend helping my Uncle Alec and the Browns to move to one of the six new Aboriginal Welfare Board houses which had built in town. One of the stipulated conditions of a lease was that the men had to be in work, thereby implying they were of good character and able to pay the rent. I recall the rent was quite affordable for a working man in regular employment, perhaps £2.00 or £3.00 a week, equivalent to what I had earned at Barber's as a youth. The houses were normal urban style homes and a vast improvement on the unlined, tin shacks at Hollywood and elsewhere. This phase in country NSW Aboriginal life is today referred today as "the dispersal". There are no polite terms for the machinations of the welfare authorities, but I confess this phase was the beginning of self-respect for many of my people, or at least those who were able to maintain regular employment and support their families. They now lived in conditions that were similar to other Yass people and although still discriminated against socially and in other less subtle ways, it was a start. I have benefitted from this move and today am able to move freely in Yass society, with a minimum of discrimination. I look forward with hope that my people will now enjoy some respect by others.



Returning home 1950s. A typical NSW Railways' train of the times.

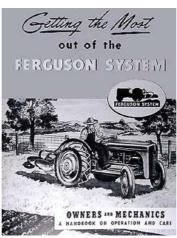


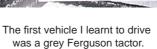
The view towards Bowning Hill on the property formerly known as "Bellevue Hill".

The dam is a more recent addition

A few examples of Allan Water's vehicles c. 1955 ("Bellevue Hill", Bowning, where I worked in my mid teens).









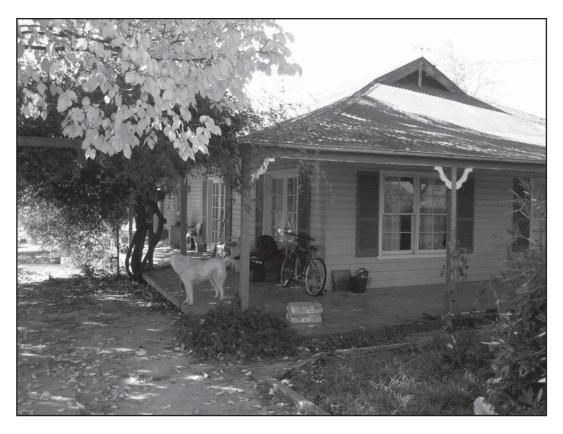
Making Do The work ethic

Allan and Olive Waters, for whom I went to work in 1955, were part of an established Yass district family, some of whom were identified with Dalton and Jerrawa. Allan owned the property "Bellevue Hill", near Bowning (see 2010 image). It was about 1080 acres (440 ha) and included a comfortable weatherboard homestead with a veranda all around, a shearing shed and other sheds that housed Allan's car, truck and tractor. I remember he told me the property had cost him about £20.00 an acre (\$40), or about £22,000.00 (\$44,000). Mrs Waters had a daughter Robyn, by a previous marriage who lived

with her in a house they also owned on the corner of Rossi and Dutton Streets (see 2010 image next page), which backed onto what is today Mt Carmel College. I think Robyn at the time was about ten or twelve.

Today I remember Allan as "a good old bloke", I called him "Boss" until I was much older. He was good to work for. I lived out on the property in one of the homestead's bedrooms and ate with him in the house. He was a fair cook and we certainly did not go hungry.

I did not come into town much, but when



Allan Water's former homestead on the property previously known as "Bellevue Hill", Bowning, where I started work in 1955



A modern view of the Water's former home on the corner of Rossi and Dutton Streets.

Where I sometimes stayed in 1955 and 1956

I did I stayed with the family in Rossi Street, sleeping in a room I had helped Allan fit out on the back veranda. Olive, whom I called Mrs Waters, as one did in those days, was a kind person and protective of me in a motherly sort of way. However, she had issues with me visiting my Yass extended family too often and certainly if I stayed out overnight with them. I suppose she felt responsible for me. She was a good cook and the meals she gave us all were great. I remember she was a Catholic, went to church regularly at St Augustine's and had fairly strict views about many things, for instance we never ate meat on Fridays. However, when she cooked for the shearers out on "Bellevue Hill" when the shearing was on, the shearers were served meat every day, never fish no matter what day of the week it was, but we still had fish on Fridays! Subsequently I now have a poor appreciation of fish meals and generally avoid them.

When I was in town, which as I have already said was not often, I worked in the Water's garden and generally helped out. I never had to ask for my wages, so I was able to get money to my Mum on a regular basis. I had a Bank of New South Wales passbook, so I generally knew where I was financially speaking. I well remember the day I noticed the accumulated balance

was £20 (\$40.00), even after giving money to Mum. This was a veritable fortune in my eyes and looking back I suppose it spoke well of my saving. In my spare time, which included Saturdays and Sundays, I was able to add to my wages by rabbitting out on the property, mostly for the skins which I pegged out to dry, and kept out there. From time to time the wool and skin merchant from Yass would call by on his rounds and pay me cash for my skins.

Allan had a cream coloured Standard Vanguard sedan, not the original post war one with the swept back, but a later model. I surprised myself when relating this detail recently that I could even remember his registration plate which was AKD 393 (and his telephone number was 14 S, which was a party line and we answered after three short rings S***). He also had a three ton Bedford truck and a grey Ferguson tractor which he taught me to drive. His property was largely sheep, but he had a couple of cows which we milked. I helped with the milking and did the separating, producing cream and skim milk as end products, Allan made good butter from the cream, while the remaining skim milk was fed to the dogs and/or the pigs.

A lot seems to have gone on with my fam-



The Yass tram which ran between Yass Town and Yass Junction. Seen here crossing Rossi Street, past the Goodradigbee Shire Offices and obliquely opposite the Water's home (opposite picture). Inevitably it disturbed the peace of the Water's and other homes as it went past.

© Yass & District Historical Society Inc.

ily at this time, the details of which are hard to remember, but I believe just before the end of 1955, perhaps September, I expressed a wish to visit my family at Nowra. I remember Mrs Waters being alarmed initially thinking that I was leaving and not coming back, which was not what I intended. I left my belongings at the house in town, caught the train at Yass Junction for Moss Vale and then took a bus to Nowra.

So it was back to Brown's Flat for a couple of weeks. Not much had changed there with Mum's family; they were still living in the same poor circumstances, eking out a living by performing seasonal picking on various farms in the district. This included pea and bean picking, harvesting sweet corn, potato digging and bagging, or whatever work came along. Although I had become accustomed to better housing now, I do not remember being judgemental about the circumstances in which my grandmother's family still lived. Aboriginal people are like that I believe, they just accept the way things are and as for me it was just great to be in familiar surroundings again with members of my family. They were pea-picking at the time, so I just joined in and thereby was able to further supplement the household income while I was there.

I stayed for a couple of weeks and then

caught the bus for Moss Vale and the train back to Yass. I do not remember how long I stayed with the Waters this time around, but I recollect missing my Mum and family and impulsively I just left one day without telling the Boss and returned to Nowra, by what means I am not sure. The Waters must have thought this was typical for an Aboriginal person, going walkabout, but that was not the case, I was just emotionally screwed up and needed my family.

I have had a few goes trying to sort out the chronology of events with Tony covering 1956, but it is difficult and perhaps not all that relevant to my overall story. However, I do remember setting off back to Yass at some stage, hitchhiking to Moss Vale. My hitch-hiking was not standing at the side of the road and signalling with my thumb as people do today, I walked steadily in the direction of my destination and signalled with my thumb when I heard a car overtaking me.

Initially, I did not have much luck. I had reached Cambewarra a good five kilometres north of Nowra and was halfway up the hill to the Kangaroo Valley before I got a ride to Moss Vale in a milk truck. Then I walked out to the Hume Highway and a young man in a newish Holden stopped and asked "Do you want a ride?" I hopped in, but there was something

about him and the car that put me on my guard. For one thing there was no key in the ignition and for another he seemed desperate to impress me, even saying "When we get to Goulburn I am going to flog the car radio. I should get a good £30 (\$60) for it and then I will be able to shout you a feed, mate." Why? Also it alarmed me that he boasted about troubles that he and his mates had experienced with the police. Anyway, when we got to Goulburn I invented some excuse and asked to be dropped off in town. From there I was making my way out onto the Hume Highway again, when a ute turned into a house gateway and the driver surprisingly stopped and said "Looking for work, mate?" I asked what he had in mind and he replied "Oh, a bit of fencing and that." I told him that I had not done any fencing before and he replied that did not matter. "Just wait a minute," he said, "I have to get something in the house," and disappeared around the back of the house. Whereupon, a police paddy wagon drew up with a scrunching of the roadside gravel. The driver, a policeman, said "Hop in, you are wanted in Goulburn, son" and back we went, this time to the Goulburn Police Station. Naturally I was apprehensive and on the way I told him I had just been offered a job, but he did not seem to care, or be impressed. Meanwhile, I wondered what the bloke thought when he reemerged from the house and I was not there! He must have surely wondered "Where the hell has he gone?"

At the police station I was cross-examined about my earlier hitch-hike and what I knew about the driver of the Holden. They did not tell me why at first, but they appeared to want to be sure I was not involved with him. It soon turned out that they had arrested him for stealing the car. I then volunteered that because he had intended to sell the radio in Goulburn, I had thought that something was wrong and had decided to leave him as quickly as I could. Fortunately, this appeared to gel with them and so off I went again hitch-hiking to Yass.

It was proving to be an odd day, because after quite a walk my next lift stopped, the driver leant across the front seat of his car and called out through the passenger side window "Looking for a job, I am going to Harden." I replied "Yes, what sort of a job?" I hopped in hoping to learn more and he soon told me about the

Hume concrete pipe works at Harden which he said needed men and with which he was connected in some way. This being 1956 the industrial recovery after the war was well under way and employers often found it difficult to hire labor, particularly for heavy, dirty work; in this case producing spun concrete pipes for culverts and storm water drains. Nevertheless, after a while he stopped his car somewhere between Harden and Binalong and said "Look I need a rest!" and stopped the car at the side of the road. Apparently he had been on the road for some hours and he promptly settled back in his seat and nodded off; strange! It was too strange for me, sitting there like an idiot waiting for him to wake up, so I quietly opened my door, grabbed my swag and crept away in the direction of Binalong on foot. I camped the night there on the side road and then made my way early next morning to Yass, hitch-hiking another ride, and turned up at Hollywood. I stayed there for a couple of nights with Uncle Harold and Aunty Sissy Williams, friends of my family. My next call was on Uncle Alex Bell, my father's brother, in North Yass and as usual I was made warmly welcome.

I turned sixteen in March 1956, and continued like my Dad to be actively on the lookout for work, no matter where it offered. Some of the people who afforded me employment in Yass did so after a knock on the door and the question "Have you got any work you want done?" Often they had casual gardening in town, or knew of burr-cutting, or similar work, out on one of the district's properties. In those days chemical herbicides were not as available or as popular as they are today, so chipping with a hoe was the main means of weed control, particularly thistles (which if they get into the wool devalue the clip when it comes to be sold).

Some jobs paid quite well if they were for longer periods than, say a day. So I settled back into Yass and entered the next phase of my life; proving to myself that I could make it without having to subsist on welfare, then known as "Social Security" about which I knew nothing. This meant (nearly always) being in work and having enough money to be self-sustaining and able to contribute to the household wherever I was staying. I guess this all harked back to "Old Dad" and Grandmother Bertha, in North Yass, who believed this was the only way to self-

respect and independence.

Tony and I have done a fair bit of research to jog and confirm my memories, particularly about times when I was fifteen and sixteen. Recently we had access to the Australian Electoral Rolls online, a great resource for historians and biographers. We needed to check on the spelling of Allan Waters' first name, since it can be spelt in various ways. In the 1954 Roll we confirmed that "Allan Waters" lived at "Bellevue Hill, Bowning, grazier M" (M for male). Coincidentally, we also found in an earlier Roll, that of 1936 that Grandfather Alex, Grandmother Bertha and my Dad, Eric, were included in the Hume Electoral Roll. Interestingly, entry No.184: is "Alex Bell, North Yass, camp-labourer [sic] M", No. 185 is "Bertha Bell, North Yass, home duties F" and No. 186 is "Eric Bell, Aboriginal Camp, North Yass, labourer M" (my Dad). By the way, the 1949 roll shows both my grandparents again, with grandfather's name this time spelt in full "Alexander" but of "Oakhill, North Yass, labourer M". Mum is recorded too in 1949: "Lucy Bell, Hollywood Reserve, home duties F", but Dad was not mentioned, so he must have been away again. Most of us think Aboriginal people first received the right to vote in the 1967 Referendum, not so states the Australian Electoral Commission's website:

http://www.aec.gov.au/Voting/indigenous_vote/aborigin.htm

"In most States the right to vote went back to early times of white settlement". Interesting, but I seem to recall that Aboriginal people who failed to vote despite being enrolled, were not fined, unlike their white brothers.

Welfare and the dole are always matters of social contention where poor people are concerned. The word "bludger" was and is often scattered in critical conversation like pellets from a shotgun and innately I tried early to avoid the term being applied to me. Sometimes obtaining work meant returning to Nowra to join my family with seasonal pea-picking work, which in those days was all done manually. There are several references in Aboriginal literature to a researcher ironically named James Bell (like my white forebear c.1856 – 1888, incidentally). In a PhD thesis in 1959 Bell researched Aboriginal assimilation at La Perouse and also included a brief history of Aboriginal society

on the New South Wales south coast at Nowra (as I have mentioned before, my white ancestor was James Bell of Gundagai who married Fanny Lane, an Aboriginal woman in Cootamundra in 1881). Bell's research paper confirms that in general Aboriginal people of the NSW south coast were poorly paid in relation to white workers performing the same work and that regular employment for Aboriginal people was typically scarce.

Not all peas and beans are capable of being harvested by machine even today, but when the crop is suitable for machines today one can replace about thirty or more manual workers. In the 1950s it was done manually and we all became adept pea and bean pickers. Perhaps the hardest work however was harvesting potatoes, digging, picking and bagging - back breaking work that no manual worker misses today.

Despite manual harvesting being hard work my people were glad to have it and regulars like my family in Nowra were often picked up in a farmer's truck and taken to the fields perhaps 30 minutes' drive away. A farmer would sometimes appear unannounced and called out "Anyone want work?", but there were regulars too who had standing arrangements with my people. Other Aboriginal locals travelled further afield and either camped out under canvas, or stayed in shearers' quarters if they were lucky. An interesting booklet compiled by Kath Schilling and published by the NSW Government "Aboriginal Women's Heritage: Nowra" provides fascinating and touching oral histories of these activities, some articles written by members of my extended family.

My little old grandmother, Mum's mother Charlotte (1886 to 1975), was a champion picker and was still doing her share in the mid 1950s, despite then being in her sixties. Our group earned enough for us to subsist for quite a time without resorting to welfare (see remarks below).

Anyway, on one of my later visits to Nowra, Dad was also down there harvesting, typically going wherever work offered, as was his habit. As an aside, I believe Dad's frequent absences from Yass, particularly with Mum's family at Nowra, may have given rise to a later lie promulgated in some Yass quarters that my Bells are really Nowra people, not Yass Ngunnawal Bells,

but see Bell family research by Dr Ann Jackson-Nakano on page 18.

When the picking gave out, for me this was succeeded by many short term jobs in Yass. The going rate for casual jobs then was 5 shillings (50¢) an hour. It does not sound much today, when the equivalent may be in excess of \$20 an hour. Someone desperate enough who registered for Social Security in the old days, if they could not maintain themselves through work, say a husband, mother and child might receive only about £6 02 06 (\$12.50) a fortnight (the equivalent by the way of earning about 16 cents an hour based on a forty hour week). That was judged to be the subsistence level at the time and one can easily see there was a considerable motive to get a job, any job, even at five shillings an hour (50¢).

The variety of work was wide, apart from the work aforementioned I spent some time on George Johnson's property scrub-cutting. The money was quite good; even after feeding ourselves there was something over to take away with us after a couple of weeks (when the contract cut out), perhaps £9 (\$18) net, not including feeding ourselves while we were working.

In the spring of 1956, I also worked in Nowra

harvesting various vegetables with Dad. But as I have said before, I went wherever work was likely to be on offer and I remember hitch-hiking once to Galong from Yass with Dad to work in the limestone quarry there, where we stayed for about a month. I remember on pay days we would send Mum money.

It was hard and dirty work in the quarry for a slight, sixteen year old, breaking rocks with a 16lb (7kg) hammer ready for the crusher (the crushed limestone was used in agriculture) and then helping to burn the limestone to make quick lime (used in cement manufacture). Lime reacts when it comes into contact with moisture such as around the eyes, mouth and sweaty areas and it can give one nasty rashes with its caustic effects. This made me cranky and may have been the cause of a falling out between Dad and me, because we then split up for a time. After this I came back to Yass, so one may well say I was itinerant for most of 1956.

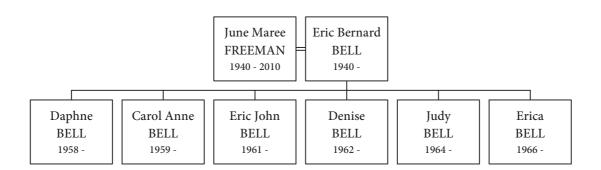
§§§



Picking and bagging peas NSW (?) c. 1960 A familiar sight for me and my family. This image from NLA Jeff Carter Collection, reproduced with permission.



Feeding the people, seaonal pickers' vital contribution to Australian agricultural economy.





View of Comur Street, Yass c. 1956. (From left) "Costumier, Ladies and Children", "Post Office and Telephone Exchange", "Timmer's Bakery". (Centre) "83 Garage" Black & White postcard from the Rose Series.

© Yass & District Historical Society Inc.,

The Late Nineteen-Fifties

Commitments

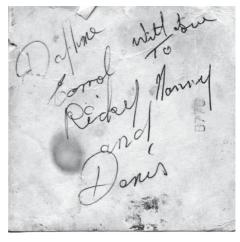
owards the end of 1956, I resumed a friendship with June Freeman and a group of friends with whom I had grown up in Yass. June's father, Fred "Buck" Freeman was one of my Dad's Yass contemporaries and June's mother Pearl came originally from Wreck Bay, to the south of Jervis Bay, so we both had Yass as well as coastal connections and we got on well together. June lived in Yass at the time with her sister Doreen and her husband Lindsay Connolly. Lindsay was employed by the Department of Main Roads. June's and my youthful friendship must have come to the attention of June's Aunty, Evelyn Collins in Brungle and she came over and whisked June away. I do not know why, but it probably did not reflect too well on me. June stayed in Brungle for a while where her Aunty and friends were employed performing seasonal fruit picking and millet cutting.

Christmas 1956 came and went, and in January I scored a well paid job with contractors in Canberra, who were laying sewerage and storm water pipes on a new housing estate. I lived in a hostel at Kensington, while the job lasted. The hostel atmosphere was not very sociable but

that did not matter because I usually hit the sack soon after the evening meal, thoroughly worn out by the job which was pretty tough. During the day I was employed doing pick and shovel work and cleaning out storm water drains. The job lasted only two or three weeks before I became redundant and I was free to return to Yass to my routine of knocking on doors in search of work.

Before long, sometime in 1957 June returned to Yass and we took up where we had left off. If she had not returned then - who knows what might have ensued? Because in idle conversations with my mates up to that time I had often remarked that one day I would like to go travelling around the country before settling down, as my Dad had done as a young man. The Connolly's were kind to us both and I moved in to live with them in their home in Pollux Street, Yass, I had turned seventeen in March 1957, which seems on reflection to be an early age to take on domestic commitments, but at the time I looked upon myself as a mature man. Without a doubt I had already packed a lot of experience into my life up to that point!





One of the few surviving images from those times (I-r) Carol, Ricky & Daphne with Denis the dog.

On 1 January 1958, June and I became parents for the first time when Daphne was born.

I was then working for Max Wade on his property on the Yass Plains, doing all kinds of work and he paid me £7 10 00 (\$15.00) a week; it wasn't much, but we got by.

While I was doing this, one of my clever-dick friends suggested that I apply for the Social Security benefit "just in case", or the dole as it had been named in the Great Depression, which meant minimal sustenance payments as I have remarked before. My friend had said, "You might as well, everybody does; it's extra money". So I took myself down to the Yass courthouse, filled in and signed the forms, despite having already obtained work for Max Wade for a few weeks. Where the form asked about recent earnings I faithfully filled in the amount Max had already paid me. The amount of pay I would eventually get from the dole was a joke, because when the cheque arrived it was for two shillings and sixpence (25¢) for a fortnight. Although one was allowed to supplement the welfare payment to a small degree, I had by my declaration nearly exceeded it and the balance left due to me was thus laughable. As I have remarked before, people were critical at the time about those who resorted to welfare and the term bludger was bandied about a lot because of the widespread belief that the system was being widely rorted. I thereupon swore I would never again lower myself by resorting to handouts like this.

Max Wade farmed the plains to the west of what today is Shearsby Crescent. He had a right of way to the west of where the current mushroom farm is located and I would make my way to work down the slope in the vicinity of Hollywood and down his right of way. We did whatever was needed on his place, much like the work I had performed for the Waters. When not working for Max I worked around the town and out on the nearby properties. I got by fairly well.

In the late summer and early autumn of 1958, I found myself cutting millet at Tumut. I stayed with a friend, Tiger Freeman (June's cousin), and we worked for Aub Vickery. The earnings were quite good, £3 10 00 a day (\$7.00), but as usual there was no security. Most of my people at the time were itinerant, seasonal workers performing manual labour that no one else would take on. However, for most of us seasonal work had

an important social aspect, because we were often engaged as a team, so while the work was hard, at least we had the company of members of our family and extended family to keep our spirits up. After about two months I came back to Yass and continued my door knocking. I managed to get a job as a builder's labourer working on a site in North Yass but again typically that lasted only three weeks.

Later with my brother John Stewart and his wife May, we were engaged by Clarrie Smith whose property was on the other side of the Mundoonan Range on the way to Gunning. June, Baby Daphne, the Stewarts and I moved into an old mud house not far from Ladevale and we occupied ourselves with scrub-cutting for two months (land clearing). Again it was hard yakka, but we were all together. Coincidentally, my Dad was working at Ladevale too, not far away and I remember I walked over one weekend to see him and camped the night with him before walking back, not like today where everyone hops into a car to go anywhere! Whenever we were together Dad always cut my hair and this opportunity was too good to miss, so he duly gave me a good cut before I left to rejoin the others.

In the spring we moved down to Nowra for the pea and bean picking and stayed in John Stewart's tin clad hut at Brown's Flat for the season, before moving back to Yass and staying again with June's sister and her husband in Pollux Street for a short while, after which we stayed with my Uncle Alec in Grampian Street, North Yass.

In 1959 Uncle Ferdie, my Dad's eldest brother, who had possession of my grandparents' old house, which had a separate title within the Barber's "Oak Hill" property, left and went to Melbourne leaving the house vacant. This suited me fine, because I then moved in there with my family, this being about the time that Noel Claude Barber Snr, of "Oak Hill", died. A message was sent to me that the Barber family's solicitor wished to regularise the ownership of the land and the Barber family wished to cease paying the council rates. So I took this on board, and had the responsibilities for the property transferred to me. I paid the rates thereafter. I was now not only a nineteen year old family man but a householder too.

Footnote: The Boxing Bells

The name Bell, particularly those identifying with Aboriginality, resonated through the boxing tents which were part of showgrounds and travelling fairs at the time. Owners of some of the troups included Jimmy Sharman (started 1911) - see image overleaf, Roy Bell¹ (started 1924), but there were others too. Some of my Yass relatives became well known boxers in Yass, Queanbeyan and Sydney, as well as in the tents and although none of them reached the heights like Lionel Rose, Tony Mundine, or George Bracken (all famous Aboriginal boxers), they are long remembered for being handy with the gloves. Yass names like "Kid" Bell, Horrie Sidebotham and "Kid" Moffatt appear in 1930s issues of The Canberra Times reporting on contests in Queanbeyan and Goulburn. I think looking back the "Kid" name probably reflected their light weights, like me less than 53.5kg meant Bantamweight, or less.

The year I was born The Sydney Morning Herald reported successful efforts of NSW Police and Rotary to promote Boys' Boxing Clubs in Sydney, but also at Bega, Cooma, Cootamundra, Goulburn, Murrumburrah, Orange, Quirindi, Tamworth, Young and Yass. Indeed, when I was nineteen there was a club in Yass, although police were involved it was not styled as a Police Boys' Club, more a community club.

I remember gratefully the efforts of local police in giving their time outside of work to local boxing, men like Jack Perrin. Terry Pollard a local citizen was also a great help. My grandfather, my father and my uncles encouraged me to box too and over the years I participated in a lot of amateur bouts. Earlier, in the run-up to the 1956 Melbourne Olympics there was a concerted effort to recruit amateur boxers and I received an invitation to try out, albeit unsuccessfully. According to Wikipedia, Australia ranked equal fourteenth at the Games with Argentina and Finland, with one Bronze medal each. Typically, the USSR won the most medals, 6 with 3 Gold, followed by Great Britain, 5 with 2 Gold, and USA, 3 with 2 Gold.

As will appear later, I had to travel to Sydney for an interview prior to joining the NSW Railways in 1961 as a fettler at Coolalie near Yass. I had a letter of introduction/reference from the Coolalie Ganger, Alf Apps, confirming that despite my lack of weight (8st 2oz - less than 60kg) I could do the work. The regulations stated a minimum weight of 10st (72kg). Someone at the time mentioned that if I wanted to put on weight I should eat plenty of bananas, the boxing fraternity had lots of theories like this either for gaining weight or losing it! On my way to the interview at Central Railway Station in Sydney, I duly bought a bunch of bananas and started wolfing them down while waiting for my appointment. As far as I know they made no difference at all and I passed my medical satisfactorily. My general standard of fitness and my reference had the desired effects, I got the job.

The next train home was not until late in the evening so when I was dismissed by the interviewees, what better than to visit my cousin Charlie Bell, Uncle Alec's son, at Erskineville. When I arrived and gave him all the news, he said "I am boxing at Sydney Stadium tonight. Why don't you come along and sign up for a fight too?" I was jealous of my amateur status fighting in the boys' clubs, but he said "Who will know, we'll call you Bernie Bell!"

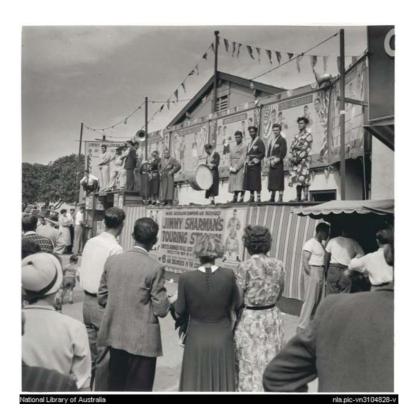
So I went along and boxed four rounds, albeit losing, but I was paid £4 appear-

Neither an Aboriginal nor a relative.

ance money, a handsome amount for those days (sometimes that was all I earned doing casual work in a week). So much for my secret professional boxing career!

I enjoyed club boxing and I had modest success over the years. Altogether I had over fifty fights, mostly in my age bracket, and I won nearly half of them. As I aged, because of my light weight I incurred a penalty in some contests particularly when I found myself boxing much younger opponents "man versus boy"! On the other hand many of those I fought in my age group were a good stone heavier (7kg) but I remember one opponent same age/same weight, whom I beat fairly at Queanbeyan, went on to be the NSW flyweight champion and only narrowly missed becoming the Australian champion.

I had contests all over the State, for example: Binalong, Captains Flat, Cootamundra, Goulburn, Harden Murrumburra, Queanbeyan, Sydney and Young. Some of those opponents I beat went on to become district and state champions, so I conclude that my standard of boxing was competitive. Overall, looking back, it was great fun and allowed me to travel a bit and meet others from entirely different backgrounds.



An evocative image of professional boxing - in which my brother Alec and some of our uncles played a part as contestants. See text previous page.

© Jeff Carter Collection 1959 -Published with permission of National Library of Australia

The Nineteen-Sixties

Parenthood

I turned twenty-one, 17 March 1961. It was a normal workday, Friday, but I determined to get home and celebrate my birthday with my family. This was uncharacteristic of men at the time, who would usually celebrate these events after work in the pub first with their mates. Likely or not, they may have reached home a bit worse for the wear afterwards, hardly encouraging kids to reverence their father's birthdays, but then I am a bit of a romantic.

There I was at the end of the day sitting at the table with my kids Daphne, Carol and Ricky (Eric); aged three years, two years and a couple of months respectively. I doubt that they remember it was a fine early autumn day and that we celebrated with cakes and cordials, but I do. This was in the shack at Oak Hill.

For me the high points of the nineteen-sixties were the six children that June and I had together:

Daphne 1958, Carol 1959, Eric (Ricky) 1961, Denise 1962, Judy 1963 and Erica 1967.

Life was not easy for any of us, but we did not have high expectations, constrained as we were by our Aboriginal background and the way society was at the time, but we just got on with life and did the best we could. Looking back, I am more than amply compensated by having had great kids, with whom I still have a close attachment today and who with my grandchildren are the joy of my life. I usually manage to remember significant dates like their birthdays and they remember mine. Nevertheless, their mother June and I became separated in 1968 and all the children were well looked after by family members. Although, I moved away from Yass and lived in Sydney for many years, Daphne and Denise also lived with me permanently after I married Kay Weeks on 14 October 1970. These events were complications in all our lives, but today purely a matter between us as family.

As I wrote earlier, we started off family life in the shack at Oak Hill and I continued my habit of seeking work wherever it offered, but I had a strong desire to obtain something more permanent. This wish led to railway work and I was encouraged in this by Alfred Apps who was the ganger at Coolalie, on the main line north of Yass Junction. Although, as I wrote earlier, I was slight of build, less than 60 kgs, I was fit and could perform the heavy manual work satisfactorily. This led me to apply for permanent work as a fettler (Oxford dictionary: a person who does repair or maintenance work on a railway). One of the attractions was, if lucky, one might score a railway cottage in which to live with one's family at a favourable rent.



In the meanwhile, I was also encouraged in the railway endeavour by my Uncle Alec, who was a long serving fettler and actually owned a cottage at Coolalie. I was emotionally attached to my uncle because he had fostered my amateur boxing career, was my coach and indeed was usually my "corner man" when I boxed.

As time went by, Des Apps, Alfred's son, moved out of his Railway cottage at Coolalie and we were able to move in there, which was handy, albeit a bit isolated for June and the family. We moved in right away with Daphne

aged four, Carol aged three, Ricky aged one and our baby Denise.

Some time later Uncle Alec had a move and vacated his cottage at Coolalie. He offered it to me and arranged for me to buy it through the Railways for £300 (\$600) through deductions from my Railway pay and we moved across to that cottage. Alec's cottage was much the same size as the Railway one, but it had the benefit of a verandah sleepout, more room for our growing family.

Daphne and Carol were soon going to Mt Carmel School in Yass from there. The school bus came right to Coolalie Station and stopped outside our house. They were picked up each school day. The bus originated in Jerrawa and took children in to the Yass schools.

One day after they had just left, Daphne came running back with the alarming news that the bus had met with an accident and had collided with a tree. Daphne had a cut on her forehead and other children were hurt too. Rex Thompson, another Coolalie ganger, and I immediately hopped into his car with Daphne and went to where the bus was, a short distance away on the Coolalie Road. We picked up a couple of kids who were injured and took them into the hospital in Yass.

With the kids going to school each day, and for June's convenience, we decided later to accept an opportunity to take over the rent of a home in Pollux Street, North Yass from the Aboriginal Welfare Board. This was a three bedroom weatherboard and fibro house and the rent, if I remember rightly, was about \$5.00 a week. This was to be our home for several years and allowed June's sister and family the use of our Coolalie cottage.

It is funny how life turns out, because I was not all that careful as I am today about details like insurance, but of course the Railway had advanced me the money and insisted that the property remain insured. Things did not change when we moved into town, I continued to have the payments deducted from my pay. This was just as well because the cottage burnt down; a total loss! Fortunately, no one was injured, but I eventually received a handy payout of \$700, (which because of decimal currency actually dates the event for my story; after 14th of February,1966). This allowed me to pay off my Railways debt and I had something over.

So we had moved into town to an Aborginal Housing authority house in Pollux Street, then No 31 (although the original house is no longer there). No 31 has many memories for me because all of our six children lived there with us.

The house had electricity, town water, but no telephone. There was an open plan living room cum kitchen (carpeted on one side with lino for the rest), three bedrooms, a bathroom cum laundry with a shower over the bath and a chip hotwater heater. There were twin concrete laundry tubs (typical for those times, but rarely seen today except as having a second life as garden planters or horse troughs), and a wood fired copper in which we boiled our laundry, as one did in those days. The toilet was attached to the house but only had access from outside which was better than having it down-the-back as in many home yards then. The kitchen had a green vitreous enamel "Bega" cast iron, combustable wood stove, made by Metters (see image below), the oven door was cream. It interests me that an old one is currently for sale on E-bay for \$50.00 and indeed that an example of the tubs is for sale in New Zealand also, but no asking price!



Woodcut image of a cottage burning down (see story above).



All that remains of our cottage at Coolalie.

A site inspection with four of my daughters on on Saturday, 17 October 2009

Daphne in foreground



Coolalie 11 km from the Laidlaw Street turnoff and 10 km from No 31

Most people were more energetic about growing vegetables and fruit than they are to-day, although I have developed a bit of a green thumb in later life and love growing plants. At No 31 we grew tomatoes, salad vegetables including radishes, spinach, cabbage and cauliflower in the back yard, but the front yard was tiny and I did not bother then with a flower garden as much as I would today. For a while my

Uncle Alec and Auntie Kate lived next door and I remember she was a good cook. She could make great dampers, which were appreciated by the kids. Although there were bakers in Yass this meant a long walk to town and outlaying scarce money. A good damper is both economical and delicious when fresh and Aunty Kate's served with jam were the goods!



A Bega wood stove similar to ours.



A classic example of concrete tubs.



A beaut fresh damper (image from a recipe ad).

Nineteen Seventies

Life in Sydney



Eric & Kay Bell, Sydney 1970

owe a lot to the Weeks family with whom I grew up in Yass and particularly to my wife of forty years Kay Weeks, whom I married in Sydney in 1970. One weekend in 1970, I went by train from Yass to Sydney, overlooking that it was a long weekend and that the train was fully booked, but my years working for the railways had taught me a thing or two. This was no obstacle and I managed to get a seat alright and more importantly managed to stow a large tea chest of Kay's Yass belongings and my luggage in the guard's van.

Kay met me at Central Railway Station and took me to the house she had found in Redfern, just a short train ride away, and I spent the weekend getting used to the idea I was now living in the Big Smoke. Wishing never to be out of work and having just left Burden & March, builders in Boorowa, where I had been working as a labourer, I followed my established habit of knocking on doors immediately after the long weekend. This was a bit nerve racking because I did not know my way around and therefore did not stray far from home, so I was unsuccessful.

Fortunately, Kay's brother-in-law, Keith Chal-

lenger, who was a long serving linesman with the Sydney County Council (SCC), came to my rescue a week later. Keith amongst other things was also an Electrical Trades Union delegate and proved to be a good mentor. He gave me a telephone number to ring at SCC and the man who answered said "What kind of work are you looking for and do you have a driving license?" I replied that I had been working as a builder's labourer and yes I did have a driving license, but would be interested in perhaps training to be a linesman in future. "Well, we can see about that later," he said, "but you can start straight away as a labourer. There is a job out at the Eastern Suburbs Depot at Rozelle.

So this is the way I found secure employment initially as a gardener's offsider and later as a fitter's mate with The Sydney County Council, the large distributor of electricity generated by The NSW Electricity Commission. I worked for SCC and its successors, Sydney Electricity and Energy Australia, for the next twenty-seven years. They were good employers and being part of a rapidly growing modern industry it was the place to be, a bit like the computer in-

dustry today.

Kay and I were married at the Newtown Registry in Sydney on Wednesday 14 October 1970. We started our married life renting in Thomas Street, Redfern. I remember being struck with the smallness of the terrace house when I first saw it, the front was almost on the street and the back yard was tiny, a bit of a shock to one used to the wide open spaces.

Fortunately Kay had acclimatised well to city living and knew her way around, which I did not. People would mention the names of suburbs in conversation and I would wonder "Where the hell is that?" Trains and buses were daunting too and if it was not for Kay and my work mates I could have become easily lost to begin with. As it was I turned up at the wrong depot my first day at work, but fortunately the correct one was not far away and I was able to front up on time, a matter of principle for me.

It was not long after Kay and I set up home at Redfern that circumstances brought about us fostering Kay's niece Vicki, then just a few months old. Today we look upon Vicki as a daughter and she looks upon us as her parents. Also it was not long before my daughter Daphne and later my daughter Denise joined us. Meanwhile Kay and I had two sons, Colin and Darren, so eventually we were a household of two adults and five kids which necessitated a move initially to No 5 Smithers Street, Chippendale for three years and then we moved to Calder Road, Darlington. Finally in 1980, we went to Erskineville where we stayed for sixteen years, first to Amy Street for a short while and then to McDonald Street.



Officiating at a family wedding. "Myself", who gave the bride away and Kay looking glamorous.

For much of the time, Kay also worked as well as looking after us all. One of her longstanding jobs was working for a sock factory, which also meant if she wished she could bring piece work home and thereby further supplement what we earned. I also benefitted from regular over-time and so we managed to get by quite well. I was paid weekly and appreciated what it meant to have full-time employment and regular income.



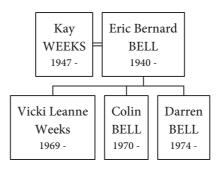
Shaky photo by an excited workmate trying to catch me allegedly drinking beer out of a jug. So life was not all that serious some would say. These are two of my good mates Ron Turner & Keith Chant.

Life was pretty good with us and the permanent job meant I had regular holidays and we could visit our respective families together, which was great.

Many people will recall the SCC vehicles which for many years were uniformally coloured a light shade of green¹ and always had the appearance of being well kept and modern, as they were. This reflected the corporate culture and its considerable self confidence. This was before privatisation of many parts of the industry, which occurred later and is still going on, SCC was a significant earner of profits for the State Government and this was reflected in the organisation's culture. I learnt a lot about good management practices and procedures at the work face. My eventual job was to follow a pre-arranged schedule of inspecting SCC substations making sure they were in a clean state and reporting any defects for later attention by tradesmen. This meant I travelled a lot, initially on foot and by public transport, but later I was provided with a vehicle which I took home overnight so as to be ready for for any emergency call-out, and to be able to drive direct to the job without resorting to public transport and shank's pony.

Initially my job was affected by union demar-

¹ Until an alert executive realised that green vehicles did not command as good a price as white ones on the used vehicle market. Then the fleet became uniformly white.









Colin Bell Vicki Weeks Darren Bell

cations, which prevented me performing many simple maintenance tasks, but as time went by SCC developed a culture of multi-skilling and my offsider and I could carry out much of the maintenance on the sub-stations ourselves, as long as it did not include live power (for safety reasons) beyond changing light bulbs of course!

The first man I worked with was Ronnie Turner (see picture above), who was a gardener, whose job was to go around making sure SCC property was neat and tidy. So I became his offsider for a while and that proved to be a good start because he had such a good attitude. Ronnie was provided with a truck for his work and when I asked him for directions about getting to and from work, he asked where I lived. When I told him Redfern, he said "Well, that's no problem. You get to the depot each day by public transport, I live at Matraville so I'll pick you up

at the depot in the mornings and drop you off after work."

As time went by I became a regular relieving offsider. Jobs would last for months at a time. I worked alongside electrical fitters and substation fitters and learnt a lot. One of the fitters, Zane Lemarchant, lived at Newtown and when I asked him for directions to get to and from work he replied he could easily pick me up and drop me off near home every day. Zane was a good bloke, red headed, and although SCC workers were not big on nicknames I called him "Blue", as one does. We became good friends.

One of the many offsider jobs was with substation fitters who were either renovating or building new substations. These took high voltage power (about 11,000 volts) from the underground lines and passed it through a transformer down to about 410 volts, which was then rectified at the users end depend-



Colin, Kay & Darren on a visit to Canberra

ing on whether they were using three phase, or two phase. The substations required a lot of wiring and before long I found myself running and fitting the high voltage wires while the fitter would attend to the more complicated low power end. My work would be signed off by the fitter because I did not have a fitter's certificate.

In due course I was recognised as a fitter's mate and received a pay rise in acknowledgement. As I remarked earlier, my eventual full-time job was to follow a pre-arranged schedule of inspections of metropolitan and suburban substations, which I initially covered on foot and by public transport, but eventually I was provided with a vehicle which I took home at the end of the work day. This was very convenient and increased my productivity and that of my offsider substantially.

I enjoyed my twenty-seven years, not only

the work but the mateship with others that worked out of the same depot. I am proud to say that I had a reputation for punctuality and I never missed a day from work whether for sickness or any other reason. In 1995 my employer went through a rationalisation, as many firms did at the time, and some of us were offered redundancy packages, but as I was still only fiftyfive and enjoyed the job I initially refused. But in 1996 I was offered an even more attractive package and I accepted it, as it almost too good to refuse. I received a generous redundancy payment - 2 weeks' pay for each of my twenty-seven years of service, which together with my 333 days of accumulated sick pay, plus long service leave. This enabled Kay's and my return to Yass and the purchase of our own home, which we still live in.







Vicki and her brothers Colin and Darren in 1989.

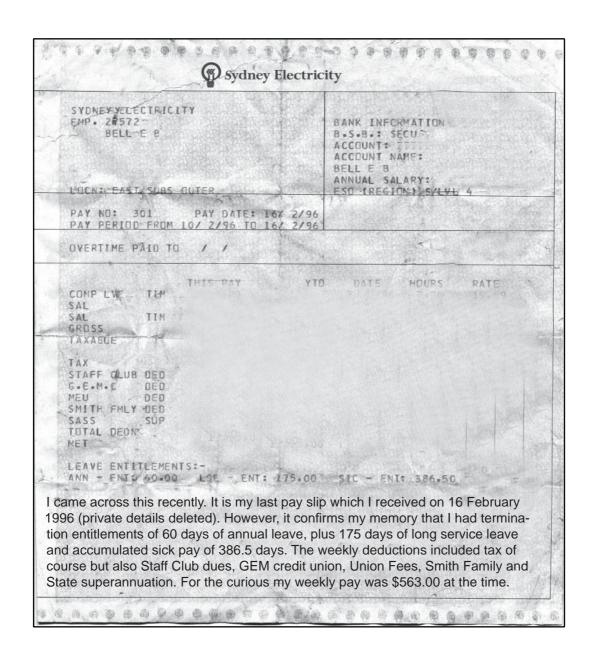


Sydney Power sponsored team of touch football players visiting Yass with me (r).

I do not have many photos from my working days because cameras were not as common then as they are today, everyone seems to have one either in their pocket or as part of their mobile phone. However, one photograph I do have is of some of my depot mates' and me with our touch football team. I was manager/coach and on a couple of occasions I travelled to Yass with the team and this snap was taken on one of those occasions. We were sponsored by our employer and as depicted the team are wearing Sydney Electricity T-shirts



Socialising at a wedding with my supervisor Ted Thurston



Life and holidays with our children (plus visits to family)



Colin & me at 47 Thomas St Redfern Sydney



Visit with friends in Mount Street, Yass. Vicki extreme left with Ricky on tricycle.



Darren & me outside 2 Calder Road Darlington Sydney



Darren - " My Dad Loves Me, I'm a Tax Deduction"



Colin, Darren & Vicki at Callala Beach, Jervis Bay



Father Xmas & Darren Calder Road Darlington Sydney



My kids at home at Amy Street, Erskineville, Sydney Denise, Colin & Darren



Vicki & carousel horse Sydney



My vegie patch at the Erskineville house with Darren on scarecrow duty.



Walking Callala Beach with my brother John Stewart



Darren & me

Callala Beach visits were all about socialising, swimming, walking and fishing. At left Darren and me with a bucket of shell fish and at right Daphne's eldest, Tanya, helping me haul the beach net. Holidays were happy days for all of us.



My grandaughter Tanya & me



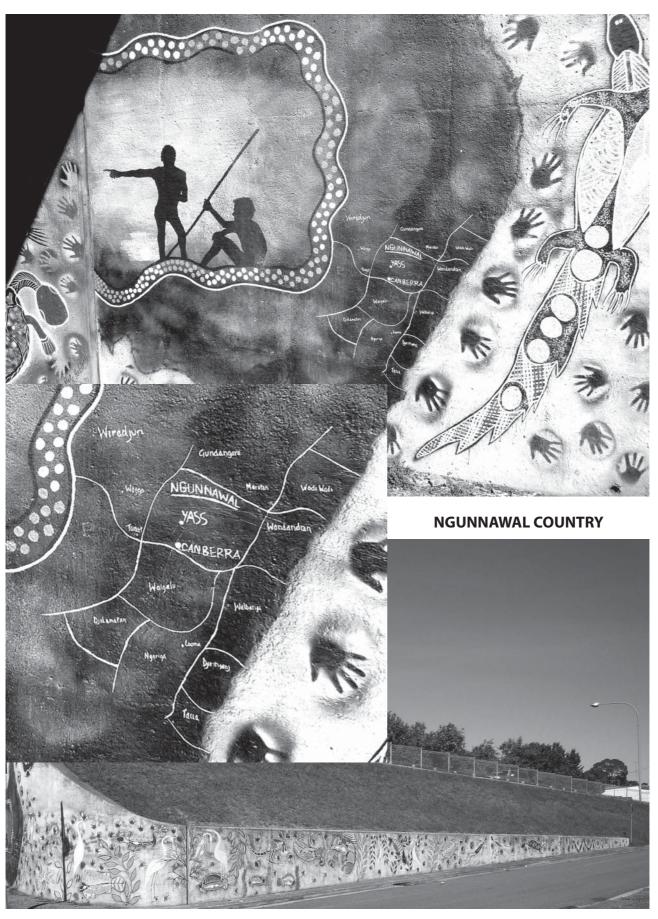
Me & my Mum



Colin, my Mum & Kay



With my sister Jean Bundle, née Stewart, & her husband Mervyn at Lakes Entrance.



Artwork inspired by Yass Ngunnawal people and Yass Municipal Council (see my remarks on page 107)

Return to Yass

RETIREMENT & RETURN TO YASS

March 1996, Kay and I were now free to do what we wanted with the rest of our lives. We did not waste any time, and returned to Yass as soon as we could pack our things and have them transported. This was quite an occasion and in typical fashion there was a lot of family involvement helping us make the transition from the big city to our home territory. Our Yass family connections welcomed us home and helped us settle in. Daughter Vicki came up from Narrawallee, near Ulladulla with her husband, Scott Clulow, to help which was very welcome.

By 15 April 1996 we had rented a comfortable house in Yeo Crescent, for \$150 a week, where we stayed until October. In the meanwhile, Kay and I looked at a few houses that were for sale and I was attracted to one in North Yass which had plenty of land and best of all a big shed. The asking price was \$90,000 which was okay, but for various reasons we decided on 13 McBean Parade which was \$6,000 more and did not have a shed, only a carport! Given my later activities in Yass, I sometimes regret not having bought the one with the shed, but nevertheless we have been very happy with our home in McBean Parade.

Among our many helpers, Kay's brother Bert Weeks was still in Yass at the time and as usual was a tower of strength. As soon as we settled for the house with Garth Jones, the Yass real estate agent, we got stuck into repainting our new home and updating a few things like replacing carpet in the kitchen with modern lino. Most of our possessions, accumulated over twenty odd years in Sydney fitted in well and today it feels as though we have always lived here.

Soon I was enjoying not having a regular

work routine and thought initially that I could do more or less what I liked, subject of course to Kay's plans for me each day! Little did I know that this was not to last, as I soon became more and more involved in caring for my Ngunnawal people and others.

INVOLVEMENT IN NGUNNAWAL AFFAIRS

While we were still in Sydney my cousin Jean Merritt and others spoke to me about the incorporation of a specifically Ngunnawal community corporation, which would undertake caring projects for our people with an emphasis on the aged and disabled, and about forty of us subscribed and became members. It was clear to us all at the time that this was the appropriate way to go, because it would instil in us proper governance, record keeping and transparency for all our future activities. In hindsight this was a sound strategy.

By the nineties some headway had been made in Aboriginal well being in some places, for example most Ngunnawal people were better housed by then and in the main lived in typical Australian homes rather than the substandard conditions many of us had been subjected to before on reserves and missions

Until the return to Yass our lives had revolved almost exclusively around our family and work, busy times. Kay in particular was ambitious for the younger members of our families and encouraged them to persist with their school studies. All of them stayed on at school for the leaving certificate, which must have been hard for them at times when some of their contemporaries left school as soon as they could, but they did it and today they are glad they did. I am grateful to Kay for this and her good mothering instincts, in particular the way she accepted my other children, some of

whom lived with us at various times, but we kept in touch with all of them as a matter of course. Kay treated them all no differently to our own three: Vicki, Colin and Darren.

NSW ABORIGINAL WELFARE BOARD

Despite our busy, sometimes hectic lives in $Sydney, we were \, not \, is olated \, from \, developments$ in Aboriginal community affairs, not only in Sydney but Yass and elsewhere. Aboriginal people were impatient for political progress and there was growing political activism at the time. I mentioned in earlier pages The NSW Aboriginal Welfare Board and its influence on my peoples' lives in and about Yass. In New South Wales the Aborigines Act (NSW) 1969 was eventually enacted by the Askin State Coalition Government which abolished the Aborigines Welfare Board altogether. Following which an Aboriginal Advisory Council and a Directorate of Aboriginal Welfare (1969-1975) were created within the NSW Premier's Department. Earlier, the Federal Government had assumed responsibilities for Aboriginal Affairs nationwide following the 27 May 1967 referendum which approved two amendments to the Australian Constitution relating to Indigenous Australians. But until 1981, the aim of government policy in NSW was still the assimilation of Aboriginal people into mainstream society, a change that had developed in Australia in the nineteenthirties influenced by the late Professor Elkin's ideas which had grown out of his extensive anthropological studies (he was the first Professor of Anthropology at Sydney University).

In 1978, during the tenure of the Wran Labor State Government a Select Committee of the NSW Legislative Assembly [State Parliament] published two reports on Aborigines, which stated that the policy of assimilation had failed, and that Government policies must be aimed at self determination in future. The first report recommended that the State Government recognise land rights and prior Aboriginal ownership of the land. The second report made a number of recommendations concerning social and economic policies relating to Aboriginal people, but progress was painfully slow.

I am not an authority on Aboriginal politics, but it is not difficult to appreciate the frustration and anger of Aboriginal leaders like Charles Perkins. Dr Charles Nelson Perrurle Perkins AO (1936-2000) was the first Aboriginal to graduate from university and the first Aboriginal to head a Federal Government Department. The Charlie Perkins Trust website states among other things:

"In the summer of 1965, Charles organised a group of thirty students to travel to Walgett, Moree, Bowraville and Kempsey to protest against discrimination and poor living conditions. In his autobiography, Charles wrote "The Freedom Ride was probably the greatest and most exciting event that I have ever been involved in with Aboriginal affairs. This unprecedented protest exposed the apartheid [sic] of country Australia..."

I was twenty-five at the time and living at Coolalie because of my work with the NSW railways. I was intent on bringing up my kids and surviving, but inevitably since I am basically conflict averse I found the media publicity troubling. By then things were marginally better in Yass in inter-racial terms. The 1950s had seen the construction of an Olympic swimming pool and a new high school in Yass. Aboriginal children attended local government and parochial schools and some used the Yass swimming pool routinely. Attendance at the local cinema for example no longer caused me the discomfort of being made to sit in an area designated for Aboriginals, I recall by then we were escorted by the torch-bearing usherettes to seats of our choice, not that I attended all that frequently at the time.

LANDMARK NATIONAL EVENTS

Gradually more and more Aboriginal people spoke up for themselves, sometimes in angry tones and there were a number of well publicised milestones, for example Vincent Lingiari, the Gurindji people's *Kadijeri* (clever man) led his people off Wave Hill cattle station, a controversial action at the time.

We have some of these details from a Wikipedia article, as follows:

"There had been complaints from Aboriginal employees about conditions on Wave Hill Station over many years and a Northern Territory government inquiry held in the 1930s said of the owner Baron Vestey and his company:

It was obvious that they had been ... quite ruthless in denying their Aboriginal labour proper access to basic human rights."

However, little was done over the decades leading up to the strike.

Billy Bunter Jampijinpa, who lived on Wave Hill Station at the time said:

"We were treated just like dogs. We were lucky to get paid the 50 quid a month we were due, and we lived in tin humpies; you had to crawl in and out on your knees. There was no running water. The food was bad – just flour, tea, sugar and bits of beef like the head or feet of a bullock. The Vesteys mob were hard men. They didn't care about blackfellas."

Gurindji who received minimal government benefits had these paid into pastoral company accounts over which they had no control. In contrast, non-Aboriginal workers [there] enjoyed minimum wage security with no legal limit on the maximum they could be paid. They were housed in comfortable homes with gardens and had full control over their finances.

Vincent Lingiari was quoted widely in the press at the time of the walk off:

The issue on which we are protesting is neither purely economic nor political but moral... on 22 August 1966 the Gurindji tribe decided to cease to live like dogs, he said."

In due course this action led to the famous land claim, which ground on through the courts until 1975 when the then Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, handed back the Gurindji land to its traditional owners, symbolically pouring a handful of earth into Vincent's hands.

Since then there have been many signal events, whose short titles immediately conjure up vivid and for me disturbing memories, because all of them impacted on Ngunnawal affairs and our Aboriginal people Australia wide [my emphases]:

- 1990 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) (1990–2005) was created (the Australian Government body through which Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders became formally involved in the processes of government affecting their lives). A number of indigenous programs and organisations fell under the overall umbrella of ATSIC.
- 1991 the **Royal Commission Into Black Deaths in Custody** handed down its recommendations,
- 1992 the High Court recognised native title to Murray Island, in the historic **Mabo** case, overturned the doctrine of 'terra nullius' and paved the way for the filing of native title claims,
- 1990s the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission started a national inquiry into the practice of removing children. The Bringing Them Home Report a national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was tabled in Federal Parliament on 26 May 1997.
- In 2003 ATSIC became embroiled in a number of controversies after operating for a dozen years and was formally abolished by the Coalition Government in 2005. (In 2006 the policy and coordination roles then became the responsibility of the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination in the Federal Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.)

Before we returned to Yass there had been many changes in the administration of Aboriginal matters in New South Wales. At the State level for example, the NSW Government's website states among other things:

"In 1989, the Government set up the NSW Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee, chaired by the Director General of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs. The purpose of the Committee was to facilitate the exchange of information between Departments and ensure that services

provided to Aboriginal people were appropriate and effective.

In December 1992, the Council for Australian Governments endorsed the National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Programs and Services for Aboriginal People and Torres Strait Islanders. The Office of Aboriginal Affairs took the role of assisting line agencies to implement the National Commitment, and established the NSW Coordinating Committee for Services Provided to Aborigines (chaired by the Director General) to achieve more effective and efficient Government agency outcomes.

In July 1993, the Office of Aboriginal Affairs was transferred from the Premier's Department [Carr Labor Government] and became a separate agency responsible to a Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

In March 1994, the Office of Aboriginal Affairs was replaced by a Department of Aboriginal Affairs, with an upgraded role for the Director General.

Current NSW Government policy on Aboriginal affairs is based on the philosophy of Aboriginal self determination. This means the right of Aboriginal people to determine their own priorities and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development."

The foregoing gives some background to my later involvement in Yass community affairs once Kay and I settled in.

NGUNNAWAL ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

As I remarked earlier, Ngunnawal people decided to incorporate a body to be responsible for our peoples' advancement and welfare. I have had substantial involvement as a member, one time chairman, office manager and case worker. In all of these roles I have had contact with many professional people, who I am glad to say in the main were well motivated and worked hard to bring about progress in Aboriginal affairs, which the Australian community now requires of their elected representatives and its servants.

Traditional Ngunnawal lands cover a very wide area from Boorowa in the north to Queanbeyan in the south, with Yass in the middle, but it also includes most of the Australian Capital Territory including Canberra. As a result we are affected by two state/territorial administrations as well

as the Commonwealth of Australia, and several district/urban municipal bodies, most of whom have an interest in Ngunnawal welfare under a multiplicity of programs associated with health, aged care, education, housing and employment. The government administrators, consistent with the modern theme of self determination, needed points of interaction with Ngunnawal people and the Ngunnawal Aboriginal Corporation has proven to be an appropriate vehicle.

I find it remarkable that we started with six clients but now at any one time have over a hundred clients on our books, the numbers depending on varying client requirements. Many of these are aged, ill or disabled people, who need support, advice and assistance with their lives, but this is only the tip of the iceberg, so to speak.

Because health, aging and disability were matters of urgent need, and at last had government focus, we had immediate contact with NSW Southern Area Health personnel. In particular with Yass Hospital where we had a lot to do with staff, initially with Judith Williams the then Manager of Yass Hospital (and today Deputy Mayor of Yass Valley Council), but we also had a lot of support from the staff of the Yass Community Health Centre. All of them were happy to have links with the Aboriginal community and Ngunnawal Corporation provided this.

Ngunnawal Aboriginal Corporation is today described as an "auspicing" body, a term I had not previously heard, but when one starts associating with health & welfare professionals and others one has to learn their terms. Auspicing is a good term because it means "with the help, support or protection of". Our Corporation at the time of writing has a full time staff of a dozen (with another dozen case workers resident in their respective localities).

Our major activities are:

- Providing aged care under the Commonwealth HACC programs (100% Health and Community Care)
- Providing Community Aged Care Programs under the CACP (50% NSW& 50% ACT)

These days I am employed by the Ngunnawal Corporation part time, since officially I am "semiretired" – (I became seventy in 2010!) officially I work five hours a day for five days a week, but I spend as much unpaid time as circumstances dictate, for example I am available by phone at any time of the day or night for consultation or advice, sometimes I am just a shoulder to cry on for someone in crisis.

I have three vehicles at home: Kay's small car for her personal use, my utility which I use for my Landcare projects and an office sedan for use in my work with clients of Ngunnawal Corporation. Typically I drive people in the sedan to medical appointments, or for official Ngunnawal business, which can range from Young (to the north west of Yass), to Goulburn, to Canberra, to Nowra and elsewhere.

EARLY NGUNNAWAL CORP. ACTIVITIES

An early project for our board was to respond to the needs of our people affected by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's report on the stolen generation. With all the publicity surrounding the 1990's hearings, which received wide exposure in the media, and particularly the final report which was tabled in Federal Parliament on 26 May 1997, there was widespread trauma among those who, like my sisters Bertha and Daphne, had been taken away from their parents by the authorities and incarcerated in various institutions. The reawakening for many of often very cruel memories was indescribable, I know because my sisters Bertha and Daphne for example, had not wanted to talk about their experiences at all. Fortunately there were many meetings of Aboriginal people and sympathisers from the white community which helped the grieving process to some degree.

Speaking with Bertha one day she expressed a need to share her experiences with me and we had a long and painful talk face to face. As I have said before, I felt partly responsible for Bertha and Daphne being taken away, something of which I cannot rid myself entirely, although I was a mere thirteen at the time. Our discussion was emotionally charged but I am glad we had it, because it unburdened Bertha to a slight extent and helped me with some of my ghosts.

Bertha, who died in 2006, also shared her story in "Stories of the Ngunnawal" published by Journey of Healing Inc in 2007.

Addressing this subject more directly, in 1997 I was asked by the Yass Community Health Centre to address a group of concerned people at a meeting in Sydney and spoke about my sisters' experiences. The meeting was comprised of people who wished to support the growing awareness of this sorry chapter in our history and I am glad to relate that Ngunnawal Corporation subsequently received a generous grant to be used at our discretion to bring comfort to stolen generation members.

Also in 1997 I was invited to participate and chair an Aboriginal Health Committee set up by the Southern Area Health Service to address in particular Aboriginal Otitus Media (middle ear infection)¹. The committee included Judith Williams and a doctor from Goulburn Hospital. The aim was to institute a program for children in the wider community and encourage their parents to have them medically examined. This went on successfully for three years and did a lot of good.

An early project that won substantial public goodwill in Yass arose through the ACT Arts Council and The Yass Council's Indigenous Consultative Committee, of which I was a member. There was a perennial problem with graffiti on the Yass River bridge approaches and the bridge pylons in River Bank Park. Yass Council and the local police were at a loss to do something about it.

We were able to find an artist, Dale Huddlestone from the Tuggernong Art Centre to help us motivate local children to participate in the murals for this site. One can see there the outlines of their hand prints and indeed mine too, although the hand prints are not individually identified. Dale also supervised the

¹ Otitus Media is a common childhood infection which affects the middle ear caused by colds, flu and chest infections, prematurity (being born early) and smoking around children. It is a common childhood disease according to Westmead Hospital - 75% of all children have had one episode of by the age of five and for some it may continue throughout school life. As many as eight out of ten Aboriginal children could have a middle ear infection and hearing loss at some time during the school year. Hearing loss can make things much harder at school for Aboriginal children.

creation of a number of panels by the children which were later mounted on the bridge pylons. The aim was to give local kids a sense of ownership. Children from four of the town's schools were involved.

YASS VALLEY INDIGENOUS CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE & YASS VALLEY COUNCIL

"MUNNAGAI YERRIBI WALKING TRAIL"

The following is a news release by the foregoing bodies in May 2005, copied from the Yass Tribune website with permission.

"The Yass Valley Indigenous Consultative Committee in partnership with the Yass Valley Council was successful in obtaining an Environment Trust Grant of \$37,000 from the NSW State Government to progress works associated with the development of an Aboriginal Interpretative Trail in Riverbank Park, Yass.

The Wallabalooa Interpretative Trail Project was an initiative of the Yass Valley Indigenous community. It aims to present the story, through time of the Wallabalooa culture (northern Ngunnawal Aboriginals) in a natural setting on the banks of the Yass River in Riverbank Park, Yass. The project resulted in the revegetation, through planting of indigenous and where possible endemic flora, on a 2km section of the river, which was frequented and used as a traditional swimming hole for the Wallabalooa people.

Environmental works were complemented by a series of interpretative displays that recount culturally and historically significant events associated with the Wallabalooa people. The trail provides recognition of the historic association of the Ngunnawal people to the local landscape and aims to educate both indigenous and non indigenous people of all ages about the Ngunnawal, and in particular Wallabalooa culture. The indigenous community sees the project as an act of practical reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians."

I am happy to relate that the successful Grant application was prepared for us by Ms Fleur Flannery.

GAINING RECOGNITION FOR OUR PEOPLE

I trust it will not be seen by readers as disingenious when I state that a major motivation for Yass Ngunnawal elders and me has been to cement relationships with other community bodies and authorities in Yass. This activity, often initiated by us, now covers a very wide canvas.

We have enjoyed a lot of encouragement and what started as a stressful exercise for some of us has now become fairly routine and indeed enjoyable for those of us who perform these activities. Almost as a matter of course Ngunnawal representatives are now included in many civic ceremonies and receive invitations to address schools, associations and clubs locally. Essentially this represents a public relations drive by us for acceptance of Aboriginal people by the wider community. Other communities in Yass have traditionally had access to mentors, civic referees and advisors, so why not us?

These days we Ngunnawal have good relations with the local Judiciary, the Police, Civic Leaders, Educators, as well as Health, Employment and Welfare personnel. This is all vital for our people and visiting Aboriginals, any of whom (for any reason) find themselves in trouble. We can and do represent and advise them when requested.

BURUNYA ABORIGINAL CORPORATION & LANDCARE INITIATIVES

This corporation was formed by me and my friends out of a desire to encourage Aboriginal youth employment locally.

It has enjoyed substantial support by Yass Valley Council, Palerang Shire, The Murrumbidgee Catchment Authority and the Yass Area Network of Landcare Groups which include many local farmers, graziers and environmentalists.

One of the major activities of Burunya has been a program of eradication of feral willows carried out by Aboriginal people. This has involved poisoning, removal, stockpiling and burning of this noxious species, (later in the program green removal as well). For this we have received a number of Landcare awards.

AWARDS & CEREMONIES

I have often read about the difficulties community leaders like me have in reconciling their roles as representative of their people and the hubris that goes with receiving awards and publicity often in their own names. This is a sensitive issue with me, because I have received many personal nominations and awards for Ngunnawal activities, particularly in the last five years. These cover many of the activities I have mentioned and it is a matter of concern to

me that not all the participants, supporters, etc., received public recognition too.

The images that follow, courtesy of the Yass Tribune, are examples of what I am writing about and I must pay tribute here to the generous attitudes of the Managing Editor, Robyn Sykes and her staff of the Yass Tribune, plus many other journalists, for the publicity they have afforded me and my people in our public endeavours.



Raising the flag at the Yass Memorial Hall for NAIDOC Week are Hugh Percy, acting General Manager of Yass Valley Council, mayor Nic Carmody, Charlie Merritt, Desi Connors, Peter Bell, Beryl Elizabeth Mundy, Vanessa Wallace, Dorothy Dickson and Eric Bell. © Yass Tribune 10.7.2009



2009 Jobs Ready Course certificate holders: (back) Anthony Merritt, Greg Chatfield, Matt Freeman & Dwayne Connors (front) Caleb Payne, Desmond Connors, Amy-Lee Bell, Melissa Williams, Robbie Taylor, Andrew Bell and Douglas Payne.



Burunya Aboriginal Corporation and Wagga Wagga Aboriginal River Restoration groups in Yass © Yass Tribune 23.11.2007



Eric Bell receiving another Award © Yass Tribune 2.6.2010



Doug Payne, Greg Chatfiield, Eric Bell & Robbie Taylor at Yass High School marking the broadcast of Mr Rudd's Apology © Yass Tribune 15.2.2008



Eric Bell and Mayor Nic Carmody opening the "Munnagai Yerribi walking trail" © Yass Tribune 16.7.2008



Doug Payne, Eric Bell (in distance) Greg Chatfiield planting yet more trees

© Yass Tribune 18.9.2009



"WIRADJURI STORIES

Aboriginal life in southeastern Australia, Wiradjuri and neighbouring regions [including Ngunnawal]".

Courtesy of Dr Peter Rimas Kabaila, BSc (Arch), B.Arch (UNSW), Dip.Ed, BA (Hons), PhD (ANU)

WIRADJURI AS HUNTER/GATHERERS

By the time European explorers crossed the Blue Mountains and entered Wiradjuri territory in 1813, Wiradjuri lands covered a large part of NSW, bounded by limits of usage of the people who said wira (no). Wiradjuri was one of a group of 'no-having' (wira or wiraay = no, and djuri or thurray = having) Aboriginal languages, which included a number of other dialects or languages in neighbouring areas of southeastern Australia (Austin et al. 1980).

Social organisation

In common with other Aboriginal and hunter-gatherer groups, Wiradjuri social organisation was based on the band, a kin-based family group: mobile and egalitarian. Status in the band was by age, where elders played an important leadership role. The band hunted and gathered together over a range that included riverine and hinterland country. At times, bands joined to form large gatherings of several hundred people to participate in ceremonies, initiation and trade.

Aborigines in south-eastern Australia lived a semisedentary life, gathering food in small groups, which typically consisted of a man and his wife or wives, children, and older relatives. After the age of ten, boys lived at a separate men's camp to prepare towards their initiation into manhood. Girls could marry once they reached the age of fertility at 14. These groups gathered when there was a food surplus to hold ceremonies, or defend themselves against other groups, and became known as 'tribes' by the Europeans (Buchan 1980: 1).

As hunter-gatherers, they had to know their country intimately in order to prosper. They tended to be mobile, and it follows that their most important survival mechanism was their knowledge, rather than their equipment. The daily life of people was routine, but also included highlights, marked by practice of religion and ceremony, orchestrated by the most knowledgeable seniors in the community.

Although the long-term survival of hunter-gathering over the last few million years is popularised as 'environmentalism', it is better seen as 'adaptive stability'. There was no buffer between the hunter-gatherer and

the natural environment. Hunter-gatherers of the past knew their habitats as routine and reliable food sources, before the arrival of peoples with more aggressive social systems, which pushed out remnant hunter-gatherer groups into unattractive environments with problems of survival.

Hunter-gatherer life was a pattern of living in small foraging groups ('bands'), which move around. (Lee and De Vore) This explains much of the operation of Wiradjuri communities and sheds light on their difficulties of settling into towns. Each group operated from a camp, where collected food was shared out. Whilst the women and children were based around the camp, men travelled further to hunt. Food supply maintained the local group size at about 25 to 50. Groups tended to be spread out as sparse populations, around 1 person per square mile (approx. 260 hectares), and in the range of 1 to 25 persons per 100 square miles (approx. 2,600 hectares). Each group moved around in order to hunt and gather, so personal property was at a very low level, maintained at a minimum by a generally egalitarian system. Groups came together on a seasonal basis, which divided the year into times of fusion into large groups ('public' periods) and fission into separate household camps ('private' periods). Larger groups, sometimes called 'tribes', were of about 500 people, the manageable size for everyone to know everyone else. Groups were not bound by any necessity of maintaining property. They did not maintain exclusive rights to any parcel of land, because they frequently visited other groups. The hosts of one season become the guests of another, so that reciprocal obligations were built up between groups. In this way the population was kept circulating between permeable and shifting group territories. (Lee and De Vore) These aspects of small community life continued in altered form in Aboriginal settlements to recent years.

Traditional settlement

The hunter-gatherer household camp and shelter was an older pattern of life, which continued after European settlement. There were two types of settlement, small

camps of extended households or bands, and larger, village-like, community camps.

A small Aboriginal camp on the Yass Plains consisted of simple stringy bark wind-shelters: 'The natives had just arrived in the paddock, and established their temporary village or encampment; their habitations were merely sheets of bark, stripped from trees in the vicinity, and supported by props, the sheet of bark being placed to windward, and shifted as might be required, the fire for cooking purposes, etc., being made in front'. (Bennett) Such shelters with large sheets of bark in simple leanto structures framed by a single or several forked poles, appear to have been a widely occurring hut type in south-eastern Australia.

A small type of bough shelter appears to have been widely used by households while travelling. It was a simple frame constructed by placing a few young boughs or saplings tightly in the ground in a semi-circular form, the upper parts of which were woven or tied together, then covered with bark, leaves or grass. Dawson, though writing of Victorian riverine people, said that the women erected these small temporary camp shelters. Small saplings were bent into a dome shape and covered with grass or bark, with an open side often facing the morning sun or a sheltering rock. A small fire burned in this entry. Camps of several related households clustered a number of dome shelters facing a common fire, which was mainly used for heating. A separate fire outside the cluster was used for cooking. In fine warm weather, the shelter was not built and a few green bushes placed in a half-circle to windward of the fire. (Dawson)

The early white explorer Charles Sturt described the larger community camps. There were permanent pathways following the rivers and leading to camps. He observed that 'the paths of the natives on either side [of the river] were like well trodden roads'. Despite most groups appearing to be highly mobile bands, he saw signs of village-like communities on several occasions. For example, following the Macquarie River, he found a group of 70 huts, each large enough to hold 12-15 men. They all had the 'same compass orientation', with one hut containing two large 90-yard long nets. (Sturt)

Distribution of the various hut/shelter types is unknown, but appears to have depended on the weather, size of household and duration of stay. There seem to have been four types: (1) Circular bush screen as a wind-break in warm and fine weather; (2) Forked pole bark lean-to as a shade/overnight rain-shelter; (3) Small covered bough shelter for camps of short duration; (4) Large covered bough shelter for seasonal camps. Use of outside cooking fires and versions of bough shelters continued in use at recent Aboriginal settlements.

Based on such accounts, a hypothetical model for the pre-European Wiradjuri community camp might be as follows: A typical household 'cluster' would contain several shelters for very windy or rainy conditions. Each shelter had its own hearth. Outside, another hearth was used for cooking. Beyond the swept area around the shelter was a household refuse zone. Community camps would contain numerous household clusters, and also be connected to nearby resources, such as reliable sources of water and food, spiritual sources such as dreaming places, and established pathways. Some groups would gather for short periods for ceremony or to share during seasons of plenty in larger community camps. All of these patterns were later re-created in 20th century Wiradjuri settlements.

Material culture

Wiradjuri material culture was one of stone, fibre, wood, bark, bone, and shell. Mussel shells were sometimes used as scrapers. Nets were made from plant fibre cord. The range of tools and weaponry included spear throwers, parrying shields, broad shields, clubs, shovels, axes and varieties of throwing sticks. Early description of Aborigines centred on such technology. Skin cloaks were worn reversed (with the fur turned inwards) during winter. The skins were pegged and scraped in ornamental patterns with a mussel shell scraper, and stitched together with finely divided kangaroo tail sinew thread using a bone awl. (Bennett)

Wiradjuri adult men at this time had front upper teeth voids from their initiation, and wore red and yellow ochre face paint, possum skin cloaks, a stick or bone nose septa, and net headpieces. A Wiradjuri man's hand weapons included a club, boomerang, woomera and an array of spears, but his minimal essential, carried in the teeth when crossing a river or climbing after a possum, was the stone hatchet, galengar or mogo. Women's articles of equipment seen at camp were several fishing spears ('lances'), shields, clubs, 'chisels', and 'workbags' with items such as paint and feathers, head nets, teeth necklaces and sinew for sewing the possum skin cloaks in which they carried their infants.

Chord, also valued by early white stockmen for whiplash making, was made by separating kangaroo tail tendons into threads. Two threads were rolled on the thigh, and additional thread added from time to time to make up several metres of fine cord. Short spears were about 1.8m. long and were made of reed pointed with hard wood. Long 3.6m. spears were made from a single shaft of hardwood with a sharpened point. With triple pronged spears of about 3.6 to 4.2m., Wiradjuri spent times on the river in bark canoes, returning with fish or platypus. Some of the shields had patterns carved with a kangaroo incisor tooth. Aborigines at Wellington carried a special hooked tool for retrieving grubs from tree bark that would be chopped out with a hatchet, and wooden paddles for digging up grubs and vegetable roots. (Bennett)

Medicine

Wiradjuri used a range of treatment techniques for common illnesses. As well as eucalyptus steam-pits they used wattle tan-water for burns, the carrying of particular plant gums to treat diarrhoea, and the binding of wounds with gum leaf bandaging or a clean clay pack. Similarly Cunningham, who was an English surgeon, noted that some of the acacia gum was diluted to treat 'affections of the urinary organs, and dysentery'. He also saw a man with a deeply wounded foot bury it into soft earth as a poultice, although he judged it to be a 'sorry substitute for a poultice'. (Cunningham)

Mary Gilmore, daughter of the manager of 'Cowabbee' station in the 1870s, described two areas set aside for special uses in Wiradjuri camps. The first were oven mounds, for communal food preparation at camps, or treatment of respiratory illness. Some ovens were constructed as eucalyptus steam-pits for rheumatism and respiratory infections. A special area of the camp was also set aside for the instruction of women and delivery of babies. Babies were born in camps under the supervision of Aboriginal midwives. The expectant mother was relieved of arduous tasks by the other women at camp, who also procured sufficient food for her. At a time when white doctors in Wagga Wagga donned their oldest coats, (kept stiff with dried blood as a mark of their trade), Aboriginal midwives carefully wiped their hands with the antiseptic from bruised gum leaves. Wiradjuri men knew to stay away from this small area that would hold several women and girls at a time, hidden from view and camouflaged by bushes. It had a carefully prepared floor clear of grass tussocks and roots, and then swept bare. A birthing bed was then laid with fresh and soft eucalyptus leaves, in overlapping layers like shingles on a roof, to create a continuous carpet. The eucalyptus oil exuded by the branches was a precaution against infection. A cauterised cut was made through the umbilical cord with a firestick and the newborn was dusted down with carefully prepared white ash. The baby was then dried with grass and the afterbirth was buried, and later burned. (Gilmore 1934

Food economy

Wiradjuri food economy was centred on the river corridors and their hinterlands. For convenience, it divides into four broad environmental zones, although any or all of these may have been in use at the one time: the river, swamp, plain and forest. Wiradjuri subsistence was varied and tuned to the four environmental zones. The wide range of foods was subject to seasonality, typically requiring movement through the landscape. This wide ranging diet was described as 'almost all kinds of living things they can catch'. (Backhouse) On the rivers in good seasons, fish were in such super-

abundance that people were indifferent to it, and did not eat it when other food could be procured. In the lower and drier western lands there was greater seasonal fluctuation in the available foods. Periods of hardship were the very dry seasons and extensive floods on the plains. Wet stormy winters were a time of hardship particularly in the south and in the high country, where the winters were longer. Sturt found groups who were starving and noted his impression that they were dying fast from scarcity of food during the drought. In this situation, he found the shallow grave of a woman who had been covered with leaves, which the party reburied in the 'proper' way. (Sturt)

Wiradjuri occupation was thus centred on the major river basins of the region, with seasonal use of the drier river hinterlands, plains, and forests. While Wiradjuri came to become known as 'river people' because of family encampments that occupied the river corridors all year round, it is likely that many other bands camped for considerable periods of time in the nearby creeks and swamplands, as well as relying on water soakage in the plains. Once drier seasons returned they relied on the river, all the groups beating a gradual retreat to the river corridor in times of scarcity. [See also chart next page]

Religion

Wiradjuri religion was expressed through the agency of spiritual experts, training of youths by initiation ceremonies, and burial practices.

Some men, karadji, attained through higher degrees of training specialist spiritual skills that other band members also shared, but to a less developed degree. In this sense the karadji were ordinary individuals in the camp who led ordinary lives. Wiradjuri included the outstanding individuals of a strongly reflective turn of mind, who led in aspects of community life but shared the egalitarian Aboriginal outlook on life, in which no one was able to dictate to anyone else. (Elkin 1944)

Burials encountered by Sturt included an eight grave cemetery with conical grave mounds. At about the same time in the 1830s, a visitor to Wellington described this common type of burial. The dead person's legs were bound up to bring the knees to the chin and the body was placed in a round hole which was covered with leaves and boughs, and mounded with earth into a conical shape. A trench was cut part of the way around the mound, and surrounding trees were carved. (Backhouse)

continued on page 115

Wiradjuri food economy			
Food Economy	Activity	Details	
River economy	Canoe fishing	Sturt (1833) recorded Aboriginal fishing. People navigated the river in simple canoes made form a square of bark with clay sealed at the ends, using their 3m. spears as poles and paddles. On one occasion, groups fished with short spears tapered to a point and caught fine fish, which they gave to the whites. They themselves preferred to sit down to a meal of 'muscles' [sic]. His impression was that Aboriginal groups on the river preferred tortoise meat to the fish that they so easily speared along the river.	
	River and land nets	One net seen by Sturt had mesh for river fishing, and the other had a large mesh for catching large game on land such as kangaroos. Once Sturt's boat was almost stopped by a net across the river. The fishing nets had stone weights and were stretched in a semicircle across the river.	
	Stocking water courses	Mary Gilmore (1934) recollected Wiradjuri awareness of the limits to natural replenishment of vegetation and game. They replanted fruit seeds and medicinal shrubs, and restocked watercourses with breeding fish and crayfish carried in coolamons. They also carried out 'harvest rotation' by alternating their campsites so as to enable species to recover locally.	
	Fish traps	Fish traps were laid in watercourses. Gilmore remembered that these began with a large tree, undermined on the riverbank, so that a year later it could be manoeuvred in position by hand to bridge the watercourse. A dam of interlaced brush or saplings was then constructed below the tree to allow small fish to pass through but keep the larger fish within particular waterholes.	
	Log traps	In major billabongs such as the Edwards at Deniliquin, Pregan Pregan and Wollundry at Wagga Wagga, log barriers were constructed. Places for large gatherings were selected partly on the basis of a good food supply, so that a sufficient quantity of food, near at hand, would be available to feed the large numbers of people. Some seasons prior to inter-group ceremonial gatherings such as burbungs, the waters would be examined for the availability of fish. Then at least a year before the gathering, the trap would be closed sufficiently to impound large fish in a pool.	
	Mussels Bulrush	River mussels were another commonly collected food. The early surveyor Thomas Mitchell (1838) described them as the chief food at Lake Cargelligo. As creeks and billabong waters receded, brush dams trapped the fish, mussels were collected and edible plants such as the bulrush (Typha) were gathered. These were part of a hugely varied hunter-gatherer diet, as put by Bennett: 'they may be said to devour 'every living thing that runs upon the surface of the earth, or in the waters beneath'.	
Swamp	Harvest	Mary Gilmore (1934) recalled that certain areas of swamp country were	
Economy	rotation	known as bird-nesting 'sanctuaries' set aside by the Aborigines to ensure continued supply. Wiradjuri only hunted or fished such areas in alternate seasons. Natural lakes such as Lake Cowal and Lake Cargelligo, were fished or stalked on one side only in any season. Such rotation ceased when the sanctuaries became overrun with people from the expanding towns of the late 19th century.	
Plains Economy	Grass seeds	Grass seeds were one of many Wiradjuri foods. Being a women's activity, grass seed collecting, milling, and baking into small dampers (cakes) was little reported by early European recorders, most of whom were men. However, grindstones and nutting anvils found at Warangesda and Bulgandramine missions attest to the processing of vegetables and grinding of grass seeds.	
Forest Economy	Possum	Wiradjuri hunted a large range of animal species, but possums were the most commonly reported portion of the diet, being remembered as 'the great standby' for local Aborigines around Wagga Wagga in the 1870s. In the wooded eastern part of the region, possums provided a year-round availability of meat.	
	Honey	When Mitchell (1839) followed Goobang creek into the Bogan River his party traded a steel tomahawk and was fed honey by local Aborigines. He described the technique of gluing a tiny feather-down weight to a captured bee with gum. The bee was then followed to the nest, the honeycomb being chopped out with a hatchet and taken away on bark sheets.	
	Koalas	Koalas were highly regarded game meat. Another tree dweller was the	

	possum, which could be smoked out.
Large game	Larger game species, such as wombats, bustards ('plains turkeys'), goannas, emus, kangaroos and dingoes, would all have been hunted. Some may have been protected by their identity as a clan totem to some groups, or limited by food restrictions. Even in the 1990s, the food restrictions on emu meat were remembered at Murrin Bridge.
Fire control	Wiradjuri land use included back burning to fight large fires and reseeding the ground after a fire to promote recovery of vegetation. It also included intentional firing to flush out game. Following a fire, game returned to an area, attracted by young shoots of regrowth. Forests in the eastern lands were kept open for easier hunting. Some early settlers described them as being 'park-like'.
Re- planting edible fruit	Once the ground was cool enough to walk on, Gilmore (1934) saw how Wiradjuri walked through the burnt area, examining the vegetation, testing to see which seed pods had opened. The women gathered fresh seeds and replanted them in the more severely burnt out areas. The children were instructed to damp down the planted seed. Quandong trees were valued as an edible fruit and Wiradjuri people paired the male and female trees when they were replanted. They also carried branches from a flowering grove to fertilise other trees, leaving the branches under trees to show that the work had been done and did not need to be repeated.

continued from page 113

Initiation

There is one highlight that might provide a small window, a fleeting glimpse, into this past world: the burbung. This most important ceremony, to confirm and test knowledge, marked initiation into adulthood. Hundreds of people would gather from Wiradjuri country and beyond. At the last great burbung of Wiradjuri country, held near Darlington Point in about 1878 (near what was later the Warangesda Mission), were built large earthworks and mounds, carved and decorated posts, a large bough yard to house the initiates, and a kilometre of cleared and marked ground. Boys

underwent three or four burbung over several years, each ceremony stepping them closer to maturity, before they attained full adulthood. It was also a chance for a council of elders to meet and make decisions. (Mathews 1897)"

© Peter Rimus Kabaila 2009