The Failure of Noble Sentiments:
Bogimbah Mission on Fraser Island

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ABSTRACT

In the 1890s, as the Australian Aboriginal population appeared to be declining, and as debates raged over how to 'save' them and find a place for them in colonial society, two men, Archibald Meston and Ernest Gribble, proposed answers to this pressing 'problem' in Queensland. Their solutions were quite different, one involving the state, the other the churches via the Australian Board of Missions, and they clashed fiercely as each tried to make their own solution work.

This dissertation examines the background, the philosophy and the methods of the two men during the years from 1895 to 1905 with particular focus on the administration of Bogimbah Reserve and Mission on Fraser Island in Queensland and its impact on the Butchulla people of the Wide bay district. It will be shown that while Meston wished to segregate Aborigines as a means of preserving a certain semblance of their traditional life, Ernest Gribble, a missionary, wanted to civilise and Christianise them, and was given the opportunity to do so after Meston's state-funded experiment had allegedly failed. The tensions between the two men, and their respective treatments of the Aborigines entrusted to their care, are explored here in order to understand the differences between their approaches. Ultimately it will be shown that from the perspective of the Butchulla people who were subjected to the methods of the two men, both Meston and Gribble's vision were failures.

Declaration

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis

Signature

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Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the Butchulla people of the Fraser Coast of Queensland, whose stories inspired me to write this thesis. To that end also, I thank the late Dr John Ferry who first shone the light for me on a story that was and is little known, both by me and the general community, and who encouraged me to make this unique story the subject of my Master's thesis.

To those in the community who talked to me about their journey – thank you. My family, both close and extended, deserve a special mention for supporting my task since 2004. They have missed out on many things that a mother and grandmother would normally do for them to allow me to 'work on my thesis'. Similarly my friends and colleagues have been understanding about the fact that the research and writing came first and everything 'social' came a poor second.

My supervisor, Dr David Andrew Roberts has pushed, prodded and encouraged me to delve deeper into the research literature in order to more fully explain this story. I appreciate tremendously all the work he has done in this regard. The thesis is much the better for his advice.

To those people who helped me out at the many libraries and archives I visited, may I say a sincere thank you, and a special thank you to Mrs Ailsa Head, who knew my aversion to feeling seasick while reading films and who kindly worked through the films of the Maryborough Chronicle, extracting and photocopying material for me. Without that material this thesis would be much the poorer. Finally I would like put on record the debt I owe to my colleague, the late Dr Ralph Clark, for the valued input he gave and I would also like to thank Dr Belinda Beattie for her invaluable advice on the content of this thesis. All errors remain my responsibility.

ABBREVIATIONS

ABM	Australian Board of Missions
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ADB	Australian Dictionary of Biography
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
B C	Brisbane Courier
CMS	Church Missionary Society
Col. Sec.	Colonial Secretary
FIT	Fraser Island Transcript
GP	Gribble Papers
JOL	John Oxley Library
LMS	London Missionary Society
MC	Maryborough Chronicle
ML	Mitchell Library
NSW	New South Wales
QPD	Queensland Parliamentary Debates
QPP	Queensland Parliamentary Papers
QSA	Queensland State Archives

Introduction

This thesis provides a history of the Bogimbah Aboriginal Reserve and mission on Fraser Island in Queensland between 1897 and 1904, as a means of enhancing our understanding of the experiences of the Wide Bay or Butchulla Aboriginal people of southern Queensland under the 1897 *'Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* during its first decade of operation.[1] The dispute between the Chief Protector of Aborigines, Archibald Meston, and the missionary, Ernest Gribble, and the impact of their quarrels on the Butchulla people, is particularly examined.[2] Of special concern is how these two central and influential non-Aboriginal characters, and the power struggle between them, hastened the decline of the Butchulla under the '*Act*'. An examination of these issues is necessarily carried out within various contexts. These contexts include the overarching issue of how the new settlers interacted with the existing indigenous society and the consequent Christianisation and civilisation debate, and how officials managed that relationship in terms of their policies and practices. Nineteenth century attitudes towards Aborigines are examined as are the nature and consequences of the supposed 'protection' afforded to Aborigines by church and state authorities, the violence against Aborigines, immigration to Queensland to 1900, and the consequent destruction of the traditional life of the Butchulla. These contexts frame the arguments in this thesis.

Although much has been written about the fate of Aborigines in Queensland, to date there has been no close examination of Bogimbah and its effect on the Butchulla. This alone is a compelling reason for this study to address that deficiency. Other reasons include the fact that this social experiment was a unique experience,

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[1] Bogimbah is referred to as both Mission and Reserve interchangeably, especially in Press reports. I have endeavoured to refer to Bogimbah and White Cliffs as Reserves until the Anglican Church takeover in 1900 and as a Mission thereafter. Similarly the word Church is used as a general term, sometimes referring to its missionary arm.

[2] Fraser Island is the traditional home of the Butchulla people. In the literature there are many spellings of the name. In this thesis I have used the spelling adopted in the contemporaneous context. Therefore, as well as the male form Butchulla, the female form of Batjala or Badtjala is also used along with other forms of spelling found in the literature of the time.

the necessity to record the experiences of the Butchulla to aid scholarly research in this area, and for the descendants of the Butchulla to learn more of their history.

While many other missions and reserves in Australia were established by missionary societies and by governments, each failing or prospering for different reasons, the Bogimbah settlement is particularly interesting because of the extent to which it was used to enact the very different ideologies and methods of these two men. Their competing visions for Bogimbah not only reflect and exemplify some of the contemporaneous beliefs of nineteenth-century colonists, but also illuminate key elements of the struggle between church and state in colonial Queensland. We see also how their efforts failed in practice to adequately address the circumstances of the Wide Bay Aborigines and effectively exacerbated the difficulties they faced in surviving the onslaught of colonisation. The politics surrounding the controlled management of the Butchulla tell us much about the policies and practices of colonial governments and settlers, and help us understand how and why they proved so disastrous. Here we have a circumstance, a unique case study of an Aboriginal population, where different manifestations of two dominant themes, Christianity and civilisation, presented by ardent advocates, resulted essentially in failure, and this thesis examines the reasons why both approaches failed. While the writer realises that other missions and reserves in Queensland are also worthy of study, in this case the thesis is limited to Bogimbah in order to provide a manageable platform upon which to reflect on the wider story of Queensland missions. If this means that research on other missions is not widely examined in this work, then it is my hope that others may take up that challenge.

Archibald Meston (1851-1924) was a key architect of the infamous '*Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium* Act' (1897)[3] and from 1898 the Southern Protector of Aborigines in Queensland.[4] In this capacity he founded and administered the Fraser Island Reserve during its first phase to 1900. His

[3] The *Act* was followed in other Colonies and thus probably affected more Aboriginal people than any other law until the passage of the Commonwealth *Native Title Act 1992*. It was the model for similarly 'protective' and restrictive legislation in Western Australia in 1905, the Northern Territory in 1910 and South Australia in 1911.

[4] S. E. Stephens, 'Meston, Archibald (1851 - 1924)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 5, Melbourne University Press, 1974, pp. 243-244.

involvement is examined from an historical and philosophical perspective. Ernest Richard Bulmer Gribble (1868-1957), the son of the renowned missionary, John Brown Gribble, took charge of the Anglican Yarrabah Aboriginal Mission near Cairns (originally the Bellenden Ker Mission, named after the mountain behind it) following the death of his father in June 1893, and from 1900 was also the absentee warden of the Bogimbah Mission on Fraser Island until its closure in 1904, when many of the surviving residents were removed and placed under his immediate control at Yarrabah.[5] Gribble's involvement is also studied in relation to the historical and philosophical context. At a time when it was widely accepted that traditional Aboriginal societies in southern Queensland had been irredeemably decimated by their contact with white colonisers, both Meston and Gribble believed they had the capacity, and the means, to save and salvage the remnants of the Butchulla people and other Queensland Aborigines. Their efforts, however, differed markedly in terms of method and desired results, although both sought to impose absolute control over Aboriginal lives in a manner that proved enormously destructive to the wellbeing of the Wide Bay Aborigines, so that despite the different methods they employed, the outcomes of their interventions were tragically similar.

This thesis primarily focuses on Bogimbah reserve and mission on Fraser Island, as well as Yarrabah mission near Cairns, the two missions where the Butchulla were sent, and where they found themselves under the unfettered control of both Archibald Meston and Ernest Gribble. While the Bogimbah episode is widely regarded as an unmitigated disaster, Yarrabah, because of differing conditions there, achieved a recognised degree of success – measured by its longevity, relatively low mortality rates, and the establishment of an Indigenous 'Yarrabah church'. To a lesser extent this thesis is concerned with the Barambah reserve, near Murgon (which became Cherbourg Aboriginal Settlement in December 1931, and remains a well known Aboriginal community), where some Bogimbah residents were sent after the closure of the Fraser Island settlement in 1904. The Barambah example is especially instructive in illuminating some of the later consequences of Meston's and

[5] Christine Halse, 'Gribble, Ernest Richard Bulmer (Ernie) (1868 - 1957)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 14, Melbourne University Press, 1996, pp. 330-331.

Gribble's policies, particularly in regard to education and employment. The operations of other Queensland missions in the period are considered in so far as they are relevant to the broader patterns of policy and experience that impacted on the Wide Bay Aborigines. There was considerable variety in the management of reserves and missions across Queensland, and differing conditions resulted in different outcomes. On the whole, however, all missions and reserves contributed in some way to the destruction of traditional Aboriginal societies, entrenching the exclusion of Aborigines from the broader society and helping to enforce a crippling dependence on state assistance. Inescapably, the experiences of the Butchulla at Bogimbah and Yarrabah must be interpreted within this broader, pervasive pattern.

By placing this analysis within the context of the disagreements between Meston and Gribble, this thesis traces the conversion of an ancient, self-sufficient hunter-gatherer society to one that was largely subservient, dependent, dislocated and subjected to the control of white people, caused by their forced engagement with administrators and missionaries in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. The Butchulla, like many other Aboriginal peoples, were decimated and degraded through forced migration from their original homes to reserves and missions. Their story, however, is particularly instructive in the manner in which it illuminates the contemporary dispute between Meston and Gribble - a dispute that reflects on broader tensions between church and state, and between colonial governments, humanitarians and settlers - about the best means of salvaging and 'saving' Australian Aborigines. The motives and actions of both Meston and Gribble, and their impact on Aboriginal people whom they sought to protect, are closely examined in this thesis.

* * *

Archibald Meston and Ernest Gribble shared the common aim of preserving and protecting the remnant Aboriginal peoples of Queensland using reserves and missions. Both deplored the past treatment of Aborigines, earnestly believing that, in Gribble's words, 'the condition of the remnant of their race is by no means a credit

to White Australia',[6] though both were also pragmatic and somewhat pessimistic about the probable fate of Australian Aborigines as a 'race'. But they disagreed markedly on the means and methods of improving and saving Aboriginal peoples.

Meston favoured State controlled Aboriginal Reserves and was wary of the applicability of Christianisation, apparently believing that governments, not religious bodies, were better placed to take charge of Aboriginal affairs. He leaned toward a sanitised vision of 'traditional' Aboriginal communities, protected through segregation and isolation from non-Aboriginal influences. In this schema, Christian values and methods were less important than the 'basic measures of control and discipline' administered by a state bureaucracy.[7] Meston plainly set out the principles of his reserve on Fraser Island in an official memorandum in 1899:

> The original intention with regard to this settlement was to collect the unemployed and degraded blacks from the settled districts, place them on a tract of country which they could regard as their own, free from all contact with whites except those *controlling* them and occasional authorised visitors, allow them to live as near as desirable to their primitive condition and retain their own language, their weapons and corrobories and various customs. By no other method can any section of this race be handed down to posterity. By no other method are they worth handing down. When an aboriginal ceased to speak his own language and make and use his own weapons it is time to leave this planet. He is no longer of any interest to the philologist, ethnologist, anthropologist or the general public.[8]

On the other hand, Gribble's idea, which can be gleaned from his personal journal, formed by a long, global history of evangelical enterprise and reflecting his own strong religious background, was to 'Europeanise the Natives by gathering them onto the mission, by force if necessary, segregating them from white society and providing a permanent home'.[9] While Gribble agreed with Meston on the need for isolation and segregation, he differed by believing that their 'permanent home' must become a Christian Utopia, where Aborigines could pursue the possibilities of a higher and better state of living as defined by Christian/European values. Thus, for Gribble, it was absolutely necessary to 'break through the wall of senseless customs

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[6] Ernest Gribble, *Problem of the Aborigines,* Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1932, foreword.

[7] Thom Blake, *A Dumping Ground: A History of the Cherbourg Settlement,* University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2001, p. 2.

[8] Archibald Meston to Colonial Secretary, Col. Sec 483, QSA, 25 Nov 1899, 14985, p. 5, (author's emphasis).

[9] Gribble Journals, quoted in Christine Halse, 'The Reverend Ernest Gribble and Race Relations in Northern Australia', PhD Thesis, University of Queensland, 1992, p. 53.

and traditions … of the dark skinned and dark minded'.[10] The 'elevation and the evangelisation of the aborigines', he wrote, depended on 'the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ' and 'teaching them habits of industry' in order to have them 'take an interest in themselves as a race and cultivating their self respect'.[11]

* * *

Fraser Island's Bogimbah Reserve originated in February 1897 – the same year as the passing of Queensland's '*Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act'* - when Meston established a station at the old Quarantine site at White Cliffs on the western side of the Island.[12] Initially established as a state-controlled Aboriginal reserve, its location reflected Meston's firm belief, widely shared at the time, that Aborigines needed to be segregated for their own protection and preservation, and under Meston's influence it remained primarily a state enterprise. However, for a variety of reasons (explored in this thesis), the reserve was, in 1900, subjected to a radical change in management when given over to the control of the Anglican Church, 'with a view to their taking over the whole charge of the settlement and managing it upon religious lines'.[13] Bogimbah thus passed into its second phase from February 1900 till August 1904 as an Anglican mission, under the control of Gribble's colleague, William Reeves. When it was disbanded in 1904, over one hundred Aboriginal residents were moved fifteen hundred kilometres away to Yarrabah, near Cairns in far North Queensland.

While Fraser Island is renowned all over the world, less is known about the ill-fated Aboriginal settlements established there from the 1870s, nor of the Aborigines who had called the island home for many thousands of years. The AIATSIS catalogue

[10] Halse, 'Reverend Ernest Gribble', p. 53; Ernest Gribble, *Forty Years with the Aborigines,* Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1930, pp. 83-122.

[11] Gribble, *Ibid*., p. 122.

[12] Meston's first recommendation had been for the reserve to be established on Stewart Island (between Fraser Island and the mainland, and which had better soil than Fraser Island). Meston to Horace Tozer, November 1896, Fraser's Island considered as an Aboriginal Reserve, *Fraser Island Transcript*, Aboriginal Resource Unit, Anthropology Museum, Brisbane, 1981 p. 115.

[13] *The Church Chronicle,* 2 July 1900, p. 194.

in Canberra, for example, reveals only thirty-six works relating to the Butchulla people (mainly children's books and some linguistic studies). However, Bogimbah barely features in the historiography of Australian missions. Raymond Evans, who is the primary academic authority on the Bogimbah Reserve, was 'struck by the almost total silence of the historical sources upon this significant segregative experiment'.[14] Evans study is the only work available on any serious aspect of Fraser Island and the Aborigines who once lived there. John Harris's comprehensive *One Blood*, comprising almost one thousand pages, does not mention Bogimbah at all.[15] In fact there is some misinformation about the missions on Fraser Island. Quoting Long's study of missions in Australia, John Chesterman, Gary Presland and Hilary Carey all list the Fraser Island mission as having run from 1873 to 1904 under the Methodist Church Missionary Society.[16] Reverend Fuller, a Methodist Minister, did run a mission on Fraser Island from 1870 to 1873, but then withdrew.[17] There was no further mission on Fraser Island until Meston, on behalf of the Queensland Government, established a secular Reserve at the old Quarantine Station at White Cliffs, and then at Bogimbah, from 1897 to 1900, when Gribble took over the reserve on behalf of the Australian Board of Missions until 1904.

The pre-colonial and early post-contact history of the Butchulla people has also proven difficult to research. Local histories of the Maryborough and Wide Bay area give very limited coverage of the subject and local descendants of the Butchulla know little of their history during this era.[18] This fact makes it imperative to draw together the filaments of evidence concerning this chapter in Queensland's relationship with its Aborigines. An 1897 history by George Etienne Loyau, one of the

[14] Raymond Evans, *A Permanent Precedent: Dispossession, Social Control and the Fraser Island Reserve and Mission 1897-1904,* St Lucia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Studies Unit, University of Queensland, Brisbane, 1991.

[15] John Harris, *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope,* Albatross, Sydney, 1994.

[16] Hilary Carey, *Believing in Australia: A Cultural History of Religion*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1996, p. 79; John Chesterman, 'Under the Law: Aborigines and Islanders in Colonial Queensland' in John Chesterman and Brian Galligan, *Citizens Without Rights: Aborigines and Australian Citizenship,* Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1997, p. 37; Gary Presland, *For God's Sake Send The Trackers,* Victoria Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 50.

[17] Fuller moved to the mainland opposite the island and then went to Hinchinbrook and Cardwell in North Queensland, and after that to Deebing Creek near Ipswich.

[18] Irene McBride, personal interview with author, 6 November 2008.

early colonists in the region, offers remarkably colourful descriptions of the Indigenous people, albeit in the condescending prose of the day.[19] Six pages, out of a few hundred, provide notes on the local language, rock carvings and contact with early pioneers. In the fashion of first generation pioneer histories, Loyau's work was unconcerned with the larger picture of how local Aborigines fitted into the new society but with white men and women, who transplanted their old culture to an untamed wilderness, and how Maryborough grew from a tiny settlement on the banks of the Mary River in the 1840s to the prosperous, productive city of the late 1800s. The Aboriginal offering in this story is largely confined to anecdotes such as that of 'Beeston', who was reputedly 'a good specimen of a once free race, speaks English well, and has shaken hands with Sir Henry Norman', as well as being 'a member of the Salvation Army'.[20] Obviously shaking hands with Sir Henry (Queensland Governor at the time) had elevated 'Beeston' a step or two on the intelligence ladder and proved he was capable of being civilised. Loyau, in the 1890s, fully believed Aborigines were 'capable of being trained to become respectable and intelligent members of society', a declaration that forms a key perspective in this thesis. The best feature of his book is that it provides a frame of reference for the attitudes and beliefs of that time period, when Meston was promoting his scheme to preserve the Butchulla, and the missionary societies were actively promoting civilisation and Christianisation. [21]

Similarly, James Lennon's history of Maryborough details the early pioneers, institutions and industries of Maryborough from 1880 to 1924 within the framework of the immigration to Maryborough then occurring. Only three A5 pages are devoted to the local Aborigines, and these are mostly concerned with relating a story of a boat trip to Maryborough by government officials, accompanied by Durramboi, an escaped convict who lived with Aborigines further south, which provided some of the first encounters with the original inhabitants of the area. Discussing Aborigines becomes a preface to the 'real' history, the 'white' history, and an acknowledgement that once they were here and formed the early history – but now they were gone.

[19]George Loyau, *The History of Maryborough,* Pole, Outridge & Co, Brisbane 1897.

[20] *Wide Bay News,* quoted in Loyau, *Ibid.,* p. 223.

[21] Loyau, *op. cit.,* p. 224.

Norman Buettel's book, '*A History of Maryborough'* (1976) acknowledged that the Aboriginal history of the area was difficult to relate, though he was able to draw from the research of Jan Walker, who had completed a thesis on the subject the previous year.[22] More recently, Tony Matthews' official history, commissioned by Maryborough City Council in the 1990s, devoted a chapter to local Aboriginal history, though again the book's emphasis is on the development and growth of the city, with Aborigines again appearing as a backdrop.[23] This meshes well with the examination in this thesis of the way in which immigration to Maryborough affected the Butchulla, which forms another perspective of this thesis.

Searches at the Queensland State Archives and the John Oxley Library reveal multiple references to the Bogimbah Reserve. The Colonial Secretary's Inward Correspondence concerning Fraser Island, held at the Queensland State Archives, holds the official correspondence between Meston, in his capacity as Southern Protector of Aborigines, and the Government. Meston's Annual Reports provide much detail. The John Oxley Library in Brisbane holds the personal papers of Archibald Meston. The *Fraser Island Transcript* holds reports and correspondence concerning Fraser Island and the Butchulla . The local newspaper*,* the *Maryborough Chronicle,* a complete set of which is held by the Maryborough City Library, contains many references to Bogimbah over a number of years, while the holdings of the Brisbane Diocese Anglican Church Archives include columns of news, in *The Church Chronicles,* which made possible a piecing together of the Church's involvement in the missions. The Australian Board of Missions has its record centre in Sydney, where the Mitchell Library and the Anglican Archives at St Andrew's Cathedral hold many relevant records on their involvement in the mission on Fraser Island, along with those of Ernest Gribble. Similarly, Ernest Gribble's personal papers are held in the Mitchell Library. These materials provide much of the evidence for the arguments mounted in this thesis. However, while these records do exist in repositories in Sydney, such as the Mitchell Library, access to them remains problematic. Access to some records, such as those belonging to St Andrews

[22] Norman Beuttel, *A History of Maryborough,* Maryborough, Wide Bay and Burnett Historical Society, 1976, p. 19.

[23] Tony Matthews, *River of Dreams*, Maryborough City Council, Maryborough Qld., 1995.

Cathedral, are now restricted although they were previously available. Also, the time period covered in this dissertation lies outside the reach of some of the major series of documents commonly used to explore such themes, such as those of the Australian Board of Missions records, which cover a later period of 1910 to 1950. Therefore, in parts, this dissertation draws much from authors, such as Christine Halse, who were fortunate to obtain access to primary records that are not now openly available. If there are questions unanswered because of this lack of access then future researchers ought to be able to build on the foundations laid by this dissertation.

There is a large corpus of work on the impact of European invasion on Aboriginal peoples in Australia, and some of this has focussed on the experiences of Aborigines resident on missions and reserves in Queensland. However, surprisingly little has been written on Bogimbah and the Butchulla people of the Wide Bay area, in part because of the scarcity of available information. There are large gaps in the scholarly literature and in the information known by Butchulla descendants and the general public.

Raymond Evans has written extensively on the history and plight of Aborigines in Queensland with Jan Walker, Joanne Scott, Kay Saunders and Kathryn Cronin**.** In *'These Strangers Where are they Going'* (1977)*,* Evans and Walker examine European-Aboriginal relations in the Wide Bay area of Queensland from 1842, discussing the double onslaught of civilisation and Christianity which forced local Aborigines into a state of dependency on settlers and administrators.[24] 'Where rifles and strychnine had once taken their toll, alcohol and disease, abetted by neglect and indifference now decimated the natives'.[25] However they failed to bring Meston and Gribble, and their personal dispute and philosophies, into that narrative. The authors detail the calls for segregation on Fraser Island, initiated by early missionaries and culminating in Meston's vision for an Aboriginal Utopia and Gribble's Christian

[24] Raymond Evans and Jan Walker, 'These Strangers, where are they going? Aboriginal-European Relations in the Fraser Island and Wide Bay Region 1770-1905', *Occasional Papers in Anthropology,* 8 March 1977.

[25] Raymond Evans and Jan Walker *'A Permanent Precedent: Dispossession, Social Control and the Fraser Island Reserve and Mission 1897-1904',* St Lucia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Studies Unit, University of Queensland, Brisbane, 1991, p. 64.

mission, but have not investigated the practical effects of that argument. Evans and Walker do not explicitly tackle the interaction between Meston and Gribble over Bogimbah, or consider how their personalities and worldviews were brought to bear on the Butchulla, but they have provided an historical analysis of white settlement in Butchulla country which proves useful as a prism through which to view the disagreements between Meston and Gribble.

Another important work by Evans is *A Permanent Precedent* (1991), which examines the way Aborigines were segregated and exploited under the guise of 'protection'. Evans frames his arguments within the 'inter-actionist theory of deviance and social control', explaining how Aborigines were seen as 'deviant' and were 'recast from a sovereign into an alien status'.[26] He argues convincingly that the humanitarianism of the closing stages of the nineteenth century was a minor force in the context of European/Aboriginal contact, and that governments were able to 'deal with' Aborigines in ways that equated 'protection' with absolute control over Aboriginal lives.[27] Similarly, Evan's article, 'Steal Away' (1999), as its title suggests, considers Meston's schemes for removing and segregating Aborigines after framing the 1897 *Act*.[28] Without this compulsory removal system, Meston's reserve would not have attracted Aborigines from the Maryborough area, as was the case in the New South Wales experience especially. However, as Evans points out, what had began as a social experiment to 'save' the Butchulla, 'had ended in the accomplishment of local genocide'.[29]

Evans focuses more specifically on the role of Missions and Reserves in providing vocational education for young Aboriginal men and women with Joanne Scott.[30] 'The Moulding of Menials' (1988) explores the production of obedient and low paid workers, suggesting that the State sponsored system of education for Queensland Aborigines 'stressed uncomplaining obedience and service' and was

[26] *Ibid.,* p. 1.

[27] *Ibid.,* p. 7.

[28] Ray Evans, 'Steal Away', *Journal of Australian Studies,* Vol. 61, June 1999.

[29] *Ibid.,* p. 1.

[30] Joanne Scott and Raymond Evans, 'The Moulding of Menials: The Making of the Aboriginal Female Domestic Servant in Early Twentieth Century Queensland', *Hecate,* Vol. 22, No 1, 1996, pp. 139-157.

'part of a broader system' of 'control and surveillance'.[31] The idea that Aborigines could only be educated and trained in so far as they might serve white people, has always been a central product of Aboriginal research and is demonstrated again in this thesis. This belief was fundamental to the policies enacted by Meston and Gribble at Bogimbah and later at Yarrabah Mission. Evans and others have published important texts that do not, however, explore the bifurcation of views regarding the civilisation and Christianising of Aborigines, as exemplified in the divergent approaches of Meston and Gribble.

There is now a large body of work, particularly dealing with frontier conflict in early Queensland, and with the oppression and state controls imposed under the '*Protection Act'*. In the context of the colonial relationships between the new settlers and Aborigines in general, C. D. Rowley's groundbreaking *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* (1974) had much to say about Queensland and the failures of colonial administrators to protect Aborigines from violence and mistreatment. These two issues are implicated in Meston's motivations and this thesis explains how these driving forces played out in practice. Rowley's chapter on 'The Queensland Frontier, 1859-1897' says much about the background to 'The Act' and the means by which it institutionalised Aboriginal inequality and welfare dependence, but although the role of missions and reserves and the characters of Meston and Gribble receive some attention, the important examples of Bogimbah and Yarrabah missions are again neglected.[32]

Since then, Henry Reynolds has written widely and very influentially on the history of race relations in Australia, with a notable interest in Queensland (his adopted state for much of his academic career), which has provided him with ample evidence of violence, racism and contested views on land ownership.[33] Reynolds has written on the role of missions and missionaries, especially in his notable work, *This Whispering in Our Hearts*, in which he traces the careers of some of Australia's most

[31] *Ibid.,* p. 140.

[32] C. D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society,* Penguin Books, Ringwood, Vic. 1974.

[33] Henry Reynolds, *Why Weren't we Told,* Penguin Books, Ringwood Vic, 2000; Henry Reynolds, *The Law of the Land,* Penguin Books, Ringwood Vic, 2002; Henry Reynolds, *Frontier*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1987.

prominent humanitarians, many of them missionaries, and includes a memorable chapter on the turbulent career of Ernest Gribble's father, John Brown Gribble, in Western Australia. The work of the Gribbles in Queensland is not really covered. Reynolds' more recent book, *Nowhere People* (2005), while briefly mentioning Meston (Gribble is not mentioned) looks more closely at contemporary concepts and constructions of race and racial purity, which are key themes in the opposing convictions of Meston and Gribble discussed in this thesis.[34]

The study of missions and missionaries and their complex interactions with Aboriginal Australians has also been the subject of a long and extensive corpus of literature. One of the most accessible texts, which might be accepted as a useful overview and starting point for the study of Australian missionary endeavours, is John Harris's *One Blood* (1994). Although it purports to be a comprehensive history of *200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity*, it does not mention the Bogimbah mission on Fraser Island. Written from a Christian perspective, the work is appreciative, if somewhat apologetic, of the failures and shortcomings of Christian missionaries. Writing of Ernest Gribble, for example, Harris notes 'his opinions could be construed as racist', yet 'they were far ahead of his time and far ahead of views still espoused by many Australians today'.[35] Harris's work contrasts with the bulk of recent historiography, including that based on the stories told by Aboriginal people themselves. These, as Hilary Carey notes, provide a 'necessary corrective' to the work of those who see the experience through the prism of being missionaries themselves.[36]

Recently, studies of Christian missionaries have focussed on the way Aborigines were construed and constructed in missionary thinking and writing. Hilary Carey's 'Introduction to Colonial Representations of Indigenous Religions' provides a useful overview of this writing.[37] She quotes Christine Weir's examination of 'the archetypal missionary narrative in which the barbarity of heathen religious practice

[34] Henry Reynolds, *Nowhere People,* Viking, Camberwell, 2005.

[35] Harris, *op. cit.,* p. 504.

[36] Carey, *Believing in Australia,* p. 72.

[37] Hilary Carey, 'Introduction: Colonial Representations of Indigenous Religions', *The Journal of Religious History,* Vol. 22, No 2, June 1998, pp. 125-131.

was held up for believers to decry'.[38] A special issue of *The Journal of Religious History* examined 'the representation of indigenous religious cultures in Australia, Fiji and New Guinea as well as the mission enthusiasm of the evangelical revival which instigated many of the texts subjected here to analysis'.[39]

There have been a number of excellent studies of Yarrabah Mission, including Kaye Corner's unpublished thesis 'Yarrabah: A Mission for the Aboriginal people in North Queensland, The Effect of Government and Church Policies 1900-1912'.[40] Her work concentrates on the years subsequent to Bogimbah's closure and on the difficult relationship between Gribble and the Board of Missions over finances along with Gribble's propensity to act without approval. She attributes Yarrabah's failings to the 'interplay of personality and single-mindedness of Gribble, a Church grappling with the whole issue of Aboriginal missions and Yarrabah in particular, the changing priorities and approval of the Australian Board of Missions, and a government becoming more committed to the control and administration of missions'.[41] As her work is not concerned with Fraser Island, she notes only that 'the unsuitability of the Bogimbah's [*sic*] site because of poor soil forced its closure in 1904', though this is too simplistic an explanation for the closure of the mission.[42] She thus misses an opportunity to explore the dispute between Meston and Gribble over the policies most suited to saving Aborigines, which provide an important background to the history of Yarrabah and were first enunciated for Bogimbah, and ignores the underlying reasons that prevented Yarrabah from being a more effective mission. This thesis identifies and explores those reasons.

Judy Thomson's *Reaching Back: Queensland Aboriginal people recall early days at Yarrabah Mission* (1989), is based on interviews about stories of first contact, handed down by grandparents and other elders – stories of how Aborigines were 'brought in' to the Mission; tales of the Gribbles at Yarrabah, how the dormitory

[38] *Ibid.,* p. 129.

[39] *Ibid.,* p. 125.

[40] Kaye Corner, 'Yarrabah*:* A Mission for the Aboriginal People in North Queensland, The Effect of Government and Church Policies 1900-1912', Postgraduate Diploma of Arts thesis (History), University of Queensland, 1994.

[41] *Ibid.,* p. 56.

[42] *Ibid.,* p. 92.

system operated, the Christianisation of their people and how they fared after they left Yarrabah.[43] This book illustrates Gribble's 'success' in 'Christianising' Aborigines at Yarrabah. A significant theme through the book is the affection felt for both Gribble men, (especially Ernest whom they called Dadda Gribble), and for mission life. While there is little bitterness about what might have been or what has been lost, there is a recurrent sense of regret. Some of the mission residents were formerly at Bogimbah on Fraser Island and were moved to Yarrabah when Bogimbah was finally closed in 1905, thereby further disrupting their lives. Thomson's stories mainly elucidate the positive side to the Christianisation debate without explaining just how deeply it affected the psyche of the Butchulla people. Set in the context of colonial relationships, the prevention of violence and the 'protection' of the Aborigines sent there, it does not adequately explore the reasons behind Gribble's custodianship.

While Bogimbah has received little attention, the principal characters in its establishment and operation have been well scrutinised in terms of their role in the broader policies affecting Queensland Aborigines in this period. Christine Halse provides important insights into the thoughts and beliefs of Ernest Gribble in her unpublished thesis, a biographical account of Gribble, and her book based on that thesis, *A Terribly Wild Man,* detailing some of the practices and decisions that affected Aborigines under Gribble's authoritarian control at Yarrabah.[44] Halse concentrates her work on Gribble's psychosocial development, but it remains a valuable resource in understanding both how and why Gribble attempted to civilise and convert those Aborigines resident on Fraser Island. This theme is central to this thesis. Halse specifically wrote her thesis and consequent book as biographies but her key findings were that Gribble's human frailties did not lead to successful outcomes for the Aborigines, and that he was neither saint nor sinner, but that he never deviated from his aims of bringing the Christian word to Aborigines throughout Australia. She does not examine his dispute with Meston. Like Meston,

[43] Judy Thomson (Ed.), *Reaching Back: Queensland Aboriginal people recall early days at Yarrabah Mission,* Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1989.

[44] Christine Halse, 'The Reverend Ernest Gribble and Race Relations in Northern Australia', PhD Thesis, University of Queensland, 1992; Christine Halse, *A Terribly Wild Man,* Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2002.

Gribble totally believed in himself and his capacity to Christianise and civilise Aborigines wherever they were located. This theme formed one of the cornerstones of colonial policy in the nineteenth century and so is important in explaining the subsequent failure of Gribble's Fraser Island mission.

William Thorpe wrote 'Archibald Meston and Aboriginal Legislation in Queensland' (1984), which was 'an attempt to explore the thinking behind this momentous policy, and in particular the ideology and practice of Archibald Meston, the major architect of the 1897 legislation and the Southern Protector of Aborigines in Queensland from 1898 to 1904'.[45] According to Thorpe, 'Meston's odyssey developed into a quest for a mythical Aboriginal entity remote from British settlement and a corresponding search for exotic Aborigines who possessed some distinctive physical characteristics such as hairless bodies, or who practised "cannibalism"'. Thorpe also highlights Meston's ambivalence toward Aborigines, 'protecting' them on the one hand and exploiting and denigrating them on the other.[46] This thesis expands on this analysis, throwing further light on Meston's faithfulness to a 'noble savage' mentality and showing how this informed his plans for the Bogimbah settlement, and how this contrasted with the ideas and approaches of his adversary, Ernest Gribble.

Two other writers have produced significant studies of Archibald Meston. Cheryl Taylor's *Prologue to Protectorship: Archibald Meston's Public Life in Far North Queensland*[47], looks at Meston's life in North Queensland where he entered public life and politics, *The Mighty Byronian Olympus; Queensland, the Romantic Sublime and Archibald Meston*[48], explores the influences in Meston's life which contributed to his 'romantic' and 'noble' view of Aborigines. *Constructing Aboriginality: Archibald Meston's Literary Journalism, 1870-1924*[49], examines his significant number of public

[45] William Thorpe, 'Archibald Meston and Aboriginal Legislation in Colonial Queensland', *Historical Studies,* Vol. 21, No 82, April 1984, pp. 52-67.

[46] *Ibid.,* p. 57.

[47] Cheryl Taylor, 'Prologue to Protectorship: Archibald Meston's Public Life in Far North Queensland, 1882-1888', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland,* 1988, Vol. 19, No. 11, July 2004.

[48] Cheryl Taylor, 'The Mighty Byronian Olympus; Queensland, the Romantic Sublime and Archibald Meston', *Queensland Review*, Vol. 11 No.1, April 2004.

[49] Cheryl Taylor, 'Constructing Aboriginality: Archibald Meston's Literary Journalism, 1870-1924', *Journal for the Association of Australian Literature*, Vol.2, 2003.

writings - poems, newspaper articles and reports, which Taylor claims were significant in expressing both Meston's persona and the public perception of Aborigines. These works stress Meston's propensity for self promotion, his 'romantic' views, both of Aborigines and the North Queensland landscape, fauna and flora, as well as his aspirations towards a political career. His behaviour and actions over a decade were an attempt to position himself as an expert authority on Queensland Aborigines. Faith Walker has also written of Meston's penchant for romanticising the lives of Aborigines, a view no longer widely held, in the aptly named *Reinvention of the 'Noble Savage': Archibald Meston and 'Wild Australia*[50]*.* This view of Aborigines, above all, informed Meston's 'career' and his attitudes to Aborigines under his control on Fraser Island.

Two writers in particular have dealt with the consequences, in later years, of Meston and Gribble's participation in the lives of the remnants of the Butchulla tribe and other Aborigines in Queensland. In '*You Can Trust me – I'm With The Government'*, Kidd examines the non-payment of earnings to the Aborigines by the Queensland Government and the control that the Government exerted over Aborigines resident at missions and reserves, such as Yarrabah and Cherbourg.[51] The main thrust of Kidd's publications is that the money 'stolen' from the Aborigines by the government was used to subsidise the reserves. Her writings serve to illustrate just how dependent the Aborigines had become on the Government. This thesis contends that this was a direct result of the policies of Meston and Gribble.

Ros Kidd's *The Way We Civilise* (1997), based on her PhD thesis from the University of Queensland, considers the importance of Government policies, which was reflected in the way in which they first used missionaries, and then state reserves, to civilise and Christianise Aborigines while supposedly 'protecting' them.[52] Kidd shows how Aboriginal labour was exploited under the pretence of 'assimilating' them. She touches on missions and provides evidence that missionaries were

[50] Faith Walker, 'Reinvention of the 'Noble Savage': Archibald Meston and 'Wild Australia'', *Journal of Royal Historical Society of Qld.,* Vol. 18, No.3, August 2002.

[51] Ros Kidd, 'You Can Trust Me – I'm With The Government', ***Queensland*** *Review,* St Lucia, Qld., Vol. 1 No.1, June 1994, pp. 38-46.

[52] Rosalind Kidd, *The Way we Civilise,* University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1997.

supposedly only there to correct the spiritual life of Aborigines, while the Government's role was to support and maintain them physically. As explained in this thesis, this is exemplified by the differences in ideology between Meston and Gribble. Using Foucault's concept of 'governmentality', Kidd, like Evans, explores the complex field of Aboriginal affairs in Queensland by understanding Aborigines as 'inmates' rather than citizens. It also explains the continued decline of Aboriginal culture and their lower standing in Australian society, which was a direct result of both Meston's aims and activities and also those of Gribble.

Thom Blake discusses the consequent exploitation of Aborigines after Meston and Gribble's failed attempts to preserve and protect them. *A Dumping Ground: A History of the Cherbourg Settlement* (2001) examines Barambah (now known as Cherbourg). He makes an excellent case that this reserve at least, was simply a depot for cheap labour for the neighbouring settlers, being nothing more than a 'slave depot'.[53] His study revealed a pattern whereby the government cheated the Barambah Aborigines out of the wages that they had legitimately earned, using that money, instead of public revenues, to maintain the settlement. Blake argues that the Aborigines at Cherbourg were thoroughly and systematically exploited. Blake also shows how resilient Aborigines were in re-forming kinship ties and maintaining some of their culture, as Barambah was not a place run by missionaries but a secular institution. This serves as a useful contrast to Bogimbah.

In 'Re-examining total institutions: a case study from Queensland' (2003), Mary-Jean Sutton examines specific spatial and physical characteristics that fit Erving Goffman's structural description of 'total institutions'.[54] She concludes that many missions and reserves did indeed fit those criteria and that the aim was to attain full control of the Aborigines who lived in these missions and reserves, and can be seen as a reflection of power relations in modern society.[55] This conclusion has great relevance for this study, as this control of the Aborigines was essential to change

[53] Blake, *op. cit.*

[54] Mary-Jean Sutton, 'Re-examining total institutions: a case study from Queensland', *Archaeology in Oceania,* Vol. 38, No. 2, 2003, pp. 78-88.

[55] *Ibid.,* p. 78.

their lives, destroy their traditional ways and inculcate Christianity and civilisation into them.

While there is a strong body of work on Australian Aborigines in general, and much research and writing about Aborigines in Queensland, no one has placed Archibald Meston and Ernest Gribble, and their opposing approaches to Aboriginal welfare, as exemplified in their dealings with the Butchulla people, into that body of knowledge, in order to study and understand the experiences of the Aborigines of the Wide Bay area. Ray Evans and his colleagues, Thom Blake and Ros Kidd, dominate the current work on Queensland Aborigines, and have added much to our knowledge base. Noel Loos, Henry Reynolds, Shirleen Robinson, Lyn Hume and Regina Ganter have also made significant contributions. This work builds on and adds to that scholarship and goes some way to addressing the deficiencies identified above.

* * *

Chapter One provides an overview of mission activity overseas and in early colonial Australia including the Christianisation versus civilisation debate, and examines the establishment and the failures of early missions in New South Wales along with the Queensland missions and reserves leading up to the establishment of Bogimbah. Chapter Two focuses on the Butchulla area of Queensland, Fraser Island, and the area around Maryborough, examining the Butchulla's island home, their tribal lands and the early contacts between Butchulla and white people. Also considered is the uneasy relationship between the Butchulla and the settlers who arrived after the 1840s. Chapters Three and Four describe the traditional life of Butchulla Aborigines. These two chapters examine such important parts of their life as their food and their health along with their education and learning styles. Religion and spirituality, marriage, totemism, kinship and language are also examined. As a means of studying how Meston and Gribble contributed to the experiences of the Butchulla people under the infamous 'Act', the traditional practices of the Butchulla

people are compared and contrasted with what happened under the administration of both Meston and Gribble.

Chapters Five and Six examine the protagonists in this story – firstly Archibald Meston and then Ernest Gribble, and explain how their lives before Bogimbah influenced the ways in which they treated the Aborigines under their care. In these two chapters Archibald Meston's early life is examined as are the Reserves at White Cliffs and Bogimbah under Meston's control and in Chapter Six Gribble's early life and Bogimbah Mission under Gribble's control are analysed. The differences between Meston and Gribble will be fully examined, especially how their beliefs affected how they ran the reserve and missions on a day-to-day basis. Sections within these chapters are devoted to their disagreements and what the consequences of their respective policies were. Chapter Seven considers Yarrabah Mission.

In concluding, the aims and consequences of Meston's and Gribble's administrations of Bogimbah and Gribble's time at Yarrabah are assessed and some alternatives are suggested. The problems associated with these alternatives will also be briefly argued. The final part of this thesis encompasses the conclusions drawn from this study and explains the successes or otherwise of both Meston's and Gribble's aims.

Chapter One

A Misery of Missions

The fate of the Butchulla people of the Wide Bay area, like that of other Queensland Aborigines, owed much to the confluence of various factors and circumstances that had their origins earlier in the century. Politicians and policy makers in the late-nineteenth century inherited an 'Aboriginal problem', arising from the failure of earlier policies to incorporate Aborigines into the social and economic life of the colony. The problem, of course, also grew out of the fact that Aboriginal people had actually survived the early frontier phases of invasion, despite widespread predictions that they would not. While the actions and behaviour of some colonists seemed to indicate a complete disregard for the plight of Aborigines, and in some cases an apparent preference for their complete annihilation, the official vision promulgated by the highest authorities in church and state over the course of the nineteenth century was that they should be integrated into the new society. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, prevailing policies sought to 'protect' Aborigines through segregation and oppressive control, especially via the use of missions and reserves. This chapter offers an historical background to the Aboriginal 'problem' and to the various attempts to solve it, with a particular emphasis on the role of state authorities and religious organisations. This helps us understand the key beliefs and motives underlying the creation of the Bogimbah reserve and mission on Fraser Island from 1897, as well as some of the reasons for its failure and its negative impact on the Wide Bay Aborigines.

* * *

From the time Arthur Phillip's 'First Fleet' arrived in Sydney in 1788, relations between colonists and the colonised were mired in complex legal and circumstantial difficulties, as Europeans set about dispossessing Aborigines without proper

acknowledgement of their customary rights and interests.[1] The most conspicuous and predictable result was a violent clash between cultures as the new settlers tried to tame the countryside and its inhabitants to suit their own cultural and economic patterns, while Aborigines resisted attempts to rob and remove them from their traditional homes. Relationships between the old and the new inhabitants often went from tolerable to bad to worse, generating mutual mistrust that frequently descended into violence, a pattern that was repeated as settlement spread inland and along the shores and hinterlands of coastal Australia. The ultimate result, in the broadest terms, was a catastrophic destruction of Aboriginal populations and culture, and the reduction of the survivors to a state of marginalisation and dependency. Queensland's Wide Bay area was no exception (as explained later in this thesis).

The intervention of Christian missionaries in this unfolding tragedy was, in the early stages at least, somewhat haphazard and unfocused. When missionaries did finally begin to enter the Australian field, their activities were characterised, in J.D. Bollen's words, by 'limited interest, modest undertakings, ungenerous financing and early withdrawal'.[2] The Australian colonies were founded in an era when old social philosophies were being recast by 'Enlightenment' thinking and by burgeoning humanitarian and evangelical values. This, as Neil Gunson noted, should have boded well for the Indigenous owners of Australia.[3] However, missionary activity in Australia was slow to commence, even though the First Fleet arrived with an evangelical clergyman, Richard Johnson (1753-1827), nominated by the influential Eclectic Society which pictured the new settlement as a place 'whence the Gospel light may hereafter spread in all directions, and multitudes may rejoice in it who are

[1] David Andrew Roberts, ''They Would Speedily Abandon the Country to the New Comers': The Denial of Aboriginal Rights', M. Crotty and D. A. Roberts (Eds), *Great Mistakes of Australian History*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2006.

[2] J. D.Bollen, 'English Missionary Societies and the Australian Aborigines', *Journal of Religious History,* Vol. 9, 1977, also cited in Kaye Lorraine Corner, Yarrabah: A Mission for the Aboriginal People in North Queensland, The Effect of Government and Church Policies 1900-1912, Partial requirement for the Postgraduate Diploma of Arts (History), University of Queensland, 1994, at Brisbane Diocese Anglican Church Archives, Brisbane Queensland p. 30.

[3] Niel Gunson, *Australian Reminiscences & Papers of L.E. Threlkeld,* Australian Aboriginal Studies No. 40, Canberra, 1974. Vol. I, p. 8.

at present covered with a thick darkness'.[4] Henry Venn, an English evangelical minister and one of the founders of the Clapham Sect, believed Johnson's appointment as Chaplain to the First Fleet heralded 'a great future for the Australian Aborigines who would thus be introduced to Christianity and who would call upon his name in vast numbers and all the savageness of the Heathen shall be put off'.[5] However, although he was generally sympathetic to the needs of Aborigines around Sydney Cove, Johnson was instructed to preach to convicts, not Aborigines.[6] In the earliest days of New South Wales, the battle to survive outweighed the desire to Christianise Aborigines.

The cause of civilising and Christianising Australian Aborigines was not helped by Johnson's successor, Reverend Samuel Marsden, who despite being a local agent for the Church Missionary Society and the London Missionary Society, believed that '[t]he time is not yet right for them [Aborigines] to receive the great blessings of civilisation and the knowledge of Christianity'.[7] Marsden believed that civilisation, which to him meant education in English language, culture, religion and habits, was a natural precursor to the acceptance of Christianity, but that as Aborigines 'had no wants' it was difficult to see how they might be coaxed to change their lifestyle. Marsden was far more interested in the missionary effort in New Zealand than in the Australian Aborigines, seeing Maoris as a 'very superior people', perhaps in part because their discernable social structures and semi-settled village life made them

[4] John Newton to Richard Johnson, in James Bonwick, *Australia's First Preacher,* Sampson Low, Son and Marston, London, 1898, p. 148, also cited in John Harris, *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope,* Albatross, Sydney, 1994, p. 40. The Eclectic Society was formed in 1783 and one of its important aims was to promote the word of the Gospel among 'Heathens'.

[5] Jean Woolmington, 'The Civilisation/Christianisation Debate and the Australian Aborigines', *Aboriginal History,* Vol. 10, No.2, 1986, p. 91.

[6] Jean Woolmington, 'Writing on the Sand: The First Missions to the Aborigines in Eastern Australia', in '*Aboriginal Australia and Christian Missions'*, Swain and Rose (Eds), Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1988, AASR, Adelaide, p. 77; Jean Woolmington, 'Early Christian Missions to the Australian Aborigines', *Historian,* No. 28, October 1974, p. 2.

[7] Marsden to Pratt, in John Harris, *One Blood 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope,* Albatross, Sydney, 1994*,* p. 24. In later years Gribble was somewhat dismissive of Marsden's opinion saying: 'the first recorded effort made in Australia to Christianise and civilise the Aborigines was made by the Rev. Samuel Marsden soon after his arrival at Sydney in the year 1795. …Alas! It was relinquished after a short trial'. Ernest Gribble, *Forty Years with the Aborigines,* Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1930, p. 1.

seemingly more amenable to Christian teachings.[8] But even more sympathetic colonial chaplains, such as Robert Cartwright (1771-1856), who had enough concern for Aboriginal welfare to advocate they be settled in a special township, with allotments for adults and workshops and schools for the children, found their ideas stymied by an unenthusiastic government[9]. Only later did such ideas become more fashionable and accepted.

One of the first meaningful attempts to ameliorate the deteriorating condition of Aborigines around Sydney, and to lay the foundations for their integration into colonial society, was Governor Lachlan Macquarie's 'Native Institution', created in 1814 (originally at Parramatta, and later moved to 'Black Town'). Macquarie was persuaded to found the Institution on the urging of William Shelley, a missionary representing the London Missionary Society, who suggested it be established 'for the purpose of educating, Christianising and giving vocational training to Aboriginal children'.[10] Importantly, although run by a missionary, the chief purpose of the Native Institution was essentially secular, emphasising education, vocational training and the re-socialising of Aborigines (specifically children). Such attempts to mould and manage Aboriginal lives were, as Henry Reynolds notes, seemingly grounded in the experiences of the Industrial Revolution where 'ragged schools, the poor house and the penitentiary' dealt with those of lower classes, such as itinerants, highland clansmen and slum dwellers.[11] The Institution was intended to both allay the threat of Aboriginal resistance to white colonisation, and to improve and preserve Aboriginal people in a manner that would position them as small farmers and/or ordinary working-class citizens who could provide cheap, dependable and sorely needed labour for the colony. As many historians have noted, the Institution was fundamentally flawed, in terms of both its aims and techniques, and yet similar ideas and flaws pervaded other subsequent

[8]Marsden to Pratt, 7 April 1808, cited in Bollen, *op. cit.,* p. 284, Woolmington, C*ivilisation /Christianisation Debate*, p. 96.

[9] K. J. Cable, *Australian Dictionary of Biography,* Melbourne University Press, Vol. 1, 1966, pp. 211-212.

[10] Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians,* Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1994, p. 31.

[11] Henry Reynolds, 'Aborigines and European Social Hierarchy'*, Aboriginal History,* Vol. 7, 1983, n.p.

civilising schemes,[12] including those that emerged under the auspices of the missionary societies. Indeed, as we shall see, some of the same principles were at work in the schemes created later in the century by Meston in the wake of Queensland's *Aborigines Protection Act*.[13]

It was not until the 1820s that the missionary societies began serious attempts to protect and convert Australian Aborigines. By then, the devastating impact of colonial expansion on Aboriginal populations had begun to challenge the good conscience and humanitarian feeling of those who adhered to the basic Christian premise that all creatures were as one in God's eyes. Having successfully lobbied for the abolition of slavery, humanitarians in Britain turned their attention to the plight of the Empire's indigenous populations, including Australian Aborigines, and their interests and agendas were increasingly reflected in British colonial policy. Indeed, as Christine Halse notes, Anglicanism and British Imperialism became 'inextricably linked' in Australia.[14] According to Noel Loos, the nexus between Church and State in Australia reflected a much wider and older association between Christianity and the expansionist energies of powerful European states.[15] Tony Ballantyne notes that the understanding of this nexus has increasingly informed historical writing, to the extent that religion is now recognised as 'a crucial domain through which cultural difference was articulated, ordered, and managed under colonial rule'.[16] This view, however, has been qualified by Andrew Porter, who asserts that the vagaries and inconsistencies within the missionary endeavour precluded the missions from being used as a meaningful 'tool of imperialism', and

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[12] Peter Read, 'Shelley's Mistake: The Parramatta Native Institution and the Stolen Generations', in Crotty and Roberts, *Great Mistakes of Australian History,* p. 47.

[13] The 'Act' is discussed in detail later in this thesis.

[14] Christine Halse, *Terribly Wild Man,* Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2002, p. 9. See also A.G.L. Shaw, 'British Policy Towards Australian Aborigines 1830-1850', *Australian Historical Studies,* Vol. 25, No. 99, 1992*,* p. 265; J. D. Bollen, 'English Missionary Societies and the Australian Aborigines', *Journal of Religious History,* Vol.9, 1977, pp. 264-265; Howard Le Couteur, 'The Moreton Bay Ministry of the Reverend Johann Handt: a reappraisal', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society,* Vol. 84, Pt.2, p. 140.

[15] Noel Loos, 'From Church to State: The Queensland Government Take-over of Anglican Missions in North Queensland', *Aboriginal History,* 1991 15:1, p. 194. See also Max Warren, *The Missionary Movement from Britain in Modern History,* SCM Press, London, 1965, p. 18.

[16] Tony Ballantyne, 'Religion, Difference and the Limits of British Imperial History', *Victorian Studies,* Spring 2005, 47, 3, p. 430.

'that missionaries could be supremely pragmatic in turning imperial agents to their own advantage'.[17]

In any event, humanitarianism towards Aborigines was never a popular cause in the Australian colonies. As Henry Reynolds put it, 'the friends of the blacks were seen to gratuitously assume an air of moral superiority … their contemporaries called them Exeter Hall enthusiasts, maudlin philanthropists, meddling pseudo-philanthropists, do-gooders, bleeding hearts, nigger lovers and many other more abusive epithets'.[18] Nevertheless, a range of denominational mission organisations established branches in New South Wales, including the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS), the interdenominational London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society'.[19] At various times, and in various places, they were engaged in working with Aboriginal people in schemes that often enjoyed some form of government sponsorship.

The missionaries, as Corner states, 'arrived in the field with the imperative to convert non-Christians and to affirm the superiority of the Christian religion over others. However, they overlooked the basic tenet of Christianity that all humanity is equal with no room for prejudice or claims of racial inferiority'.[20] This may be true, but there were other dimensions to the missionary agenda, and other problems inherent in their methods. Those who wished to 'improve' the condition of Australian Aborigines in the early-nineteenth century generally understood that the imperative was to Christianise *and* civilise them. 'Civilising' meant teaching Aborigines the skills necessary to render them useful members of white society, involving the replacement of traditional ways with those vocational and domestic skills necessary to integrate Aborigines into white society. 'Christianising' meant

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[17] Andrew Porter, 'Church history, history of Christianity, religious history: some reflections on British missionary enterprise since the late eighteenth century', *Church History.* 71.3 (Sept 2002): 555(30).

[18] Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in our Hearts,* Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1998, p. xv.

[19] Carey, *Believing in Australia*: *A Cultural History of Religion*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1996,

p. 58. As the Catholic Church struggled even to find representation in Australia there were no Catholic Missionary Societies active in the Colony at that time.

[20] Kaye Lorraine Corner, Yarrabah: A Mission for the Aboriginal People in North Queensland, The Effect of Government and Church Policies 1900-1912, Partial requirement for the Postgraduate Diploma of Arts (History), University of Queensland, 1994, at Brisbane Diocese Anglican Church Archives, Brisbane Queensland, p. 31.

substituting traditional Aboriginal religious systems and beliefs with those of the Christian religion (broadly defined). In the early-nineteenth century the two goals were hard to separate. Although some early missionaries were content to impart the most basic Christian tenets without interfering with traditional lifestyles, in colonial Australia the states of being 'civilised' and 'Christianised' were perceived as two sides of the same coin. As one missionary put it, Aborigines 'must be taught the art of cultivation … and it will only be by keeping them employed that their minds will be made susceptible of Religious impressions … They must also be taught to settle upon a spot where they will always be under the inspection of their teachers'.[21]

This fusion of Christianity with the civilising project seemed particularly necessary in the case of Australian Aborigines because Europeans imagined them to be especially 'savage and barbarous', to the extent that it could not be seen how they might possibly absorb Christian principles without some 'improvement' in their lifestyles. The prevailing view was expressed by Lord Stanley in 1844 when he opined that Aborigines were 'feeble, savage, migratory, averse to cultivation and bereft of civil government and religion … [and that] all that can be required by justice … is to endeavour, as civilisation and cultivation extend, to embrace the Aborigines within their pale, to diffuse religious knowledge among them'.[22] To the evangelicals especially, Australia was, as Richard White notes, 'a land sunk in depravity, a land awaiting salvation, and they [missionaries] set sail with a good supply of trousers.[23]

Aborigines had not always been depicted so negatively. In the late-eighteenth century, some Europeans had been prone to idealise man in a supposed 'native state', free from the burdens and corruptions of civilisation.[24] The early

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[21] John Harper, 23 April 1827, quoted in Reynolds, *This Whispering in our Hearts,* p. 15

[22] Lord Stanley to Captain Fitzroy, 13 August 1844, Select Documents on British Colonial Policy, 1850-1860, quoted in Barry Bridges, 'The Aborigines and the Land Question: New South Wales in the Period of Imperial Responsibility', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical* Society, 1970, 56(2), p. 95. Stanley was under-secretary for war and the colonies under Canning and transferred to the Colonial Office in March 1833 until June 1834, carrying through the bill for the abolition of slavery drafted by James Stephen. He was called to the House of Lords as Lord Stanley of Bickerstaffe in 1844, and was secretary of state for war and the colonies from September 1841 until his resignation in December 1845 and he elaborated and organized the 'probation' system of convict administration in Van Diemen's Land. Richard White, *Inventing Australia,* Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1981, p. 10.

[23] *Ibid.,* p. 14.

[24] *Ibid.,* p. 10.

exploration of the South Pacific, especially Captain James Cook's adventures, had opened vistas of new worlds 'inhabited by happy, healthy beautiful people whose every want was supplied by the tropical forest, and who, best of all, know nothing of the cramping sophistries of civilisation'.[25] Such views stood in strong contrast to those earlier expressed by explorers such as William Dampier, whose account of a voyage to New Holland at the end of the seventeenth century represented Aborigines as 'the miserablest People in the world… differ[ing] little from Brutes'.26 Cook, however, famously remarked that although they 'appeared to some to be the most wretched people upon Earth', Australian Aborigines were 'far more happier than we Europeans; being wholly unacquainted with the superfluous but the necessary Conveniences'.[27] As Woolmington observes, such representation of Aborigines 'came very close to Rousseau's concept of the "noble savage", man living in harmony with nature, unspoilt by the materialism of European society'.[28] As we shall see, these ideas influenced Archibald Meston's views of Aborigines, at a time when such romanticism was well out of favour. [29]

The idea that Aborigines were somehow 'noble' and happy in their 'natural state' was never really popular or widely accepted by Europeans, and it was not long before the romanticism succumbed to harsher views which held Aborigines to be savage and grotesque.[30] Christian theology and the growing influence of evangelicals were instrumental in casting Aborigines as repugnant pagans.[31] As Mulvaney puts it:

> Any suggestion that a fallen race awaiting its redemption possessed nobility of character was considered unchristian. Mission organisations stressed the abomination of savage society and spared no thought for investigating its past or recording its present. Along with other Oceanic races, the Australian Aborigines became ignoble'.[32]

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[25] Alan Moorehead, *The Fatal Impact: An account of the Invasion of the South Pacific 1767-1840,* Penguin, Melbourne, 1966, p. 62.

[26] William Dampier, *Dampier's Voyages,* edited by John Masefield, Grant Richards, 1906, quoted in Moorehead, *Ibid.,* p. 131, White, *op. cit*., p. 2; Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific,* Harper and Row, Sydney, 1984, p. 169.

[27] Smith, *Ibid.,* p. 170.

[28] Woolmington, *Early Christian Missions,* p. 2.

[29] White*, op. cit*., p. 12.

[30] White, *op. cit.,* p. 13.

[31] Smith, *op. cit.,* p. 173.

[32] D. J. Mulvaney, 1958, quoted in Bollen, *English Missionary Societies,* p. 263.

The rise of Darwinian theories in the last half of the nineteenth century helped consolidate the idea that Aborigines were an inferior 'race', at the opposite end of the evolutionary scale to White civilisation, bound to extinction as a consequence of the natural laws of selection. 'Increasingly', as Reynolds and May put it, 'Aborigines were seen as members of a less evolved earlier race, a biological and cultural fossil preserved by the isolation of the continent'.[33] The construction of Aborigines as morally and physically defective facilitated the policy of segregating them on missions and reserves where they could be 'protected' and prevented from interbreeding with non-Indigenous partners.

Although Christianisation was the ultimate aim of early missionaries, the importance of work and industry was integral to their teachings. Every mission that commenced in Australia had, as one its central aims, the necessity that Aborigines should work.[34] So regularly was it mentioned in missionary writings and so distressing was their failure to impart that precept to Aborigines that 'one could be pardoned for thinking that it was, to them, a primary Christian virtue'.[35] To work was the will of God and therefore both lay missionaries and church ministers demanded Aborigines adopt a work ethic in order to render themselves civilised and Christian. Aborigines met that demand with a variety of consistent responses including derision, ignorance and resistance.[36]

Yet on another level, the missionary agenda required that Aborigines be civilised, simply because they could not be Christianised as long as they remained semi-nomadic. While there were various ways of measuring and defining civilisation, the immediate concern was to have Aborigines become sedentary, fixed to one spot where they could be taught and monitored. By this means Aborigines would be

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[33] Henry Reynolds and Dawn May, *Contested Ground,* Ann McGrath (Ed), Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1999, p. 177.

[34] Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

[35] *Ibid.,* p. 211

[36] The basic belief of a work ethic has persisted in Australia where Aborigines (and others) are not only expected to contribute their labour in a paid work place, but also through a variety of schemes where the Government (representing society as a whole) ties the money it gives (and thereby survival) to work performed for the community as a whole. In modern Australia this is now called 'mutual obligation'. The concept of a protestant work ethic has passed from one of the norms of a theocratic society and is now entrenched in a secular society. Nevertheless, its roots lie in religiosity from the early days of Christianity.

wrested away from their ceremonies and communication with other tribes, and eventually learn the material and moral advantages of living like Europeans. The alternative was for missionaries to itinerate, a method that was widely discussed in the nineteenth century, having enjoyed some success in the South Seas and in Polynesia, but only because the people already lived in small villages, where the missionaries could settle and enjoy a few comforts. In Australia, however, itinerating involved constant movement through harsh and dangerous landscapes, with little food or shelter. Early missionaries such as Leigh and Cartwright had, as Gribble later recalled, 'followed tribes in their wanderings'.[37] Others who were based on mission stations (Tuckfield at Buntingdale in Victoria, for example) walked many miles into the surrounding neighbourhoods, spending time at Aboriginal camps, but usually with a view to enticing them to come in to the mission.[38] However, the idea of itinerating full time was deemed impractical, even impossible. According to Ferry, 'when George Langhorne suggested in a letter to the Colonial Secretary that part of his time be spent itinerating with Aborigines, an immediate reply ridiculed the idea as detracting from the ''grand design'' of forming a village'.[39]

During the early-nineteenth century there was considerable cooperation between the various missionary societies and the colonial authorities, with regard to protecting Aborigines and integrating them into white society. As far as the colonial governments were concerned, the agenda was driven by the need to solve the increasing dilemma of racial violence on the frontiers of settlement. As the problem came to appear increasingly intractable, governments looked to the missionaries for assistance. In this way, the aims of civilising and Christianising Aborigines came to the forefront of Aboriginal policy. However, in the process certain problems and ambiguities emerged, particularly with respect to practices and principles under which the missionaries should work. In particular, there was some confusion over how the aims of Christianising and civilising were related, and how they were to be

[37] Ernest Gribble, *Forty Years with the Aborigines,* Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1930*,* p. 1, Ernest Gribble, *The Problem of the Aborigines*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1932, p. 124.

[38] C. A McCallum, 'Tuckfield, Francis (1808-1865)' ADB, Vol. 2, Melbourne University Press, 1967, pp. 540-541.

[39] John Ferry, 'The Failure of the New South Wales Missions To The Aborigines Before 1845', *Aboriginal History,* 1979 3:1, p. 29.

reconciled. As noted, the two aims were generally mentioned together and usually seen as inherently inseparable, but there were conflicting ideas about whether one should precede the other. According to Woolmington, 'some missionaries and colonists believed it was essential to convert heathens to Christianity first, in order to fit them for civilisation, while others held the opposite view and claimed that civilisation was the first step to take'. Indeed, many were of the opinion that 'conversion to Christianity was quite impossible unless preceded by the introduction of civilisation'.[40] The latter opinion contradicted the view of some influential Church figures, such as Bishop William Broughton (1788-1853), who believed Christianity might precede attempts to civilise Aborigines.[41] The debate over method and practice came to the fore from the 1820s, as state-sponsored missionary activity began to accelerate in NSW.

The 1820s and 1830s saw the implementation of a number of experimental missions in colonial NSW, the most significant of which were Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld's Lake Macquarie mission, and the Anglican Church Missionary Society's Wellington Valley mission in the central-west of NSW from 1832. Both were 'frontier missions', deliberately established on the fringes of European settlement, in order to access Aborigines who were supposed to be isolated and uncontaminated by European influence. (The perceived need for isolation and segregation would also inform the planning of later missionaries and administrators including Meston). Both were also highly significant in the manner in which they represented a nexus between Church and State. Threlkeld's mission, originally established under the auspices of the London Missionary Society with the backing of Governor Thomas Brisbane, later operated as an independent mission with some financial support from Governors Ralph Darling and Richard Bourke.[42] The CMS mission at Wellington Valley was devised by the Anglican CMS and Colonial Office in London, and funded to

[40] Woolmington, *The Civilisation/Christianisation Debate*. p. 93.

[41] K. J Cable, 'Broughton, William Grant (1788-1853)', *ADB*, Vol. 1, Melbourne University Press, 1966, p. 159. The significance of the King's School in Gribble's life will be explained later in this thesis.

[42] Niel Gunson, *Australian Reminiscences & Papers of L.E. Threlkeld,* Australian Aboriginal Studies No. 40, Canberra, 1974.

the tune of five hundred pounds per annum by the NSW government.[43] Both were significant also in bringing to the fore issues concerning the segregation of Aborigines on isolated reserves, and in testing the contradictions and anomalies in the missionary method, especially in terms of the dual gaols of Christianising and civilising.

Both Threlkeld's Lake Macquarie mission and the CMS mission at Wellington Valley were considered failures – 'spectacularly unsuccessful', in John Ferry's words[44] - at least in terms of the objectives they had set themselves. They experienced an array of problems that were soon recognised as endemic, some of which persisted and reoccurred at Bogimbah and Yarrabah in the late-nineteenth century. One fundamental difficulty lay in attracting Aborigines for instruction, at a time when their attendance was entirely voluntary. (That problem, of course, was addressed directly in Queensland by the policy of forced removals built into the 1897 *Act*). For all their efforts, the missionaries struggled with their Aboriginal subjects, who were overcome with sickness and disease and appeared headed for unavoidable annihilation as private settlement increasingly encroached into tribal lands. Moreover, Aborigines appeared resolutely unappreciative of the missionary efforts. A visitor to Lake Macquarie noted how even when an Aborigine became 'acquainted with the doctrines of Christianity, and all the comforts and advantages of civilisation, it was impossible for him to overcome his attachment to the customs of his people'.[45] When evidence of success was not forthcoming the interest of governments and parishioners waned and financial contributions dried up, so that Aborigines soon came to be seen as a 'hopeless cause'.[46] Ultimately the missionaries themselves were consumed by bitter infighting with their superiors, and with each other, especially at Wellington Valley where the CMS missionaries (Reverends William Watson, Johann Handt and later James Günther) were seldom even on speaking terms.

[43] David Roberts, '"Binjang" or the "Second Vale of Tempe": The Frontier at Wellington Valley, New South Wales, 1817- 1851', PhD thesis, University of Newcastle, 2000, p. 184.

[44] Ferry, *Failure of the N.S.W. Missions,* p. 33.

[45] Horatio Hale, quoted in Gunson, *op. cit.,* Vol. 1, p. 6.

[46] Bollen, *op. cit.,* p. 280.

The early frontier missions also revealed some of the problems in equating, or attempting to separate, the imperatives of civilisation and Christianity. Threlkeld (who had formally worked in the far more glamorous and profitable missionary fields of the South Seas) did not believe that civilisation was a necessary prelude to accepting the Gospel, saying that if he were allowed to preach then civilisation would follow. On reaching Lake Macquarie in 1826 Threlkeld immediately began to instruct the Aborigines in simple agriculture.[47] However, his most famous achievement was an extensive study of the local Awabakal language and his translation of biblical texts into that language. This soon became the primary goal of his mission, such that he did apparently little else in the way of instructing or training his subjects.[48]At Wellington Valley, where there was more staff, a modest budget and some existing infrastructure (the mission occupied an abandoned government settlement that had previously housed a convict agricultural establishment) the CMS missionaries worked more earnestly to impart civilisation and Christianity concurrently. As Carey notes, the Wellington valley mission was intended to effect 'conversion and civilisation (there was rarely much distinction made between the two)'.[49] However, the need to impart religious instruction, which required time and constant attention, was compromised by financial pressures and the need to be self-sufficient, which meant that farming often became more important than preaching.[50]

Similar problems were evident on the northern frontiers of NSW, in what soon became the colony of Queensland. Johann Handt (formerly with the CMS at Wellington Valley) was relocated to Moreton Bay from 1836, but gave most of his attention to convicts rather than Aborigines. In the late 1830s a number of Lutherans brought to NSW by the Presbyterian minister, John Dunmore Lang, to address the shortage of Protestant clergy in the colony, established themselves near Redcliffe,

[47] Niel Gunson, 'Threlkeld, Lancelot Edward (1788-1859)', ADB, Vol. 2, Melbourne University Press, 1967, pp. 528-530.

[48] D.A. Roberts, ''Language to save the innocent': Reverend L. Threlkeld's linguistic mission', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, December 2008,94.2, p. 107.

[49] Hilary Carey, 'Conversion, Gender Order and the Wellington Valley Mission, 1832-1843', in *Religious Change, Conversion and Culture,* Lyn Olsen Ed, Sydney Studies, p. 254.

[50] Harris, *op. cit.,* p. 110.

then moved to Nundah, or 'Zion Hill', where they attempted to build a self-sufficient village to provide Aborigines with an example of a settled, Christian village.[51] They also failed to attract Aborigines to the mission and poured most of their efforts into farming, gardening and other secular duties.[52] Ultimately they were undermined by a growing European population, prompting them to apply (unsuccessfully) to move from Nundah to Fraser Island in 1842 where they hoped to remove Aborigines from the corrupting influence of whites.[53] Similar ideas informed a subsequent mission on Fraser Island, undertaken by Reverend Edward Fuller (see below). In 1843, Catholic Bishop John Bede Polding sent four Passionist priests to Stradbroke Island, where they hoped (but failed) to isolate Aborigines from the pernicious influence of white people and the corrupting effects of the alcohol and tobacco. After three hard years and over two hundred baptisms, the missionaries departed Stradbroke Island and went on to other endeavours.[54] Ultimately, these early colonial missions set the pattern for the failure of future missionary endeavours and helped entrench a perception that Australia and its Aborigines provided a distinctly unglamorous and hopeless field of missionary endeavour, especially set against other fields in Africa, India, China and the South Seas.[55]

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Colonial practices and attitudes that were cemented in early colonial NSW were carried north into Queensland during the mid-nineteenth century, imported by settlers from New South Wales, who went north in search of new pastures, and

[51] *Ibid*., p. 111.

[52] *Ibid*., pp. 108-109.

[53] Handt left Nundah mission when it closed in 1842 and returned to church work in Sydney.

[54] Harris, o*p. cit.,* p. 114; Faith Walker, 'Useful and Profitable: History and Race Relations at the Myora Aboriginal Mission, Stradbroke Island, Australia, 1892-1940', *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum, Cultural Heritage Series,* p. 139; C. P. Thorpe, *First Catholic Mission to the Australian Aborigines,* Pellegrini, Sydney, 1949, p. 139.

[55] Ferry, *op. cit*., p. 26, Later in this thesis, as Mission Notes are quoted from *The Church Chronicle,* it is revealing to note that the messages from Fraser Island are always placed third or fourth in the columns of news, after those from China, New Guinea, Melanesia and even Central Africa. This gives some idea of the order of priorities of the Church at this time.

adopted by the multitude of new immigrants who came to Queensland seeking work and land. By the mid-nineteenth century, the benevolent and well-meaning policies that had been pursued by early New South Wales Governors had seemingly receded into the distant past, and had been replaced by a far more aggressive and self-regulating approach to the management of Aboriginal populations.

It is generally understood that the Queensland frontier was especially hostile and brutal. Henry Reynolds, for example, estimates that as many as ten thousand Aborigines, or about half the total number believed to have been murdered during the conquest of Australia, died in frontier conflict on the Queensland frontiers, and though these figures have been recently contested there is sufficient evidence to support the view that violence was pervasive and enormously destructive.[56] Diseases such as smallpox, influenza and typhoid also contributed to a major demographic catastrophe in Queensland. Those Aborigines who survived were marginalised, forced onto reserves and missions, put into unpaid and low paid labour, and made dependent on welfare and 'white money'. Goodall describes the creation of reserves in New South Wales as 'the total assumption of control by the colonisers over the survivors of the wars, who were 'rounded up' and 'herded' into these compounds by the newly created protection boards which intended from the very beginning to isolate them from the settler society except for a very narrowly defined labouring role'.[57] A Communist Party publication of 1920, written about Palm Island but also relevant to other establishments, says that 'reserves were created by governments along with settlements on which remnants of tribes were herded … Reserves became pools of cheap labour where people were compelled to live in isolated backward conditions deprived of land ownership and elementary human rights'.[58] The cumulative result in Queensland, as in the other colonies of Australia, was a loss of traditional culture and land, and a lingering sense of despair and injustice. As an unnamed Aborigine told Tom Petrie:

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[56] Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier,* JCU, Townsville, 1981, p. 165; Keith Windschuttle, 'The Myths of Frontier Massacres in Australian History Pt II', *Quadrant,* November 2000, pp. 17-24.

[57] H. Goodall, 'Land in our own country: the Aboriginal land rights movement in south-eastern Australia, 1860-1914', in V. Chapman and P. Read (eds), *Terrible Hard Biscuits*, Sydney, 1996, p. 168.

[58] A Communist Party Publication, *A Programme for Aboriginal people of the Palm Island group- a natural Paradise,* QS 505/1, 3A/109/2, Box 454, p. 2.

> We were hunted from our ground, shot, poisoned, and had our daughters, sisters, and wives taken from us…what a number were poisoned at Kilcoy…They stole our ground where we used to get food, and when we got hungry and took a bit of flour or killed a bullock to eat, they shot us or poisoned us. All they give us now for our land is a blanket once a year.[59]

In Queensland, as in NSW, the role of missions and missionaries in this process was complex and contradictory. Missionaries both ameliorated and assisted the destruction, segregation, punishment and exclusion of Aboriginal people. Generally speaking, they sought to protect Aborigines, but too often they appear to have participated in and even encouraged that exploitation. For example, Meston, as we shall see, wanted absolute isolation for his charges, in order to keep them 'pure', but soon began contracting out the labour force at Bogimbah to serve white people as farm labourers, police trackers, and domestic servants.[60] Queensland applied educational and work practices guaranteed to exploit Aborigines, far in excess of what happened in NSW. Similarly both Meston and Gribble used the corroborees of the Aborigines, under their strict control, as 'fundraising' ventures. At Yarrabah, Gribble even formed a musical performing band to raise money.

The Churches and their missionaries entered Queensland wholeheartedly and with hope, and from 1837 to 1920 there were a total of at least twenty-three missions established in Queensland.[61] The failure of early missions in New South Wales and Queensland required the mainstream Christian churches and their respective missionary societies to consider new approaches. For the Church of England in Australia, the primary instrument after 1850 was the Australian Board of Missions (now the Anglican Board of Missions) set up by Bishop Selwyn of New Zealand, for the conversion and civilisation of Melanesians and Australian Aborigines. Gilbert White, Anglican Bishop of Carpentaria, thought the Board would redress the problems posed by 'other colonising Christians' and do more to heal the

[59] Constance Petrie, *Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland*, Watson and Ferguson, Brisbane, 1904, pp. 182-183.

[60] Thom Blake, *A Dumping Ground: A History of the Cherbourg Settlement*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2001; Kidd, *The Way we Civilise,* University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2000.

[61] B. Halstead and D. Smith, *Looking for your Mob,* Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1990.

'devastation' by 'offering assistance … [and] salvation to the colonised survivors'.[62] The ABM became the 'missionary arm' of the Church of England in Australia, organised by the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia.[63] However, it made no attempt to evangelise in Australia for another generation. At the second General Synod in 1876, it was decided to undertake work among the Aborigines in Queensland, at the government reserve at Mackay.[64] Thereafter, for many decades, the ABM played a key role in the administration and management of Queensland missions, including Bogimbah on Fraser Island, over which it assumed control after the failure of Meston's secular experiment. The Board of Missions was involved in a cycle of co-operation and competition with the Queensland Government which, as we shall see, was well illustrated in the case of Bogimbah on Fraser Island.[65] As Noel Loos has noted, the ABM's role in Queensland involved an 'assertion of authority' that 'disrupted traditional Aboriginal society'.[66] This was intentional. To instil one set of values and faith, it was necessary to supplant the old.

Fuller's Mission on Fraser Island

Fraser Island was identified as an excellent site for a Christian mission as early as 1842, when the Lutheran missionaries from Zion Hill near Brisbane appealed to Governor George Gipps to be allowed to relocate there, in order to be quarantined from the corrupting influence of white settlers and convicts. In 1843, the newly appointed Land Commissioner, Stephen Simpson, recommended Fraser Island as 'an excellent place for a missionary station as it was thickly inhabited by aboriginals'.[67] Fraser Island was a very popular as a place for a mission, probably because of the very fact that it was an island and provided the segregation deemed necessary by

[62] G White, '*Round About the Torres Straits: A Record of Australian Church Missions,* Sydney, 1917', p. 8 cited in Loos, 'The Australian Board of Missions, The Anglican Church and the Aborigines, 1850-1900', *Journal of Religious History,* Vol. 17, No 2, Dec 1992, pp. 194-5.

[63] Noel Loos, 'The Australian Board of Missions, the Anglican Church and the Aborigines, 1850-1900', *The Journal of Religious History,* Vol. 17, No 2, December 1992, p. 195. The Church of England in the Fraser Island and Maryborough area was controlled by the Diocese of Brisbane.

[64] *Ibid* , p. 199.

[65] Noel Loos, 'From Church to State: The Queensland Government Take-over of Anglican Missions in North Queensland', *Aboriginal History,* Vol. 15, No. 1, 1991, pp. 73-84.

[66] Loos, *Australian Board of Missions,* p. 195.

[67] Alice Wilson, Maryborough Wide Bay and Burnett Historical Society, File F11 p. 1.

these supplicants. However, thirty years passed before Simpson's advice was acted on when Edward Fuller's mission was established, during which time the Fraser Island population had been decimated by disease, starvation, opium dross obtained from the Chinese in the Maryborough area, and violent clashes with settlers. In the local press the severe reduction in Aboriginal numbers was put down to 'the march of civilisation and the ministerial policy of ''Queensland for white people'''. The *Maryborough Chronicle* reported on timber getters 'hiding plenty of grog from a shipwreck many years ago, and now "the blacks" were finding cases of it and partaking of it in sprees, which resulted in a death or two'.[68] Meston attributed the decline in the local Aboriginal population to 'drink, opium and defective nutrition'. This reflected contemporary public opinion as Loyau also wrote 'the heavy mortality has been due mainly to the use of intoxicating drinks'.[69] In part this belief absolved the local community from responsibility for the decimation of the local Butchulla. Aborigines themselves simply put it down to 'plenty fella die'.[70] There was a sad element of truth in each explanation.

In 1870, the Methodist minister and bush missionary, Reverend Edward Fuller, established a mission on Fraser Island, pitching a tent near a place called Pierson's Landing, said to be on the southwest side of the island about three miles north of Snout Point and near White Cliffs. That location seemed 'to be the Aboriginals' main crossing place to the mainland, and as you are driving them out of Maryborough they seem to be coming back to Fraser Island by the dozens'.[71] Fuller thought the solitude and isolation of the island would assist him in ministering to those whom he paternalistically described as 'my' people'.[72] Fuller was 'not the archetypal bible-thumping missionary'. He had served several years with the British Army in India and South Africa, and had travelled over five thousand miles evangelising through the Darling Downs and northern Queensland. He had also

[68] *Maryborough Chronicle*, 1 May 1886, p. 2.

[69] George Loyau, *The History of Maryborough,* Pole, Outridge & Co, Brisbane 1897, p. 224.

[70] *M.C.,* 1 May 1886, p. 2.

[71] Joan Christiansen, *They Came and Stayed,* no publisher, Hervey Bay, 1991, p. 172.

[72] *Ibid.,* p. 172

served at Bourke in New South Wales.[73] Many leading citizens of Maryborough pledged to help Fuller by raising funds.[74] Other locals, however, thought he was making a big mistake.[75]

Fuller left Maryborough on the pilot boat on 1st November with gardening tools, seeds and other supplies.[76] However, he planted crops in soil that was 'dark and swampy or white and sandy', rather than exploiting traditional food sources. Like Threlkeld, he studied the Aboriginal dialect in the hope that he might one day preach the gospel in that language, and he also attempted to teach Aborigines the English language.[77] Like others before him, Fuller relied on gifts of food and supplies to hold their attention, but ultimately found that he could not force Aborigines to remain stationary. He complained that 'unless some means can be devised for employing the natives so as to put a stop to their wanderings, much success in Christianising them can hardly be expected'.[78]

The *Maryborough Chronicle*, considering the reasons for Fuller's failure, pointed to an inherent flaw in the missionary method, this being the apparent belief that Aborigines would embrace civilisation once they were exposed to its benefits, as if 'the growth of radishes, onions etc … were expected, in some mysterious way, to facilitate the conversion and civilisation of the blacks'. The *Chronicle* also noted the detrimental influence of a cynical and self-interested white community 'who seem, not unnaturally, to have regarded the new propaganda as somewhat of a nuisance, by drawing away the natives who were accustomed to assist them'.[79] In 1873, after moving to the mainland at Tin Can Bay, where he was plagued by the same problems, Fuller quietly gave up.[80] He had not persuaded local Aborigines to

[73] Tony Matthews, *River of Dreams,* Maryborough City Council, Maryborough, Qld., 1995 p. 129.

[74] *M.C.,* 25 Feb 1871, p. 2.

[75] *M.C.*, 1 April 1871, p. 2.

[76] *M.C.*, 20 October 1870, p. 3.

[77] Matthews, *op. cit.,* p. 128.

[78] *M.C.*, 21 March 1871, p. 3.

[79] *M.C.,* 18 March 1874, p. 2.

[80] Mathews, o*p. cit.,* p. 26. Fuller also conducted a short-lived mission on Hinchinbrook Island, near Cardwell in North Queensland about 1878 and was later appointed Superintendent of the Deebing Creek Mission from 1892. http://www.logan.Qld..gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/ADE671EF-0B37-4CA6-9B66-501C36BF0324/0/RichinHistoryAboriginalculture.pdf.

abandon thousands of years of tradition in favour of a civilised and Christian lifestyle, the benefits of which had not been well demonstrated to them. He had been unable to persuade Aborigines to remain at his camp and resist their need to depart for corroborees and other social and cultural engagements.[81] His failure prompted the *Maryborough Chronicle* to rail against 'the practically useless hobby of Christianising the blacks'. Its opinion was that 'missionary societies should devote their time and labours more to the propagation of religion amongst the settlers in our new districts'. At least they were settled and stationary on their well-defined plots of land.[82]

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As the frontier era closed in eastern Australia, and as colonial settlement expanded and consolidated, the opportunities for Aborigines to maintain their semi-nomadic lifestyles diminished, and the need for missionaries to itinerate faded. It was at this stage, in the late-nineteenth century, that the establishment of reserves and missions became more crucial to the survival and protection of Queensland Aborigines. In Queensland, in the years preceding the 1897 Act, a number of important reserves were created. In 1890 a short-lived mission was established on Bribie Island at the northern end of Moreton Bay, which was soon after moved to Myora on North Stradbroke Island (see below). One of the most renowned missions was John Brown Gribble's mission at Yarrabah, near Cairns, opened in 1893 and continuing for many years under different administrations, including that of his son Ernest. Yarrabah continued in one form or another up until the 1950s and is still an Aboriginal community today. Yarrabah becomes important to this story after 1900, when the last of the Butchulla tribe were transferred there from Fraser Island, though the broader history of this mission helps explain some of the motives and the actions of Ernest Gribble, who also played a large role in the operation of Bogimbah. The Kongkandji people of the Cairns area proved reluctant converts to Christianity, and it was not until the years of Ernest Gribble's administration that Aborigines came

[81] *Ibid,*

[82] *M.C.*, 17 March 1874, p. 2.

to live at Yarrabah in substantial numbers, though they did so mostly because they were increasingly being forced from their lands by white settlement around Cairns. Gribble also actively used local police, and his cutter 'Hazelhurst' to bring Aborigines into the mission.[83] Gribble did achieve a 'village' style of living for his charges but at great cost to the Aborigines and their traditional way of life. There are competing opinions on the success of the Yarrabah Mission, and these will be discussed later, to contrast and contextualise the apparent failure of Bogimbah.

Two others missions deserve brief attention here, particularly as a means of providing some contrast to the regimes established on Fraser Island. First, Barambah mission, established in 1901 (renamed Cherbourg in 1931), near the town of Murgon in South East Queensland, is important to this thesis because some Aborigines from Fraser Island were placed there after the closure of Bogimbah. Barambah also provides an instructive example in that it was not run by a religious body, although it was originally conceived by a missionary, William Thompson, in June 1899.[84] Archibald Meston, in his capacity as Southern Protector, sent forty Aborigines there from Durundur Reserve. Thirty-three others were sent from Kilkivan, on the edge of Butchulla territory. Barambah was not as tightly regulated as Bogimbah, and became infamous as 'a dumping ground for the lame, the halt and the incorrigible … the black criminals of the state'.[85] Aborigines did not enjoy living there and many absconded and returned to their own country in what Chief Protector J. W .Bleakley described as 'remarkable feats of endurance'.[86] The Government did not have the resources needed to 'round them up' and so Aborigines were largely left to live their own lives.[87]

The defining feature of Barambah, however, was the forced employment of its residents in local settler industries. Providing cheap labour helped assuage the fierce resentment of local settlers who initially opposed the mission, and attracted

[83] Gribble, *Forty Years,* p. 60.

[84] Thompson to Home Secretary, QSA HOM/B3 'T' Cited in Blake, *op. cit.,* p. 5. The Act is discussed in more detail later in this thesis.

[85] Arnell to Home Secretary, quoted in Blake, o*p. cit*., p. xi.

[86] John Bleakley, *Aborigines of Australia*, Jacaranda Press, Sydney, 1961, p. 195.

[87] Blake, o*p. cit.*, p. 50.

much needed income for the cash-strapped establishment. The aims of protecting and segregating Aborigines were thus cynically betrayed, and in time Barambah became little more than 'a dumping ground and a slave depot'. Nevertheless, Aborigines showed an unexpected resilience at Barambah, the best attempts of administrators failing to break their spirituality and tribal ties. Blake describes how 'new tribes' were formed at Barambah, reinforcing the importance of kinship and traditional values.[88] At Barambah, there was no attempt to Christianise, and the attempt to civilise Aborigines consisted mostly of enforcing them to live on the reserve while working for wages that were kept by the administrators. Certainly there was no attempt to foster the culture and traditions of Aboriginal residents, though they found their own ways of doing so at Barambah.

Another important and instructive mission was that created at Myora on North Stradbroke Island. In many ways it represented the antithesis of what most people (including Meston and Gribble) envisaged for Aborigines. Consequently, it was also singularly successful, in certain respects. Faith Walker summarises Myora succinctly:

> Unlike other Aboriginal reserves in Queensland at the time, Myora was not a rigidly controlled government or church institution. All aspects of behaviour were not highly regulated, accommodation was not compound-like, children were not separated from their parents and corporal punishment was not the norm. At Myora there was no resident administrative hierarchy, no fencing and no dormitories.[89]

Most importantly for the long-term health of the residents, 'there was no sense of isolation or desolation'.[90] Aboriginal families had already partly integrated with white families at the nearby Dunwich Benevolent Asylum, and many Myora people had full and long-term employment. Unlike Aborigines on other reserves, including Meston's on Fraser Island, those on North Stradbroke were free to leave and enjoy an ongoing association with their traditional lands. There were no oppressive attempts to Christianise or civilise them, and traditional culture was maintained by the elders and 'Grannies'. At the same time, their interaction with white people, and

[88] Blake, *op. cit*., pp. 205-216

[89] Faith Walker, *Useful and Profitable,* p. 137.

[90] *Ibid*.

their interest in gardening, saw them voluntarily adopt European ways, while 'most of the residents expressed adherence to some Christian religion'.[91] Residents at Myora were provided with housing, education, work and clothing, as well as Government rations. In stark contrast to the authoritarianism and starvation at Bogimbah, there was no corporal punishment at Myora, and food and water were abundant.[92]

Roth described the Aboriginals at Myora as different from those in other missions. 'They did not consider themselves Aboriginals, they did not want any protection, they wished their European friends and others to visit them at holiday time, they objected to the land they were on being a reserve, and they wished to remain unmolested as they were'. He favoured a non-interventionist policy for Myora, suggesting that the residents be allowed to work out their own destiny.[93] In actual practice this meant they were free to observe their traditions, if they so wished. This may have been a pragmatic decision on Roth's part, as he admitted in 1906 that administering the Act at Myora was with its 'close association for years past with Europeans … a matter of supreme difficulty''.[94] Whatever the reasons, unlike other areas and missions such as those discussed in this thesis, there were no forced removals to or from North Stradbroke Island. Walker states that this 'further assisted in the maintenance of social cohesion and identity'.[95]

The idea that residents on missions be allowed to 'work out their own destiny' was novel at that time, but it is doubtful, in the wider context of race relations in Australia, whether that approach would have been successful in the long term. Certainly it did not marry with the patronising attitudes of the time. Gribble certainly would not have accepted such a *laissez faire* attitude to missioning to the Aborigines and that mind-set later led to the decimation of the Wide Bay Aborigines, while Meston was the architect of the '*Act*', beginning that process of control and

[91] *Ibid.,* p. 163.

[92] *Ibid*., p. 148.

[93] *Ibid.*, p. 142.

[94] Walter Roth, Report, QPP, 1907, p. 12, quoted in Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

[95] Walker, *Useful and Profitable*, p. 138.

subsequent decimation of the Butchulla people. He too is implicated in that same process at Bogimbah.

In contrast to the control vested in Meston, Myora mission was controlled by three tiers of authority - the Senior Inspector of the Department of Public Instruction, the Chief Protector of Aborigines and the Medical Superintendent of the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum. Walker considered that real authority lay with the Medical Superintendent, Dr Frederick Turnbull who saw the Aboriginal population as 'a necessary evil and a supply of cheap labour.'[96] Likewise, Meston hired people out to supplement finances and Gribble believed in making the Aborigines 'work for their supper', but the outcomes were vastly different. Long after Bogimbah Mission closed and the remaining Aborigines were transferred, like long-term prisoners of the Crown, from Fraser Island to Yarrabah, the residents at Myora were still happy, healthy and living on their own lands. That is not to say that Myora was the perfect mission, but that it proved a better option for the time. Ironically Myora mission probably better achieved the aim of 'civilising' and 'Christianising' the Aborigines there, than did Gribble at Bogimbah.

* * *

The role of missions and government reserves in the destruction of Aboriginal society in eastern Australia since 1788 has long been the subject of interest and controversy and, although limited to a discrete number of missions in New South Wales and Queensland, this chapter has outlined some of those interests and controversies. While some authors have sought to excuse or downplay the impact of Christian missions, it is widely believed that missions and reserves played a fundamental role in the destruction of Aboriginal values and customs, and that in some respects they were integral to the colonial process. While shielding Aborigines from some of the worst excesses of frontier contact, the missionaries, in Reynolds' words 'mounted an intellectual challenge to Aboriginal society and culture far more deliberate and consistent, than any other group of Europeans in colonial Australia'.[97] The questions of whether they 'relieved or exacerbated racial conflict, eased or

[96] *Ibid.,* p. 143.

[97] Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier,* James Cook University, Townsville, 1981, p. 158.

heightened cultural barriers, restrained or condoned the violence of settlers' has long been debated, though many might agree with John Mulvaney that 'gospel-mongering' exercised a fatal influence in 'conditioning the native policy of a generation – that generation which witnessed the decimation of the aborigines'.[98]

'Christianity and its missionaries', writes Kenelm Burridge, 'have much to answer for'.[99] This is undoubtedly true, but at the same time missions and reserves did manage to save or extend lives and prepare some Aborigines for entry into a new world. 'Missions did well to care for Aborigines but also reshaped and socialised them to white people's standards, controlling their lives, their independence and the religious customs. The control of Aboriginal people produced the crippling dependence and tension of institutionalism'.[100] Hilary Carey concludes:

> the history of missions in colonial Australia reveals the best and the worst features of institutional Christianity. The establishment of missions led to the perpetuation of what can fairly be described as the great evils of colonialism. But they also acted as refuges for significant numbers of Aborigines who might otherwise have lost everything in the passing of the frontier.[101]

In a wider context Carey states: 'Overall it is fair to say that the long attempt to convert the Australian Aborigines, from 1788 to 1910, was a complete failure. The Aborigines were neither converted nor 'civilised' as the missionaries had hoped, and by and large they retained their own religious beliefs which remained a mystery to the Europeans'.[102] Despite the well-meaning men of the nineteenth century, and their plans, even *The Church Chronicle,* official publication of the Anglican Church in Queensland, reported that 'civilisation has not improved, it had well nigh exterminated the Aborigine in Queensland'.[103] Others from a later date, such as Aboriginal activist Gary Foley, blame Christianity for bringing more misery and suffering to people than any other single disease in the history of mankind'.[104]

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[98] Bollen, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

[99] Kenelm Burridge, 'Aborigines and Christianity: An Overview', in *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions,* Swain and Rose (Eds) The Australian Association of Religious Studies 1989, pp. 18-29.

[100] Corner, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[101] Carey, *Believing in Australia,* pp. 74 -75.

[102] *Ibid.,* p. 55.

[103] *The Church Chronicle,* 1 Feb 1899, p. 90.

[104] Carey, *Believing in Australia,* p. 57.

Another view is enunciated by Flo Grant, an active Christian and an Aboriginal Information Officer, who argues, in the interests of balance: 'Christianity should not be singled out to blame for the destruction of Aboriginal values, culture, religion and language'. Her justification for this view was the work of the Australian Inland Mission, which she viewed as a positive outcome.[105]

On the matter of the Christianisation versus civilisation debate, which is at the heart of the dispute between Meston and Gribble, there were opposing views. Although William Westgarth stated in 1864 that the passing of the Aborigines would prove 'a very small matter to our busy modern world, which, in the supremacy of the practical, hardly divines what useful purpose, or purpose of any kind, the Australian savage diversifies and disturbs the bright scene he has so long trodden', he believed that Aborigines could be civilised even when they failed to be converted to Christianity.[106] The Reverend F. S. Hagenauer believed that 'although Aborigines may be doomed to pass away from the face of the earth, the law and gospel should be joined together to put them right, to ameliorate their condition'.[107]

The man most influential in changing Queensland Aborigines, Ernest Gribble, believed that Christianity and civilisation could be achieved concurrently, but was strongly influenced by the necessity of converting souls. In common with others of the day and influenced by Darwinian thinking, Gribble saw the Aborigines strictly as a 'child race'. He believed they were 'simple and primitive as we once were'.[108] While he saw them as primitive he did not see them as degraded. Degradation came with contact with Europeans. He saw Christianity as the means to a higher standard of living.[109] 'We have no right to debar the race from any opportunity of upliftment. We, as a race, were helped by other races'.[110]

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[105] *Ibid.,* p. 57

[106] William Westgarth, *The Colony of Victoria,* London, 1864, p. 233.

[107] Hope Neill*,* 'One of the mission blacks'- girlhood and education on a Queensland Aboriginal Reserve', in S. Taylor and M Henry (eds.), *Battlers and Blue Stockings: women's place in Australian Education*, Aust. College of Education, Deakin ACT, 1989, p. 69.

[108] *Ibid.,* p. 14.

[109] *Ibid.,* p. 27.

[110] Gribble, *Forty Years with the Aborigines*, p. 122.

Meston, while not denigrating Christianity per se, realised the irony of the push in M'Douall Stuart's words on hoisting the Union Jack on Central Mount Stuart: 'may it be a sign to the natives that the dawn of liberty, civilisation and Christianity is about to break upon them'.[111] Meston favoured another outcome, which was to preserve the Aborigines, as far as practicable, in their previous 'noble' state, as far as was humanly possible, although he was aware of the debate and commented on it in his writings, especially his *Proposed System*. His views on this will be explored later in this thesis. The differences between Meston and Gribble were most certainly informed by the debate taking place in the nineteenth century on the Christianisation and civilisation of the Aborigines, both here and in England. These differences will also be discussed in further detail in the following chapters. As these views were intertwined, the debate was vigorous, ongoing and seemingly insoluble. Having given an overview of the history and ethos of missionary work in Australia, and the background to the *Act,* the next chapter moves on to the area the Butchulla people inhabited.

[111] *The Bulletin,* 8 May 1895, cited in C. Taylor, 'Constructing Aboriginality: Archibald Meston's Literary Journalism, 1870-1924', *Journal for the Association of Australian Literature,* Vol.2, 2003, p. 130.

Chapter Two

Butchulla Country

This chapter describes Fraser Island, particularly in terms of the physical resources available to the Butchulla, in order to set the scene for an account of their lives under the regimes imposed by Meston and Gribble. Details of early contact between the Butchulla people and Europeans are given, as is a description of the eventual 'discovery' and settlement of Maryborough on the mainland. I also consider the intense and sometimes violent relationship between the Butchulla and the residents of Maryborough, then a fledgling regional city.

* * *

Fraser Island is located in the State of Queensland, 180 kilometres north of Brisbane (see map at Appendix 1). Its length of 122 kilometres stretches off shore from Gympie in the south to Bundaberg in the north. The island varies in width, being about 30 kilometres at its widest point, and barely 7 kilometres at its narrowest point at Platypus Bay near its northern end. At its southern tip, the island is only two kilometres from the mainland at Cooloola, and there Aborigines were able to cross between the island and mainland, particularly at low tide, wading and swimming or sometimes using canoes.

Fraser Island was inscribed on the World Heritage Register in 1992, and is the largest sand island in the world with an area of 1,630 km^2, consisting entirely of Aeolian sand dunes and beach sand deposits, with the exception of the volcanic promontory complex at Indian Head, Middle Rocks and Waddy Point.[1] It is the only

[1] Ian J. McNiven, Ian Thomas, Ugo Zoppi, 'Fraser Island Archaeological Project (FIAP): Background, Aims and Preliminary Results of Excavations at Waddy Point 1 Rock shelter', *Queensland Archaeological Research,* Vol. 13, 2002, p. 1.

place on earth where rainforests grow on sand. In 1924 a large sunken forest was discovered just north of White Cliffs, where Meston's first reserve had been established at the old Quarantine Station. Stumps of trees re-appeared after thousands of years and were embedded in hard sandstone rock, which was thought to be once rich black soil above sea level.[2] According to Ian McNiven, 'the whole region possesses considerable archaeological and environmental integrity due to minimal European development'.[3]

The region receives an average annual rainfall of 1,500mm, mostly falling between January and June. Fraser Island is particularly well endowed with fresh water, estimated reserves being around 10-20 million megalitres within the sand mass, with a further 400,000 megalitres retained in the perched aquifers and dune lakes.[4] This water helps to maintain a great variety of different habitats, supporting a significantly diverse fauna including frogs, false water rats, skinks and turtles. Flora includes at least fifty species of ferns and mangroves.[5] Meston recognised some of the island's natural attributes in 1897 when he commented on the 'splendid supply of excellent water' and 'streams full of fine fish and very large eels'. He noted that 'swans and swan eggs and many water fowl were in great abundance', and that 'the western shores were covered with crabs and oysters' and 'the saltwater gave them boundless stores of fish, turtle and dugong'.[6]

Over the last twenty years, and in particular since the cessation of logging in the 1990s, Fraser Island has become a destination for thousands of backpackers, whale watchers and tourists each month.[7] They marvel at the unique rain forest and the clear water of Eli Creek tumbling into the sea on the eastern side of the island. However, few tourists know the Aboriginal history of Fraser Island (or K'gari, meaning Paradise, as it was known to them), because there has been very little

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[2] Joan Christiansen, *They Came and Stayed*, no publisher, Hervey Bay, 1991, p. 172.

[3] McNiven, Thomas, Zoppi, o*p. cit.,* p. 1.

[4] Protected Areas Programme, World Heritage Sites, p. 2, at http://www.unep-wcmc.org/sites/wh/pdf/Fraser%20Island.pdf, viewed 10 Dec 2009.

[5] *Ibid.,*

[6] Archibald Meston, *Report to the Queensland Government on Fraser Island,* Government Printer, Brisbane, March 1895.

[7] Williams gives a figure of 300 000 per annum, *Princess K'gari's Fraser Island,* no place, 2002 p. xv.

literature on the subject. Elaine Brown contends that, since Fraser Island attained World Heritage status in 1992, 'greater attention … [has been] focused on this region than ever before, and there is a need to document and interpret its human history as well as its accepted ecological values'.[8]

There is some disagreement over the composition of the tribal groups in the Wide Bay area. Most agree that the Batjala/Butchulla were one of around nineteen subgroups of the Kabi-Kabi nation whose territory stretched north and west of Brisbane, covering the whole Mary, Burrum, Maroochy, Noosa and Mooloolah river basins. The Butchulla owned Fraser Island and the adjacent mainland from Tin Can Bay, north to Pialba and to the west on a line that runs parallel to Bauple Mountain, between Maryborough and Gympie. The term Batjala is said to mean 'sea-people', but there is a competing version which gives the prefix 'ba' for no and the 'tjala' as tongue.[9] There is an interchange of names between the female form Batjala and the male form Butchulla, with many writers and historians simply using the male form as the tribal name.

Writers, commentators and historians disagree on the names, composition and boundaries of the Aboriginal groups who owned Fraser Island and adjacent sections of the mainland.[10] In his 1895 local history, Loyau unhelpfully referred to 'Mangiburra' and 'Doondurras' peoples, while calling the Fraser Island Aborigines Moonbi or Myall (an old colonial term meaning 'wild' or 'untamed' Aborigines who lived beyond the settled regions).[11] Edward Fuller, who ran a mission for a few short years on the island from 1873, recorded nineteen distinct 'tribes' of Fraser Island Aborigines, but was presumably referring to distinct family groups.[12]

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[8] Elaine Brown, *Cooloola Coast,* University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2000, p. 83.

[9] Norman Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia,* University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1974, pp. 165-166; Fred Williams, *Princess K'gari's Fraser Island,* Fred Williams, no place, 2002, p. 2.

[10] N. Buettel, *A History of Maryborough,* Maryborough, Wide Bay and Burnett Historical Society, 1976, p. 174.

[11] George Loyau, *The History of Maryborough,* Pole, Outridge & Co, Brisbane 1897, p. 223. It is not known why Loyau differed so significantly from others in the names of local Aboriginal groups. Perhaps he was using broader non-local terms for Aborigines in general.

[12] Alice Wilson, Maryborough Wide Bay Burnett Historical Society file F11 p. 5.

The accepted understanding is that there were three main Aboriginal groups in the Wide Bay area, each having some claim to Fraser Island. Norman Tindale's authoritative *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia* (1974) allocated Fraser Island to 'Batjala', 'Ngulungbara' and 'Undanbi' peoples, apparently based on the evidence he gleamed from residents at Yarrabah in 1938, and on the earlier work of Edward Curr. The Batjala occupied the central and largest section of the Island, as well as the mainland 'along the lower course of Tinana Creek and north along the coast to Pialba' while the Dulingbara 'extended from about the southern third of the island to Noosa Head on the mainland' and the Ngulungbara occupied the Island's north. Tindale conceded that the distinctions were problematic, owing to the disruption of post-contact society, though they certainly seemed to regard themselves as separate peoples.[13]

More recent writers, such as J. G. Steele and Fred Williams, have followed this idea (with slight variations in spelling),[14] as did John Sinclair, who was involved with the Fraser Island Defenders Organisation during the 1980s and 1990s.[15] Similarly, Elaine Brown contends that there were three main groups in the Wide Bay area, quoting Gaiarbau, one of the last of the Dungidau people of Kilcoy who was one of Tindale's informants.[16] John Dalungdalee Jones, a descendant of a white man, John Rooney and an Aboriginal woman from Fraser Island, Mary Ann Dalungdalee, whom Rooney 'tribally married', also claims that the Batjala were only one of three groups on the island.[17] But these matters remain contested, in part because of issues arising from sand mining operations and native title claims, with organisations such as the Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action insisting the region lies

[13] Tindale, o*p. cit.*, pp. 165-166.

[14] According to J.G. Steele, the 'three distinct nations' were the *Badjala* of central Fraser Island, the *Dulingbara* of southern Fraser Island and the *Ngulungbara* of north Fraser Island. J G Steele, *Aboriginal Pathways*, University of Queensland Press, 1987, p. 187; Williams, *Princess K'gari,* p. 2.

[15] FIDO, *Educational Supplement No 13 to Moonbi 105, The newsletter of the Fraser Island Defenders Organisation,* July 2003, n. p.

[16] According to Brown, these were the Dulingbara stretching from Noosa to Inskip point and inland, almost to the Mary River, as well as occupying the southern third of Fraser Island, the Batjala which 'owned' the middle third of Fraser Island and mainland areas to Pialba in the north, and finally the Ngulungbara who occupied the northern third of Fraser Island. Brown, *op. cit.,* pp. 22-25.

[17] John Dalungdalee Jones, *Noosa Shire Digital Heritage Network,* p. 1, viewed at http://www.brumbywatchaustralia.com/WelcomeFraser06.htm, 12 Feb 2008.

within the broader sphere of 'Gubbi Gubbi territory'.[18] In any event, as Brown notes, 'the variety of names emerging from the literature illustrates the difficulty of pinning a single name on an Aboriginal group as European custom requires', and 'it is probable that over a period of time, groups in particular territories changed both their composition and their names'.[19]

Olga Miller, elder of the Batjala tribe, stated her case forcefully to Tony Matthews in 1993. 'There was only one nation here', she said.

> In his Occasional Papers in Anthropology, No 8, Dr Lauer records the population of Fraser Island as being the Ngulungbara (burra) in the north, the Dulungbara (burra) in the south, with the Budjilla in the centre of the island. Unfortunately it was not known then to Dr Lauer that the two words for the north and southern end of the island were merely directions for the two moieties (extended families) of the Bujulla (sic) people.[20]

Miller 'claims that this nation was separated into six clans, each of which controlled a section of the island'.[21] Claiming descent from both the Fraser Island Wondunna clan, and the missionary John Brown Gribble, Ernest Gribble's father, and with her position as caboonya or official record keeper and historian of the island passed on to her by her grandfather Wondunna, much weight must be given to Miller, who had a strong local oral history to inform her. According to Miller there were six main clans, known as burras; the Wonapinga, the hunting clan; the Wongurrie, makers of canoes, who also made and tended the fishing nets and traps; the Wonamutta, (the Clever Man), a kind of doctor; and the Wondunna, responsible for maintaining the record of the laws and customs of the entire nation (Miller's Aboriginal family was of this Wondunna clan). The fifth clan was responsible for teaching children songs, dances and Aboriginal markings. The sixth clan was ruled by 'The Clever Woman', who was responsible for tending to any nursing and childbirths within the community. Each of these clans had their own defined territory on narrow stretches

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] *Ibid.,* pp. 26-27.

[20] Olga Miller, *The First 200 Years,* p. 8, quoted in Tony Matthews, *River of Dreams,* Maryborough City Council, Maryborough, Qld., 1995.

[21] Matthews, *op. cit.,* p. 20.

of land on the western side of the island.[22] Matthews discusses the massacre of the fifth group, the artist clan, at Susan River in *River of Dreams.*[23]

This description of the clans and their responsibilities in the wider community shows how they comprised an effective social organisation, and how each clan had its own part to play in the life of the broader group. We may never know with certainty the exact composition and makeup of Aboriginal society in this region, and contemporary land claims laid by John Dalungdalee Jones before he died in 2006, have complicated matters even further. Perhaps the last word should go to Frances Chan, who says that whether there was one tribe or three, whether they spoke the same dialects or different ones, or whether they were all just sub-groups of the Batjala, they definitely cohabitated on the island and 'there is no doubt that they were in close contact with one another and shared a similar culture'.[24] Certainly their territories were fixed in a manner that allowed adequate acquisition of food, shelter, trees and wood within defined geographical areas. As Meston put it, '[a]mong themselves no native could even walk on to the land of another tribe without special permission and a satisfactory reason'.[25] By gathering them together and relocating them for the sake of their preservation, he seriously disrupted their social cohesion and traditional life.

In regard to the population and numbers of Butchulla people in the area, Meston stated that the Wide Bay area was home to up to two thousand people, but David Bracewell, an escaped convict who lived on Fraser Island for twelve months in 1836, claimed there were many more.[26] By this time it is likely that the Butchulla had been decimated by disease. Smallpox, probably introduced by earlier Macassan visitors, may have struck the Butchulla and adjacent nations as far back as 1820. The

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[22] McNiven. Ian J., Russell. Lynette, Schaffer. Kay (Eds), '*Constructions of Colonialism: Perspectives on Eliza Fraser's Shipwreck',* Continuum International Publishing, London, 1999, pp 30-31; Olga Miller, personal interview with Tony Matthews, conducted at Maryborough 1 April 1993, quoted in Matthews, *op. cit*., pp. 25-26.

[23] Matthews, *Ibid.,* p. 28.

[24] Frances Chan, *Hervey Bay and the Fraser Coast*, Central Queensland Press, Rockhampton, 1999, p. 19.

[25] Archibald Meston, *Queensland Aborigines, Proposed System for their Preservation and Protection,* Govt. Printer, Brisbane, 1895, p. 7.

[26] Matthews, o*p. cit.*, p. 29.

pock marking so distinctive to smallpox was evident in Aborigines when white settlers arrived in the area in the 1840s, although E. M. Curr, the Victorian squatter and ethnographer, who had extensive experience in the 1880s in cataloguing diseases, believed that the disease did not reach Fraser Island.[27] In 1860, when a Native Reserve was first gazetted on Fraser Island it was estimated that two to three thousand Aborigines went to live on the island. Loyau estimates the population in 1850 as being about 5,000.[28] In 1875 Richard Sheridan, Officer of Customs, Water Police, Harbour Master and Immigration Agent in Maryborough distributed 350 blankets. Six years later in 1881 only 141 blankets were distributed.[29] By the time Meston took over the lives of Maryborough and Fraser Island Aborigines, there were only about fifty Butchulla left in the area. This is an imprecise but illuminating insight into the dramatic demographic decline of Aborigines in southern Queensland, in a very short space of time.

* * *

Well before settlers and missionaries came to the Wide Bay area, even before the Europeans arrived in Australia, the Aborigines of Fraser Island may have had some limited contact with white people. While McNiven has not been able to place Aborigines on Fraser Island before 6,000 BP, there is some evidence the island was visited by Europeans before the nineteenth century. Courtney and McNiven studied two clay pipes found at Corroboree Beach, on the Eastern side of the island, near Indian Head, discovered at Midden site 799/54 in the mid 1970s.[30] These were photographed and briefly described by Peter Lauer.[31] A third pipe was discovered a few kilometres away in 1993-94. Courtney and McNiven claim that one of the pipes was 'most likely manufactured during the second half of the nineteenth century. It definitely was not manufactured in the seventeenth century (when moulded clay pipe manufacture begins) … or eighteenth century where typologies of Dutch and

[27] Judy Campbell, *Invisible Invaders,* Melbourne University Press, 2002, p. 112.

[28] Loyau, o*p. cit.,* p. 223.

[29] Christiansen, *op. cit*., p. 172.

[30] Kris Courtney and Ian McNiven, 'Clay Tobacco pipes from Aboriginal middens on Fraser Island, Queensland', *Australian Archaeology,* Number 47, 1998, p. 44.

[31] *Ibid.,* p. 44.

English pipes are undisputed and well-documented'.[32] They concluded that there was no real evidence of European visitors to the island before the eighteenth century.

However, we know that Captain James Cook passed Fraser Island in 1770, and observed Aborigines gathered at a place he called 'Indian Head', 'Indian' then being a common, generic word for dark-coloured people. Mistaking Fraser Island for part of the mainland, as he sailed along its Eastern Coast, Cook named it the Great Sandy Peninsula. The waterway, which divided the island from the mainland, was and still is called the Great Sandy Straits. Cook continued along the coast northward, hugging the eastern shore of the island and naming geographical points of interest, such as Sandy Cape and Breaksea Spit, shortly before being wrecked on the Great Barrier Reef.[33]

There is controversy surrounding the oral history handed down about Cook's journey. Some say that the Aborigines told a story of how the sailing boat looked like a pelican, with a man turning the wheel as it came closer to shore. There are claims that Aborigines wove the details of this event into a corroboree. Olga Miller disputes this story, claiming that Aborigines could not have known what a wheel was and doubting that Aborigines could have observed such detail at such a distance.[34] Whatever the truth, the story is now widely accepted as popular history. In 1923 an old man named Willy Watts was brought over from Barambah Aboriginal Settlement and supposedly related the details of a 'Captain Cook corroboree' to Edward Armitage of Maryborough, who was amazed that the story had survived six generations.[35] It is not implausible that such oral history could survive six generations, particularly as oral traditions play such a strong role in Aboriginal culture. Willy also told Armitage that the Aborigines had tracked Cook's ship from

[32] *Ibid.,* p. 47.

[33] J. Beaglehole, *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery: The Voyage of the Endeavour 1768-1771,* Cambridge University Press, London, 1955, pp. 320-322.

[34] Matthews, *op. cit.,* p. 20.

[35] *Ibid.,* p. 21

the southern part of the island near Hook's Point 'and had followed the "astonishing" vision all the way to the bluff'.[36]

Matthew Flinders anchored the *Investigator* off what is now called Sandy Cape in July 1802 and landed on the island. He recorded the visit in great detail in his log. Flinders took a party ashore, including the renowned Sydney Aborigine, Bongaree, but reported that, although there were Aborigines present, they retired and 'suffered Mr Brown to botanise without disturbance'. Flinders observed the Fraser Island people, noting the hard tumours on their wrists (the result of their fishing technique) and remarking on their fine physiques, which he attributed to their fine diet of seafood.[37] It is not known what the Aborigines of Fraser Island thought of this second visit from strange white figures, but they feasted on porpoise blubber and were left hatchets and other tools by Flinders and his party. These visitors then sailed away, no doubt leaving the Aborigines perplexed, excited but probably disturbed, at this second intrusion.

In 1822 Captain William Lawrence Edwardson was sent on an official expedition in the colonial cutter *Snapper*, to explore north to Latitude 28, in order to locate a site for a new penal settlement for the Colony. He reported many Aborigines all along the shore on the mainland from Rainbow Beach to Tin Can Bay, and that they appeared to be numerous and hostile.[38] However, the most significant and famous encounter between Fraser Island Aborigines and outsiders came as a consequence of the shipwreck of the brig *Stirling Castle* in 1836, and the 'escape' of Mrs Eliza Fraser, wife of Captain James Fraser who was murdered. There is considerable disagreement over Eliza Fraser's story and her treatment under the care of the Butchulla. At the time, the story, derived from Eliza's own accounts, was highly sensationalised for a mass audience willing to believe that the genteel white woman was tormented and abused by her 'savage' hosts.[39] Larissa Behrendt, Kay Schaffer and others have studied 'Eliza Fraser's Mutating Myth', interrogating the

[36] Williams, *Princess K'gari*, p. 20.

[37] Matthew Flinders, *A Voyage to Terra Australis,* G & W Nicol*,* London, 1814, p. 14.

[38] Captain Edwardson, Report to Governor, 29 July 1822, Mitchell Library Q017.4/ H811.2/ 2.

[39] Brown, o*p. cit*., pp. 82-124. For a particularly uncritical account, one that is wholly unsympathetic to the Aboriginal perspective, see Michael Alexander, *Mrs Fraser on the Fatal Shore*, Phoenix Press, London, 1971.

story in its many forms as being symptomatic of colonial opinions and representations of Aboriginal society[40] Butchulla versions of the story ascribe different cultural motives to their treatment of Mrs Fraser. Local Butchulla elder, Olga Miller, for example, says 'Eliza Fraser was protected by the women of the camps, who painted her with a protective marking to show she should be looked after, and the mud was a sunburn preventative'.[41] Interestingly, Archibald Meston took exception to the popular version of the Eliza Fraser story, believing her account to be 'wildly improbable' and 'evolved from her own imagination'. He was particularly suspicious of her 'accusing the blacks of deeds quite foreign to their known character and quite unheard of before or since in aboriginal annals'. [42]

The Moreton Bay area developed in the same way as the southern settlements. The Aborigines in the 1820s were numerous and the original inhabitants were certainly visible in the emerging settlement.[43] The sheer numbers of Aborigines in the area piqued a sense of foreboding in some non indigenous onlookers, although, initially, the portents seemed good. The usual gifts were given but, as time wore on and the area changed, the racial climate changed. Soon, in the Moreton Bay area, as in the southern areas, the Aborigines realised that the face of their land was changing dramatically and their food production and land holdings were being eroded. This led to the 'reprisals' and raids common in all areas as white land holders and penal settlements took over the traditional lands of the Aborigines.

After the establishment of the secondary penal station at Moreton Bay in 1825, Aboriginal contact with white people became more common. There were a number of escaped convicts in the area including David Bracewell and Durramboi

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[40] Keren Levelle, Interview with Larissa Behrendt in 'Indigenous legal scholar debunks Eliza Fraser myths', *Law Society Journal,* November 2000, p. 19; Kay Schaffer, *In the Wake of First Contact: the Eliza Fraser Stories,* Cambridge University Press, Melbourne 1995; Ian McNiven, Lynette Russell, Kay Schaffer (Eds), '*Constructions of Colonialism: Perspectives on Eliza Fraser's Shipwreck',* Continuum International Publishing, London, 1999.

[41] Jim Davidson, 'Eliza Fraser's Mutating Myth', *Eureka Street,* March 1996, pp. 52-53; McNiven, Russell and Schaffer, *op. cit.,* p. 35.

[42] Meston, quoted in Ray Evans and Jan Walker, 'These Strangers where are they going?-Aboriginal-European Relations in the Fraser Island and Wide Bay Region 1770-1905', *Occasional Papers in Anthropology,* 8 March 1977, p. 44.

[43] Raymond Evans 'The Mogwi Take Mi-an-jin: Race Relations and the Moreton Bay Penal Settlement 1824-42', in R. Fisher (ed.), *Brisbane: the Aboriginal Presence 1824-1860.* Kelvin Grove, Qld., Brisbane History Group, 1992, pp. 7-30, 91-94.

(James Davis), as well as white settlers north of Brisbane, so it should be presupposed that the Aborigines knew about white people, to a significant extent, by the time Maryborough was settled around 1847, and when Edward Fuller arrived on Fraser Island in the 1870s the Aborigines must surely have been unsettled and disturbed about this new intrusion into their lives.[44]

This section has described the early contact between white people and the Aborigines of the Wide Bay area. The trickle of settlers emigrating to Maryborough from Europe became a flood after 1860. But this wave of new settlers would not have come as a complete shock. It is inconceivable that the communication between tribes between Sydney, Brisbane and further north would not have alerted the Aborigines of the Wide Bay to what was happening in other parts of the land. The triennial meeting of the tribes in the Bunya Mountains gave the nations of south east Queensland the opportunity to communicate via stories and corroborees, those events which had happened since their last great meeting.[45] The history between the previous Aboriginal landholders, and how the Aborigines were treated by the residents of Maryborough is next described, as both sides struggled to live with and near each other, sharing the precious land and its resources, which had until then been the exclusive domain of the Butchulla people.

* * *

Maryborough was settled by colonists from 1847.[46] Even earlier, squatters such as John Eales from the Hunter Valley had searched for and found land there, and in the surrounding western hinterland, on which to graze sheep.[47] The site had been 'discovered' by Andrew Petrie, architect, builder and public servant, who sailed north from Brisbane in 1842, with a party consisting of Eales, Henry Stuart Russell,

[44] Evans and Walker, *These Strangers*, pp. 47-48.

[45] Bruce Elder, *Blood on the Wattle,* New Holland Publishers, Sydney, 2003, pp. 140-144

[46] Loyau, o*p. cit.*, p. 3.

[47] John Kerr, *Sugar at Maryborough: 120 years of challenge,* Maryborough Sugar Factory Ltd, Maryborough Qld., 1987, p. 2.

Mynarton Joliffe, and Walter Wrottesley. The boat was rowed by convicts and proceeded via Noosa Head, Double Island Point, the narrow and sometimes dangerous Wide Bay Bar, Inskip Point and finally into the Great Sandy Straits between Fraser Island and the mainland. Making camp on the western coast of Fraser Island, they found the entrance to the Wide Bay (later Mary) River and travelled up river to Tiaro, approximately thirty nine kilometres south of Maryborough. Both the Mary River and Maryborough were named in honour of Lady Mary Fitzroy, wife of the New South Wales Governor, tragically killed in a carriage accident at Parramatta in New South Wales in 1847.[48] George Furber, from Maitland in New South Wales, built the first wharf and wool store in 1847 and the first shipment of wool from the district was sent to Sydney via the schooner *The Sisters* in December 1847.[49] Furber and Edgar Aldridge from Baddow in Essex commenced trading on the western side of the Mary River, some kilometres away from where the town was later established.[50] Pastoralists with established interests in NSW, such as John Eales, the Leslie brothers and the Archers, were at the vanguard of the push into this region, and are now counted in popular memory as 'Queensland pioneers'. They were followed by others who were attracted to the area by an emerging economy based around the extraction of timber, and the production of wool on the stations in the Burnett region, west of Maryborough. However, as was the case throughout Australia, the land was not won cheaply or easily from Aborigines.

Shooting, poisoning and other acts of violence were common in southern Queensland, including the Wide Bay area and Maryborough. Probably the Butchulla knew about occurrences outside their region, including the infamous large-scale massacre by poisoning at Kilcoy station, north of Brisbane, and the attempted poisoning on Nindery Station, near Maroochy, both described Tom Petrie.[51] Evans and Walker state that in the 1850s 'Maryborough virtually remained in a state of

[48] John M. Ward, 'FitzRoy, Sir Charles Augustus (1796 - 1858)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 1, Melbourne University Press, 1966, pp 384-389.

[49] Tom Blake and Richard Allom, *Original Maryborough Site*, *An Historical Study,* Maryborough City Council, Maryborough, 1988, p. 11.

[50] Loyau, o*p. cit*., pp. 2, 19.

[51] Constance Petrie, *Reminiscences of Early Queensland,* Watson Ferguson, Brisbane, 1904, pp. 157-158. See also Simpson to Governor, 30 May 1842, *Fraser Island Transcript,* pp. 27-28.

perpetual siege, with the Fraser Island people, or 'saltwater blacks' as they were termed, vowing to drive the whites away entirely'.[52] Aborigines gathered, well armed with 'nulla nullas', spears and other weapons, to defend their territory and the residents of Maryborough also armed themselves with conventional firepower.

Government officials feared that white settlers would abandon the fledgling settlement, a prospect that did not sit well with them. As Evans and Walker note 'the threat of Aboriginal incursions seems to have kept the citizens of Maryborough in a state of perpetual tension and alarm as well as substantially retarding the development of the port for many years'.[53] In 1852, John Carne Bidwill, Commissioner for Crown Lands in Maryborough and a well known botanist, informed the Chief Commissioner of Crown Lands that 'if the population of Maryborough shall continue to decrease, some great catastrophe may arise'.[54] Bidwill built a five foot paling fence around his own house.[55] Pressure mounted for a full scale 'examination' on Fraser Island.[56] This finally began on Christmas Eve 1851, continuing until 3 January 1852, and ending, it is suspected, with many Butchulla Aborigines on Fraser Island being driven into the sea on the Eastern side of the island,[57] though the details and veracity of this episode cannot be verified.

In Maryborough, George Furber and his son-in-law, George Wilmhurst, were early victims of Aboriginal violence. There were strong rumours persisting that Furber had shot several Aborigines. Henry Palmer, early Maryborough settler and storekeeper, later the first Mayor, described (in 1903) how Furber 'came up to my store and fixing on a certain black, drew a pistol out of his breast pocket and shot him dead saying "that is the man that tried to kill me"'.[58] On 13 October 1847, Furber and an associate were fencing and made the mistake of handing an axe to an

[52] Evans and Walker, *These Strangers,* p. 55.

[53] *Ibid.,* p. 50.

[54] Bidwill to Chief Commissioner of Crown Lands, 14 October 1852, JOL, A2.48/315.

[55] Evans and Walker*, These Strangers,* p. 50.

[56] J Bidwill, Meeting of Magistrates, Maryborough 19 Feb 1851, Oxley Microfilm Reel A2.A3, frames 846-48.

[57] *Moreton Bay Courier*, 20 Nov 1852, p. 3, and 3 Jan 1853, p. 2.

[58] Henry Palmer*, '*Reminiscences of the Wide Bay and Burnett Districts up to the Time of Forming the Port of Maryborough, Queensland', *Queensland Geographical Journal,* Vol. 17, 1903, p. 91.

Aborigine who was digging postholes. 'As Furber stooped to his work the Aboriginal clave his skull down into the neck and the other Aboriginal dropped Barren, (the mate) with a morticing axe'. Furber managed to get himself to Ipswich (one hundred and fifty miles away) for treatment and survived, but 'still the vendetta between him and the blacks continued and in December 1855, while cutting timber on the banks of Tinana Creek … he and his son-in-law, William Wilmhurst were assassinated by the two employed blacks'. In his reminiscences, Palmer proclaimed Furber the innocent party, describing him in glowing terms as 'a man of great force of character, fearlessness, versatility of attainments'.[59] Being known as a murderer of Aborigines did not preclude one from being lauded as a reputable 'pioneer'. Being murdered *by* Aborigines certainly enhanced that reputation.

In and around Maryborough, Aborigines resisted and reacted to their situation by committing 'robberies', especially for food to fend off starvation. Henry Reynolds notes that in late 1855 'there were 26 separate robberies in Maryborough which netted the local blacks at least 1500 lbs of flour and 800 lbs of sugar as well as meat, tea, clothes, bedding and utensils'.[60] Beeston, mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, felt 'vexed with Mr [Horace] Tozer … no work, no blanket; no food, no nothing. He says this is wrong. The White race has taken away his land, and nothing is given in return – nothing left but to starve, beg or steal'.[61] John Carne Bidwill, Commissioner for Crown Lands in Maryborough, complained in 1852 to his superior in Sydney on behalf of a local resident:

> the local clans had taken his sweet potatoes despite a watchdog and a paling fence six and a half foot high. He had, he said, found blacks actually 'lying within five yards' of his sitting room at 8 o'clock in the evening. They had been watching him write at his table while their companions 'dug the potatoes at about twenty yards further down the hill'.[62]

Such actions, of course, were necessitated by reduced circumstances, a consequence of the strains and impositions placed on their traditional lifestyles by the colonists. But the situation proved intractable. In the early 1860s, the local paper

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[59] James Lennon, *A History of Maryborough,* Maryborough, Wide Bay and Burnett Historical Society, Maryborough, 1924, p. 18.

[60] H. Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier*, James Cook University, Townsville, 1981.pp. 161-162

[61] *Wide Bay News*, quoted in Loyau, *op. cit*., p. 223.

[62] Bidwill to Commissioner of Crown Lands, *Colonial Secretary's Correspondence,* 9967/1852.

conceded its 'admiration of the black burglars, who acted 'as though they had served an apprenticeship in London or New York'.[63] Violence seemed to be the preferred way of dealing with the problem. In Maryborough, colonists took the liberty of administering, in Reynolds' words, 'a sound thrashing for offences against the decency and peace of the neighbourhood'.[64] When in 1861 an Aborigine was shot while crossing the Mary River to get to his camp, the murderer, commended as 'an efficient and zealous officer', was presented with a sword by a committee of citizens. Although the matter led to protests in the local press, there was no arrest or trail of the offender.[65] George Lang, a local Maryborough resident, who claimed to have witnessed or known about the murder of over 150 Aborigines in the area in 1857-58, asked 'Where are our magistrates? … they do not care a fig for either law or justice and … are as guilty of every act of cruelty as the actual perpetrators'.[66]

The casual attitude towards the violence afforded the Aborigines in Maryborough, is exemplified in the comments which were published in the local paper:

> Two Aborigines were killed, one wounded and one taken prisoner and paraded through the streets of Maryborough. Questioned later over the reason for the assault, Lieutenant John O'Connel Bligh of the native police force replied vaguely 'I think it was for robbing some store. I do not remember'. In appreciation of his continuing 'meritorious' surveillance, the Maryborough whites, in March 1861, presented Bligh with a gleaming ceremonial sword, inscribed 'As a mark of esteem for his services in suppressing the outrages of the blacks'.
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> In February 1862, the Maryborough Chronicle neglected to mention whether or not Bligh was wearing his sword of honour when, upon meeting a gin in the bush, 'he galloped over her, bruising and lacerating her terribly. [67]

Another Aboriginal woman also drew the ire of the Brisbane paper: 'the blacks in and about Maryborough are notorious for their impudence and viciousness. On Monday night a black gin in that town struck Constable Murphy's arm with a

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[63] *Maryborough Chronicle*, 5 February 1862, p. 2.

[64] *Ibid.,*

[65] Report and Minutes of Evidence of Select Committee, Queensland Votes and Proceedings, 1861, p. 389.

[66] G. D. Lang to J.D Lang, Sydney, 31 March 1858, ML, quoted in Ray Evans and Bill Thorpe, 'Indigenocide and the Massacre of Aboriginal History', *Overland,* Vol. 163, Winter 2001, p. 29.

[67] *M.C*. 5 February 1862, p. 1, also in Dr Peter Lauer, *Occasional Papers in Anthropology, No.8.,* University of Qld. Press, Brisbane, 1977.

tomahawk, cutting it across'.[68] Perhaps that was a reprisal for one of the acts mentioned above. Although the cause cannot be described with certainty, such incidents served to heighten the fear and hatred of the Aborigines around Maryborough.

In 1885 two sisters visiting from Sydney were 'shocked at the way things were done in Queensland'. Having met an Aboriginal woman while they were out for a walk one morning, they were stunned to find her being hunted out of town in the afternoon: 'saw the same sable lady … being driven out of the town across the river by the mounted police, and our feelings were deeply outraged at the way they were driven down the street, like so many sheep or dogs, to the water's edge, when they plunged in and swam to the opposite side to their camps'.[69] This was undoubtedly Granville, a suburb of Maryborough where many Aborigines still reside. This behaviour reflected the prevailing attitude of the white citizens of Maryborough towards the Butchulla, who had become outsiders in their own territory. Those, like the settler Lang, who were disquieted by the treatment and pending fate of local Aborigines, were increasingly inclined to believe that 'The blacks must be protected. They suffer a hundred times more at the hands of the whites than the whites do from them'.[70] However, there seemed to be little humanitarianism in the responses of the citizens of Maryborough to the plight of local Aborigines. In 1892 the local police officials candidly confessed, 'the public here will do nothing for the relief of the Aboriginals'.[71]

Perhaps the colonisation of the Wide Bay region was a less destructive experience for local Aborigines, because they were able to leave Maryborough and take refuge on Fraser Island. The island certainly provided a safe retreat after raids

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[68] *Brisbane Courier*, 17 March 1874, p. 3.

[69] Henry Reynolds, *Black Pioneers,* Penguin, Ringwood, 2002, p. 216.

[70] Evans and Walker, 'These Strangers where are they going?-Aboriginal-European Relations in the Fraser Island and Wide Bay Region 1770-1905', *Occasional Papers in Anthropology,* 8 March 1977, p. 58.

[71] Meston*, Report to the Queensland Government on Fraser Island*, Government Printer, Brisbane, 1897, p. 3.

on colonists in the Maryborough area from the mid-1840s, to the late-1850s.[72] However, it was not long before Fraser Island too became the focus of timber getters and cattlemen such as the Dicken and Aldridge families, who moved onto Fraser Island to raise cattle, breed horses and fell timber. When George Perry Dicken took his wife there he told her there were about a thousand 'blacks' on the island. The numbers of Aborigines in the area soon fell drastically.[73]

Maryborough attracted approximately 22,000 immigrants from 1860 to 1900, most looking for agricultural and pastoral employment. They established not only basic institutions such as schools, banks, railway, shops and merchants, but also major industries such as the sugar and juice mills, forestry, timber cutting and ship and train building. Indeed, these industries still provide Maryborough with its baseline economy. The official population grew from 3,542 in 1871 and 7,083 in 1881 to a staggering 10,159 in 1901, a huge increase in a relatively short period.[74] As Aboriginal lives succumbed to disease, opium abuse, intoxicating liquors, sexually transmitted diseases and the loss of tribal and family life, white Maryborough prospered. Few new settlers seemed to worry about the fate of the local Butchulla people. In fact, in 1890 the twenty-five old people in a town camp at Maryborough were described as 'a little mob of blear eyed maimed creatures'.[75] Home Secretary Horace Tozer admitted that the first Aborigines had been removed to Fraser Island because of 'repeated complaints made to me that these blacks were a nuisance to the white residents of the town'.[76] The 'nuisance', in part, was based on matters of health. The idea of 'protecting' Aborigines, especially through isolating and quarantining them, was motivated in no small part by the desire to shield white people from the sight and proximity of Aborigines.

Events at Maryborough came to a head when it was noticed that 'many young lads' were contracting syphilis from young Aboriginal girls. As Judy Campbell

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[72] Raymond Evans, 'The Owl and the Eagle', in *Fighting Words: Writing About Race,* UQ Press, Brisbane, 1999, p. 37.

[73] Williams, *op. cit.,* p. 81.

[74] Matthews, *op. cit.,* p. 164.

[75] Reynolds, *Black Pioneers*, p. 202.

[76] *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 11 November 1897, p. 1540.

has shown, syphilis was not indigenous but was introduced by white and Chinese colonists, and yet the problem and its consequences were largely blamed on Aborigines[77]. As Chesterman notes, 'from the beginning of European settlement … white men engaged in sexual relations with Aboriginal and Islander women that might variously be described as prostitution, exploitation and unambiguous rape', although 'white settlers … were usually immune from any legal consequences'.[78]

The responses of the good white citizens of Maryborough are summed up in Evans' statement:

> fears of contamination, both hygienic and eugenic, activated by the proximity to whites of venereally diseased blacks and the general colonial perception of a burgeoning 'half-caste menace' were far more crucial in inducing exclusionist responses than were any genuine impulses towards care, protection and regeneration.[79]

In 1895, there was still no real solution to what has been termed the 'Aboriginal problem' in Maryborough. It was at that point that Archibald Meston entered the scene to champion the protection and preservation of Queensland's Aboriginal survivors. As we shall see, Maryborough and Fraser Island played a key role in his scheme.

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[77] Judy Campbell, *Invisible Invaders: Smallpox and Other Diseases in Aboriginal Australia, 1780-1880*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2002, p. 25.

[78] John Chesterman, *Citizens Without Rights: Aborigines and Australian Citizenship,* Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1997, p. 35.

[79] Evans, '*A Permanent Precedent: Dispossession, Social Control and the Fraser Island Reserve and Mission 1897-1904' ,* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Studies Unit, [79] Raymond Evans, 'The Owl and the Eagle', in *Fighting Words: Writing About Race,* UQ Press, Brisbane, 1999*,* p. 37.

[79] Williams, *op. cit.,* p. 81.

[79] Matthews, *op. cit.,* p. 164.

[79] Reynolds, *Black Pioneers*, p. 202.

[79] *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 11 November 1897, p. 1540.

[79] Judy Campbell, *Invisible Invaders,* p. 1.

Chapter Three

Traditional life of the Butchulla

Health, Education , Language and Kinship

To fully understand the impact of the rules, regulations and ideologies imposed by the civilising and Christianising projects orchestrated by Meston and Gribble, it is essential to show how the Butchulla lived their traditional lives in the Wide Bay area before the arrival of Europeans. During the twentieth century we have learned that prior to white settlement in Australia, Aborigines had led a rich, vital and self-sustaining life for many thousands of years. Theirs was a relatively non-material but highly spiritual existence, steeped in oral history, ancient laws and well-established cultural and religious practices. Contrary to most early European suppositions, there were many distinct Aboriginal populations, with strict and complex definitions of territory and ownership. Their semi-nomadic, hunter-gatherer lifestyles were brilliantly adapted to the diverse environments in which they, and their ways of using and understanding their ecosystems were covered by an intricate knowledge, passed orally and by other means from generation to generation. In short, their lifestyle was sophisticated in its simplicity.

This thesis does not require a thorough dissection of every aspect of the Butchulla's traditional life and culture to show how Meston and Gribble damaged it. However, outlined below are some key matters concerning the Butchulla of the Wide Bay area, namely their health and diet, education, language and kinship, these being the areas in which they suffered most upon their removal to Fraser Island. Marriage, burial practices and other aspects of social and spiritual culture are discussed in the next chapter. While there is a scarcity of first hand material concerning the Butchulla, it is possible to infer and reconstruct something of their traditional culture using records relating to the broader body of southeast Queensland Aborigines. A particularly invaluable source is the reminiscences of Gaiarbau, 'the last surviving

member of the Jinibara tribe' recorded by L. P. Winterbotham.[1] In the preface to those reminiscences, Norman Tindale wrote of the fortunate circumstances of Gaiarbu providing that information, even though he had not been initiated.[2] Although 'much of the hidden life of his people remains undisclosed to him', Gaiarbu provided 'a by no means uncertain picture of many facets of their life, in the days when they were vainly attempting to maintain their own way in the face of the ever increasing numbers of men of the Western World'.[3] Gaiarbau talked extensively about the customs and beliefs of his people, touching on subjects such as totems, marriage and kinship rules, burial ceremonies, the death watch, spiritual beliefs, measurement of time, intertribal relations and other activities such as organised games and wrestling and story telling.[4]

Health and Diet

It is reasonable to say that the health of Aborigines today remains so bad in places as to be a national disgrace. Yet when Europeans first arrived in Australia there were many reports of the fitness and strength of Aborigines, especially when observed in their 'natural' or 'uncontaminated' state. In part, these reports were used to contrast the condition of Aborigines who had come into contact with white settlers, and certainly as colonial settlement spread, so too did starvation and disease. There is substantial evidence that Aboriginal society pre-settlement was characterised by good health, and that Europeans were largely responsible for the introduction of most diseases and sicknesses.[5] Important research, especially by Judy Campbell, building on earlier work by respected experts such as Ronald and Catherine Berndt, has given us a clearer and less idealistic picture of the state of Aboriginal health before contact, including the prevalence and impact of trachoma, leprosy, yaws, skin diseases, and possibly some nutritional diseases, as well as

[1] L. P. Winterbotham, 'Gaiarbu's Story of the Jinibara Tribe', *Queensland Ethnohistory Transcripts 1,* Archaeological Branch of the Qld. Govt., Brisbane, 1982.

[2] Winterbotham, *Ibid.*, preface.

[3] *Ibid.,* p. 4. Note however, that Tindale also describes Gaiarbau as 'a fully initiated member, but could not pass on any secret information to an uninitiated person'.

[4] *Ibid.,* pp. 6-9.

[5] See Peter M. Moodie, *Aboriginal Health,* Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1973, p. 1.

hepatitis B, syphilis and, at least in more recent times, smallpox.[6] However, it cannot be doubted that Aboriginal health seriously declined as a result of the dramatic changes in lifestyle wrought by colonisation, and the evidence from the experiences of the Butchulla on Fraser Island demonstrates this clearly.

George Ettienne Loyau, writing in 1897 about Maryborough Aborigines whom he observed in the early-1860s, described them as 'excellent fellows … with fewer vices than virtues, healthy and of splendid physique'. He recalled 'one aboriginal who stood fully 6ft high and weighed sixteen stone'.[7] Matthew Flinders, who in 1799 and 1802 was the first European to observe Fraser Island Aborigines, thought them 'much more fleshy' than Aborigines around Sydney, which he attributed to their 'being able to obtain a better supply of food with scoop nets which are now known on the southern parts of the coast'.[8] Meston, when writing his *Report on the Station recently formed on Frasers Island* said of them: 'when the Sandy Cape light-house was being built the blacks were friendly and gave considerable assistance, performing feats of carrying and lifting altogether beyond the powers of any ordinary white man, to whom they were physically far superior' and that Robert Ferguson had seen 'blacks following one another up the sandhill to a height of 350 feet, each carrying a 200lb bag of flour'.[9]

Ernest Gribble shared the view that Aborigines were naturally well built and vigorous, and that their physical wellbeing had been destroyed by the arrival of Europeans. 'The race as we found it, was a much healthier blooded race than our own' he wrote in 1932. 'We have introduced not only our civilised vices, but also the diseases of our civilisation, and the natives have gone down before them like snow

[6] Judy Campbell, *Invisible Invaders: Smallpox and Other Diseases in Aboriginal Australia, 1780-1880*, Melbourne University Press, 2002; Ronald Berndt and Catherine Berndt, *The World of the First Australians, Aboriginal Traditional Life: Past and Present,* Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1992, p. 15.

[7] George Loyau, *The History of Maryborough,* Pole, Outridge & Co, Brisbane 1897, p. 183.

[8] Matthew Flinders, *A Voyage to Terra Australis,* G & W Nicol, London, 1814, p. 14.

[9] Meston to Tozer, Fraser's Island considered as an Aboriginal Reserve, *Fraser Island Transcript*, Aboriginal Resource Unit, Anthropology Museum, Brisbane, 1981 p. 118.

before the rays of the sun'.[10] It was a view that echoed those of Reverend Samuel Marsden, writing over a century earlier:

> From us they have suffered infinite loss in their provisions and clothing, and from us they have contracted the most painful and fatal diseases, under which many of them hourly suffer until death relieves them … we have much to answer for on their account to the Judge of all the Earth. The utmost one can do for them will only be a small atonement, a trifling return for the permanent injury they have sustained.[11]

Meston was particularly impressed with the natural physical condition of Aborigines, but he could also be especially critical, depending on the context of his observations. For example, speaking of Aborigines in North Queensland he wrote: 'Any man may go today, among the semi-wild tribes, and see for himself what beautifully and symmetrically made men they are, what perfect muscular development and what amazing strength' they possess'.[12] Speaking of the Butchulla, he said that they 'represented in physique and intelligence some of the finest Aboriginal men and women in Australia'.[13] Meston's observations reflected his own scientific curiosity in 'primitive', unspoiled culture and his highly romanticised ideas about the purity of man in his natural state. As Thorpe has noted, his enthusiasm for Aboriginal anatomy 'seemed to parallel his mania for collecting Aboriginal artefacts, cave skeletons, weapons and Aborigines themselves as exhibits in his 'Wild Australia' displays'.[14] Yet on other occasions he referred derisively to the disease ridden, opium smoking wretches 'hanging around' Maryborough, this being in the context of his attempts to persuade the government to back his experimental plan for an Aboriginal reserve on Fraser Island. Such observations were deliberately intended to provide distressing evidence of the influence of white society on local Aborigines, and sadly the weight of evidence suggests his descriptions were largely accurate. Meston held little interest in Aborigines living in the cities and towns. Writing in

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[10] Ernest Gribble, *The Problem of the Aborigines*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1932, p. 143.

[11] Samuel Marsden in Niel Gunson, *Australian Reminiscences & Papers of L.E. Threlkeld, Vol.1,* Australian Aboriginal Studies No. 40, Canberra, 1974, p. 348.

[12] William Thorpe, 'Archibald Meston and Aboriginal Legislation in Colonial Queensland', *Historical Studies,* Vol. 21, No 82, April 1984, p. 60.

[13] Meston to Tozer, *Report to the Queensland Government on Fraser Island,* Government Printer, Brisbane, March 1895, p. 3.

[14]William Thorpe, 'Archibald Meston and Aboriginal Legislation in Colonial Queensland', *Historical Studies,* Vol. 21, No 82, April 1984, p. 60.

1923 of 'tame town blacks', he contrasted them with the 'the better types of men and women, the *real* wild warriors and women, [who] were too proud and independent to come near the settlement, and had measureless contempt for the degenerates who begged from the whites … and allowed themselves and women to be degraded, drunken and diseased'.[15]

While the precarious health of Aborigines at Maryborough was a key motivation behind the decision to remove the remaining population to Fraser Island, it appears that, once there, their health declined further and the mortality rate continued to rise. The sandy soils found on Fraser Island were incapable of sustaining a self-sufficient lifestyle. By confining them on the island, Meston was restricting local Aborigines to only part of their 'food basket'. He needed and wanted isolation for his charges, a central plank of his plan to preserve their 'natural life', but that meant he could not allow regular visitors to the island who might otherwise have been a source of food and other supplies. Meston was certainly aware of this dilemma. Interestingly, given his apparent scepticism of missionary methods, Meston held precisely the same views expressed decades earlier by Dandeson Coates, first Lay Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, who in an 1838 letter to the then Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, Lord Glenelg, noted: 'The progress of civilisation operates disastrously on the Aborigines by exhausting their food supplies and drawing them into baneful contact with the colonial population'.[16] Meston quoted Coates in his Proposed System, published in 1895, to underline the necessity of segregating Aborigines entirely from white society. This contact with the whites was one reason (according to the standards they had set themselves) earlier missions had failed. In the early colonial period, Aborigines could not be forced onto reserves and retained the opportunities to mix and exchange with white settlers, exposing Aborigines to the influences and vices that contradicted missionary teachings.

[15] Archibald Meston, 'Old Moreton Bay Tribes', *Daily Mail,* 20 October 1923, p. 23.

[16] Dandeson Coates quoted in Archibald Meston, *Queensland Aborigines, Proposed System for their Preservation and Protection,* Govt. Printer, Brisbane, 1895, p. 18.

On the other hand Meston was restricting the ability of Aborigines to supply their own needs, for traditionally this required movement and exchange between the island and the mainland, as far as Kingaroy and the Bunya mountains. So, not only was he affecting the Wide Bay Aborigines when he removed them to Fraser Island, but also those of other adjacent regions who traditionally shared the excess of fish from Fraser Island. Meston was not unaware of the nature of relationships between the Butchulla and their neighbours, as is evident in his 1923 description of the great triennial feasts held at the Bunya Mountains, which attracted people from across southern Queensland. Meston described the importance of bunya nuts as a source of nourishment, particularly fat, in the Aboriginal diet.[17] He was also aware of other mainstays of the Aboriginal diet. In his report of 21 August 1897, Meston strongly advised that:

> an advertisement be sent to each of the Maryborough papers announcing that the oysters on Little Woody Island be reserved for the settlement. Those are the only oysters left out of all in the Sandy Straits. They are being removed wholesale by oyster cutters and pleasure boats and will soon be completely stripped if not reserved and protected. From these oysters the blacks will soon lay down beds for cultivation, in suitable adjoining localities and so maintain a permanent supply.[18]

There is no evidence that this request was approved. In fact white settlers had established successful oyster leases in the 1870s along the coast from Tin Can Bay to Hervey Bay and these businesses continued well into the 1920s.[19]

Fraser Island was naturally well endowed with water and particular foods, especially marine species, and that, with the addition of bunya nuts and other food obtained on the mainland, kept local Aborigines healthy and fit. There were not many animals on the island, and few herbivores, most likely because of the relatively low proportion of available protein caused by the lack of grass growing in the dense forests on the island.[20] However, there was a wide variety of fish, shellfish and crustaceans. Over two hundred middens have been discovered on Fraser Island,

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[17] Archibald Meston, *The Bunya Feast, Mobilan's Former Glory*, 6 October 1923, in Meston Papers, John Oxley Library, OM 72-82/32, Brisbane.

[18] Meston, *Report on Fraser's Island Settlement*, 24 Dec 1897*,* No.10739, p. 2.

[19] Elaine Brown, *Cooloola Coast,* University of Queensland Press, 2000, pp. 171-175.

[20] John Sinclair, *Discovering Fraser Island,* Pacific Maps, Surry Hills, no date, p. 85.

showing evidence of oyster harvesting and the procuring of many varieties of fish.[21] A key environmental element of Fraser Island is its rain-forest core, oriented sub-parallel to the longitudinal axis of the island, and running along the middle third of the island, which is a major source of ethno-historical evidence of Aboriginal plant foods, including a staple of the Aboriginal diet, a particular fern, (*Blechnum spp*).[22] There were also a wide variety of birds, up to seventy-three water/sea species and seventy-two land species available for human consumption.[23] Fraser Island is rich in reptile fauna and harbours a large number of specialised sand dwelling reduced limb skinks, populations of acid frogs, breeding colonies of loggerhead turtles and green turtles, fish and honeybees. In 1897, Meston reported that significant amounts of turtles were being captured, and that annual mullet catches were large enough for the surplus to be smoked. Dugongs were also caught with nets.[24] Meston could be justified in believing that the island's resources were sufficient to maintain a large human population.

There is a record of the complex way the dugong was hunted and caught which illuminates cultural sensitivities. It involved two days, many men and a little tact on the hunter's part, because of totemic affiliations. They used a spear weakened in one spot, which broke off when it entered the animal. The other half was taken for proof that the dugong had been speared. The injured dugong typically headed for the nearest creek, and the hunter returned to the camp to casually mention that he had picked up the broken part of the spear near that creek. Next day other hunters, who did not have the dugong as a totem, went to find the animal. Any men of that totem would leave the camp while the dugong was cleaned, cooked and eaten. If necessary they stayed away for a week, as there was much to eat on such an animal. A kangaroo would attract the same courtesy, but, as there was less meat on a kangaroo than on a dugong, those having totemic ties to that animal

[21] United Nations Environment Programme, Protected Areas Programme, World Heritage Sites, p. 2.,Viewed 10 Dec 2009, at http://www.unep- wcmc.org/sites/wh/pdf/Fraser%20Island.pdf

[22] Ian McNiven, Ian Thomas and Ugo Zoppi, 'Fraser Island Archaeological Project (FIAP): Background, Aims and Preliminary Results of Excavations at Waddy Point 1 Rock shelter', *Queensland Archaeological* Vol. 13, 2002, p. 2.

[23] *Ibid.,* p. 2.

[24] Maryborough Chronicle, 15 May 1897. p. 2.

stayed away for a lesser time.[25] Such measures were designed to conserve the resources of Fraser Island and the adjacent mainland. There was no excuse for Aborigines being short of food on Fraser Island except for the mismanagement of those resources by both Meston and Gribble and their insistence that Aborigines remain cloistered and confined on the island, rather than moving over their traditional mainland territories to broaden their food sources.

Likewise the food on Fraser Island and the nearby mainland was extremely nutritious. It is estimated, for example, that 100 grams of mud crab contained up to 21.9 gm of protein, oysters 6.6gm, red bellied black snake 23gm and kangaroo 20+gms. Kangaroo (not found on the island, but abundant on the nearby mainland) also contained significant amounts of potassium, other trace elements and fat.[26] Turtles of many types contained about 25gms per 100gms of protein while their eggs contained 8.6gms/100gms. Fish of all varieties, (particularly mullet which was a staple of their diet and very abundant), averaged 29gms of protein per 100gms, 10gms of fat, 269mgs of potassium and 14mgs of calcium. Dugongs gave 25gms per 100gms of protein, 3 gms fat and witchetty grubs up to 20gms of protein, and 37.5 gms of fat. The grass tree leaf, common to the area, still gave 20mgs sodium, 340mgs potassium, 80mgs magnesium and 70mgs of calcium.[27] A fruit, similar to the monsterio, grew freely on Fraser Island. The Butchulla called it 'gulbun'. Properly prepared it can be consumed with impunity, but as it gives cattle the 'staggers' cattle owners attempted to eradicate it, thus removing a staple of the Butchulla diet. Bunya nuts, obtained on their travels, contained 49.2 gms per 100 gms of carbohydrate, 230mgs potassium, 54mgs of magnesium, and 6mgs of calcium. All these foods also contained a good percentage of water, not that water was wanting on the island.[28] Thus, their nutritional needs were easily met by their traditional diet.

[25] Tony Lauer, *Occasional Papers in Anthropology,* No 8, University of Qld. Press, Brisbane, 1977, p. 22

[26] Janette Brand Miller, Keith W James, Patricia M A Maggiore, *Tables of Composition of Australian Aboriginal Foods*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1993.

[27] *Ibid.,* p. 116

[28] Fred Williams, *Princess K'gari's Fraser Island,* no place, 2002, p. 13.

At White Cliffs, and then at Bogimbah, Meston was constrained by budget imposts, like almost any other administrator. In his report to the Home Secretary in May 1897, barely months after removing Aborigines to Fraser Island, he wrote:

> The provision bill is being gradually economised. So far the beef account shows barely 2 ½ lb. weekly for each person. One pound daily is the allowance for flour. Tea and sugar are also carefully economised, and about 6lb weekly is the allowance of tobacco. This has been obtained at 2s 3d including duty, or at an annual cost to the State of 1s3d per lb. The mullet season is now coming in, and the old men have made a lot of band nets ready for the occasion. As more will be caught than the station can use, the surplus will be smoke-dried for future requirement. They have made a splendid dugong net, which now only requires a couple of anchors and some floats to be ready for use. Turtle are also being captured and large numbers of whiting are caught daily with hand lines by women and children and old men. [29]

By September 1897 the supply of beef had been 'gradually reduced until it has practically ended', so that Aborigines 'have to find all the rest of the food they require'. Meston proposed that 'In the future all boomerangs, spears, shields and nullas will be sold at the rate of a shilling each', the proceeds to be used for providing clothing.[30] Meston easily reconciled these seemingly parsimonious declarations. They exemplified Meston's belief that he could, on behalf of the government, run a self supporting reserve so that the government would not be required to resort to mission funding to protect Aborigines. Meston had flagged potential sources of profit in his *Proposed System,* and it was in accord with his assertions, before setting up the reserve, that it be self-supporting. He had written of the reserve at Corranderk in Victoria that he believed 'The reserves can be made not only self-supporting if wisely managed but to yield a profit available for the extended operation'. Corranderk had produced a crop of hops, which cost 1140 pounds, 943 pounds of which was profit.[31] Meston was under no illusion about the need for self-sufficiency and budget requirements. One of the main planks of his plan had been his promised capacity to 'work within a budget'.

The Butchulla were soon starving on their now restricted homeland because the food they required was either not there or was insufficient in quantity. Meston

[29] Meston to Home Secretary, Report 1897.

[30] Meston to Home Sec, 17 Sep 1897, 12038.

[31] Meston, *Proposed System,* p. 27.

spent precious budget money on tea, sugar, beef and tobacco, none of which constituted the traditional diet of the Butchulla people, and which did not contribute to a healthy diet. At least Aborigines were still bringing in many varieties of seafood, turtles and crustaceans, although, as discussed below, when nets needed repair it became a severe disadvantage to the food gathering, as Aborigines had to wait for new ones to arrive, not being allowed to repair or make new ones from materials on the island as they normally would have done.

The issue of food resources became a matter of contention later, when Meston and Gribble sought to defend their reputations by debating and disputing claims concerning the number of Aborigines who had died under their respective regimes. In the Legislative Assembly in December 1900, the Member for Burrum, Mr Nicholas Tooth, asked the Home Secretary how many Aborigines had died on Frazer Island since the station was handed over to the Anglican Mission. The reply from the Hon. Justin Foxton was that nineteen had died, and he detailed each one and the causes of death, which included the death from cancer of the throat of a man aged forty, and two men in their twenties of consumption (tuberculosis), to a baby aged eighteen months who was said to have been 'poisoned by eating wild fruit whilst camping out'.[32] This seems a strange cause of death for people who had been aware of the edible flora on the island for thousands of years, perhaps suggesting that Meston's policies had already affected the transmission of crucial traditional information from parent to child. It could also have been the result of separating children from close parental supervision. Other deceased ranged in age from a child of six weeks who had died of convulsions, to Bessie, aged eighty, who had 'been in the habit of opium smoking and clay eating while on the mainland'.[33] Due to Bessie's advanced age and habits, in this case at least, the mission might have been exonerated from responsibility.

Four people were reported to have died from clay eating, a condition said to have been brought about by the severely inadequate diet on the island. In 1900, four children were hospitalised in Brisbane suffering from ankylostomiasis, a severe

[32] *M. C.* 17 December 1900, p. 3.

[33] *Ibid. p. 3*

intestinal hookworm infestation, again brought on by inadequate diet and poor sanitation.[34] Persons suffering from this disease experience insatiable cravings to eat clay, ashes, even charcoal, in order to replace the missing elements in their diet. The disease leads to severe anaemia and ultimately death. It is doubtful that Aborigines had ever suffered this condition before the arrival of Europeans, given the affluence of their traditional diet. No one in authority seemed to be openly cognisant of the fact that it might be due to the restricted lifestyle imposed on Aborigines through their confinement on the island and the restricted food choices they had to endure. If they did they were not prepared to countenance the alternative. But clearly, Meston's and Gribble's policy of restricting Aborigines to the island meant that a large part of their diet, that which they obtained from the mainland and in their movements, was neglected, with severe consequences.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics lists the key risk factors for Indigenous health today as smoking, alcohol, substance abuse, physical inactivity, stress, violence and malnutrition.[35] Most of these factors can be attributed directly to the influence of the coloniser and the new ways of life imposed upon Aborigines in order to 'civilise' them. Food is only part of good health, and physical health is different to emotional health. Aborigines had always practised a holistic approach to their health, and they were deprived of much more than food while confined on Fraser Island. A healthy lifestyle requires a sense of self-esteem, physical activity and access to one's kin and family support, as well as a stable cultural life. That kind of lifestyle would have required that they be allowed to acknowledge and practise their culture and to have a degree of self-determination - something that was a strong part of their previous lives for thousands of years, and was taken from them on their removal to Fraser Island.

[34] Colonial Secretary's Correspondence. 483A/4702 and 4470, 29 March 1900, 9 April 1900.

[35] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples,* 2005, p. 3. See also A. R. Welch, 'Aboriginal Education as Internal Colonialism: the Schooling of an Indigenous Minority in Australia', *Comparative Education*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Special Number (11): Education and Minority Groups 1988, p. 211, on the reduced life expectancy of Australian Aborigines in 1976.

Education

White society also took responsibility for educating their young from Aboriginal mothers, fathers, uncles and aunts, for each of these relatives had a place in educating the young. Raelene Baker recalls how her 'mother parented us through her storytelling and just being there. As kids we would go bush and be taught some of her ways, storytelling, bushwalking, looking for different animals and turtles. Traditionally for us, parenting and learning is passed from generation to generation'.[36] In traditional Aboriginal society the education of children began very early in life and all members of the extended family and other members of the clan or tribe played their part. The children learned practical skills, as well as cultural and social norms, which were essential to their development, safety and well-being. Traditional education, as Hope Neill explains, 'was a continuum which developed in stages from childhood to death. It was, and still is, a heritage for Aboriginal people to be proud of'.[37] Michael Ryan, a white man brought up with Aborigines, says: 'the black man is better educated and he is taught by masters of their profession. Nothing is left to chance in his education- it is a must if he is to survive. To you he is completely uneducated, and to his way of thinking you are the same'.[38]

In Butchulla society the caboonya was the keeper of the stories, the official historian and record keeper. The late Olga Miller, a Batjala elder and descendant of both Fraser Island Aborigines and John Brown Gribble (Ernest's father), wrote widely of the stories told to children on Fraser Island. In *The Legends of Moonie Jarl* (1964), Miller, along with her brother Wilfred Reeves, detailed some of these stories and how they were intended to impart lessons concerning 'specific places and protocols of behaviour'.[39] The stories taught children important lessons such as not wandering away from the family, not killing animals and birds (and why), what happens when

[36]Raelene Baker, in *Health Matters,* Vol. 9, No 1, February 2004, p. 5 at http://www.health.Qld..gov.au/news/health_matters/2004/HM_Feb_2004_web.pdf, 19 August 2007.

[37] Hope Neill in Taylor. S. and Henry. M (Eds.),'*Battlers and Blue Stockings: women's place in Australian Education'*, Aust. College of Education, Deakin ACT, 1989, p. 66.

[38] W. Michael Ryan, *White Man, Black Man*, The Jacaranda Press, Milton Q, 1969, p. 43.

[39] Wilfred Reeves and Olga Miller, *The Legends of Moonie Jarl,* The Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1964. For discussion, see Juliet O'Conor, 'The Legends of Moonie Jarl: our first indigenous children's book'. *The La Trobe Journal*, Vol. 79, Autumn 2007, p. 66.

you die, how fire came about and how important that was to Aboriginal society, and even not to steal. The story of 'The Boomerang' for example, tells of how two children killed the little bird, which was their 'eurie', 'meat' or totem, and how their father threw a spear at it, which returned to him in the shape of the boomerang.[40] In 'The Wishing Crab', a young woman impatient to marry is inadvertently drawn to her own brother as her mate, for which they are punished by being turned into emus.[41] 'Strings and Things From Long Ago' teaches how string was used to make fishing nets, bird nets, rope scoop nets with handles as well as describing how the fishing was done.[42] In these ways, Aborigines taught lessons differently from Europeans, who had their own cultural ways of teaching children about honesty, values and how the world came about. These differences would later come into sharp focus.

The story of how Fraser Island got its name 'K'gari' was also an essential part of the children's education.

> It was Beiral, the great god in the sky, who made all the people. But the people had no land. So Yendingie, Beiral's messenger, came down from the sky and first he made the sea and then he made the land. When he reached what is now Hervey Bay, he had a helper with him – the beautiful white spirit, called Princess K'gari. K'gari helped Yendingie to make everything. They made the seashores and the mountain ranges, and all the beautiful lakes and rivers. Princess K'gari enjoyed what she was doing so much that she worked very hard. Yendingie said to her 'I think you had better have a rest otherwise you will be too tired. There are some rocks over there in the sea. Why don't you go over there and have a rest K'gari?' So she did. She lay there and fell into a deep sleep. When she awoke she said to Yendingie, ' I think this is the most beautiful place we have ever made. Please Yendingie, I would like to stay here forever'. 'Oh, no, I could not allow you to do that. You are a spirit and your place is with me.' But K'gari pleaded with him. 'Please … I could still see what you are doing. I could still look up into the sky. I would love to stay here'. Finally Yendingie relented and said 'Very well, but you cannot remain here in your spirit form. I will have to change you'. So he changed her into a beautiful island and then, so that she wouldn't be lonely, he made some trees and some flowers, and lakes that were specially mirrored so that she could see into the sky. He made beautiful creeks and laughing waters that were to become her voice. And, as well as birds and animals, he made some people to keep her company. Now he told these people who they were and what they had to do. He also taught them the magic procreation so that their children and their children's children would always be there to keep Princess K'gari company. And she is still there today, looking up at the sky and very happy indeed.[43]

[40] Reeves and Miller, *op. cit.,* p. 16.

[41] *Ibid.,* p. 40.

[42] Olga Miller, *Strings and Things From Long Ago*, Olga Miller, Maryborough Qld., 1999.

[43] Olga Miller, in Williams, *Princess K'gari's Fraser Island,* pp. 1-2.

This story has strong parallels with the Christian story of Creation and every Aborigine born or living in the Wide Bay area would have been told this story, so it can be imagined how confused Aborigines became when the missionaries, who had come to stay on their land, told them a different version of something which they thought they had known about forever.

The missionaries on Fraser Island, from the time of Reverend Fuller onwards, changed the education of young Aborigines to suit their own aims, and this new education was a key component of the civilising project. First and foremost, especially under Gribble, came a Christian education with Bible stories, prayers, hymns and catechisms, compounded with instructions on cleanliness and hygiene and rudimentary training in the skills of agricultural labour and domestic service. A Queensland education official put it in succinct terms in 1896. 'What they [Aborigines] need is teaching in religion, moral duty, decent behaviours and habits of perseverance in settled industry'.[44] Pandanus weaving and cane basket work were also suggested as an 'interesting and remunerative pastime' as if Aborigines could only cope with work traditionally associated in white society with the old, the infirm and the intellectually challenged, or activities associated with Polynesian visitors.[45] In this way, the education of Aborigines reflected 'assimilationist policies', as Welch notes. By 'immersing pupils in white culture it was hoped that … Aboriginality could be bleached out and that these minorities could simply be made into honorary whites, albeit at the bottom of the economic pyramid'.[46] As Blake notes, education was intended to prepare Aborigines for their future lives as settlement inmates. Second, it was to produce 'diligent and obedient' employees'.[47] This was made easier, as Shirleene Robinson identifies, by the fact that there was no control over

[44] D. Ewart, Dept Public Instruction, Letter No. 96/8939, quoted in Joanne Scott and Ray Evans, 'The Moulding of Menials: The Making of the Aboriginal Female Domestic Servant in Early Twentieth Century Queensland', *Hecate,* Vol. 22, No 1, 1996, p. 141.

[45] Joanne Scott and Ray Evans, 'The Moulding of Menials: The Making of the Aboriginal Female Domestic Servant in Early Twentieth Century Queensland', *Hecate,* Vol. 22, No 1, 1996, p. 142.

[46] A. R. Welch, *op. cit.,* pp. 207, 209.

[47] Thom Blake, *A Dumping Ground: A History of the Cherbourg Settlement*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2001 p. 138.

the labour of children in the Moreton Bay district from 1842 till 1902.[48] From the earliest days of colonial NSW, it was clearly anticipated that Aborigines could, at best, only aspire to being landless labourers.[49] While Gribble wholeheartedly embraced this policy, Meston was not sure about it. Meston noted 'can man worth their salt be nursed into being by an education? I doubt it'.[50]

Essentially 'white views of the educability of Australian Aborigines meshed neatly with more racist views 'that Aborigines were part of an inferior race who were probably destined to die out, and who would, at most, be only able to fulfil the most menial forms of employment' and in the words of a white settler of the time, 'I would be foolish to argue that all men are equal. The blackfellow is inferior and must necessarily remain so, but he is by no means inferior as to be unable to rise above the level of a working animal'.[51]

Language

Like other Aboriginal nations, the Butchulla had their own language, some of it shared with neighbours, some of it unique. Language is a deep and fundamental part of social identity and, in Dixon's words, 'every political unit prides itself on having its own national or tribal "language"'. 'If a minority group is to maintain its own ethnic identity and social cohesion it must retain its language'.[52] As the evidence given by one Aboriginal girl at Barambah in 1905 suggests, learning language in the colonial era remained an important bridge to the past, at a time when so many facets of traditional life were being unravelled and destroyed.[53]

A number of vocabulary lists lie in the archives of AIATSIS, including some Butchulla words compiled by Davis and Bracewell, and later by Fuller and Meston. For officials and missionaries seeking to change and advance Aboriginal society, communication was of particular importance. Researchers working in this field in the

[48] Shirleene Robinson, 'The Unregulated Employment of Aboriginal Children in Queensland 1842-1902', *Labour History,* No 82, May 2002, p. 1.

[49] Henry Reynolds, 'Aborigines and European Social Hierarchy', *Aboriginal History,* Vol. 7, 1983, np.

[50] Archibald Meston, notebook in Meston Papers, OM 64/17 Box 8449, Box 1 of 3, JOL.

[51] Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

[52] R.M.W.Dixon, *The Languages of Australia,* Cambridge University Press, Sydney, 1980, p. 79.

[53] Blake*, op. cit.,* p. 218.

twentieth century have led us to understand something of the richness and complexity of Aboriginal languages, and appreciate the importance of language to Aboriginal identity.[54] Early Europeans in Australia, however, struggled to appreciate the value and intricacy of Australian languages, and over time most Australian languages have been lost, including that of the Butchulla. [55]

Many early settlers demonstrated an interest in Aboriginal languages, and some colonial identities, notably the Attorney General Saxe Bannister, envisioned the acquisition of Indigenous languages as a means of bringing Aborigines into the fold of civilised law and society.[56] This task came to appear hopeless once Europeans began to understand the sheer diversity and complexity of these languages, and once the Aborigines who spoke them began to disappear under the weight of colonisation. Nevertheless, in the early-colonial period, missionaries such as Lancelot Threlkeld (at Lake Macquarie) and William Watson (at Wellington Valley) emerged as the champions of language acquisition, in part because they needed to communicate their Christian message to Aborigines without waiting for Aborigines to master the English language, but also because they saw it as a means of evidencing the sophistication of Aboriginal society and disproving the convenient assumption of colonists who maintained that Aborigines were mere beasts.[57] Missionaries also preached in English, but it was felt that concepts delivered in English, with its own peculiar syntax and phonology, were not adequately understood by Aborigines. Historian John Harris, in describing the work of translator Bob Love in the 1920s, considers: 'such problems have frequently suggested to the ignorant that Aboriginal

[54] Dixon, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

[55] This has changed over the last three years as the local newspaper and the local Butchulla community, led by Aunty Joyce Bonner, have embarked on a program of reintroducing the Butchulla language to both Butchulla descendants in the area and the local non-indigenous population.

[56] Alan Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia, A History, Vol. 2*, Oxford University Press, 2004; D. A. Roberts, '"Language to save the innocent": Reverend L. Threlkeld's linguistic mission', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 94, Pt.2, December 2008, pp. 107-25.

[57] Hilary Carey, 'Lancelot Threlkeld and Missionary Linguistics in Australia to 1850', in E.F. Koerner, *Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science,* Vol. 106, John Benjamins Publishing Co, Amsterdam, 2003, p. 263.

languages were deficient. Almost invariably the problem is with the translator who cannot explain a concept to people whose English competence is low'.[58]

The notion of using Aboriginal language as a tool for civilising, originally adopted by those such as Threlkeld and Fuller at Fraser Island in the early-1870s, became less fashionable.[59] It instead became accepted that Aborigines must learn English as part of becoming civilised, as the retention of their own language perceivably helped to preserve old allegiances and traditions, and was thus a bar to their 'improvement'. Gribble, as a missionary, was particularly adamant about this.[60] Although he sensed the complexity of Aboriginal languages, he was no anthropologist and insisted that 'good English' be used on his stations, although he stated that originally they used pidgin English.[61] At Yarrabah, he banned 'language' altogether.[62]

Meston, in contrast, had considerable interest in and respect for Aboriginal language. He tried to learn Aboriginal words on Fraser Island, as he had done during his early days on the Clarence River, largely as an intellectual or scientific exercise, but also in part because he hoped to preserve some aspects of Aboriginal culture from the type of destruction favoured by the missionaries.[63] Conversely, in the case of Aborigines, to ban that language, and to break social cohesion and tribal identity was to be part way to the new social structure needed to civilise them. Meston's personal papers feature notebooks of vocabularies acquired from different Aboriginal peoples he encountered in his travels. These include word lists and notes made during visits and interviews with Aborigines in Brisbane, Moreton Island and Toowoomba between 1869 and 1870.[64] Meston gave the preservation of language as one of the important aims of the Reserve on Fraser Island, for in his view, 'When an aboriginal ceased to speak his own language and make and use his own weapons

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[58] John Harris, *One Blood 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope,* Albatross, Sydney, 1994, p. 837.

[59] Tony Matthews, *River of Dreams,* Maryborough City Council, Maryborough, 1995, p. 128

[60] Ernest Gribble, Missionary Notes, 1897, p. 86.

[61] Dixon, *op. cit*., p. 71; Ernest Gribble, *Forty Years with the Aborigines,* Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1930, p. 99.

[62] Gribble, Missionary Notes, 1897, p. 86.

[63] William Thorpe, 'Archibald Meston and Aboriginal Legislation in Colonial Queensland', *Historical Studies,* Vol. 21, No 82, April 1984, pp. 53-54.

[64] *Daily Mail,* 20 Oct 1923, p. 19.

it is time to leave this planet. He is no longer of any interest to the philologist, ethnologist, anthropologist or the general public'.[65]

Gribble, on the other hand, believed that English was the 'language of Christianity', reflecting ideas of Empire building, colonialism and the part of Christianity in civilising Aborigines. It seems that, over time, older Aborigines at missions gave up using their language and according to Bowman Johnson, this was the case at Barambah.[66] Certainly, in southern Queensland, appreciation of Aboriginal languages declined amongst white people. Loyau, living in Maryborough in the second half of the nineteenth century, mistakenly believed: 'the language of a savage is as simple as his mind, being drawn from a limited vocabulary which obtain in civilization'.[67]

Kinship

> Overlapping circles of extended family lie at the heart of the lives of most Aboriginal Australians. Networks of family relationships determine day to day activities and change the course of destinies. From an early age Aboriginal Australians learn who belongs to whom, where they come from and how they should behave across a wide universe of kin. These are highly valued and integral components of Aboriginal cultural knowledge. And yet these same familial systems have been the site of repeated attacks by successive waves of Australian governments, tearing at the heart of Aboriginal family life.[68]

In Aboriginal society, family defined one's identity and set the parameters for everyday life, and for behaviour towards others. It influenced the tasks performed each and every day, and provided a surety of behaviour from babyhood to old age. It was the basic unit of society. These vital connections were seriously endangered and often lost when settlers and missionaries came to Queensland and to the Wide Bay. As Haebich notes, 'successive waves of governments' have torn at the heart of Aboriginal family life.[69] Removals begun in Meston's day continued for many years but had different aims. Meston wanted to gather Aborigines together. After 1900

[65] Archibald Meston to Colonial Secretary, Col. Sec 483, QSA, 25 Nov 1899, 14985, p. 5.

[66] Blake, *op. cit*., p. 217.

[67] Loyau, o*p. cit*., p. 220.

[68] Anna Haebich, *Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800-2000*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle WA 2000, preface.

[69] *Ibid*., *p. 54.*

the removals policy was designed to civilise children via education, but disrupted family life to a degree never seen before in Aboriginal society.

In some cases this occurred even when the white fathers made it clear that they were happy to be responsible for their offspring - including their education. Val Clements was sent to Barambah in 1908, after Bogimbah was closed, even though his white father offered to educate him in Townsville. He never saw his father again. Daisy Gorringe was separated from her German father and Aboriginal mother and taken when ten years old to 'be educated'.[70] As a Haebich reports, 'In 1928, Albert Holt, his wife, several of their children and his aged mother in law were taken from Springsure. They were not all taken to the one reserve'.[71] This splitting up of families was common. Willie Clark noted: 'They came through the bush for weeks and at night, the troopers would surround them so they could not escape but the mothers would be chasing after them and crying, 'my baby, my baby my baby!…she'd never seen her mother or father from that time'.[72] Arthur Malcolm tells of the 'divvying up' of families being sent to different missions and reserves, albeit later than this study, despite pleas to be sent together as one group.[73] Numerous residents of Yarrabah, when interviewed, had similar stories, even more so those from Fraser Island. Stanner noted 'every personal affiliation was lamed, every group structure was put out of kilter, no social network had a point of fixture left'.[74] Blake contends that 'the result of the removals program was quite different from that claimed by the proponents of the scheme … rather than being for the 'care and protection' of the state's Aborigines, it contributed to the destruction of their cultural and social life'.[75]

Many women in particular, have taken up the challenge and written about their loss of identity, their paucity of family life and how that impacted on their later life. Jean Hamilton, as an uneducated woman at the age of sixty, told the story of her

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[70] Blake, o*p. cit*., pp. 53-54.

[71] *Ibid.,* pp. 53-54.

[72] Judy Thomson (ed.), *Reaching Back: Queensland Aboriginal people recall early days at Yarrabah Mission,* Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1989, p. 17.

[73] *Ibid.,* p. 22

[74] W. E. H. Stanner, *After the Dreaming,* Boyer Lectures, Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1968, p. 57

[75] Blake, o*p. cit*., p. 53.

family life in northern NSW for her children and grandchildren, and how important her extended family was to her.[76] Sally Morgan felt compelled to write her book, *My Place* (1992), after discovering her Aboriginal roots.[77] Doris Pilkington evokes just how important her family is to her when she details her well-known story, and what her mother and aunt suffered to return to it, in *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence.*[78] Like Morgan, Lynette Russell tells her story of her Aboriginal grandmother who could not admit her racial origins, thereby suffering from not having a true family background to tell subsequent generations.[79] Speaking about Cherbourg, Cilla Malone says 'but overall there was such a great loss of culture and law and a disintegration of the whole family structure, which I think is why we have the problems that we have today in some of the Aboriginal communities'.[80] Cherbourg, previously Barambah, was one of the places where the last of the Wide Bay Aborigines were relocated.

One unexpected consequence of Barambah, which continues into the twenty-first century, is the resilience of the people who live there. Although originally drawn from many places in Queensland, Aborigines at that reserve formed new kinship ties, and became, effectively, a new 'tribe' with their land and roots in Cherbourg. Blake details how, at Barambah, the Aborigines removed there formed themselves into regional affiliations, camping near each other, along tribal lines, and in that way cushioned themselves somewhat from the traumatic effects of removal from their own lands.[81] Hope Neill declared that, as oppressed people, the bonds that grew became more than bonds of friendship, but developed into kinship, and that out of that oppression came an additional culture, language and a stronger spirituality.[82] This continues even today as Aborigines now describe their mob as 'being from Cherbourg'. This includes many Butchulla people who were relocated to Cherbourg and grew to call that place, rather than Fraser Island, home, although over the last decade there has been a deepening feeling of being a Butchulla person,

[76] Jean Hamilton, *Just Lovely,* Joan McKenzie, Coonamble, 1989.

[77] Sally Morgan, *My Place,* Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1992.

[78] Doris Pilkington, *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence,* University of Qld. Press, Brisbane, 2005.

[79] Lynette Russell, *A Little Bird Told Me,* Allen and Unwin, Sydney 2002.

[80] Leah Purcell, *Black Chicks Talking,* Hodder, Sydney, 2003, p. 147.

[81] Blake, o*p. cit*., p. 205.

[82] Neill, *op. cit*., p. 70.

rather than a Cherbourg person. It demonstrates how deeply Aborigines see themselves as part of a clan, how important kinship is to them and how attitudes and beliefs built up over thousands of years do not always disappear under the pressure of assimilation.

Huggins and Blake have demonstrated that Aboriginal women on missions and reserves were 'doubly segregated – sequestered in dormitories, separated in both gendered and generational terms, and thus substantially removed from traditional cultural influences that would enable them to acquire essential knowledge of their Aboriginality'.[83] As women played an integral part in the passing on of knowledge, this severely affected that capacity. This rose directly from Gribble's policies on Fraser Island. Before Gribble came on the scene there were no dormitories, only traditional, cultural separations, and when Gribble opened his mission on Yarrabah and then moved on to control Fraser Island, this policy was continued and refined. Dormitories robbed both parents and children of proper family intimacy, a basic human need.

Ernest Gribble himself wrote a passage that neatly summarises the reaction of many Aboriginal mothers to missionaries in general and to him in particular, showing their strong maternal instincts and their fear of their children being 'stolen' from them:

> At first little notice was taken of me, the people being busy questioning the two boys while I stood a little apart. Presently one man asked Harry who I was, and on his saying quietly the one word `Missionary', the effect was wonderful to behold, the women gave me one look full of fear, then clasping their children tightly, vanished; the men stood their ground, but looked as if they would like the ground to open and swallow either me or themselves.' Gribble subsequently learned the reason for the hostile reception. Aborigines for miles around had heard of the mission, he wrote, and the idea was 'among them that we intend taking their children forcibly from them'.[84]

Evidence shows that governments and officials knew about the attachments Aborigines had to their lands but they persisted with their policy of removals. In 1899, while debating amendments to 'the *Act'*, one Member of Parliament claimed

[83] J. Huggins and Thom Blake, `Protection or Persecution? Gender Relations in the Era of Racial Segregation', in K. Saunders and R. Evans (eds) *Gender Relations in Australia. Domination and Negotiation*, Marrickville, NSW: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992, pp. 43-49.

[84] Gribble, *Missionary Notes,* 22 June 1896, p. 44.

that to remove Aborigines from their own homes 'would have the effect of destroying life more rapidly than was done by the wild blacks themselves'. A resident of Miles commented: 'the one thing you must make the Home Secretary understand is that the old blacks will not leave their old Yowrie. They say they will die here'.[85] Even Bleakley, who as Chief Protector for twenty-nine years instituted more removals than any other, said 'It is inevitable that, to a people so clannish in their ideas, removal from their own country, with all its sacred associations, to another and entirely strange land, would be the cause of a good deal of hardship to them'.[86]

Meston was quite proud of the way he brought Aborigines from all over Queensland to Fraser Island, in order to maintain Aborigines as 'a whole'. 'On the 8th (July 1897) I removed four aboriginal women from Brisbane to Fraser's Island' he wrote in his report to the Home Secretary on 19 July 1897.[87] In his 1902 report Meston boasted: 'Removals in Southern Division began with the 51 blacks sent to start the aboriginal station at Fraser's Island, on February 24th 1897. Since then I have sent 165 blacks to Fraser Island from South, Central, North and West Queensland'.[88] He had also sent forty Aborigines to Barambah from the Durundur area and thirty-three from Kilkivan.[89] He had previously written to Tozer telling him, inter alia, that 'in their wild state each Aboriginal tribe is isolated on its own clearly prescribed territory and never leaves, except for brief periods on special occasions'.[90] He told Tozer:

> these Boonah blacks profess to be much attached to the locality as their mothers and fathers were born there. It is too late in the day to humour these caprices and sentimentalisms'. Exactly the same argument is given by old blacks at Beaudesert, Beenleigh and Southport, but this is not to be accepted as an argument against collecting them together for their own benefit in some central reserve. It is too late in the day to humour these caprices and sentimentalisms which the total change of environment has deprived of all tangible significance.[91]

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[85] Blake, o*p. cit.*, p. 54.

[86] *Ibid.,* p. 54.

[87] Archibald Meston, Report to Home Secretary, 19 July 1897, Col. Sec. 483A*,* No. 9258, p. 1.

[88] Meston to Tozer, 18 October 1902, Col. Sec. 483A*,* No 1175, p. 1.

[89] *Ibid*.

[90] Report on Fraser Island*,* March 1896, QSA Col. Sec. 483A, no number, p. 8.

[91] Meston to Tozer, Report on South Queensland Aborigines, Col. Sec. Z1608, Frame 33-37, dated 30 Dec undated year, but after 'proposed' Fraser Island Mission.

It would seem from this statement either that Meston really did not care about the Wide Bay Aborigines and their traditional way of life, or that he saw his plan for Aborigines unravelling and was desperately trying to keep any Aborigines together in order that his preservation 'experiment' could go forward. When Gribble was placed in charge the twin goals of Christianity and civilisation could not be achieved under the Aborigines' old way of living. They had to be removed from their traditional lands for new ways of living to be imposed on them. Being on their own lands reinforced their old beliefs and their old ways.

Removals were used to control, to punish and to break down the fabric of Aboriginal society so that a new life could be mapped out for them as willing workers under white control. It was many years before the full impact of this policy was realised. Under 'the *Act*' removals constituted a way of both peopling the missions and reserves and destroying family ties. It also dislocated Aborigines from their land. The government wanted to destroy that connection. Under 'the Act', wives were separated from husbands, children torn from their parents and elderly grandparents separated from their support system of children and grandchildren. Meston and Gribble had different reasons for embracing removals. Meston instituted a program of removals, conceiving it as a measure for the common good, because he wanted to gather the remnants of Aboriginal populations together in one place in order to preserve what remained and what he saw as worth keeping of the Aborigines' lifestyle. Gribble continued the policy because it was entirely in keeping with his goal of controlling and reinventing Aboriginal lives. Gribble wanted Aborigines in one place to civilise them and to preach to them.

Chapter Four

Traditional Life of the Butchulla

Marriage, Burial and Spirituality

In his attempts to 'preserve' the Butchulla, Meston was in some respects more forgiving and accommodating than Ernest Gribble. The changes wrought by Gribble after 1900, when he and the ABM took charge of Fraser Island and converted it from a secular reserve to a church mission, were overwhelmingly destructive. He too was deficient in his 'duty of care', and his impact was particularly evident in terms of the damage done to Aboriginal cultural and religious practices, especially marriage and burial customs, as discussed in this chapter. The assault on these important aspects of Butchulla culture considerably reduced the quality of their lives.

Marriage

In traditional Aboriginal society, the rules of marriage, like many other aspects of Aboriginal life, were strictly regulated and controlled. Some knowledge of Aboriginal social organisation - tribes, clans, totems and kinship - is necessary to understand marriage laws. The term 'tribe' is problematic and generally not favoured in current scholarship, but can be loosely employed to describe a group of people who have more in common with one another than with others. (It is more usual for non-Aboriginal scholars to speak of dialectical or linguistic units, irrespective of whether or not Aboriginal people identify themselves in such terms).[1] Elkin calculated the membership of a tribe as about 100 to 1,000 with an average of about five to six hundred.[2] A clan can be defined as 'a group of people who claim to be descended in one line from the same putative ancestor or ancestress, not always named and not necessarily in human shape'.[3] Tindale, who did fieldwork in the early-

[1] Ronald M Berndt. and Catherine H Berndt, *The World of the First Australians, Aboriginal Traditional Life: Past and Present,* Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1992, p. 33.

[2] *Ibid.,* p. 33.

[3] *Ibid.,* pp. 42-43.

twentieth century, understood that Aborigines preferred to live in family groups, with related families, comprising a 'horde or clan', being 'the largest group within which a man can take part in community life and share his thoughts while still feeling he is among his own kind'.[4] These are very basic and easily contested definitions, but they here suffice for the purpose of discussing marriage laws that were fundamentally changed by the regimes of life on colonial reserves and missions.

Aboriginal tribes or clans were divided into two moieties (halves), determined by ancestral descent, each having its own totem, usually a species of bird or animal. Membership is assigned at birth, or even at conception, either along matrilineal or patrilineal lines, and never changes. This has an environmental and ecological basis that assisted the conservation of faunal species, but also prevented intermarriage. At birth each member is assigned to one of four sections. According to Berndt and Berndt, these consisted of:

A. Banaga =	**B**. Burong
C. Garimba =	**D**. Baldjeri

A and B and C and D represent the intermarrying sections, while A and C, and B and D, represent the children of those parents. A husband and wife must always be of opposite moieties with resulting different totems. This is probably the most important rule of all for marriage and the most basic, even if there are variations. Thus if a Banaga man marries a Burong woman then their children will be Baldjeri. If a Banaga woman marries a Burong man their children will be Garimba.[5] The section that any children of a couple belong to will be the opposite to that of the father. In the Butchulla these sections were Barung, Bunda, Balkum and Darwain. Under this system, as Thom Blake was told by former residents of Cherbourg, 'we knew who every person was. Whether they were Batjala, Kabi Kabi or Wakka Wakka or

[4] Norman Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia,* University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1974, p. 19.

[5] Berndt and Berndt, o*p. cit.,* pp. 47-48.

whatever the case may be. I knew where they came from'. (The Kabi Kabi and Wakka Wakka were neighbours of the Butchulla). 'The utmost significance was attached to knowing to whom one was related and the nature of that relationship'.[6] Cherbourg residents, many of whom originally came from the Wide Bay area, including Fraser Island, certainly knew their genealogy, and it gave them comfort in trying times. 'For inmates who had been separated from their immediate family, it was consoling to find kin, even if they were only distantly related'.[7]

There are various 'rules' governing Aboriginal marriage, given that there is a large enough group for marriage to take place within. The key point in the late 1800s, and continuing into the twentieth century, was that there were not enough marriage partners of the correct sections for the Butchulla to 'marry right'. Marriage is usually exogamous and women move out of the unit or group at marriage, although still maintaining their totemic affiliations and spiritual ties with their 'country'.[8] This is an important principle because it guarantees the integrity of Aboriginal culture. Marriages are not expected to be monogamous and another general principle is that marriage is formally discouraged between persons of two succeeding generations. This, again, preserves a 'clean' bloodline.

In Aboriginal society girls are 'promised' or betrothed to suitable partners, someone of the right section, when they are young, but this does not mean that a marriage occurs then. This could and did lead to many misunderstandings later. The Butchulla marriage ceremony took several days to complete, involving two ceremonies, with the girl 'given' to her husband after the conclusion of the second ceremony.[9] Two tribal groups would be present and the girl's mother's brother gave the girl away and put a white cockatoo feather first in the husband's hand and then took it and put it in the girl's hair and said to the headman, thus addressing all present, 'I give her away to you' for he could not speak directly to the bride or the

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[6] Bowman Johnson, 'Growing up in Queensland', *Aboriginal History,* 11: 78, 1987 *cited in* Thom Blake, *A Dumping Ground: A History of the Cherbourg Settlement*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2001, p. 216.

[7] *Ibid.,* p. 205.

[8] Berndt and Berndt, o*p. cit.,* p. 41.

[9] L. P. Winterbotham, Gaiarbu's Story of the Jinibara Tribe, *Queensland Ethnohistory Transcripts 1,* Archaeological Branch of the Qld. Govt., Brisbane 1982, p. 27.

groom, for he was jalu to both. Jalu denotes a taboo relationship, common in Aboriginal society. The feather was given to the bride's mother to be used at the head of a spear if the groom had to be approached because of ill treatment of his wife. The headman then gave the tribal cry, as did the others. This concluded the ceremony and the couple were led away to be alone for a few days before they returned to work.[10]

Aborigines on missions and reserves came under the control of missionaries and officials who seemed to care little about this important aspect of Aboriginal life. Aboriginal marriage laws were not well understood, and were not in any event considered appropriate for a people who needed to be civilised. For missionaries especially, the emphasis was on joining together God-fearing people, those obedient to the 'white system' and those of good physical health and moral character. This denoted an improvement in their position. Traditional or customary definitions of a 'wrong' marriage were superseded by the imposition of European ideas and demands. This had deep and lasting repercussions for the Butchulla, including the loss of kinship, and a pervasive 'guilt' over marriages to the 'wrong skin'.

Meston was certainly aware of Aboriginal marriage laws, even if he discounted them somewhat in practice. 'Their marriage laws have carried them triumphantly across the "man devouring gulf of centuries" with a splendid physique still unimpaired and free from all hereditary diseases', he declared confidently.[11] He complained to the Home Secretary about white men 'stealing' the Aborigines' rightful partners at Childers, near Maryborough. This complaint also reflected Meston's antipathy towards Kanakas, as discussed earlier. After explaining the provisions of the new *Act* to about thirty men and women at Childers, Meston said:

> The men spoke very earnestly about their women being taken from them by kanakas. They said that there were at least seven women living with kanakas and that they were thus deprived of their own wives while their young men had no prospect of partners. This of course is to them a serious grievance and I would respectfully ask the Home Secretary for authority to remove these women and restore them to their own people when removing to Fraser's Island.[12]

[10] *Ibid.,* p. 27.

[11] *Maryborough Chronicle,* 26 May 1897, p. 2.

[12] Archibald Meston, Report to Under Secretary, Col. Sec. 483A, No. 16560, 24 December 1897, p. 1.

A memo from the Home Secretary mentioned women who had complained to him about being 'married' to the wrong husbands while under Meston's control.[13] The complaints were investigated but judged to be lacking in substance, although it was found that 'the [Aboriginal] men in order to accomplish their desires with the women are in the habit of saying that unless the latter give way to them Mr Meston would put them in the lockup or chain them up in the cemetery'.[14]

There is no evidence that Gribble took any account of customary arrangements in his control over the marriage of his charges. His strict and overbearing behaviour concerning Aboriginal marriage probably had its genesis in the beliefs of his father, J. B. Gribble, and his father's colleague, Daniel Matthews of Maloga Mission in Victoria. The two had once contemplated establishing a mission in Victoria together.[15] Matthews announced that 'One of the first acts of reform I adopted in collecting and bringing them into the Government reserves and villages was to induce them to marry according to our British laws. This they objected to at first, telling me they had been 'married enough'. Matthews was known to have locked the storeroom door for some days until Aborigines 'came to their senses' and agreed to be married according to his rules. 'Through taking this stand I was enabled to put a stop to their illicit and unhappy relationships, and so brought in joy and contentment'.[16]

Aborigines had their own strict moral codes that allowed a degree of sexual freedom before marriage, albeit subject to stringent controls defined, as explained above, by kinship, betrothal obligations and inter-tribal laws. Halse contends that Aboriginal cultural practices like infant betrothal, pre-pubescent marriage and wife exchange were seen by Gribble as 'irrefutable evidence of moral and social depravity', in sharp contradistinction to his own European-Christian values.[17] Halse considered that marriage was his 'cure for carnal desire' because it promoted

[13] Home Secretary, Memo on Fraser's Island, 26 Sept 1899, p. 1.

[14] *Ibid.,* p. 2.

[15] Daniel Matthews, 'Native Tribes of the Upper Murray', *Journal of the Royal Geographic Society, S.A.* 1898-1899 to 1900-1901, Vol. 4, pp. 48-49.

[16] *Ibid.,* p. 139.

[17] Christine Halse, *A Terribly Wild Man,* Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2002, p. 76.

monogamy and a settled, domestic existence, but also because marriage ceremonies provided occasions for festive celebrations of the Christian message.[18] Charity Davidson, interviewed by Halse, claimed Gribble particularly favoured inter-racial marriages, which would eventually lead to a dilution of Aboriginal 'blood', rather than allowing marriages between Aborigines that threatened to promote retention of traditional Aboriginal ways. Gribble wanted instead 'to mix the colour'.[19] As Norman Underwood recalled:

> they didn't want a half-caste man to marry a half-caste woman. They wanted to keep that race down. They never gave a reason why, they just wouldn't allow it. There were a few couples who did do it, they stood up for their rights. But they didn't want them to marry. They had to do the picking and choosing of the partners. That was the law.[20]

That was indeed the law, as laid down in the Queensland Government's *Act* of 1897, conceived by Meston. In 1923, the policy, of the past and of that era, was elucidated clearly by the Chief Protector:

> To combat the half-caste evil, it is essential that the gulf between the white and black race should be widened as far as possible. With this in view, the marriage of full blood women to whites or aliens is rigidly tabooed, half-castes of aboriginal nature are encouraged to marry back, and the superior type are assisted to uplift themselves and mate with their own kind.[21]

The Protector's report did not make clear who these 'superior types' were, but presumably he meant Aborigines who had been converted to Christianity and who were considered 'civilised'. Meston too would probably have agreed but for different reasons. He wanted to preserve Aborigines rather than 'breed them out', providing he himself could choose the marriage partners from his 'eligible pool'.

These were common measures, instituted by Gribble also at Bogimbah and later by those in charge at Barambah. Thom Blake explains that at Barambah, where some of the Butchulla were sent after Bogimbah and Yarrabah, marriage was one of the few avenues of escape from the mission regime, although it was common for the

[18] *Ibid.,* p. 77

[19] Christine Halse, 'The Reverend Ernest Gribble and Race Relations in Northern Australia', PhD Thesis, University of Queensland, 1992, p. 142.

[20] *Ibid.,* p. 85.

[21] *Annual Report of Chief Protector of Aborigines*, 1923, State Library of Qld., p. 7.

marriages to later break down.[22] Ruth Hegarty, for example, left the dormitory when she was twenty-one to get married.[23] It is doubtful if there were any 'correct' marriage partners left at this time, either on the reserve or in the general community, so decimated was the Aboriginal population of south-east Queensland. Blake explains, 'courtship was permitted but only in a situation where it could be carefully monitored', enacted 'under the strict supervision of the police'.[24] However, the 'inevitable consequence of trying to regulate such relationships was to foster clandestine meetings and alliances'. So, Blake concludes 'instead of diminishing the incidence of miscegenation, the dormitory regime only served to increase the number of "half-caste" children as most girls fell pregnant to white men off the settlement'.[25] In part this was due to the practice of placing Aboriginal girls in private domestic service where, it is generally accepted, white owners and workers took advantage of them. As the prevention of miscegenation was one of the fundamental aims underlining the creation of missions and reserves, this aim was obviously not successful. Meston showed his abhorrence of miscegenation when he says 'only such isolation would put a stop to the breeding of half castes, a very undesirable element in any white population'.[26] Meston would rather keep his charges 'pure' Aborigines, not a lesser form of white people. Gribble abhorred miscegenation even more, especially as he found his own flesh was weak, and he could not reconcile his actions with his beliefs when he allegedly fathered an Aboriginal child.[27]

This policy led to even further ills as white society began to remove half-caste children from their communities and attempt to give them a white upbringing and education, thus creating the so-called 'Stolen Generations'. There are still ramifications ensuing from that policy. The fact that the mothers were Aborigines, even though the fathers may have been white, 'downgraded' these children, their Aboriginal 'blood' tainted and 'spoiled'. Sue Shore claims that 'the watermarks of

[22] Blake, *op. cit.,* p. 74.

[23] Blake, *Ibid.,* p. 74.

[24] Darcy Cummins, interview, 1988, quoted in Blake, *Ibid.,* p. 77.

[25] *Ibid., p*p. 77-78.

[26] Meston cited in Ray Evans, 'Steal Away', *Journal of Australian Studies,* 61, June 1999, p. 85.

[27] Halse, *op. cit.* pp. 85-88

whiteness provide enduring points of reference for employability skills'.[28] Hilary Carey describes this policy in even stronger language: 'in their secularised form, missions actively participated in the odious assimilationist policy of removing part Aboriginal children from their mothers and sending them to dismally funded boarding schools to prepare them for lives of menial service under the draconian eye of the relevant state Aboriginal Protection Board'.[29]

Mortuary Rites and Burial practices

All cultures bury their dead in accordance with established cultural beliefs and religious constraints and customs. For Aborigines, death and burial were not simply practical matters but treated with the same respect and ritual that pervaded other parts of their life. Mourners inflicted gashes and cuts on themselves. Loyau, writing of the customs of the Butchulla, noted how 'female Aborigines covered their heads with ashes and cut their heads and breasts with sharp pieces of glass, their movements keeping to the rhythm of their crooning'. The cicatrisation was done with a small eugowrie shell; 'it was common for women to incise the front of the head, and men to incise the back of the head'.[30] Gribble and others were clearly horrified by such practices. At Yarrabah, he complained of the wailing when Menmuny's mother died[31]. 'Wailing was kept up for her every night for many months so that for some time after her death we still felt her presence among us'.[32] What was a comfort for Aborigines was a source of annoyance for Gribble, and in the case of the mourning for Menmuny's mother it was probably exacerbated by reminding him of the enormous influence she once had on the Mission residents.

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[28] Sue Shore, 'Destabilising or recuperating whiteness? (un) mapping 'the self' of agentic learning discourses', in Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Whitening Race,* Aboriginal Studies Press, ACT, 2005, p. 97.

[29] H. Carey, *Believing in Australia: A Cultural History of Religion*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1996, p. 71.

[30] Winterbotham, o*p. cit.*, p. 89.

[31] Menmuny is discussed in further detail later in this thesis . He was an influential Aboriginal leader in the area and it was his support of both the Gribble men that tipped the scales for them in terms of having Aborigines come in to the mission.

[32] Ernest Gribble, *The Problem of the Aborigines*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1932, p. 90. The significance of Menmuny will be discussed later in this thesis.

Within the extensive and complex social and kinship structures of Aboriginal society, one death could affect many. Commonly, people moved away from the scene of a person's death. This became practically impossible under the new regimes of reserves and missions, where it was impractical and often impermissible to shift camp every time someone died. As such, these restrictions upset traditional religious beliefs concerning the fate of spirits after death, but also altered the conventional and practical means by which death was accommodated within Aboriginal society, including the remarriage of those who had lost their partner. Missionaries and superintendants also undermined traditional practices concerning the disposal of the physical and spiritual remains of the deceased. The Butchulla, a coastal people, buried their dead in the sand on the day of their death. According to Gaiarbau:

> On the second day they believed that the spirit came back and on the third day the relatives would go to a rock at Pialba on which was the footprint of Beiral, their Supreme Spirit, whose left foot had marked the spot from which he had leaped on his way to the sky, and from this same spot the spirits of their dead, also followed him to the sky country. The relatives camped here, and two Gu:ndir made a bough shelter on the beach, one on each side of where the footmark was, and they watched to see the spirit 'jump off' from here. They believed that the spirit left the body on the third day and jumped from this spot (which Gaiarbau had seen). It is called Garindair Wararmi, which means 'from that spot leaped'. The two Gu:ndir would give a call , and if they heard no knock in response, they would say- 'oh well, he has gone home' but if they saw the spirit going off , they would light a fire to make a smoke in order to make sure the spirit did not come back to frighten people.[33]

Reverend Edward Fuller, resident missionary on Fraser Island in the 1870s, had a slightly different interpretation of Butchulla burial customs, when he wrote to a Brisbane newspaper:

> When a person dies, they skin him (old men and women excepted). The skin is dried and carried about by one of the relatives as a sort of charm. The bones and other parts of the body are divided among the kinsfolk. Sometimes they burn the body and carry the ashes about. They believe that the spirits of the dead blacks come up and sometimes kill their enemies.[34]

John Dalungdalee Jones, another descendant of the Fraser Island people, claims:

> Part of the ceremony of burial of our ancestors was to remove the outer layer of skin prior to being wrapped in bark, preferably Tea Tree bark. This was done by having the coals of a burnt branch moved over the skin, then scraping the burnt skin away with a sharpened shell, thereby exposing the white under-layer of skin.

[33] Winterbotham, *op. cit.,* p. 107.

[34] *Queensland Courier*, 3 October 1872, p. 14.

> The body was then laid out for three days with smoky fires kept going so as to keep the spirit of the departed from returning to haunt the living. After three days the spirit leapt into the heavens, the Bora in the sky. This is not dissimilar to the body of Christ being resurrected only after three days…Two thousand years ago, at the time of Christ there is a similarity between our Ancestor's concept that the spirit of the dead would leap into the heavens after three days had transpired ... This is why when white people came to our area; our ancestors thought them to be Muthare, our white spirit relatives returning. As such they were readily accepted into the tribe.[35]

The Butchulla tribe had distinctive burial customs. Their dead were buried lying straight with feet towards the west and arms placed alongside the body.

> If the ground were soft a hole was dug about three foot deep. A log was set each side along the bottom and across these were placed branches to form a platform, and on this the body was placed, a bark slab put over it with the curve down. The hole was then filled in with earth and other logs were placed on top to mark the grave. Trees around were blazed to mark the spot, two or three blazes on each tree'.[36]

No doubt this blazing of trees was useful when the body had to be retrieved and taken to Pialba. It must have made it easier to find the body in a heavily timbered area.

In Maryborough Cemetery, established in 1873, Aborigines who died were buried in the non-Christian section, along with other 'heathens' such as the Chinese and the Kanakas or South Sea Islanders. From 1873 to 1908 more than 6 600 people were interred in Maryborough Cemetery. Fifty-two of these were Aborigines, many recorded as being from 'The Bush', their causes of death ranging from 'murdered by blackfeller', 'wounds from a nulla nulla', 'stabbed' and 'spear wound' to syphilis, phthisis (tuberculosis), starvation, childbirth, senile decay and heart disease. In some cases there was no cause of death recorded, no name and no address, just another anonymous Aborigine buried in an unmarked grave in Section H.[37] Surprisingly this was more common in later years, perhaps due to the missionaries' strict application of religious customs preventing unbaptised Aborigines from being buried in Section G – the general section – of the public cemetery. Presumably, to be granted the right

[35]John Dalungdalee Jones, *Noosa Shire Digital Heritage Network,* p. 4 at http://www.brumbywatchaustralia.com/WelcomeFraser06.htm, viewed 8 November 2009

[36] Winterbotham, o*p. cit.,* p. 88.

[37] *Maryborough Cemetery Applications to Bury*, Maryborough City Council, Maryborough.

to be buried in this section, Aborigines needed to have been recognised as Christians at the time of their death.

Meston and Gribble, when in charge of Aborigines on Fraser Island, presumably provided a standard Western, Christian burial for each of the many persons who died under their care, although the fact is rarely mentioned in Meston's reports. We only know that the Fraser Island cemetery was a very full one, and that these deaths were not formally registered with the government via the Court House at Maryborough, indicating a reluctance to acknowledge Aborigines as people. Moreover, we know that neither man tolerated traditional burial customs. Certainly there was no allowing Aborigines to travel to the mainland to Pialba to observe the footprint of Beiral. Later, at Yarrabah in 1895, Gribble witnessed the struggle over conflicting customs when he observed Aborigines acting in 'a truly disgusting manner' when he attempted to bury a little girl. They began 'rolling in the sand, throwing it at the coffin and over each other'. Clearly '[t]hey did not want the whites to have anything to do with the dead.[38] Instead, burials and funeral rites were intended to be scenes of decorum and genuine sorrow'.[39] Even today some local Butchulla descendants resent this interference in their burial customs.[40]

As John Ferry explained, the messages given to Aborigines on missions and by missionaries were not welcomed by them:

> the emphasis which Christianity placed on death and the after life horrified the Aborigines who invariably asked the missionaries to desist when the subject was mentioned. However the entire Christian message with its complex concepts of sin, repentance, redemption, resurrection, grace etc. relied on a contemplation of one's own death and the consequences. Something akin to a tabu was associated with death in Aboriginal society and certainly the name of a dead person was never mentioned. There may well have been a cultural and psychological resistance to the reflections on death which the missionaries were continually attempting to encourage. While ever Aboriginal religious beliefs remained intact the task of the missionary would have been virtually impossible.[41]

[38] *Missionary Notes,* 15 August 1895, p. 12.

[39] *Ibid*., quoted in Reynolds, *The Missionary Impulse,* p. 139.

[40] Irene McBride, personal interview with author at Hervey Bay, 6 Nov 2009.

[41] John Ferry, 'The Failure of the New South Wales Missions To The Aborigines Before 1845', *Aboriginal History,* 1979 3:1, p. 33.

Gribble talked to Aborigines about death and the afterlife and in this respect it would have seemed to Aborigines that the present life was merely geared towards death and Heaven and Hell. Their own beliefs and customs were ignored and totally different values and beliefs were being thrust upon them. Moreover, Aborigines previously living in Maryborough had seen white men and women sinning and then strolling to church on Sunday. They had reason to believe that their own ways were superior to those of the white man's. Changing the burial customs of the Butchulla was another way Gribble imposed 'civilisation' on the Butchulla.

Spirituality

Spirituality was a key aspect of Aboriginal life, and one that missionaries were most intent on replacing. The result, as Joan McKenzie recalled, was that 'Dad did not teach us much about the Aboriginal culture as he was brought up a Christian'.[42] Although Meston did not run the reserve on Fraser Island as a Christian mission, and in fact had great differences of opinion with the Church and the Australian Board of Missions, there is no evidence that he was an atheist or agnostic. At the time of writing his Proposed System, at least, he was willing to allow the children to receive 'instruction in the moral ethics in Christianity'.[43] But even as a professed expert on Aboriginal culture, he, like Gribble, and indeed like most Europeans who had encountered Aborigines for over one hundred years, acquired only the barest understanding of Aboriginal spirituality. In particular, they misunderstood, perhaps wilfully, the relationship between spirituality and land. The misunderstanding allowed for the decision to force numerous Aborigines, from thirty-three distinct areas and speaking nineteen different dialects, to be removed and mixed together

[42] Jean Hamilton, *Just Lovely,* Joan McKenzie, Coonamble, 1989.

[43] Archibald Meston, *Queensland Aborigines, Proposed System for their Preservation and Protection,* Govt. Printer, Brisbane, 1895, p. 31.

on Fraser Island.[44] As Ray Evans put it, the whole process of colonisation was underlined by 'an arrogant disregard for their most sacred cultural commitment'.[45]

Today, some 74% of Aborigines (who make up about 1.5% at most of Australia's population) now list Christianity as their religion.[46] This suggests that over a very long time, Australian society has succeeded in its conversion attempts. James Weiner believes that Australian Aborigines 'have undergone a more or less thorough "missionisation" effort during this century'.[47] Liturgical practices have replaced smoking ceremonies.[48] Yet Aboriginal spiritual beliefs survive, often incorporated into the new Christian traditions.

It is impossible to discuss Aboriginal spirituality without linking it to a discussion on land. Religion and the land, as Halse notes, 'were central to Aboriginal cosmology and formed the key opposition in Aboriginal/Missionary contact'.[49] Europeans generally misunderstood the nature of Aboriginal 'belonging'. Rather they understood the European system of farming and agriculture, in which land was privately owned and worked to provide food for small family units. Until the Industrial Revolution, the backbone of England and its economy was the system of small villages, consisting of families who had been in the same area usually for hundreds of years, under a feudal system. Each family supported itself and sold its excess produce, be it vegetables, milk or livestock, at the local market. This was a system that worked for that society and culture. Generations of sons took over from their fathers on the same tracts of land provided that they owned the land. It is ironic that this system paralleled that of Aborigines' traditional life.

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[44] Kaye Lorraine Corner, Yarrabah: A Mission for the Aboriginal People in North Queensland, The Effect of Government and Church Policies 1900-1912, Partial requirement for the Postgraduate Diploma of Arts (History), University of Queensland, 1994, at Brisbane Diocese Anglican Church Archives, Brisbane Queensland, p. 91.

[45] Raymond Evans, '*A Permanent Precedent: Dispossession, Social Control and the Fraser Island Reserve and Mission 1897-1904',* St Lucia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Studies Unit, University of Queensland, Brisbane, 1991, p. 11.

[46] Max Champion, 'Aboriginal religion and Christianity: 'fundamentally incompatible'', *AD2000,* Vol. 8 No. 2, March 1995, p. 10. See also Carey, *Believing in Australia,* p. 72.

[47] J. Weiner, 'The epistemological foundations of contemporary Aboriginal religion: some remarks on the Ngarrindjeri', *Aboriginal History,* Vol.24, 2000, p. 262.

[48] John Wilcken, 'Matthew 5.17-19 and Aboriginal Christians (Part One)', *The Australasian Catholic Record*, 78, 2001, p. 458.

[49] Halse, '*Reverend Ernest Gribble'*, p. 58.

It sometimes seems simple to make an analogy between Christian stories and Aboriginal beliefs, but both had distinct differences as to the basis of those beliefs, the Christian beliefs being firmly rooted in a deity system which did not exist in Aboriginal spirituality, whose focus was much broader. Aborigines had spiritual beliefs that sometimes seemed to parallel Christian beliefs, but the missionaries, who were intent on spreading the Christian word, disregarded these beliefs anyhow. Brian Egloff relates one example of a similarity when he talks about Aborigines who died near Coolangatta in southern New South Wales. It is an ancient tale, which parallels Christian stories of Heaven and Hell and is also similar to the story told by the Butchulla about the spirit rock at Pialba.

> ... from a rock on the eastern slope of Coolangatta, the dead arose in spirit and departed for the after world. As they walked, a barrier of flames would block their path if they had not behaved well during life. The dead were tested…the crow spirits threw spears and wizards attempted to damage them. If when arriving at the camp of the spirit Aborigine in a land of plentiful game, the dead person was marked by fire or spear or showed signs of wounds,…he or she could not stay in the camp. If unmarked, he was dressed and decorated in the traditional manner and danced in a welcome corroboree.[50]

To Aborigines land was bound up in their social, spiritual and economic life. They did not 'just exist' as early writers and even some modern writers have postulated. Robert Hughes believed that 'the Aborigines were hunter–gatherers who roamed over the land without marking out boundaries or making fixed settlements'.[51] There was no reason why they should but it was this behaviour that convinced early settlers that Aborigines had no claim to Australia.

Their most important icon, their totem, came from the land and was used as a starting point to determine other rules. Josephine Flood states: 'totemism is the religious system in which people are identified with a particular animal, plant or natural feature, which, like themselves, was endowed with life essence by creation ancestors in the Dreamtime'.[52] Donovan defines a totem as 'a natural object such as

[50] Brian Egloff, *Wreck Bay: An Aboriginal Fishing Community,* Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1990, pp. 7-8.

[51] Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore,* Pan Books, 1987, p. 273.

[52] Josephine Flood, *Archaeology of the Dreamtime,* Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1989, p. 273.

a plant or animal, used as an emblem by an individual or group to indicate a system of relationships between people and the universe'.[53]

Even before birth, during their life, and after death and return to the Dreaming, the land provided a basis for Aboriginal spiritual beliefs. The Dreamtime created their land, their spirits and them, and nothing separated them, from the time the conception spirit entered the new baby's body at a certain point of the land until they were returned to the spirit pool when they died. Some idea of the Aboriginal relationships between land and their spiritual beliefs, may be gained from Father Pat Dodson.

> For the aboriginal people, land is a dynamic notion; it is something that is creative… Land is the generation point of existence; it's the spirit from which Aboriginal existence comes. It's a place, a living thing made up of sky, of clouds, of rivers, of trees, of the wind, of the sand, and of the Spirit that has created all those things; the Spirit that has planted my own spirit there, my own country… It belongs to me; I belong to the land; I rest in it; I come from there.[54]

Davis and Prescott examined Aboriginal frontiers and boundaries in Australia and released their findings in 1992. They found that land rights, at that time under scrutiny, had come to the fore because 'it is based on the judgement that throughout history Aborigines have had a special relationship with the land'. They argue that this relationship is based on two strands, that of 'using the food resources of the land in a life-style based on hunting and gathering' and a 'spiritual relationship centred on the belief that ancestral beings created the form of the land and the people'.[55]

Other areas of traditional life

There is not much information on the Butchulla. We know little about vital aspects of their culture, such as the practices marking the passage of young men to manhood. Two main bora rings have been identified in Butchulla country, both on the mainland near Tin Can Bay at the southern end of their territory. There may have

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[53] Val Donovan, *The Reality of a Dark History,* Arts Queensland, Brisbane, 2002.

[54] Pat Dodson, *Report of the Third Annual Conference of the Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council of Australia,* January 1976, p. 16.

[55] S.L. Davis and J.R.V. Prescott, *Aboriginal Frontiers and Boundaries in Australia,* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1992, p. 1.

been similar sites on Fraser Island that have since suffered the same fate as many of the numerous middens and burial sites destroyed by non-Aboriginal inhabitants and visitors. Matthews refers to male ceremonial sites on Fraser Island that were related to those at Tin Can Bay, where men performed 'circumcision and the cutting of cicatrices', but these have not been located. [56]

Settlers and residents of the Wide Bay area have, over time, produced sketchy accounts of local Aboriginal cultural practices. Fred Williams described local initiation rites.[57] One old resident of Maryborough, Charlie Sorenson, witnessed and described corroborees that continued to be performed for some time. From such accounts we glean some small details. For example, in piercing the septum of the nose, Butchulla used sticks painted white, rather than bones, possibly because of the limited availability of suitable bones on Fraser Island. We also know something of Butchulla cicatrisation practice, which involved transverse nicks - one row on each side of the centre line of the abdomen; also shoulder and chest cuts. Tribal cuts were made on both boys and girls at about twelve years of age, inflicted by the boy's mother's brother and a girl's mother's sister. Photos survive showing Butchulla men with cicatrices.[58]

Initiation ceremonies were something that neither Meston nor Gribble could countenance. It is difficult to say why Meston opposed these rites, given his aim of preserving Aboriginal customs, and given that he tolerated other forms of ceremony, but we might imagine that certain practices were too serious or perceivably harmful for Meston to approve. Probably, what Meston allowed to survive were those songs and dances that he felt best illustrated the 'romance' and showmanship of Aborigines, particularly those which could be exploited for entertainment and possible fund-raising. Gribble also was not averse to allowing some expressions of traditional dance and song, but only for fundraising purposes, as discussed later in this thesis. Raising funds was important to both Meston and Gribble. Many years after he had left Bogimbah, Gribble wrote that in regard to their corroborees, an

[56] Tony Matthews, *River of Dreams,* Maryborough City Council, Maryborough, 1995, p. 23.
[57] Williams, *op. cit.,* pp. 6-7.
[58] *Ibid*.

essential part of their culture, he believed there were three main kinds, ceremonial, historical and recreational.[59] Contrary to what he had said earlier, and perhaps as an 'elder statesman' of missionaries, he did not see them as any particular threat. Gribble was 'prepared to tolerate aspects of indigenous culture that did not interfere with his goals of Christianising and civilising' – or so he said long after he left Bogimbah.[60]

This chapter has offered an account of Butchulla life and culture before the arrival of Meston and Gribble, contrasted with their experiences after 1897 and also the reasoning behind both Meston's behaviour towards the Butchulla and also Gribble's and how that reflected their particular aims in respect to 'saving' Aborigines. The extant records only allow a glimpse of traditional Aboriginal life in the Wide Bay area, but the detail is sufficient to give us some idea of traditional Butchulla life and how that changed dramatically 'under the *Act*'.

[59] Ernest Gribble, *A Despised Race: The Vanishing Aboriginals of Australia*, Australian Board of Missions, Sydney, 1933, p. 6.

[60] *Ibid.,* p. 7.

Chapter Five

Archibald Meston -Protector

Having examined the traditional life of the Butchulla it is imperative to examine the two non-Aboriginal men whose ideologies and practices had most impact on their lives - Archibald Meston and Ernest Gribble. Both men have been the subjects of historical interest, notably Faith Walker's biography of Meston, *Reinvention of the 'Noble Savage* (1988)[1], a shorter piece by S. E. Stephens for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*,[2] and Christine Halse's PhD thesis and subsequent book, *A Terribly Wild Man* (2002) on Gribble.[3] William Thorpe and Cheryl Taylor have also contributed much to our understanding of Meston.[4] This thesis requires an understanding of the lives and careers of both men, in order to elucidate some of the fundamental differences, and similarities, in their approaches to the 'Aboriginal problem' in Queensland, particularly in so far as they affected the Butchulla. This chapter examines how Meston's beliefs manifested themselves in the policies he pursued at Fraser Island, while the following chapter examines Ernest Gribble in the same manner.

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[1] Faith Walker, 'Reinvention of the 'Noble Savage': Archibald Meston and 'Wild Australia'', *Journal of Royal Historical Society of Qld.,* Vol. 18, No.3, August 2002.

[2] S. E. Stephens, 'Meston, Archibald (1851 - 1924)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 5, Melbourne University Press, 1974, pp. 243-244.

[3] Christine Halse, 'The Reverend Ernest Gribble and Race Relations in Northern Australia', PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 1992; Christine Halse, *A Terribly Wild Man,* Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest NSW, 2002.

[4] Cheryl Taylor, 'Constructing Aboriginality', *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*; Cheryl Taylor, 'Prologue to Protectorship: Archibald Meston's Public Life in Far North Queensland, 1882-1888', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland,* 1988, Vol. 19, No. 11, July 2004; Cheryl Taylor. 'Romantic Pioneering in the Tropics: Archibald Meston's Home Life in Cairns, 1882-1888', *etropic: electronic journal of multidisciplinary studies in the tropics*, Vol. 2, No 1 (2003), http://www.jcu.edu.au/etropic.

Archibald Meston was the architect of Queensland's '*Aborigine's Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*' (1897).[5] He claimed in fact that he personally drafted the *Act* with the eminent public servant, William Edward Parry Okeden.[6] It was a long-lasting legacy, as the '*Act*' formed the basis for Acts in other Australian states, and was used to control Queensland's Aboriginal populations until the 1970s. The '*Act*' was the first comprehensive Aboriginal legislation passed in Queensland, heralding an era of protection and segregation whereby all Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (with certain, limited exceptions) potentially became wards of the state. The Chief Protector of Aboriginals Office had wide powers and controlled almost every aspect of Aboriginal lives, including health, education, employment, housing and accommodation, marriages, deaths, child welfare, personal finances, pensions and benefits and movement.

One outcome of the *Act* was to formalise the establishment of State run Aboriginal reserves in Queensland, which had hitherto been the product of occasional and ad hoc funding provided by missionary societies. Under Meston's scheme, the Queensland Government provided funding, although as we will see later that funding was not as secure as first thought. As Southern Protector from 1897 to 1903, Meston was instrumental in forging the character and policies of the Queensland government during this very important stage in the State's Aboriginal affairs, including the establishment and administration of one of the first state-run reserves at Bogimbah on Fraser Island.

Early Days

Archibald Meston was born in Doonside in Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1851. His great grandfather, William Meston, was the last Governor of Dunottar at the time of the battle of Sheriffmuir in 1715.[7] This family background probably influenced Meston's perception of himself as an athletic warrior, who frequently competed both with and against Aborigines in physical contests. He had a life-long interest in

[5] *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*, Supplement to the Queensland Government Gazette, Queensland Government Printer, Brisbane, 16 December 1897.

[6] Taylor, '*Constructing Aboriginality*', p. 131.

[7] Meston's papers at JOL contain newspaper cuttings relating to Dunnottar Castle and Lord Meston, OM 90-63, JOL.

guns and shooting wild game, typical of his times. Archibald came to New South Wales (NSW) on the *Saldhana* in 1859 with his parents, Alexander and Margaret, who settled on land at Ulmarra, near Grafton on the Clarence River.[8] In 1871 Archibald married Margaret Frances Shaw in Sydney, and their first child, Foressa Parisina, was born near Grafton the following year.[9] Archibald and his wife moved to Queensland in 1874 where the union produced six more children between 1874 and 1889, including his first son, Harold, who later became his father's trusted associate and colleague at Bogimbah.[10] Meston strongly defended his eldest son over the 'White Cliffs incident', and from criticism from Gribble after the Church takeover at Bogimbah, as described below.

Over the next thirty years, Meston spent time in Melbourne and Sydney, and worked as a journalist and editor of newspapers in Ipswich, Brisbane, Toowoomba and Townsville. He also worked in a solicitor's office in Melbourne and on his brother's sugar plantation in northern NSW, as well as being employed as a sugar boiler at the 'Pearlwell' plantation on the Brisbane River. He was a magistrate at the age of twenty-four, and from November 1878, at twenty-five, a Member of the Queensland Legislative Assembly for the seat of Rosewood.[11]

Meston, from an early age, considered himself an expert on Aboriginal customs and language. He claimed to have spent time living with Aborigines and professed

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[8] A Remarkable Personality, *Australian Country Life,* 15 August 1910, in Meston Papers at John Oxley Library, PRE/A692 1921/3354, Brisbane Qld.. There was already a family of Mestons in the New England area at Rocky River Station near Glen Innes (NSW). Robert, his wife Margaret and nine children had migrated on the *William Abrahams* into Melbourne in 1841, also from Aberdeen. It is entirely possible that the two families were related. Robert was a politician, being a member of the first NSW Government, and an emigration agent, and if this family background existed it may have influenced Archibald Meston to enter politics later. Pioneer Register of New England, Armidale Family History Society, Armidale, 2005, p. 210.

[9] Index to NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages, Pioneer Index, No 1872/10573.

[10] Index to Queensland Births, Deaths and Marriages, Nos. 1874/B 017961, 1877/2466, 1879/2754, 1881/5241, 1886/B035984, 1889/B044490. Harold later joined his father as Superintendent of the Mission on Fraser Island, at quite a young age, being only in his early twenties when he left the island, after the takeover by the ABM. Harold was also with his father in 1901 when he took a group of Bogimbah Aborigines to Sydney to take part in a Captain Cook re-enactment, and was the only one Meston trusted to deputise for him in his absences. From 1901 Harold was in charge of the removal of Aborigines from far and south-western Queensland, and, as Thorpe notes, he publicly 'appeared to share most of his father's views and values'. William Thorpe, 'Archibald Meston and Aboriginal Legislation in Colonial Queensland', *Historical Studies,* Vol. 21, No 82, April 1984 p. 55.

[11] A Remarkable Personality, *Australian Country Life,* 15th August 1910, PRE/A692 1921/3354 in Meston Papers at John Oxley Library, Brisbane Qld..

that he had learnt the Yoocum dialect of the Clarence River during his childhood days near Ulmarra. However, a renowned early pioneer and historian of Queensland, Tom Petrie, criticised Meston's claims to know anything but a smattering of the languages of Australia. 'One would not think a clever man as he is could be absolute master of a dialect at the age of 21 and not be able now to recall fifty words! In my own case I find that one does not easily forget what at one time formed part of one's whole life'.[12] Whatever the truth, Aborigines were obviously of great interest to him.

During much of the 1880s Meston resided at Kamerunga or 'Cambanora' near Cairns where he assumed the persona of a gentleman landholder.[13] During this period Meston continued to establish himself as a widely acknowledged authority on Aborigines. Taylor tells us he 'frequently journeyed into the bush on shooting and specimen collecting expeditions' and 'the innumerable fauna collected dead or alive at "Cambanora" imply the operation of a restless intelligence and of a drive to hoard and control'.[14] He was not wholly successful in his aim to be accepted as an expert, being once described as 'simply a freshwater selector, who by writing and talking about himself has led a few people in Brisbane to the erroneous belief that he is a large sugar planter'.[15] Nevertheless, in 1889 the Queensland Government appointed Meston to lead a scientific expedition to the Bellenden Ker Ranges in Northern Queensland (near the future site of the Yarrabah mission), which resulted in one of the first detailed accounts of the 'Bellenden Ker blacks'. There, Meston promulgated a view of Aborigines not necessarily found in his later pronouncements.[16] The 'Australian blacks', he said, like all 'savage and inferior races' are 'destined to disappear'. White colonists, he suggested, 'walk over the graves of a dead race' in much the same way that the 'blacks themselves trod over the rock sepulchres of the

[12] Tom Petrie, The Old Brisbane Blacks*, Brisbane Courier,* n. d. cutting in Meston Papers, OM 64/17, Box 8447, JOL.

[13] Cheryl Taylor, 'Romantic Pioneering in the Tropics: Archibald Meston's Home Life in Cairns, 1882-1888.' etropic: electronic journal of multidisciplinary studies in the tropics, Vol 2, No 1, 2003, p. 3. viewed at http://www.jcu.edu.au/etropic, 6 April 2008.

[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

[15] *Ibid.,* p. 3

[16] Archibald Meston, *Report of the Government Scientific Expedition to Bellenden Ker 1889*, OM 64-17, Box 2 No 7.

diprotodon'.[17] He compared the 'Bellenden-Ker blacks' to other Aborigines he had encountered elsewhere, fusing a Darwinian perspective with a certain romanticism that was evident in references to Greek mythology.

> Meston considers the words of Minerva to the Furies in his contemplation about the one-sided nature of historical reckoning. Stripped of sentimentalism and euphemism, Meston tallies up the ledger of European-Aboriginal contact, and finds that the 'white man has, beyond all question, been the most unscrupulous and deliberate murderer of the two[18]

Meston set himself up, in Taylor words, as a 'racial intermediary and interpreter of Aboriginal culture to the state's white population', in part because 'he mimicked professional practice by visiting and documenting remote tribes'.[19] His 'expert' reputation was recognised when he was quoted in an 1894 article in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*.[20] Years later, the *North Queensland Register* referred to him as 'the well-known ethnologist'.[21] Taylor's conclusion is that 'Meston's carefully constructed status as an expert and spokesman was exploitative, in that it brought him into prominence and provided him with an income'.[22] But, as William Thorpe notes, Meston's expertise did not extend to 'fundamental questions about the complex and well-documented spiritual relationship of Aborigines to land, an oversight which had profound implications for Aborigines when their future was being considered in the 1890s'.[23]

Meston, however, did not necessarily share the prevailing view that Aborigines were destined to die out through natural means. Rather, he thought the decrease in Aboriginal populations was a direct result of their contact with white people. He described the 'doomed race theory' as 'the shameful subterfuge in which strong races have endeavoured to take refuge from their crimes on the weak',[24] and

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[17] Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

[18] Meston, *Report* 1889, p. 9.

[19] Taylor, *op. cit*., pp. 121, 123.

[20] R. Etheridge Jnr. 'On the Modification of an Australian Aboriginal Weapon, Termed the Leonile, Bendi, or Buccan &c', *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 23, 1894, pp. 317-320.

[21] *North Queensland Register,* 5 Dec 1905, p. 21.

[22] Taylor, *op. cit*., p. 128.

[23] *Ibid.,* p. 57.

[24] Archibald Meston, *Queensland Aborigines, Proposed System for their Preservation and Protection,* Govt. Printer, Brisbane, 1895, p. 22

wished that theory be 'relegated to its deserved oblivion'.[25] He supported his view by citing Lord Glenelg, Secretary of State for the Colonies in the 1830s and committee member of the evangelical Church Missionary Society: 'Let us not cast upon Heaven a destruction which is our own and say the Aborigines are doomed by Divine Providence when the guilt lies with ourselves'.[26] Glenelg's sentiment was typical of the evangelical rhetoric of the 1830s, but in Queensland in the 1890s it was far less fashionable than the idea that the demise of the Aboriginal race was an evolutionary inevitability.

Meston was, like many Europeans of the nineteenth-century, inclined to 'romanticise' Aborigines as 'noble savages', particularly those 'wild' Aborigines who he felt remained 'uncontaminated' by European influence. However, this view was fading during the later part of the nineteenth century as most thinkers moved to the belief that Aborigines had to be civilised and the Mission Societies moved to Christianise them. Meston saw his task as ensuring that this race of people survived as 'pure and wild' Aborigines, and to do this he had to keep them completely segregated from white people.

Meston's intellectual and spiritual interests extended to the writings of the Romantic poets, including Byron and Shelley, whom he defended in a series of writings in the *Bulletin* during 1898. Byron, in particular, was a major influence on Meston's thinking, 'fundamental to his philosophy and to the self-image projected in his life and writings'.[27] His first daughter, Foressa Parisina, and eldest son, Harold, received their names from Byron's poetry, while Eveline Olympia, who died on New Year's Eve in 1890, also owed her name to the romance of poetry. Meston's passion for Romantic philosophy helped colour his views of the land, particularly in North Queensland, and also his impressions and interpretations of Aboriginal society.[28] He wrote descriptively of the beauty of the Barron River Falls and the 'Romance of

[25] Meston, *Ibid.,* p. 2

[26] Meston, *Ibid.*, p. 1 Glenelg had offended both Tories and Radicals by his irresolute Canadian policy, by his handling of the Cape Colony during the Kaffir wars, and by his refusal of constitutional reform in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land. See 'Glenelg, Baron (1778 - 1866)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 1, Melbourne University Press, 1966, p. 455.

[27] Meston, *Ibid.,* p. 3.

[28] Taylor, *op. cit*., pp. 6-7.

Australia' in a way not expected of a public servant and administrator. Even the titles of his articles frequently bore the words 'romance' or 'romantic',[29] for example, *The Bunya Feast, Mobilan's Former Glory, in the Wild Romantic Days*.[30] His own poetry was also published in the Grafton newspaper.[31]

Meston also pursued what Taylor describes as a 'turbulent career in Queensland politics as member for Rosewood.[32] He was a supporter of Samuel Griffith's government, which was the first to offer funding for Queensland Aboriginal missions in 1885, although stopping short of imposing direct governmental control. Meston's political career was chequered and largely unsuccessful, partly because he withdrew from critical contests, supported both sides of key political debates and embroiled himself in a libel suit. The 'prolonged frustration of Meston's political hopes', Taylor suggests, 'helps to explain his construction of himself as an expert on Aborigines'. He 'clearly decided to exploit opportunities for security and advancement in the field of race relations, which was rejected by most of his fellow politicians as taxing and second rate'.[33] This may be true, though there is little substantial evidence that his concern for Aborigines was motivated purely by political aspiration, while there is ample evidence that his interest in Aboriginal matters was long and zealous.

It is true, however, that in some of his early political dealings Meston seemed to pose questions about his true feelings about Aborigines. Several incidents that Taylor examines do nothing to build his credibility as a friend of Aborigines, although he painted himself with that brush, with much vigour, especially during his tenure as Southern Protector of Aborigines. Meston was taunted in the *Brisbane Courier* about an incident when a party of whites went from Cairns to Russell hunting for land to settle. The party apparently 'robbed the blacks without compunction and returned to Cairns loaded with dilly-bags etc stolen from the blacks', 'where one of a party

[29] Archibald Meston, *The Queenslander,* undated in OM64/17, box 3 of 3, JOL.

[30] Archibald Meston, *The Bunya Feast,* OM72-82/32. JOL.

[31] Archibald Meston, *Original Poetry,* Clarence and Richmond Examiner and New England Advertiser (Grafton, NSW : 1859-1889), Tuesday 26 April 1870, p. 4

[32] Taylor, *Prologue to Protectorship*, p. 478.

[33] *Ibid.,* p. 479.

went out after supper to get a pot-shot at a Myall, if he could find one' and 'advising Meston to be careful because 'the Government has seen fit to consider that killing a black is murder'.[34] The episodes became notorious. The Russell River correspondent to the *Chronicle* commented: 'I hear all the myalls have cleared off the river. Somehow they must have heard that Meston was coming':

> a report in the Post ... that Meston intended to collect 'skeletons and mummies' of Aborigines on the Russell River for the Sydney Museum suggests that he sanitised his collecting by claiming the status of an ethnologist … Russell River is a good place for finding skeletons and mummies of aboriginals. They used to die suddenly in that district.[35]

While Meston might have seemed an admirer of Aborigines, Taylor claims that his writings also reveal a 'deep-seated contempt for Indigenous people', evidenced in casual and sometimes jovial remarks about the behaviour of the 'mad naked savage', including stories of Aboriginal violence towards other Aborigines, and allegations of cannibalism.[36] More seriously, Thorpe claims that Meston may have actively participated in the shooting of Aborigines in 1871, while protecting his property from Aboriginal attacks.[37] Certainly, he had scant respect for settlers who 'foolishly' trusted Aborigines on the frontiers.[38] He once defended the actions of Sub-Inspector O'Connor of the Native Police whose detachment killed twenty-four Aborigines in a retaliatory attack. Meston remarked 'the massacre was our Native Police System carried out in its most legitimate and unobjectionable manner'.[39] Later, he denounced the Native Police in his report, which led to the 1897 *Act*. There is no surviving written evidence in which Meston admits to having treated Aborigines badly in any way at any time.

In describing Aborigines in one of his reports from Fraser Island, Meston held that an Aborigine who 'loses his original primitive virtues … becomes a sneaking

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[34] *Ibid.,* p. 480.

[35] *Ibid*.

[36] Cheryl Taylor, 'The Mighty Byronian Olympus; Queensland, the Romantic Sublime and Archibald Meston', *Queensland Review,* Vol. 11, No. 1, April 2004*,* p. 4.

[37] William Thorpe, 'Archibald Meston and Aboriginal Legislation in Colonial Queensland', *Historical Studies,* Vol. 21, No 82, April 1984, p. 62.

[38] Archibald Meston, *Report of the Government Scientific Exhibition to Bellenden Ker,* p. 5.

[39] Thorpe, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

hypocritical liar'.[40] Therefore, Meston advocated the preservation of those 'primitive values'. He wanted to preserve Aborigines from the corruption of white men, and the corruption of Christianity. Unfortunately, this inclined him to regard Aborigines as 'specimens', to be prevented from changing in response to new realities. In our age of environmentalism we are used to the notion of 'protected species' which we fight to preserve. 'Protected Aborigines' meant just that: a genus which had to be saved from the murderous impulses and practices of settler Australians. [41]

On the basis of his growing reputation as an expert on Aborigines, Meston was commissioned in 1894 to produce the report on the Aborigines. Horace Tozer, Queensland's colonial secretary in Sir Hugh Muir Nelson's government, instigated that report. Later, as Colonial Secretary, Tozer was responsible for the birth of the *Aboriginals Protection and the Sale of Opium Act* (1897). Tozer was noted for his 'magnificent pomposity' and his 'astonishingly large voice [which] gave vent to garbled sentences that were 'an outrage upon the English language'.[42] Tozer was also sympathetic to Queensland's Aboriginal population. According to a biographer, 'he wanted them to regain "freedom of life and action" and he viewed reservations as places of protection which Aborigines should enter by choice rather than coercion'.[43] However, Tozer's preference for voluntary residence on reserves had proved to be a failure in earlier missions. Meston, therefore, proposed compulsory removals.

Meston's subsequent report, a *Proposed System for their Preservation and Protection*, was submitted in 1895 as a 'carefully considered plan for the improvement and preserving from extinction of that unhappy race', couched in the language and principles of humanitarianism and honour, and prefaced with dire warnings about the consequences of failure (notably through reference to the fate of the Tasmanians).[44] His views ranged from a rebuttal of the doomed race theory, the

[40] Meston, *Report on Proposed Takeover of Fraser Island Mission*, 28 Nov 1899, 14985, p. 8.

[41] Colin Tatz, Genocide in Australia, *AIATSIS Research Discussion Papers N. 8*, p. 16.

[42] J. C. H. Gill, 'Tozer, Sir Horace (1844 - 1916)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 12, Melbourne University Press, 1990, p. 250.

[43] *Ibid.,* p. 250.

[44] Archibald Meston, Letter to Horace Tozer, QSA Col. Sec. Inwards Correspondence, A801, 95/15056, 17 December 1895, p. 1. The choice of the term 'extinction' reveals Meston's underlying beliefs.

futility of missionary societies (about whom he was almost vitriolic), and what Aboriginal lives should now consist of. He railed against 'Kanakas' and their perceived 'favoured' treatment, which he measured in terms of their access to money and services that were not extended to Aborigines.[45] But most importantly he marked a distinction between Aborigines in a 'pure state', such as those twelve thousand 'wild' Aborigines north of Cairns, whose 'distinctive individuality makes him one of the most interesting savages in the world', and the Aborigine who, having lost that individuality, is 'of no more value than a civilised kanaka, one of the most insipid mortals on the face of the earth'.[46] The report concluded with his version of how Aborigines could be preserved through the use of reserves, which might 'provide for hunting, fishing and agriculture. The hunter cannot be suddenly transformed into an industrious farmer. He can only be very gradually reconciled to any form of labour'.[47]

Meston's self-promotion as the Queensland expert on Aborigines came to fruition in the report. It was replete with his own considered views on Aboriginal culture, language and history, combining anthropological and ethnological knowledge with highly romanticised ideas about the purity of traditional Aboriginal society and its degeneration under the influence of colonial contact. His own athleticism and interests in physical activity and physique, which he saw as mirroring the Aborigines, as well as his strong beliefs about their need for both protection and preservation, came together in one watershed document. His report now reads like an idealistic recipe for Utopia, where Aborigines would live their traditional lives while being trained as trackers, where language, songs and weapons could be preserved, where women would be trained in housework and gardening, and the children would receive teaching in plain reading, writing and singing. The breadth of the system was all encompassing and overwhelming. When Meston arrived in Maryborough to lecture in April 1895, along with German Dr Von Martius, the

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Animals and lower order creatures died out or became 'extinct'. It was not a word used to describe any white race in the world and had particular connotations in this respect.

[45] *Ibid.,* p. 4.

[46] Meston, *Report on Proposed Takeover*, 28 Nov 1899, 14985.

[47] Meston, *Proposed System,* p. 25.

Maryborough Chronicle simply summed it up: 'there they would be settled under a system of social life carefully adapted to the inherent aboriginal character'.[48]

In his 'Proposal', Meston communicated his passionate beliefs regarding the treatment of Aborigines and what he thought they were owed by the white invaders. He wrote: 'the work of atonement for some of the dreadful past lies before us, the future honour of the nation dependent on how soon that work is undertaken, and how earnestly and effectively it is performed'.[49] In a letter to Tozer in December 1895, concerning a proposal for a reserve on Fraser Island, Meston both threatened and cajoled. He exhorted Tozer to 'act decisively' on this 'rare opportunity', for 'this question of the aboriginals [sic] is not to be postponed' and that 'if you listen to this man and that man, to endless conflicting theories … you will probably end up doing nothing'. Meston also told Tozer that 'tongue and pen will not be spared in the course on which I have started and from which I am not likely to be turned aside except by death'.[50] It was a stern warning, flavoured by own his political instincts and experience.

> 'If you decide to do nothing, it will come before the colony in a shape that will not be pleasant for Queenslanders to contemplate. If this parliament is indifferent the next will be appealed to in a very emphatic manner even if the whole question has to be laid bare from 1842 to 1895 in all its … hideousness. … It seems you are not quite clear concerning the public opinion of Queensland on the subject of the aboriginals, even that of your own constituency.' 'I hope to have a seat in the next Assembly and once there I shall doubtless compel attention to the state of our unfortunate race'.[51]

Clearly, Meston was determined to have Tozer approve his agenda. To further bolster his case he drew Tozer's attention to a clause in the instructions given to Sir Henry Norman, Governor of Queensland from 1888 to 1895, which required a governor to 'do their utmost to promote religion and education … and especially take care to protect them … and prevent and restrain all violence and injustice … attempted against them'.[52] Although Meston may have been less concerned with

[48] *Maryborough Chronicle*, 24 April 1895, p. 1.

[49] Meston, *Proposed System,* p. 4.

[50] Archibald Meston, Letter to Horace Tozer, QSA Col. Sec. Inwards Correspondence, A801, 95/15056, 17 December 1895, p. 1.

[51] *Ibid.,* p. 1(the underlining is Meston's).

[52] *Ibid.,* p. 2.

'promoting religion and education', the general tenor of the instructions given to governors provided forceful backing for the adoption of his own proposals.

In 1896, Meston was appointed as Royal Commissioner to investigate the slaughter of Aborigines in northern Queensland. His subsequent *Report on the Aborigines of North Queensland,* described the treatment of the Cape York people as 'a shame to our common humanity'; 'their manifest joy at assurances of safety and protection is pathetic beyond expression. God knows they were in need of it'. Aboriginal people met him 'like hunted wild beasts, having lived for years in a state of absolute terror'.[53] Meston claimed boat owners also 'enticed blacks on board, worked them like slaves, treated them like dogs and finished by leaving them marooned on a reef, or shot them, or landed them far from their own home on some strange part of the coast where they would be certain to be killed by the first tribe they met'.[54] In a report written in 1897, Meston derided Queenslanders who:

> Still regard the aboriginal as of no more value in the scale of being than a horse or a bullock, an inheritance from those who shot him like a kangaroo, abducted his women and sent his children away to distant friends with as much indifference as if they were pet squirrels and tame galahs...they were either not credited with any human instincts or those instincts were completely disregarded[55]

These experiences helped inform his idea that the salvation of Aborigines required strict and absolute isolation from predatory whites. This became the centrepiece of the proposals that underlined the *Aboriginals Protection Act*. Police Commissioner Parry-Okeden produced a somewhat dissenting report, characterising the Aborigines of the north as powerful, treacherous and cunning 'savages', promoting the extension of the Native Police, despite the widely recognised fact of the Force's cruelty. Meston, in contrast, recommended the abolition of Native Police.

Meston's Report on the Aborigines of North Queensland was part of an enormous body of writing, produced between 1870 and his death in 1924, which

[53] Archibald Meston, *Report to the Queensland Government on Fraser Island,* Government Printer, Brisbane, March 1896, no number, p. 8.

[54] Meston quoted in D Jones, *Trinity Phoenix: a history of Cairns and district,* Cairns and District Centenary Committee, 1976, p. 318.

[55] Archibald Meston, *Report*, 5 Jan 1897, Col Sec 143 QSA

included articles, poems, letters and stories. As Cheryl Taylor notes, 'this mass of material invites attention not only for its diverse discourse on indigenous people, but also because it helped to shape the idea of Queensland held by residents and outsiders'.[56]

Meston's view of Aborigines as a 'curiosity' to be preserved and paraded became most apparent later when he began exhibiting Aborigines in a type of travelling sideshow. In August 1897, while in charge of Bogimbah, Meston took Aborigines to Maryborough Showground, and to the Queensland International Exhibition in Brisbane, to 'perform'.[57] The 'exhibit' included the displaying of weapons, demonstrations of boomerang and spear throwing, and a football match.[58] Fancying himself as an athlete and showman, Meston also participated in these performances.[59] The *Maryborough Chronicle* thought him an arrogant and somewhat fanciful person, but noted his 'fascination' with his Aboriginal 'specimens'.[60] Probably the immediate benefit of these shows was to raise money to complement an inadequate budget. The larger agenda, though, was to demonstrate the noble, 'traditional' talents of Aboriginal people, and to advertise the worthiness and success of his plan to preserve them as a race. It had the desired effect on a reporter from the *Brisbane Courier*. 'Only five months ago these men were … in an utterly demoralised and hopeless condition, under the influence of drink and opium. What they are today the public may see by visiting the Exhibition.'[61] A few years later it was said that most of the 'warriors' were in the 'very full' cemetery on Fraser Island.

Also in 1897 Meston took two of his charges over to Maryborough to participate in an athletics carnival, proudly reporting that 'One won the first heat in the Maiden Plate, the other won his heat of the Prince of Wales Handicap, both

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[56] Cheryl Taylor, *The Mighty Byronian Olympus*, p. 1.

[57] *M.C.*, 31 July 1897, p. 2.

[58] Judith McKay, The Queensland International Exhibition of 1897: ''Dazzling Display' or 'a frost'', *Queensland Review*, Vol. 5, No. 1, May 1998, p. 81.

[59] McKay, *Ibid.,* 9 August 1897.

[60] *M.C.*, 31 July 1897, p. 2.

[61] *Brisbane Courier*, 3 August 1897, p. 7.

beating trained professional runners'.[62] The fact that they had beaten white professional runners gave Meston great satisfaction and renewed his belief in his 'noble' race. Meston was well aware of the good public relations evinced by these shows. Thorpe claims that Meston's odyssey around Australia, promoting his P.T. Barnum-like shows, 'developed into a quest for a mythical Aboriginal entity remote from British settlement and a corresponding search for exotic Aborigines who possessed some distinctive physical characteristics such as hairless bodies or who were practising cannibalism'.[63]

Kidd calls Archibald Meston 'an ex-parliamentarian, erstwhile insolvent and showman' and 'a boastful and erratic man'.[64] All these descriptions were undoubtedly true. Meston was a complex person who was attempting to deal with the most complex of problems, although he lacked no confidence in his eventual success. According to Jones, Meston 'took no risks in posterity overlooking him by asserting his own claims at every opportunity', and he had 'the audacious attitude that he knew better than anyone else about everything'.[65] It was this complexity and arrogance that became so fundamental to the plight of Aborigines in Queensland. During the time Meston presided over Aboriginal affairs in Queensland, Aboriginal lives, and especially those of the Butchulla people, were changed forever.

Background to the *Act*

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Queenslanders were very mindful of the past and present treatment of Aborigines. The Queensland government, certainly, was used to receiving reports on the appalling treatment and conditions under which Aborigines lived.[66] As Chesterman notes, 'the most

[62] Letter from Meston to Col Sec, 14602, 15 Nov 1897.

[63] *The Bulletin*, 18 Jan 1896, quoted in Thorpe, p. 57. Barnum was an American showman famous for promoting travelling shows around the United States, which featured unfortunate men and women whose physical defects entertained ordinary spectators.

[64] Rosalind Kidd, *The Way We Civilise,* University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2000, pp. 41-42.

[65] Jones, *op. cit.,* p. 153.

[66] Steve Mullins, 'Internal Colonialism, Communalism, Institutionalised Racism, Progressive Reform, Clash of Administrative Cultures, or all of the above: motivations for social control in Torres Strait, 1897-1911'*, Clionet*, (1321-5752), 1995, p. 1141.

noticeable difference between the situation in Queensland … was the far greater prevalence of violence, sexual assault and exploitation of labour suffered by Aboriginals'. The 'history of race relations in Queensland prior to the protection era renders this period as surely one of the most disgraceful in Australian history'.[67] Official attitudes in Queensland, however were harsh and resolute, as evidenced in the opinions of Queensland Senator Thomas Glassey, who observed that 'Australia has determined ''for all time'' that it would be preserved for the white race'. Similarly, Alfred Deakin famously declared that 'nothing had been so powerful in creating the momentum for Federation as the desire that Australians should be one people and remain one people 'without the admixture of other races'.[68]

The United States too had struggled with the question of how to deal with its Indigenous peoples. Meston studied the Amerindian model, with its systems of reserves, but rejected the model because of the implications of Indian land ownership, something that was anathema to White Australians. But Meston found some aspects of that model useful.[69] He was attracted to the policy of enforced removals, which in America saw 'the Indians … frequently escorted to the reserves by bodies of United States Cavalry or Infantry'. The American practice of issuing passports carried a strong appeal and he asserted that 'at Bogimbah Creek, no aboriginals can leave the island without a permit from the Superintendent'.[70] These aids to removals played to a dominant part of Meston's personality. He believed implicitly in strong control measures and these were certainly that. Gribble thought the treatment of American Indians, as they were known then, 'a crying disgrace' but thought they were different to the Aborigines, more aggressive and had far more initiative.[71] As Australia was influenced by American law, American Indians and their reservations, they were also influenced by the American Supreme Court ruling that

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[67] J. Chesterman and B. Galligan, *Citizens Without Rights: Aborigines and Australian Citizenship,* Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1997, pp. 32-33.

[68] Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 5, p. 7275, Vol. 4, p. 4804, also quoted in Henry Reynolds, *Nowhere People,* Viking, Camberwell, 2005*,* p. 86.

[69] Raymond Evans, '*A Permanent Precedent : Dispossession, Social Control and the Fraser Island Reserve and Mission 1897-1904',* St Lucia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Studies Unit, University of Queensland, Brisbane, 1991, p. 8.

[70] Raymond Evans, 'Steal away'*, Journal of Australian Studies 61,* June 1999, p. 83.

[71] Gribble, *The Problem of the Aborigines*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1932, p. 115.

'when land was reserved it was a 'right acknowledged' rather than a 'favour conferred''.[72]

In Queensland, a Southern Protector and a Northern Protector were appointed to manage Aboriginal populations. The prevailing thought was that missions and reserves, on land not needed for settlers, would provide shelter and food (and some semblance of traditional life) for the remaining Aborigines. Meston's plan was for three reserves in Southern Queensland –at Deebing Creek near Ipswich, at Durundur, and on Fraser Island. On all these reserves Aborigines were to be segregated from white people. The use of reserves and missions, as explained earlier in this thesis, had a long history in Australia. From the early nineteenth century the practice of segregation had been recognised as essential in protecting Aborigines, and the position has been plainly espoused by key administrators such as Governors Latrobe and Gipps.[73] The same ideas had underpinned the early missions in both NSW and Queensland. Meston had taken notice of these ideas and incorporated them in his plan. Evans agrees: 'In his single-minded commitment to this policy of removal, Meston was adamant that Aboriginal objections against being torn away from their homelands should not be allowed to interfere with his proposals'.[74] In his 1896 Report to Tozer, Meston argued 'the 'mind of Primitive Man' lacked any capacity for abstract perceptions and that Aborigines' 'thoughts on nearly all subjects outside of war and hunting were children's thoughts'. Aborigines were therefore 'not always the best judges of what is good for themselves' and, in their helpless, dissipated state, had to learn, in any case, to 'make the best of any alternative the strongest has to offer'.[75]

Ideas of control, segregation and punishment, however, came to play a much greater role in Queensland, where these coercive instruments of the state culminated in the restrictive and oppressive 'Protection Act'. There were thirty-one sections of the Act, each one proving instrumental in the assertion of absolute

[72] Henry Reynolds, *The Law of the Land,* Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1992, p. 140. Reynolds gives a legal definition of the term 'reserve': 'In law, 'reservation' means to retain for oneself some right or interest in property which is being conveyed to another'.

[73] Latrobe to Colonial Secretary, 5 Jan 1842 quoted in Meston, *Proposed System*, p. 19.

[74] Evans, '*Steal Away',* p. 3.

[75] Meston to Tozer, Report on Aborigines, 15 June 1898.

control over Aboriginal lives.[76] Section 9 of the *Act*, for example, allowed administrators to forcibly remove any Aborigine to a reserve (although exemptions were allowed in the case of Aborigines who were lawfully employed).[77]

Henry Reynolds and Dawn May argue that 'the scope for regulation contained in the Act was such that decision making powers effectively passed from politicians to public servants'. Thus, as Rowley claims, 'its implementation would ultimately reflect the attitudes of those empowered to enforce it'. Indeed, 'such was the breadth of discretion afforded to the Superintendents over their reserves and the protectors over their districts, that the *Act* provided very little restraint on their exercise of power'.[78] Section 10 of the *Act* gave extraordinary powers to the Minister and Protectors. Meston, as Southern Protector of Aborigines, was able to muster whoever was considered to be an Aborigine from any place at any time, to tear them from their extended families, to remove them to places far away from their homes, and then to move them again if he thought it required or fitting. To be fair, Meston, in his Report on his Proposed System had not recommended such a hard line, conceding for example that 'old men and women in certain localities may prefer to live the rest of their lives where they are', and that in such cases Aborigines could be 'supplied with food under the direction of some local and reliable friend of the blacks'.[79] The 1897 *Act*, however, seems to have considered such arrangements problematic and unworkable, and no such concessions were worked into the legislation.

The 1897 '*Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*' was the harshest of all the States' Acts concerning Aborigines, keeping Aborigines in Queensland in a state of dependency until at least the 1970s.[80] As Chesterman and Galligan state, 'Queensland has been the most recalcitrant State in conferring

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[76] Chesterman, o*p. cit*., p. 41.

[77] *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*, Section 9.

[78] Henry Reynolds and Dawn May, *Contested Ground,* Ann McGrath (Ed), Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1999, May, p. 182; C.D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society,* Penguin Books, Ringwood, Vic. 1974, p. 184.

[79] Meston, *Proposed System*, p. 27.

[80] Frank Engel in P. O'Shane, *The Queensland Acts ~Australia's Apartheid Laws?,* Uniting Church World Mission Justice Fund and the Australian Council of Churches as a study document, 1979, preface.

citizenship rights upon Aborigines'.[81] Queensland's reputation in this regard is an old one. In 1883, the London Missionary Society's Reverend W. G. Lawes commented, in discussing the annexation of Papua New Guinea, that 'Nowhere else in the world', he wrote, 'had Aborigines been so basely and cruelly treated as in Queensland – the half had never been told- and were the natives of New Guinea to be handed over to Queensland's tender mercies?'.[82]

Hope Neill claims the policy of protection enshrined in the Act had 'two bases: one humanitarian, and the other the expectation that the race was going to become extinct'.[83] In this respect the *Act* can be seen as an extension of the policy of 'smoothing the dying pillow'. Enacted in the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, it was seen as a 'final gift to the Aboriginal people', a more humane means of overseeing their demise than that effected by the violence of settlers and Native Police.[84] With tragic irony, it was articulated in Parliament as a fitting compensation for the 'duty owing by white races to the black races'.[85]

Reserve at Quarantine Station on Fraser Island (Balarrgan)

After his appointment as Royal Commissioner to investigate the slaughter of Aborigines in Queensland, Meston was aggressively confident about the prospects for his proposed reserve on Fraser Island. Its success, if managed properly, was 'a certainty'.[86] However, not everyone shared this optimism. The *Brisbane Telegraph* bemoaned the experiment:

> It is stated that Mr A Meston is making arrangements for the transfer of all aboriginals in the Wide Bay district to Fraser Island, where they will take up their residence 'free from the contaminating influence of the white man'. Poor blacks; they seem to be at the command of any experimentalist. Why should they not be allowed to see what the white man is doing with the mainland – their mainland. Who imagines for a moment that the Wide Bay blacks will go to Fraser Island voluntarily, or stay there if they do go. And what justification is there

[81] Chesterman, o*p. cit.*, p. 31.

[82] W. G. Lawes to J.O. Whitehouse, 7 April 1883, PL, quoted in David Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission,* University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1977, p. 15

[83] Hope Neill, in Taylor. S. and Henry. M (Eds.), *Battlers and Blue Stockings: women's place in Australian Education*, Aust. College of Education, Deakin ACT, 1989, p. 66.

[84] Evans, *A Permanent Precedent,* p. 2.

[85] *Ibid.,* p. 2.

[86] *Ibid.,* p. 1.

> for compulsory deportation? It is to be hoped that the 'arrangements' will never be completed for this exile scheme. [87]

This passage illuminates three core themes in Aboriginal/European relations; the contaminating influence of whites, the propensity over time to experiment with differing plans for Aborigines, and the compulsory removal of Aborigines from the land that has been stolen from them. All these themes were to be borne out in the experiences of the Butchulla.

The troubled relationship between the white population and the Butchulla around Maryborough during the latter half of the nineteenth century has been discussed earlier. However noxious the relationship was, there was some support for Meston's plan to establish a reserve on Fraser Island, particularly as it seemed to involve the removal of Aborigines from the district. As the *Maryborough Chronicle* reported:

> Mr A Meston, whose special mission is to champion the cause of the native blacks and of Queensland and to secure for them better treatment and better living than they have had in the past arrived in Maryborough yesterday to further promote his scheme of gathering together the remnants of the race in this district and settling them under a white caretaker on a suitable site on Frazer's Island. According to all accounts it will be a mercy to the poor wretches, and a protection from some contemptible whites, to remove them as quickly as possible from their haunts about town. Their present condition is a reproach to the manhood and a menace to the health of the white community[88]

The Fraser Island reserve was gazetted on 3 July 1897, covering about 160 acres beginning just north of White Cliffs.[89] Initially, Meston sent '51 blacks' to the island, and over the next few years, at least another 165 were sent there from various parts of Queensland.[90] The new home for the remnants of the Butchulla was set up at the old Quarantine Station that had been used by thousands of immigrants entering Maryborough from 1860 to the early 1890s. It was in great disrepair and Meston feared the danger of bushfires destroying the buildings. Aborigines were rounded up

[87] *M.C.*, 24 February 1897, p. 2.

[88] *M.C.*, 12 February 1897, p. 2.

[89] *Queensland Government Gazette*, 3 July 1897, p. 2.

[90] Archibald Meston, Report to Home Secretary, 18 October 1902, Col. Sec. 483A, No 1175, p. 1.

and taken there on the steamer *Llewellyn* on 23 February 1897.[91] Before their leaving Maryborough, itself something of an 'event', they had been fitted out with 'brand new trousers, shirts, dresses &c and when these were donned, the wearers presented quite smart appearance'.[92] This was the first concession in Meston's plan to have the Aborigines lead a traditional life.

The residents were accommodated in the three houses that had formed part of the old Quarantine Station. They received tea, sugar, flour, salt beef and tobacco, and 'hooks and lines to catch whiting which are in great abundance'. They also received 'a whale boat and fishing net from Brisbane through the courtesy of Captain Almond'.[93] It can certainly be claimed that Meston's efforts were well intentioned and represented a positive initiative in the protection of Aborigines. Reports about Meston in the local newspaper declared 'his arrival was greeted by lusty cheers from the blacks and their excitement increased when a ton of flour and a quantity of tobacco were also brought ashore. Mr Meston's settlement appears to be making excellent progress, and the dusky recruits are taking well to their new mode of living'.[94]

Meston soon had the reserve under a strict regimen. One of his preoccupations, reflecting his beliefs about their intrinsic worth as a noble race, was with the physical fitness of the Aborigines and he reported 'the muscles of the men have hardened, their flesh is restored and their manhood and self respect returned'.[95] Through a combination of traditional and European sports (including rugby) Meston sought to improve health and fitness. He had removed them from access to opium dross and alcohol, previously easily obtained in Maryborough, and Aborigines were now receiving rations on a regular basis to supplement what remained of their traditional diet. Meston took immediate steps to free them from

[91] Meston, Report on the Aboriginal Station recently formed on Fraser Island, Col. Sec. Correspondence. 31 March 1897, No 4153, p. 1.

[92] *M.C.,* 25 February 1897, p. 2.

[93] Meston, *op. cit.,* p. 2.

[94] M.C., *op. cit.,* p. 3.

[95] Meston, *op. cit.,* p. 2.

the effects of the opium they had been consuming around Maryborough, giving them:

> once daily a mixture of strong rum, honey and mother tincture of aconite. They bathed every day in salt water and scoured the skin with sand. They washed with soap and fresh water every third day. Twice weekly they received a dose of magnesia and five drops mother tincture of nux vomica. The oldest men and women received porridge and sugar when the stomach was unable to bear meat or new bread'.[96]

Meston reported that while the younger ones recovered quickly, the old men suffered terrible withdrawals, but Meston saw this as necessary to restoring them to their previous strong, manly and athletic condition.

Meston did not want the Aborigines allowed near civilisation where their purity would be threatened by proximity to a European way of life. After one of his 'Wild Australia' shows at Bondi in Sydney he attracted some criticism which he rebutted with the comment: 'they, so far, have not been contaminated by civilisation … absolutely free from vices … I would not have taken civilised blacks in any circumstances whatever'.[97] The idea of 'uncontaminated' Aborigines as pure and noble proved to be an important tenet of Meston's beliefs, informing his push to establish isolated missions such as at Bogimbah on Fraser Island, and providing part of the rationale for the 1897 *Act*. As the title of Faith Walker's biography of Meston notes, he was in fact partially responsible for reinventing the concept of the 'noble savage' in an age where the view had largely lost its influence.[98] He owned some particular art works, portraits of Aborigines in Queensland, by the nineteenth century painter Oscar Fristrom. Fristrom and other contemporary painters used a technique which allowed for a slow fading out effect, along the lines of literary techniques at the time, which depicted the Aborigines as 'fading', 'receding', 'decaying' and 'withering'.[99] The paintings of Aborigines now married with the contemporary descriptions of them as a 'fading, dying race'.

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[96] *Ibid.,* p. 3.

[97] Archibald Meston, *Daily Telegraph Sydney* 6 Jan 1901*,* Meston papers OM 64-17-1/5 JOL.

[98] Walker, *Reinvention of the 'Noble Savage'*, pp. 130-135.

[99] Margaret Maynard, 'Projections of Melancholy', in Ian Donaldson and Tamsin Donaldson (eds), *Seeing the First Australians,* George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1985, pp. 100-106.

Meston's views on this are also reflected in the report he wrote after establishing the reserve on Fraser Island. He reported to W.H. Ryder, the Under Secretary in the Home Secretary's Office: 'the survivors were about as unpromising a lot as ever philanthropy started to regenerate. The men had lost their manhood and self-respect, were depraved slaves of opium, listless and aimless and spiritless living under some horrid enchantment, half starved, clothed in rags, careless of life or death'. Ever confident of his own abilities, Meston reported that 'the result, even at the end of the first month under the new conditions, has exceeded my most sanguine expectations'.[100] There was no opium, no alcohol, no begging, and there were regular rations. He reported: 'In one month the whole of these men and women and children had recovered their health, the effects of the opium had worn off, and their vitality and energy were again restored in a most surprising manner'.[101] Thus he was, in his own mind, restoring Aborigines to an ideal situation, something he believed could not have been accomplished by missionaries and other less-enlightened administrators. With typical confidence Meston claimed that he had at last solved 'that aboriginal problem which has baffled Australian Governments and private philanthropy from the earliest period to the present time'.[102]

As described above, Meston seemed to have a 'romantic' vision of traditional Aboriginal life. In contrast, he also declared that 'they have felled, stumped and burned off 5 acres of ground, made a fine open ground for football, cricket, boomerang practice and athletic sports'.[103] These were activities Meston pushed, in order to keep them athletic, but he was proud to report that this was supplemented by traditional activities such as the gathering of honey. 'Others go out to the scrub and camp for a few days to make the old native weapons, spears, shields, nullas, beeroons and boomerangs'.[104] These were suitable and harmless traditional activities – ones that did not, as he put it in his *Proposed System,* 'interfere with the

[100] Meston to Ryder, *Report on Aboriginal Station Recently Formed*, 31 March 1897, No. 4153, pp. 1-2.
[101] *Ibid.,* p. 2.
[102] *Ibid.,* p. 5.
[103] *Ibid.,* p. 3.
[104] Meston to Col. Sec, 1 May 1897, 5730

harmonious management of the community'.[105] Meston was well satisfied, claiming that the Aborigines were 'perfectly happy, healthy and contented and look back on their past life with horror'.[106] Meston perhaps misunderstood the situation when he reported 'they are quite satisfied with their existence and not a soul has expressed the slightest wish to return to the mainland', because they were, for the most part, living on their home on Fraser Island and only went to the mainland for specific foods and at specific times. By the time of his next report in July 1897 Meston was reporting the removal of women from Brisbane to Fraser Island. The new arrivals were welcomed with a corroboree, and Meston expected that the women would marry the local men and 'settle quietly down to a new and more creditable existence'.[107] In Meston's next report, in August, he enlightened the Under-Secretary with the fact that they had indeed chosen partners.

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However optimistic and flattering the press reports might have been initially, Archibald Meston misunderstood or deliberately disregarded the feelings of the residents of Maryborough. Meston quickly ran into difficulties with his relationship with the residents of Maryborough. He clashed with the locals over an incident in which two sailors arrived at White Cliffs in a boat called the *Rover*, claiming to want fresh water. This threatened Meston's policy of segregation and caused him to take a strong stand. In part, he was also defending his son Harold, a natural reaction for a father who clearly trusted his son enough to leave him in charge at Bogimbah. Meston had persuaded the Queensland Government to allow him to appoint Harold as Superintendent of Bogimbah. This was a logical appointment considering that Archibald Meston also had the position of Southern Protector of Aborigines as well as being in charge of Bogimbah. Contrary to the claim by Ros Kidd that it was

[105] Meston, *Proposed System,* p. 26.
[106] *Ibid.,* p. 3.
[107] *Ibid.,* p. 4.

Archibald Meston himself who was summonsed for assault,[108] it was actually Meston's son Harold who was charged by Arthur Henry White, with aiding and abetting one of the Aborigines who had attacked White. [109] White was one of the sailors who also charged Paddy Brown,[110] the Aborigine who had inflicted some serious bruises on White.[111] In 1880 Paddy Brown had been one of five Aboriginal trackers taken to Victoria from Maryborough to help the Victorian police in various searches, returning some years later after his 'tour of duty'.[112] This experience gave Meston the confidence to install him as one who could ably assist his son Harold to keep order on the island. After two reports to the Home Secretary, both published in the *Maryborough Chronicle*,[113] a long court case followed. The case was protracted, partly because Archibald Meston offended the court by disobeying a summons to bring Aboriginal witnesses to the Court.[114] The outcome of the cases was that a fine was imposed on Paddy Brown and the case against Harold Meston was settled out of court.[115]

Meston now had to cope with public meetings concerning the 'White Cliffs Affair'.[116] Well-respected politician, Nicholas Tooth, 'wished it to be understood that he was in thorough sympathy with the object of removing the mission from White Cliffs to Bogimbah', but stayed away from the meeting as 'he might be called upon to take some action in the House'.[117] A Mr Mitchell, who seconded the motion, 'was desirous that the blacks should be removed, and that they, as Citizens, should retain that pleasure resort for themselves'.[118] The residents of Maryborough presented several petitions, one with 700 names,[119] to the Home Secretary's Office calling for

[108] Kidd, O*p. Cit.*, p. 54.

[109] *M. C.* 6 May 1897, p. 2.

[110] *M. C.* 27 April 1897, p. 3.

[111] *M. C.* 2 April 1897, p. 2.

[112] Gary Presland, *For God's Sake Send The Trackers,* Victoria Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 50

[113] *M. C.* 27 April 1897, p. 2; *M. C.* 6 May 1897, p. 2.

[114] *M. C.* 28 April 1897, p. 3.

[115] *M. C.* 5 May 1897, p. 4.

[116] *M. C.* 13 May 1897, p. 2.

[117] *M. C.* 13 May 1897, p. 2.

[118] *M. C.* 13 May 1897, p. 2.

[119] Petition of Residents, Maryborough to Col Sec. 19 April 1897, No. 12487; N Tooth to Home Secretary, Col. Sec. 483A, No. 5595, 26 April 1897.

the removal of the mission to 'some more remote spot'.[120] The residents of Maryborough had not changed their views since the Aborigines had been banished to Fraser Island. Now they wanted them even further away.

It seems that Meston's work earned at least limited appreciation somewhere in Maryborough. One interesting sidelight to this petition was that George Stupart, a prominent Maryborough businessman and signatory to the petition, wrote again to the Home Secretary a few days later, expressing his concern that if there were no place else for 'the blacks' to go, he would never have supported the petition. He thought 'the work Mr Meston had done was too good to be undone without very careful consideration' and 'you have helped to remove a stain on the good name of the Colony and I sincerely trust that nothing will be done to jeopardise the Continuance of the Camp'.[121] (In fact George Stupart had introduced Meston to the residents of Maryborough when he gave a lecture in May 1895 giving Mr Meston 'a flattering introduction referring to his literary abilities, his wide experience of colonial life and his efforts on behalf of the aboriginals of the country'.)[122] The Home Secretary then visited the Reserve in person which led to its being relocated about eight miles to the north, leaving the original site to the residents of Maryborough as a picnic and 'resort' site.[123] It seemed that the residents of Maryborough, while mindful that 'it was absolutely necessary that a reserve be set apart for the blacks, as the treatment they had received in the past from the whites was not at all creditable', were working on the much used premise of 'not in my backyard'.[124]

However, by now the Home Secretary's support for Meston had obviously evaporated, for he denied ever having given Meston absolute control, stating that it was merely a temporary arrangement until a more permanent solution to the Aboriginal problem could be devised.[125] In fact Tozer ducked and weaved somewhat, as he asked the Lands Department to 'withdraw his previous request for a reserve

[120] *M. C.* 6 May 1897, p. 3.
[121] Stupart to Tozer, Col. Sec. Inwards Correspondence, No. 3808, 29 April 1897.
[122] *M.C.* 1 May 1895, p. 2.
[123] *M.C.*, 19 May 1897, p. 3.
[124] *M.C.,* 13 May 1897, p. 2.
[125] *M.C.,* 13 May 1897, p. 2.

for Aboriginals at the White Cliffs' and requested a reserve of 1280 acres at Bogimbah Creek or Mitchell's Creek, near the Kauri Pine Nursery, saying it was 'never his intention to abandon the reserve for quarantine purposes and that this application need not stop the interim use for recreation'. He justified this on the grounds that there might be an outbreak of cholera, smallpox or other disease on a steamer, even though the time for significant immigration into Maryborough had passed and only a handful of migrants coming through the Port of Maryborough could conceivably have any use of the Quarantine Station. It was, in short, a political device to save face. However, at the same time, Tozer criticised the inhabitants of Maryborough who 'do not deserve a recreation reserve because the caretakers made no provision for looking after the valuable buildings, one of which has in consequence been already destroyed by fire'.[126] Even the local paper could not understand this back flip. 'He appears to have been misled by his instructions from headquarters and there should be a proper proclamation of powers, rights, and regulations in connection with the establishment'.[127]

Nevertheless, the decision pleased the Maryborough locals, because they had stated previously that: 'Mr Meston's solicitude for the blacks must not involve a sacrifice of the whites'.[128] In typical fashion, Meston advised the Government that 'an advertisement be sent to each of the Maryborough papers announcing that the Aboriginal Reserve has now been gazetted, and no one is allowed to enter the settlement without authority from the Home Secretary's Office, and that white fishermen are prohibited from fishing on the four mile frontage'. With Meston's usual understatement and self-confidence he added: 'This will save any further trouble'.[129] In this he was mistaken.

[126] Horace Tozer, Letter Lands Department, Col. Sec. No. 483A, No. 7435, 20 May 1897.

[127] *M.C.*, 6 May 1897, p. 3.

[128] *M.C.*, 4 March 1897, p. 2.

[129] Meston, Report to the Under Secretary, 24 Dec 1897, Col. Sec. 483A, No. 10739 p. 2.

Second Reserve at Forestry Site – Bogimbah

By 17 September 1897 timber from the old Quarantine Station had been 'worked into houses' at the new site. Meston reported that he had taken seventy-six Aborigines there and they 'were all in excellent health and quite contented'.[130] Meston was, by then, already in the eye of a storm about his insistence on removing the Mitchell family from the Forestry.[131] The Mitchell family had been in charge of the kauri pine nursery on the island and had occupied the buildings now needed for the reserve. Meston now wanted them gone. He demonstrated his dislike of Maryborough residents, writing in his own defence to the Home Secretary which correspondence was then obtained by the *Maryborough Chronicle*:

> This proposal has a characteristic Maryborough flavour. Messrs. Annear and Bartholomew omit to mention that the person they propose to place in charge of the station is a deformed dwarf, of whom the aborigines have a special horror and who possesses not one necessary qualification for the position. Such an appointment would be an insanity. It is also well to mention that the Mitchell family have been receiving public money for 15 or 16 years, and that all the work they have done in that period could be done, and done much better, by the aboriginals in three months. The appeal on behalf of Mitchell is made on purely sentimental and other extraneous grounds that very little enquiry would show to be entirely unwarrantable.[132]

In a bitter swipe at Maryborough residents, who he felt had frustrated his endeavours all through 1897, he concluded: 'Maryborough has already given infinitely more trouble than is likely to be met with in all the rest of Queensland'. Meston's version was, of course, disputed. Meston was accused of 'doing a severe injustice to the Mitchell family now being homeless, father and son having served the Forestry for sixteen years'. The ill feeling from the Maryborough residents continued with Meston being accused of displaying a 'cloven hoof', a 'lack of manly spirit', 'venom against Maryborough so palpable' and of looking after his 'precious' blacks.[133] It is quite probable that what Meston really wanted was the £65 vote

[130] Meston to Ryder, 17 Sept 1897, p. 1.

[131] *M.C.*, 14 September 1897, p. 2.

[132] *Ibid*.

[133] *Ibid.*

allocated to the Mitchell family, so that it could be put to the running costs of the Mission. Meston always believed that the work on reserves and missions could be done more efficiently at lower cost by governments, but every pound did count.[134]

Only a few months passed before Meston again had to defend his charges over incidents that occurred during a visit to the Island by Lord and Lady Brassey, who arrived for what was planned to be the warm welcoming glow of bonfires, corroborees, war dances, songs, tumbling and other feats – another of Meston's 'exhibitions'. Lord Brassey was, at that time, Governor of Victoria and was visiting Queensland.[135] Meston had brought him and his wife to Fraser Island to be entertained by Aborigines. Given his propensity for showmanship it is quite likely that Meston was hoping his 'successes' on Fraser Island would be noted and reports taken interstate. Instead, the visitors found 'a malevolent darkness' and the realisation that the Aboriginal welcoming party had gained access 'to the superintendent's house and two gallons of whisky. Almost all the party were uproariously drunk'.[136] The Aborigines claimed they had permission to enter the house.

Nevertheless, Meston continued to claim that Bogimbah was a success:

> this station is in a highly satisfactory condition, all in perfect health, the blacks working cheerfully, and living on the most amicable terms with each other. This first experiment of isolation on reserves has fulfilled the most sanguine expectations. The whole of the people at the settlement are in the best of health and are busy clearing and burning off and erecting camps on their new home[137]

However, the fact is that residents on the island, both black and white, came close to starvation, such that many resorted to eating clay. In a column in *The Church Chronicle*, Reverend Frodsham curiously noted that 'this clay eating does not disagree with the natives of Fraser Island, but it has a disastrous effect on the mainland blacks'.[138] It is not certain here whether he was talking about Butchulla

[134] *Brisbane Courier,* 12 June 1908, p. 19.

[135] B. R. Penny, 'Brassey, Thomas (1836 - 1918)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 7, Melbourne University Press, 1979, pp 391-392.

[136] *M.C.*, 6 October 1897, p. 2.

[137] Meston, Report to Under Secretary, 24 December 1897, Col. Sec. 483A.

[138] *The Church Chronicle,* 1 December 1899, p. 73.

'mainland blacks' or those from other areas removed to Fraser Island, but he also noticed on this visit that 'the rations supplied by Government are also said to be insufficient for the maintenance of mothers suckling children'. He reported also seeing 'some skin disease among the children and I understand that the filarial bearing mosquito has been at work with disastrous results'.[139]

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Meston persuaded himself that only he knew the key to the salvation of Aborigines. In contrast to contemporary thinking, influenced at that time by Darwinism, he did not think it inevitable that they would die out. He believed that, under his system at least, Aborigines might be sustained in a manner that ensured their long-term survival. He therefore believed that attending to the physical needs of the Aborigines was, in the first instance, far more important than administering to their spiritual needs. Not that Meston gave much credit to the nature and complexity of Aboriginal spiritual life. In his *Geographic History of Queensland*, he wrote 'No Australian blacks had any fixed consistent belief which could possibly be regarded as religion.[140] The Aborigine, in his view, 'does not understand any form of modern religion and he can never believe what is beyond his limited untrained mental intellectuality'.[141] If anything, this made the attempt to Christianise them even more implausible, for 'The simplest theorems in every day Christianity are to him a more hopeless conundrum than the subtle theological disquisitions of the fourth century Aryan Controversy would be to an ordinary Brisbane citizen of today'.[142] It was with some satisfaction that he reported how Aborigines were prone to note the hypocrisy of white men whom they knew to be especially bad and women they knew to be impure, going regularly to church.[143] Meston's perception of their actions was

[139] *Ibid.,* p. 73.

[140] Meston, *Geographic History of Queensland,* Government Printer, Brisbane, 1895, pp. 80-81.

[141] *Ibid.,* p. 6.

[142] Meston to Colonial Secretary, 25 Nov 1899, 14985, p. 6.

[143] *Report on Fraser Island*, March 1896, QSA 483A, no number, p. 9.

perhaps influenced by his aversion to the Christianisation of Aborigines and his insistence on returning them to their previous glory. Thus while Aborigines were apparently not intelligent enough to embrace Christianity, they were intelligent enough to appreciate the shortcoming of those who professed to teach and live by Christian principles. After Reverend Frodsham visited the island and baptised eighteen children', Meston was delighted to report that the Aboriginal men 'were baptising each other and burlesquing the whole ceremony'.[144]

Meston was enraged that 'much money is collected to spend in far-off countries where distance gives enchantment'. He criticised those 'well-meaning people [who] prompted by delusions acting on rudimentary intellects go off to upset the five thousand years old religious and social customs of China and India'.[145] He enunciated a pragmatic view on the subject. 'The clergymen and the professedly pious people of Maryborough on their way every Sunday to church passed Aboriginal men women and children half starved, clothed in rags, emaciated for want of food, stupefied by opium, wandering the streets begging for food or a few pence to buy it with'.[146] To Meston this represented supreme hypocrisy on the part of white Christians - to preach help to fellow man and ignore the problems on their own doorstep. Realising that not all those who espoused religion lived a Christian life, he took the high moral ground and declared: 'And in teaching Christianity to a wild race it would be well to remember what proportion of men worthy to be called Christians are to be found even among professedly Christian nations'.[147]

Meston's *Proposed System* had been highly critical of missionary endeavours, referring disparagingly to early-colonial missions such as those at Lake Macquarie (NSW) and Moreton Bay. 'In all cases the attempt was a disheartening failure. It could hardly have been anything else. … a race who had no form of worship, no idols and no gods could hardly be expected to at once comprehend a religion whose 'theological niceties and doctrines had divided some of the greatest thinkers of the

[144] *Ibid.,* p. 10.
[145] *Ibid.,* p. 1.
[146] *Ibid.,* p. 3.
[147] *Ibid.,* p. 24.

human race'.[148] He continued to criticise the selection of missionaries who were not usually drawn from religious orders but, as Woolmington puts it, 'humble artisans'[149] with the words:

> Nearly the whole of the early missionaries were men fresh from the old countries with only their sincerity and good intentions as a recommendation. They started with the fixed delusive idea that the race was to be saved by religion only, and that the Aborigines mind was a soil in which the seeds of religious dogmas could be sown, broadcast and bear much fruit. [150]

A further understanding of Meston's beliefs about Aborigines can be gained from his next statement:

> They overlooked the fact that the Australian native is primitive man of the Stone Age, separated from the men who came to instruct him by many thousands of years of cumulative civilisation. That the pupil was the base, and the teacher the pyramid that has been building since savage man made the first stone age implement.[151]

From all this, we can infer that Meston allowed for the possibility of conversion but certainly not in the time frame he had available to him.

Meston strongly believed the Aborigines remaining in Queensland needed to be taught basic skills to make reserves self-supporting, and that this was more important than religious indoctrination. Christianity was not an essential part of protecting the Aborigines, first because it had not served them successfully in the past, and second because it was not always successful in creating moral and peaceable citizens even among civilised nations. Religion, he said, 'has divided the most highly civilised and intellectual races at the present time after our mental faculties have been improved and our knowledge expanded by the accumulated civilisation of thousands of years'.[152] This seems to place Meston firmly in the camp of those who thought civilisation should precede Christianisation in the uplifting of Aborigines. Either way, both objectives would require time and patience, and in the

[148] Meston, *Proposed System,* p. 24.

[149] J. Woolmington, 'Humble artisans' and 'untutored savages', *Journal of Australian Studies,* Vol.16, May 1985.

[150] Meston, *op. cit.,* p. 24.

[151] Meston, *op. cit.,* p. 24.

[152] Meston to Home Secretary, 25 Nov 1899, 14985, p. 6.

short term the goal was to simply ensure their survival. Meston considered that what Aborigines really needed was food: 'the first condition is to feed the aboriginals. The food supply was the primary and principal problem with all Australian races. Until an aboriginal is well fed he is not in a condition for improvement of any kind. This applies equally to civilised men'.[153]

He certainly did not believe in Christianising them either, so this probably placed him in a camp of his own - not an unusual position for Meston.

In his *Proposed System* Meston wrote:

> …all the missions so far among adult blacks have ensured no permanent results. Noble work has been done among the children, for there the missionaries had a clear field and virgin soil. In that case they moved the young savage forward one stage of civilisation. The next generation would move forward another stage and the third and fourth would settle in the agricultural stage, useful to themselves and mankind.

Tindale used much the same words about generational progress in 1940:

> Two successive crossings with 'white' blood , the second accompanied by reasonable living conditions and normal education, enables the grandchild of a full-blooded Aboriginal woman to take a place in the general community. Where a third crossing with white occurs the children are almost invariably completely merged into the general population.[154]

Meston was also supported by William Westgarth who had stated:

> Up to that time, and for some time longer, the religious conversion of these natives was regarded as hopeless, so deeply 'bred in blood and bone' was aboriginal character. Consequently all the earlier missions were abandoned in utter despair, with only one exception, that of the Moravians, which, in faith and duty continuing the work, was at length rewarded with success. Naturally some few, especially amongst the young were less severely 'native' than the rest, and these were more or less gained. But the change came with the next generation, 'born in the purple, of surrounding colonial life. The blood and bone had been partially neutralised, and this is still more the result of yet another generation that has followed, so that, in spite of the black skin, the missionary now deals with natures much more amenable to his teachings. [155]

[153] Meston, *Proposed System,* p. 27.

[154] Norman Tindale, 'Survey of the Half-Caste Problem in South Australia'*, Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia; South Australian Branch,* Vol. 42, 1940-1941, p. 160.

[155] William Westgarth, *The Colony of Victoria,* London, 1864, p. 233.

While Meston could envisage a long-term civilisation of the Aborigines he was derisive in his opinion of the immediate past missions, which he had obviously studied:

> Religious instruction to the adult blacks on Fraser's Island would have much the same effect as it ever had on others in all parts of Australia from Victoria to the Daly River, since the dawn of settlement. It would only be attempted by people absolutely ignorant of aboriginal character and the lessons taught by a hundred years of earnest effort by good and sincere men who spent their lives in consistent and unselfish work that ended without any practical or permanent results.[156]

Meston was not wholly opposed to Christian instruction, but thought it a useless and somewhat hypocritical exercise when applied to adult Aborigines, though he conceded that children might be more receptive. Again, this was an old concept, dating back to at least the time of Governor Macquarie's Native Institution. Meston also canvassed the idea that children might be kept isolated on Stewart Island, near Fraser Island, separated from their parents, seeing them only from time to time, but ultimately rejected this idea. Meston was pragmatic enough to know that change would not take place quickly.

Meston believed in a separation of religion and administration, a view which was not dominant in contemporary thinking, evidenced by the previous cooperation between Church and State concerning Aborigines. He thought the Superintendent of a mission or reserve should not be required to undertake religious duties, but should be primarily responsible for asserting such strict administrative controls as were embodied in the *Ac*t. In previous years letters from Meston to newspapers were signed with the pseudonym 'Maroogaline', an Aboriginal word from the Clarence River area, meaning 'strong hand'.[157] When the Australian Board of Missions finally took control of Bogimbah, Meston complained to the Under Secretary of the Home Department that 'the missionaries … began by unwisely informing the Aborigines that I had nothing more to do with them and that my control was gone. Consequently the wholesome fear of having to settle with me was removed'.[158] Perhaps Meston might have been happy enough for Gribble and his team to provide

[156] Meston, *Proposed System,* p. 24.

[157] Cheryl Taylor, *Prologue to Protectorship*, p. 480.

[158] Meston to Under Secretary Home Dept. 21 Dec 1900, 19728.

limited religious instruction to Aborigines (especially the children) while he himself maintained administrative control. On learning the identities of the two men sent to Fraser Island to control the day to day running of the Mission he wrote: 'the two gentlemen sent possess neither the natural nor the acquired qualifications for the position and are not in any sense likely to exercise the slightest control over either the Aboriginal men or women'.[159]

Dr Walter Roth had replaced Archibald Meston as Southern Protector, as well as maintaining his previous position as Northern Protector, in 1904. His new title was Queensland Protector of Aborigines. This now gave Roth control over all Queensland Aborigines. Meston did not approve. He wrote to Premier Arthur Morgan, whom he considered a friend, complaining in strong language and arguing his worth to the government and to the Aborigines. He regarded it as 'a damnable injustice … sacrificing me to Roth'. 'But for me there would be no mention of Aborigines in the Statute book of Queensland, no Protectors and no Act. I am a year senior to Roth. All practical work has been done by me. He does nothing but write reports and advertise himself to make the Minister believe he is a marvellous man'.[160] In his assessment of the situation Meston was mistaken. Roth had a background in medicine and had developed an interest in ethnology. He did not seem to possess Meston's mercurial, volatile personality and was well regarded in his field. A careful analysis of both Meston's and Roth's respective careers reveals that Roth had followed an academic path (like his father and brothers), including training to become a medical doctor at University College, London. He had taught at prestigious schools both in Britain and Australia and had made a careful academic study of Aborigines. [161] Meston, on the other hand had proclaimed himself an expert, had no formal educational qualifications and had followed a variety of occupations before turning his interests to the Aborigines of Queensland. His expertise was questionable.

[159] Meston to Under Secretary Home Dept, 9 Feb 1900, 1913, p. 1.

[160] Meston to Premier Morgan, Chief Secretary's Corres. PRE/A163, 17 Dec 1903, 8881.

[161] Barrie Reynolds, 'Roth, Walter Edmund (1861 - 1933)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 11, Melbourne University Press, 1988, pp 463-464.

Meston felt strongly that his experience in the field and his contact with Aborigines going back to his days near Grafton made him the more suitable choice for the position, but it is doubtful that this self-proclaimed experience would have out-ranked Roth's careful and considered methods. The self serving and petulant politician in Meston emerged as he defended his own case by writing about his economical ways and especially that, had it not been for him, the Aborigines would be in a far more perilous state. Morgan penned a succinct note at the bottom of the letter, 'better transfer the aboriginals to the Home Secretary'.[162] Meston's pleas to become Chief Protector proved unsuccessful. Rather than being 'a damnable injustice' it is clear that the Queensland Government was not prepared to risk its reputation through any more scandals or bad publicity in this area any longer. However, removing Meston from the actual physical location did not solve the problem as he was still in a position of power as Protector, and he used this position to constantly attack Gribble, as we will see later.

Evans claims that 'the processing of the "undesirable Aboriginal subject" from the status and condition of "pariah" into that of "perpetual inmate"' completed the colonial process of identity destruction.[163] Meston did not necessarily want this outcome. He at least tried to keep their identity intact to a certain degree, as evidenced by his wish and his consent to their practising aspects of their previous traditional lives on Fraser Island. Gribble, in contrast, refused to let any Aborigine practise any part of their old ways. They were to embrace Christianity, and completely abandon their traditional culture. He systematically set about doing this at Bogimbah. The next chapter describes Gribble's early life and his beliefs as he prepared to break Meston's hold on the Aborigines and impose his own system and beliefs on them.

[162] Meston to Premier Morgan, Chief Secretary's Correspondence. PRE/A163, 17 Dec 1903, 8881.p. 1.
[163] Evans, *A Permanent Precedent*, p. 7.

Chapter Six

Ernest Gribble: Saviour of Souls

Ernest Richard Bulmer Gribble had a very different upbringing and background to Meston, but he too was very influential in shaping the lives of Aboriginal people under his control, including the remnants of the Butchulla people of the Wide Bay area. Gribble's model, of Aborigines living in isolation on reserves, seeing them educated and labouring for their keep, set a precedent for the 'management' of Aborigines for many decades. He was a missionary for sixty-four years and provided the first glimpse of Christianity to many Aborigines in Queensland and Western Australia. Unlike Meston, who became involved in Aboriginal affairs after trying other eclectic pathways, Gribble's destiny seemed laid out for him from birth. Indeed, it was said that his parents leaned over his crib and dedicated him to the Lord as a missionary like his father.[1] That did not stop him pursuing other occupations first. He was at various times an insurance salesman, a bricklayer and a drover, but according to Halse he failed at each.[2] Gribble had also tried his hand at teaching, while resident in Perth, and said later that he 'had plenty of pupils at his school, but money was scarce'.[3]

Gribble was born in Geelong, Victoria, on 23 November 1868, to John Brown Gribble and Mary Ann Bulmer.[4] John Brown Gribble was a coalminer, originally from Redruth in Cornwall, who became a Methodist minister in 1876.[5] According to Halse, he was said to have 'honed his skills as a preacher on the street corners of Ballarat, bailing up thirsty patrons outside pubs to harangue them to abandon the drink that

[1] Christine Halse, 'The Reverend Ernest Gribble and Race Relations in Northern Australia', PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 1992, p. 32.

[2] Christine Halse, 'Ernest Gribble: a Successful Missionary*?', Lectures on North Queensland History,* No. 5*,* 1996*,* p. 221.

[3] Ernest Gribble, *Forty Years with the Aborigines,* Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1930, p. 18.

[4] Victorian Pioneer Indexes to Births, Deaths and Marriages, Cert No 23534.

[5] Halse, 'Reverend Ernest Gribble', p. 4.

would lead them to perpetual hellfire, brimstone and damnation'.[6] The family travelled throughout northern Victoria and southern New South Wales, missioning to isolated settlers, and it fell to Ernest and his brother Arthur to open gates on the properties they visited. They were their father's apprentices, although Ernest apparently resented it, as demonstrated by his private declarations later on.

John Gribble turned his evangelical endeavours towards Australian Aborigines when he opened his own mission at 'Warangesda' at Darlington Point on the Murrumbidgee River in 1880. Local selectors considered him a 'bit mad, he had blacks on the brain'.[7] He later became a Minister in the Church of England, after being nominated by Mesac Thomas, formerly the first Bishop of Goulburn (NSW). Despite some opposition to his Methodist background, the nomination was supported by Bishop Barker who recognised Gribble's leadership qualities,[8] and he took his Holy Orders in 1883, after becoming a Deacon in 1880.[9] Later, Bishop Henry Hutton Parry (1826-1893) of Perth invited John Gribble to Western Australia, though his mission there failed to obtain sufficient financial resources, despite Parry having established three Church funds.[10] John Gribble returned to England to raise money, where he wrote two landmark works, *Black but Comely,* and *Dark Deeds in a Sunny Land*, concerning the condition and treatment of Aborigines in Western Australia. Both became well-known publications and earned Gribble considerable notoriety, as well as the animosity of pearlers and pastoralists whose activities he condemned.[11]

John Gribble eventually travelled to Queensland to set up the remote Yarrabah Mission on the traditional land of the Kongkandji, who owned the Cape

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[6] Christine Halse, *Terribly Wild Man,* Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2002, p. 2.

[7] Ernest Gribble, *Over the Years,* 11/18/18. Gribble Papers, ML.

[8] His nomination was opposed by Charles Campbell and Reverend Ernest Hawkins of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Barbara Thorn, 'Thomas, Mesac (1816 - 1892)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 6, Melbourne University Press, 1976, pp 262-263.

[9] *Ibid.,*

[10] *Ibid.,* Parry had established the Sustentation Fund which was to maintain the ministrations of religion if colonial grants were withdrawn; the Diocesan Church Fund which was to provide ready money to meet emergencies; and the Building Fund which was to make loans without interest for new churches, schools and rectories. In appeals for money Parry always encouraged every member to make regular contributions, however small.

[11] 'Gribble, John Brown (1847 - 1893)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 4, Melbourne University Press, 1972, p. 299.

Grafton area west to the Murray Prior Range and south to the mouth of the Mulgrave River. There he was assisted by three men, Willie Ambrym, a South Sea Islander, a young Aborigine named Pompo Katchewan, and James Tyson, a former manager of Bribie Island Mission who resigned from Yarrabah on bad terms after only six months. However, Gribble's health failed, and when he left Yarrabah in October 1892, suffering from malaria, to access medical treatment, his son Ernest assumed control of the mission as a 'sacred trust' from his father. John Gribble died in Sydney in June 1893. His gravestone epitaph, in Sydney's Waverley Cemetery says simply: 'he laid down his life for the cause of the Australian blackfellow'. [12]

The Reluctant Missionary

From his father, Ernest apparently inherited a dogged determination and a relentless perseverance, as well as a strong religious zeal. Throughout his life Ernest nestled into his religious beliefs for succour and comfort and it is said that when times were tough he read Henry Martyn's diary, and prayed to be like him.[13] He taught Sankey's hymns and welcomed visits by Methodist preachers.[14] Ernest had received an early introduction to missionary work as a boy at Warangesda. Halse notes that this childhood experience shaped his ideas of what a mission should be. In 'the sheltered isolation of an Aboriginal mission, he at last found a place where he was master of his domain', with his brothers and sisters playing with Aboriginal children, fishing, attending lessons, building canoes and sharing witchetty grubs.[15]

However idyllic his views of childhood might have been, Ernest was a reluctant missionary. Gribble himself ascribed part of the reason for his distaste for mission work to the bullying he experienced while at school in Victoria. He was forced to preach after school and to rely on girls to extricate him from these

[12] Gribble, *Forty Years,* p. 58

[13] Henry Martyn (1781 - 1812), was an Anglican priest and missionary to the peoples of India and Persia. Born in Truro, Cornwall, he was educated at St John's College, Cambridge. A chance encounter with Charles Simeon led him to become a missionary. He became a chaplain for the British East India Company, translating many Bible texts into different languages.

[14] D. Craig, The Social Impact of the State on an Aboriginal Reserve in Qld. Australia, PhD, University of California, Berkely, 1979.

[15] Halse, *Terribly Wild Man,* p. 8.

situations and to see him safely home.[16] However, later on when his marriage failed he drew upon this decision to mission in order to justify the failure of his relationship with his wife, saying that the duty came first and 'his work was a divine Christian duty and a sacred legacy bestowed by his father'.[17]

He grew up in his father's shadow, entering the Church, as was his father's wish, instead of the military as he himself desired. Ernest initially refused to accompany his father to Yarrabah, as 'he would never go as a missionary among the blacks',[18] and his father's negative experiences in Western Australia merely cemented his resolve.[19] Even while helping his father in his mission work, he found himself 'still determined not to remain in mission work, but to return to my parish work in the Diocese of Goulburn. This greatly grieved my father'.[20] But when summoned to Yarrabah by his ailing father, Ernest, despite believing himself 'beyond being given marching orders by his father', relented and 'vowed to sublimate my own desires and dreams and to live that my life may be like his'.[21] This vow proved very difficult to keep, but ultimately he devoted the rest of his life to the cause.

As Paul Smith informs us, it proved difficult for Ernest even to become ordained:

> to accommodate lack of formal training and limited study, the Primate simplified the pre-ordination examination. Gribble was given 'direction' and an abbreviated range of questions. Implicit in this was that theology was superfluous to Aborigines and reflected a patronising, paternalistic view of Aborigines as a simple people whose Priest only needed a limited understanding of the Scriptures.[22]

While the theological reason, that the Aborigines only needed a simple understanding, may have seemed valid, it is also true that Ernest, like his father before him, was not highly educated. Ernest would have been very conscious, during

[16] Ernest Gribble, *Over the Years,*11/18/18, Gribble Papers, Mitchell Library
[17] Christine Halse, *Terribly Wild Man,* p. 80.
[18] Gribble, *Forty Years with the Aborigines*, p. 53.
[19] Halse, 'Reverend Ernest Gribble', p. 40.
[20] Ernest Gribble, *Forty Years with the Aborigines,* p. 57.
[21] Ernest Gribble 1893, 1940, quoted in Halse, *Terribly Wild Man,* p. 21.
[22] P. Smith, 'Like a Watered Garden: Yarrabah 1892-1909: the Foundation Era', BA Hons thesis, James Cook University, 1980, p. 86.

his missionary career, of this limited education and the way in which he was ordained.

When Reverend John Gribble died of malaria in 1893, it was left to his son Ernest to carry on his work at Yarrabah, under the auspices of the Australian Board of Missions. But Ernest proved to be a difficult and combative personality, as if constantly needing to reassert his own personal power. Among his key targets were the ABM and Archibald Meston. Contributing to the tension between Meston and Gribble was, no doubt, the issue of power. Meston, we know, was hungry for power. As a former editor and aspiring politician he was used to interpreting and influencing public opinion, promoting his personal views and using his influence behind the scenes. As we have seen, Aborigines under his control experienced first-hand that authoritarianism and deep-seated yearning for power.

John Gribble had sought the support of the ABM for his mission at Yarrabah and it had taken them six months to approve the funding. As discussed in Chapter One, the Sydney-based ABM was the missionary arm of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia. It co-ordinated missionary outreach programs within Australia and overseas and sought to educate Anglicans about the ABM's missionary responsibilities. Ernest Gribble, while drawing on ABM support, did not always follow their instructions and frequently either disobeyed or ignored them. Gribble often defied his Church and made decisions on his own, telling the Church later or not at all. Ernest Gribble, while working within the established church and the ABM, constantly asserted his own authority and did not always bow to his employer's wishes. He refused to go to Sydney to the offices of the ABM, claiming he was overworked, while at the same time venturing to Fraser Island to establish his territory there. Even the important transfer of the people from Fraser Island to Yarrabah was effected without the approval of the Primate.[23] Gribble visited the island in March 1900, again without consulting the ABM, and stayed three months.

[23] Kaye Lorraine Corner, 'Yarrabah: A Mission for the Aboriginal People in North Queensland, The Effect of Government and Church Policies 1900-1912', Diploma of Arts (History) thesis, University of Queensland, 1994, p. 93.

At the same time, he also upset the ABM by appointing his mother to the position of Matron at Bogimbah, as if the mission was his own personal fiefdom.[24]

The relationship between Gribble and the ABM was often strained and the ABM was naturally horrified at his alleged sexual indiscretions, both at Yarrabah and later in Western Australia. There is evidence that Gribble embarrassed and worried his own son Jack about his relationship with and closeness to Sister Violet Claridge later in Western Australia, behaving 'like a possessive lover'.[25] Gribble had left Yarrabah because of public knowledge of his having fathered a child to an Aboriginal woman, Janie Brown (or Clarke) at Yarrabah. The baby, Nola, was born on 15 September 1908 and was said to have Gribble's 'bright blue eyes'. As a vocal opponent of miscegenation, Gribble was tormented by the affair and suffered a mental and physical breakdown, being admitted to Cairns Hospital.[26] The Church demanded his resignation from Yarrabah and he left on 17 June 1910'.[27] In his autobiographies he does not refer to these circumstances. Corner's study ascribed it to neurasthenia, a condition requiring complete rest for twelve months.[28] However, Gribble went soon after as a Rector to Gosford in New South Wales in 1911, and on to other missions and other tasks within the Australian Church, until he was forced to 'retire' in Western Australia, after further sexual indiscretions.[29] Gribble was an enormously controversial character, and he remains a contentious figure amongst historians. Some of the claims in Halse's study have been contested by Rod Moran,[30] who in turn has been challenged by Neville Green.[31] Many of the disagreements, claims and counter-claims, relate to Gribble's time in Western Australia at the Forrest River Mission, years after he left Yarrabah and Queensland. In the context of the so-called 'History Wars', Keith Windschuttle rebuked stories of Aboriginal massacres at Forrest River by undermining Gribble's defence of the Aboriginal

[24] Dixon to Gribble, 13 March 1900 and 24 April 1900, June 1900, Gribble Papers 7/11/3, M.L.

[25] Jack Gribble to John Needham, 30 March 1925, Box 5.8, ABMA, Mitchell Library

[26] Halse, *Terribly Wild Man,* pp. 86, 89.

[27] *ADB,* p. 331.

[28] Corner, o*p. cit*., p. 94.

[29] *ADB*, p. 331

[30] Rod Moran, 'Ernest Gribble's Dark Torment', *Quadrant (Sydney),* Vol. 46, No.9, September 2002.

[31] Neville Green, 'Ahab Wailing in The Wilderness', *Quadrant (Sydney*) Vol. 47, No.6, June 2003.

version of these events.[32] He also accused Halse of producing no hard evidence and sources to support Gribble's testimony. Disagreement arose over incidents at Yarrabah concerning Gribble's sexual behaviour and morality. There is still controversy over the claim that he fathered an Aboriginal child with Janie Brown.[33] Halse based her claim about the whole affair on personal interviews made around seventy years after the event, which Noel Loos claims is unconvincing. Aborigines, however, do have a strong oral history tradition.

His alleged paternity of the Aboriginal child, and his alleged sexual indiscretions with Aboriginal and white women, both at Yarrabah and in Western Australia, have not been concretely proven. There is a claim that the 'intense icy blue eyes' of the child said to be fathered by Ernest Gribble, did not accord with Gribble's paternity because Gribble's granddaughter said he had brown eyes.[34] But undoubtedly Gribble was an intensely troubled man, struggling with inner demons. His treatment of men and women under his care, both at Yarrabah and Bogimbah, reflected his torment over both his own sexual life and the sexuality of Aborigines. If the stories about him fathering an Aboriginal child were true, Gribble, according to the common psychological condition of 'projection', may have transferred his own anxieties to the Aborigines under his control.[35] Gribble saw himself as the church's unofficial opponent of interracial unions and he preached throughout his life that sexual intercourse between black and white was 'based on immorality'.[36]

Ernest Gribble was, according to his biographer, 'paternalistic and authoritarian' in the administration of his missions. He enforced a quasi-military regime, probably learnt during two years at the King's School, Parramatta, characterised by 'compulsory church attendance, the Protestant work ethic and the Europeanization of Aboriginal culture'. He 'segregated the sexes, confined children in

[32] For comment, see Raymond Evans and Bill Thorpe, 'Indigenocide and the Massacre of Aboriginal History', *Overland,* Vol. 163, Winter 2001, p. 21.

[33] Noel Loos, *White Christ Black Cross,* Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2007, pp. 108-110.

[34] Green, *op. cit.,* p. 32.

[35] The process of projection is defined as: 'the person's own unacceptable impulse is instead thought to belong to someone else', e.g. 'I want to steal' is projected as 'that person is stealing', Susan Cloninger, *Theories of Personality,* Prentice Hall, New York, 1993, p. 42.

[36] Ernest Gribble, n.d. Notes for Synod Speech, 12/18/25, Gribble Papers, Mitchell Library.

dormitories, and satisfied his thwarted military ambition through regimentation, uniforms, parade-duty and mission police. Recalcitrants were imprisoned or given corporal punishment'.[37] Not surprisingly, his methods and personality evoked passionate and differing reactions. 'Many Aborigines respected his humanitarian motives but condemned his authoritarian methods', according to Wise. He was 'a reckless tortured tyrant who ran his world with megalomaniac fanaticism … with a bible in one hand and a whip in the other'.[38]

Unlike Meston, 'Gribble tried to merge spiritual and administrative leadership under mission control. He aimed to evangelise and elevate the Aborigines by teaching them habits of industry'.[39] If Meston was prone to romanticising traditional Aboriginal culture, Gribble, as a missionary, was certainly not. Rather, Gribble saw Aborigines as endangered souls, to be counted and converted to Christianity. These differences in approach were reflected in the way both men ran the reserve/mission on Fraser Island. Yet Ernest Gribble, like Archibald Meston before him, was a man confident of his own abilities. This is exemplified best in his determination to act first, trusting his own judgement, refusing to kowtow to the Church authorities, and informing the ABM and relevant government authorities of his decisions after the event.

In 1957 Ernest Gribble was awarded an OBE for his life's work with Aborigines. His tales of Western Australia, told in *Forty Years with the Aborigines*, reveal a genuine love and compassion for Aborigines and the boy's own type of enjoyment he derived from their company. Any success he may have enjoyed at Yarrabah was also at great cost to his personal life. He was only twenty-four when he landed near Cairns, and ministering to Aborigines at Yarrabah cost him his wife and children. He had married Emily Wriede in Cairns on 18 April 1895, but they separated in June 1907, Emily preferring the settled life of Cairns with her children.[40] They tried to revive the relationship later but that too failed. Zalewski puts forward a view that Yarrabah 'made' Gribble, in that 'Yarrabah was a heaven sent challenge that gave his

[37] *ADB*, Vol. 14, p. 330.

[38] T. Wise, *The Self-made Anthropologist: a Life of A. P. Elkin,* 1985, p. 61.

[39] Corner*, op. cit*., p. 81.

[40] *ADB*, Vol. 14*,* p. 331.

life special meaning and its survival became something of a quest for him. He went from obscurity to being the foremost Aboriginal missionary'.[41] If that was true, he paid a high price for it.

Prelude to Church control of Bogimbah

As explained in the previous chapter, Archibald Meston endured a difficult relationship with the residents of Maryborough who, along with elected government officials, undermined him and his 'experiment' on Fraser Island. By late 1899 government support for Meston had evaporated, and serious consideration was being given to the prospect of handing Bogimbah over 'to some religious organization'.[42] Home Secretary Foxton inspected Bogimbah in 1899 and, apparently dissatisfied with what he saw, sent circulars to all the churches, eventually asking the Australian Board of Missions to take over the settlement.[43] This, of course, was a direct rebuttal of Meston's preference for secular control of Aboriginal reserves and was not well received by him. At the end of 1899, Meston was removed from direct control of Bogimbah Reserve on Fraser Island, although he was still Southern Protector of Aborigines. Significantly, Foxton's decision followed a visit to Yarrabah in north Queensland in August 1899 where he found himself greatly impressed with the work and success of Reverend Ernest Gribble.[44] At Yarrabah, Aborigines were apparently well on the way toward being 'civilised' and converted. As *The Church Chronicle* reported: 'We are glad to believe that Mr Gribble is a worthy son of a worthy father, and that he is doing really good work for the bodies and souls of the North Queensland blacks'.[45] This new direction for Bogimbah and the Butchulla

[41] Pat Zalewski, 'Yarrabah: from Dreamtime Myths to 1998', *Royal Historical Journal of Queensland,* August 2007, p. 93.

[42] Archibald Meston to the Home Secretary, Col. Sec. 483A*,* 25 November 1899, p. 1. This lack of support might have had multiple reasons, one being the embarrassing incidents being reported in the Press and another being budgetary reasons. Given Meston's political aspirations, as detailed in the last chapter, Foxton might also have been disposing of a political rival earlier rather than later, reducing Meston's power in order to limit his exposure in the public eye.

[43] *Maryborough Chronicle,* 24 October 1903, p. 1.

[44] *The Church Chronicle,2 Jan 1899,* p. 58.

[45] *The Church Chronicle,* 2 Jan 1899, p. 72.

marked a significant change in the Queensland Government's policy and obviously left Meston out in the cold.

Gribble's 'takeover' of Bogimbah was no chance act. He had been watching Meston's Fraser Island experiment for some time, always believing it was doomed. Given his strong religious beliefs, Gribble could not endorse a purely secular approach. As he later wrote, 'this settlement had been formed by the government and carried on for some years but it was a dismal failure'.[46] It was his view that 'no government can uplift or develop a primitive race such as this … It is the Church alone that can instil into the race, incentives to existence and also to higher existence'.[47] Gribble kept a scrapbook of newspaper clippings, mostly reporting negatively on the Fraser Island Mission.[48] Moreover, Gribble had the ear of Home Secretary Foxton. During Foxton's visit to Yarrabah in August 1899, Gribble voiced his serious concerns about Meston's administration of Bogimbah. Halse claims that although Foxton and Gribble made an unlikely pair, they seemed to have had a genuine friendship and were seen strolling around Yarrabah, deep in conversation.[49] Gribble, it seems, had made an important ally of Foxton in his aim of gaining control of all Aborigines in Queensland and converting them to Christianity, and of going one up in his dispute with Meston, who did not believe in the conversion of souls as a necessary component of 'protection'. Again, *The Church Chronicle* noted how well the Home Secretary thought of Mr Gribble's work for the Aborigines.[50]

A month after Foxton visited Yarrabah, he was on Fraser Island and 'after a cursory inspection he decided the residents were discontented, fearful, superstitious and Harold Meston's methods were violent and oppressive'.[51] Harold, Archibald Meston's son, was the only person Meston trusted to deputise for him on Fraser Island. Dr Walter Roth, at that time Northern Protector of Aborigines, was also apparently 'delighted by the Christian ways of those at Yarrabah and became a

[46] Ernest Gribble, *A Despised Race*, *The Vanishing Aboriginals of Australia*, Australian Board of Missions, Sydney, 1933, p. 48.

[47] Gribble, *The Problem of the Aborigines*, p. xi.

[48] Halse, *Terribly Wild Man,* p. 58.

[49] *Ibid.,* p. 49.

[50] *The Church Chronicle*, 1 Sept 1899, p. 19.

[51] Halse, *Terribly Wild Man,* p. 49.

staunch supporter of Gribble'.[52] Foxton visited Bogimbah Mission, in company with Queensland's Governor, Lord Lamington and the Lieutenant Governor of New Guinea, Mr Le Hunte, on the weekend of 23-24 September 1899. His report was critical of Meston's administration, noting in particular the poor choice of location, the failure to separate single girls from other residents, and the absence of suitable activities to keep the inhabitants busy, all of which was set in strong contrast to the situation at Yarrabah. Foxton was told that Aboriginal girls were forced to be with men they did not want and whom they 'disliked and despised'.[53] Whereas Meston thought that the Butchulla people should, in keeping with their traditional customs, be allowed periods of work, play, rest and sleep,[54] Foxton and others thought the Fraser Island residents were simply being allowed to remain idle. Clearly, the government thought Meston's experiment had run its course, and it was time to revert to the past practice of engaging missionary organisations to administer Aboriginal settlements. Foxton probably also had in mind the financial contributions that would flow from churchgoers and other philanthropists. Of course, Gribble's concerns about Bogimbah were principally about the lack of religious instruction.

Gribble Takes Over

After Gribble assumed control of Bogimbah, on behalf of the ABM, Meston was scathing about the new administration. In a long and passionate letter to the Home Secretary, he claimed that 'Throughout Queensland from the dawn of settlement to the present time the neglect of our aboriginals by the religious denominations has been discreditable to all concerned'.[55] Furthermore, as he later noted, 'every Australian Mission that flickered feebly or died miserably usually issued glowing reports down to the final collapse'.[56] He pointedly declared that 'no Christian church' had previously taken 'the slightest interest' in the welfare of

[52] D Jones, *Trinity Phoenix: a history of Cairns and district,* Cairns and District Centenary Committee, 1976, p. 291.

[53] Report of Home Secretary, Col. Sec. 483A, 26 September 1899 pp. 1, 2.

[54] Archibald Meston, *Queensland Aborigines, Proposed System for their Preservation and Protection,* Govt. Printer, Brisbane, 1895, p. 26.

[55] Meston to Home Secretary, Col. Sec. 483A, 5545, 25 November 1899, p. 4, Q.S.A.

[56] Meston to Home Secretary, Col. Sec. 483A, 2645, 16 February 1901, p. 5, Q.S.A

Aborigines at Maryborough, and that he alone had raised them to better conditions. Moreover, those conditions, he suggested, had hardly improved as a result of the Church takeover, and 'the continued complaints with regard to food and clothing and the total absence of any authority over the adult blacks are becoming a public scandal in the Maryborough district'.[57] The Board of Missions, he suggested, 'have shown their utter incapacity for the position and inability to realise their responsibilities'.[58]

Showing a fair appreciation of the history of evangelical paternalism in Australia, he complained: 'the fatal mistake in all Australian Aboriginal Mission Stations from the Reverend Marsden's 'Black Town' at Parramatta in 1797 down to the present time has been placing the general control in the hands of religious instructors'.[59] In his letter to the Home Secretary, a few weeks before the decision was made, pleading for the State not to hand over the operation to the Church, Meston revealed a few salient points. He again stressed the principle of segregation: 'In Australian history this is the first aboriginal settlement embodying the principle of complete isolation from all contact with the white race. This principle is a vital part of the Aboriginal Protection Act of 1897 and was included by Sir Horace Tozer at my earnest request'.[60]

Meston undoubtedly wished to see Gribble fail, probably still believing that he might regain control of the mission if Gribble could not produce demonstrable evidence of success. As Protector, Meston was in a good position to frustrate Gribble, and indeed the Home Secretary was soon required to instruct Meston to refrain from such interference and to confine himself to his official duties as Protector.[61] Gribble had written to the Home Secretary seeking to clarify Meston's authority and passed on that information to Meston. The reply put Meston firmly in his place, insisting that his role was purely inspectorial and not managerial: 'Mr Foxton is of the opinion that you have ample employment to occupy your time

[57] Meston to Home Secretary, 17 Feb 1900, 2378 p. 3.

[58] *Ibid.,* p. 3.

[59] Meston to Home Secretary, Col. Sec. 483A, 12539, 8 August 1901.

[60] Meston to Home Secretary, 25 Nov 1899, Col 483A, *FIT,* p. 155.

[61] Letter from Home Secretary to Meston, Col. Sec. 483A, 19 February 1900, in *FIT.*

irrespective of Fraser's Island'.[62] Meston replied, detailing most of the bitter history between himself and the Gribble family as a whole. It was not a complimentary letter, its critical and carping tone making it difficult to understand just how Meston felt he was going to win friends in, and influence, the government.

Meston was personal in his criticism of the Gribble family at Bogimbah and pushed for an inquiry into the new regime on Fraser Island, 'satisfied that there is an urgent need for an inquiry into the state of affairs' and crowing 'there appears to be some discord in the management of the Station'. He confessed he had formed a 'strong dislike' for Gribble when he had first met him at Yarrabah, and took a swipe at the Home Secretary, saying; 'I would here express a desire that the Home Secretary kindly avoid misunderstanding me with regard to my attitude', which he claimed had been marked by 'loyal obedience to the Home Secretary' along with 'a desire to see the station prosper'.[63] He was not ready to call it a Mission, but preferred the secular term. Meston was clearly offended that his views no longer held sway, and that his authority as Protector and his reputation as an expert on Aborigines, carefully cultivated over many years, had been called into question. Meston told him:

> As the Home Secretary doubts the wisdom of the course I adopted, and as the Missionaries persist in misunderstanding any action of mine with regard to the Station, I shall only be too pleased if he will kindly consent to my leaving them to settle their own troubles in the future. There is no one responsible to the Home Secretary, no control by the Department, no information available for me, and I have no authority whatsoever. It is true that my letter of instructions suggests that I visit Deebing Creek and Fraser's Island from time to time, but that is only a formality if I have no power to make any changes and my recommendations are not accepted.[64]

In August 1901 Meston complained that both Mr and Mrs Gribble's 'attitude from the start was distinctly hostile', that Mrs Gribble had not been successful at Warangesda Mission and was no more of a success at Fraser Island. 'People adapted for the control of aboriginals must be both born and made. Certainly they require to

[62] Gribble to Home Secretary, quoted in Meston to Home Secretary, *FIT* , 7 August 1901, p. 204.

[63] *Ibid.,*p. 204

[64] Meston to Home Secretary, 20 Feb 1901, 2947, p. 3, Q.S.A.

be born first'.[65] From this we can deduce that Meston obviously thought he himself was 'born to the task', demonstrating his innate sense of superior self-worth, and that the Gribble family was not up to the trusted task, despite, or perhaps because of, their long history of involvement in Aboriginal welfare. Mary Ann Gribble, Ernest's mother, had joined Ernest at Yarrabah, along with her three youngest children, in 1893 after her husband John had died. She had made herself useful around the Mission and Ernest gave her the position of Hospital Matron. It seemed appropriate for Ernest's siblings to take on roles around Yarrabah and Ernest's wife Amelia also helped the women with housewifely duties such as sewing and cooking. No doubt one of the main motivations would have been economics, but an element of 'empire building' was probably also in play. When Ernest took on the Fraser Island task, it was natural for him to ensure that his mother had a role there as well. With their family background in Victoria and in missioning this new role was seen as a family responsibility and no doubt Ernest felt far more comfortable with people whom he could trust fulfilling important roles on his missions. Meston however, in his role of Southern Protector, and on a personal level at being replaced, was unimpressed.

Mrs Gribble had apparently also entered the fray against Meston, refusing to allow him to take sixteen men to the Federal Celebrations. When Meston went to Bogimbah to pick them up, a telegram from Foxton awaited him, ordering him to return to Brisbane.[66] Meston, detailing every little thing that was wrong on the island, firmly asserted that 'Unless there is an early change in the management of Fraser's Island the future is not pleasant to contemplate'.[67] He complained that he was allowed 'no authoritative information whatever' and that the missionaries were taking advice from Mr Harry Aldridge, 'an astonishing proceeding in the face of his past history in connection with the Fraser Island aboriginal station'.[68] He concluded his letter in similar vein: 'In sixteen months 29 blacks have died, and four been

[65] Meston to Home Secretary, *FIT*, 7 August 1901, p. 206.

[66] *Ibid.,* p. 205.

[67] *Ibid.,* p. 207.

[68] *Ibid.,* p. 5. Harry Aldridge was the son of Edgar Aldridge, one of the earliest residents of Maryborough and Harry had a cattle station on Fraser Island but had a reputation for not treating his Aboriginal workers well. He married Lappy Tanner, a Butchulla woman,

drowned out of 150, and the whole station has drifted into complete demoralisation, all the result of incompetent people being in charge and a consequent foolish mismanagement against which I warned the Home Office in four separate reports'.[69] He also complained that under the new administration £618.19.0 had been spent, while Meston's spending over the last three years had been only £67.0.0. It was a report he thought was damning of both Gribble's management and the government's oversight of Bogimbah Mission.

The Home Secretary's rebuke was a victory for Gribble and the ABM. The April edition of *The Church Chronicle* dutifully took a shot at Meston:

> It will be a relief to many who have followed the work of Frazer Island Mission to know that the Home Secretary has instructed the Protectors of Aborigines that 'all Mission Stations are necessarily under the immediate care and protection of the persons in charge of the stations, who are in their turn responsible directly to the Minister. They have been informed that it is understood that they will not accordingly interfere in any way with these Mission Stations, but that they are expected to visit them occasionally, and tender advice and assistance to the Missionaries reporting annually' to the Department. It has further been impressed upon these officers that a spirit of kindly and helpful co-operation is expected from all Protectors of Aborigines. [70]

The Church, for its part, had three main grounds for believing that they could and would succeed where Meston had failed. The first reason was that men of conscience in Australia recognised that they owed Aborigines a substantial debt, on behalf of White Australians, and as Christians they were best placed to see the virtue in helping an oppressed and dying people. Although their resources were stretched across New Guinea, China and the South Seas, Australian evangelicals could not ignore 'a heavy debt to the remnant of the heavy-browed owners of our land, and the time for payment of the debt is growing very short'.[71] It was their Christian duty to save 'the poor blacks [who] are now living and dying without knowledge of Christ',[72] and they were willing to put staff and money into the project, though this did not happen immediately, for initially the Board of Missions was somewhat reluctant to take over Bogimbah because of a perceived lack of material assistance

[69] *Ibid.,* p. 9.

[70] *The Church Chronicle*, 2 April 1900, p. 130.

[71] *Ibid.,* p. 166.

[72] The *Church Chronicle,* 1 February 1900, p. 98.

from the government. Reverend Frodsham, Bishop of North Queensland, and known as 'the Restorer Bishop' because of his capacity to turn around finances, had strong reservations about finding a man with the strength, the earnestness, the tact and firmness to 'guide a childlike and yet debauched people aright'.[73] But even three years later, when it became apparent that Bogimbah was a 'settlement without the natural advantage of such a favoured spot as Yarrabah', and that feeding and maintaining the Fraser Island population was practically impossible, there remained a strong sense of commitment to, as Archdeacon David reminded parishioners, 'the obligation, which the Church felt towards the aboriginal population of the State, and the moral necessity the board of missions, recognised in answering the call to take care of the Fraser Island settlement'.[74] Reverend Frodsham held out hope of missioning to *all* the inhabitants at Bogimbah, in contrast with Yarrabah where, he said, 'little is attempted with the camp blacks, who are almost too old to be taught Christianity'.[75]

Second, reports in *The Church Chronicle* suggested Meston was not paying proper attention to the Christianisation of Fraser Island Aborigines, or making sufficient progress in teaching them to live as good white Australians with Christian principles. Simply put, the Church of England could not bear to see an Aboriginal settlement that was not based on Christian teachings. In June 1900 *The Church Chronicle*, explaining the Church's reasons for taking control of the Mission, noted that Meston had done little more than 'remove the Blacks from contact with the Whites'. 'Little or nothing was done to develop the natural resources of the Island. The Blacks remained idle and unsettled. No attempt was made to improve the land... there was no school, even for the children, and needless to say, no provision was made for bringing religious influence to bear upon their lives'.[76]

The third reason the Church believed they could succeed was that they had the financial capacity, if assisted by government, to run a successful mission, although they knew it would be a 'permanent claim upon the generosity of Church

[73] The *Church Chronicle,* 1 December 1899, p. 73.

[74] *M.C.,* 7 February 1902, p. 3.

[75] *The Church Chronicle*, 1 Dec 1899, p. 73.

[76] The *Church Chronicle,* 1 June 1900, p. 166.

people'.[77] Such optimism would prove unfounded. As Noel Loos notes, the amount put into Missions by the ABM during its first fifty years was insufficient to meet its obligations.[78] In 1886 the Griffith Government began a policy of supporting Christian missions to the Aborigines so that Queensland provided much more financial support than other Australian colonial governments. By 1959 the advantage of this system was that government obtained an Aboriginal social service and control agency cheaply, expending over fifty thousand pounds on the mission at Yarrabah.[79] Kidd and Blake have reinforced this argument.[80] The presence of missions helped alleviate some of the state's welfare obligations. As Walter Roth noted in 1904, 'The mission stations are year by year becoming of greater assistance to the state in dealing with the pauper aboriginal waifs and strays, adults and children, on the most economic lines'.[81] Gribble, to be fair, cared little for these broader stratagems. He had souls to save.

While Gribble concentrated on other means of maintaining Aborigines in his care, he did not foster any great sense of independence among his subjects, maintaining an over-arching authority. Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Bauman believes that 'the welfare systems of today, while well-meaning in intent, are sowing the very roots of destruction of Aboriginal people' and that 'welfare takes away the responsibility from the people … the family has lost its power and life plan'.[82] Jon Altman declares that much blame is sheeted home to excessive welfare dependency,

[77] *Ibid.,* p. 166. An interesting aside to this is that the will of Frederick White of Armidale had made a bequest of five hundred pounds to the mission at Yarrabah. *The Church Chronicle,* 1 March 1904, p. 124.

[78] Noel Loos, 'From Church to State: The Queensland Government Take-over of Anglican Missions in North Queensland', *Aboriginal History,* 1991, 15:1, p. 73.

[79] *Ibid.,* pp. 73, 79.

[80] R. Kidd, *The Way We Civilise,* University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2000; T. Blake, *A Dumping Ground: A History of the Cherbourg Settlement*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2001.

[81] Walter Roth, *Annual Report of Chief Protector of Aborigines, 1904*, Queensland Parliamentary Papers, 1905, 1, p. 761.

[82] Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann, 'Education and Employment: The Future For Aboriginal People', *Journal of Religious Education,* 50(4) 2002, p. 66.

and this thesis shows how the well-meaning policies of Meston and Gribble entrenched this lifestyle in Aborigines.[83] Altman explains:

> There is another set of views not based on statistics that see welfare as the problem: as the source of community dysfunction, domestic violence and substance abuse. Much of this perspective is anecdotal and sensationalised. Not only does it run the risk of blaming the victims of social exclusion and neglect for their circumstances, but it is also often linked to imported neo-conservative ideologies that focus on mutual obligation and shared individual responsibility rather than structural and historical causes of disadvantage. [84]

Nerelle Poroch, writing about mainstreaming of services to Aboriginal people in the twenty first century, explains the current policy of the Federal Government in particular as one of 'blaming the victim' and also contends that 'it ignored the importance of Indigenous culture and history and of contributing to their destiny through relationships with policy makers ...the onus was put on Aboriginal peoples to change and become civilised'.[85] This 'rebirthed' the policies of the mission societies of the nineteenth century.

The financial capability to support Bogimbah was to come in the way of a £500 per annum grant from the Queensland Government. Although it seemed a large amount, the Church recognised that it would not go far beyond covering the salaries of the Superintendent and the teacher and the rations of over one hundred people. Nevertheless, they believed that, as at Yarrabah, 'the blacks will speedily supplement outside help by their own labour'. This was integral to the civilisation process. Aborigines would cast off their hunter-gather traditions and develop a work ethic through tilling the soil to provide their own food. They also hoped and believed that 'Church people will not be backward in giving that help'.[86]

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[83] Jon Altman, 'The future of indigenous Australia: is there a path beyond the free market or welfare dependency for our indigenous people', *Arena Magazine* 84, August-Sept 2006, p. 8.

[84] *Ibid.,* p. 8

[85] N. Poroch, 'Welfare Reform and Indigenous empowerment', *Australian Aboriginal Studies,* 2006/1, p. 4.

[86] *The Church Chronicle,* 2 April 1900, p. 130.

Difficulties arise

It was not long before the Church was appealing for help in running the mission and asking for donations. The thanks of the Church went to those parishioners who donated a variety of items from clothes to adzes, lamps, towelling, plates and pannikins and even a teapot and rags for poultices.[87] An appeal was also made that 'the difficult thing is to keep the blacks in clothing and in this connection an appeal is made to the people of Maryborough for cast off clothing to be left at the Harbour Master's office to be forwarded to the Island'.[88] The cracks were appearing in Gribble's financial capabilities. The issue of clothing had lain heavy since the inception of the mission at White Cliffs under Meston in 1897. Meston had kitted Aborigines out in new clothes after mustering them and transporting them to Fraser Island from Maryborough in 1897. In March 1900, almost as soon as the Church had taken over from Meston, they too appealed for clothing. Anything would do, for Gribble feared he might have to clothe them in flour bags. 'Turkey red twill, and dungaree for shirts and trousers for small boys, also cheap print for women and shirting, also cast off clothing of all descriptions, no matter how much worn'.[89] Gribble seemingly did not care how comic or undignified Aborigines looked, providing they were modestly covered and kept warm in the absence of their previous traditional attire of animal skins, as Autumn and Winter approached in this sub-tropical area. With no kangaroos on the island, and no way of moving freely to the mainland where they would traditionally hunt, they were now reliant on donations. White settlers on the island, particularly Harry Aldridge, a cattle producer, sent beef and milk to the mission to supplement the rations.[90] Children in Toowong and Indooroopilly parishes sent Christmas presents to Aboriginal children on the island.[91]

Aborigines were expected to do their part to try to keep the mission afloat financially, to the extent of performing work for the government on the island. In

[87] The *Church Chronicle*, 1 June 1900, p. 174.
[88] *Ibid.,* p. 2.
[89] *The Church Chronicle,* 1 March 1900, p. 119.
[90] *The Church Chronicle,* 1 Feb 1904, p. 90.
[91] *The Church Chronicle,* 1 Jan 1904, p. 90.

July 1904 it was reported that mission 'had carried out the government contract for clearing the telegraph line from Bogimbah to Sandy Creek, a distance of more than fifty miles'.[92] However, a different story emerged in the *Maryborough Chronicle*'s revelation that Aborigines had 'taken their axes and provisions… to do the work, but had hidden them and did not return until the provisions ran out'.[93] The European work ethic was of course seen as instrumental to the process of improving Aborigines.[94] From naked, wandering 'idlers', the Aborigines had to be transformed into decently clothed, settled agricultural workers.

Some idea of the day-to-day regimen on the island and Gribbles' thoughts on Meston's previous administration, as well as his own ideas on how the mission should be run, are given in the Mission Notes, reported in *The Church Chronicle*. These were detailed and illuminating, and say much about Gribble's authoritarianism. The military feel to his regime, harking back to his days at Kings School, was evidenced in the daily routine:

> I am altering the system of rationing. Work started today. There is any quantity of work to be done. Two men started painting the house today, others getting mud to floor their huts. All the women are washing. Football goal posts to be erected; goat yards to be built. Irwin (the Superintendent) has a few children living at the house; they are bonnie children.[95]

In line with Gribble's vision for the Bogimbah Mission and the optimism shown for its success, Superintendent Irwin had 'thrown himself heart and soul into the work, and has started daily services and schools for the children, besides Sunday services for all the community'.[96] There was no choice for these participants under threats of withdrawal of rations and corporal punishment. This was a drastic change to the traditional lives of Aborigines, compatible with Gribble's vision of a 'village' atmosphere, with Aborigines performing industrious tasks. These were important planks of his policy. With the reference to mud floors it almost sounds as if Gribble was content to slowly raise Aborigines from their 'savagery', imposing ways to build

[92] *The Church Chronicle,* 1 July 1904, p. 186.

[93] *M.C.*, 20 Oct 1903, p. 1.

[94] J. Woolmington, 'The Civilisation/Christianisation Debate and the Australian Aborigines', *Aboriginal History,* Vol. 10, No. 2, 1986, p. 92.

[95] *The Church Chronicle,* 1 July 1904, p. 186.

[96] *Ibid*.

shelters that were, for the time being, partially rather than fully 'civilised' accommodation.

Then Gribble gets to the nub of his whole 'raison d'etre'- that of converting Aborigines into Christians:

> Sunday we had fine hearty services in the open air at 11am, infant baptism at 3pm, another open air service at 7pm. This afternoon school at 2pm for the children, drill for men for one hour, then cricket; lantern slides this evening. I have formed several boat crews, fishing parties, wood cutters etc. This week will see sewing classes started again.[97]

In Gribble's regimented world there was no time for traditional pursuits such as the making of tools or attending spiritual and ceremonial commitments, as had happened under Meston. In this sense his regime was distinctly different from Meston's.

Gribble's takeover of the Mission was not a smooth transition by any means. In March 1901, only a couple of months after the takeover, the *Maryborough Chronicle* reported that several groups of Aborigines had left the island, and apparently there was some trouble among the residents.[98] Since the removal program had brought Aborigines to Bogimbah from many tribal areas in Queensland, this was to be expected. The Home Secretary, on being informed that these groups were living in Maryborough, brought them to Brisbane, where he personally interviewed them, in the presence of Archdeacon Rivers and Archibald Meston (in his capacity, at that time, as Protector of Aborigines). No doubt Meston listened and enquired intently for any evidence that he might complain about. The Minister found the Aborigines very unhappy at the lack of sufficient meat or fish in their diet, and that the fishing net was in need of repair.

They also reported that they were not trusted to go out in the boat without the Superintendent or the assistant being present. This was an indication of Gribble's uncertainty and insecurity, as if he knew that, given the choice, Aborigines would remove themselves from his mission. Foxton and Rivers, however, were agreed 'that the natives should have much more freedom than they had hitherto enjoyed in the

[97] *Ibid*.

[98] *M.C.*, 15 March 1901, p. 2.

history of the mission control', and so instituted measures to make 'them more contented in the future'.[99] More nets would be sent, and another boat. The Minister promised to send a bullock each week to bolster the meat supply, and it was arranged for a doctor to visit the island regularly. In return, 'The blacks gave an assurance that if they were allowed more freedom they would respect the confidence; but they stated that they desired at times to go to the mainland. The Minister thinks it desirable that they should be allowed the privilege, particularly if they can take up work there and earn money'. This is what happened at Yarrabah, 'where the natives have to engage in coffee-picking, leaving their wives and families at the mission, and on their return equally dividing their earnings with the mission'.[100] There is no evidence that Meston objected to any of these compromises.

In March and April of 1901 there were further reports of 'batches of blacks' absconding from Bogimbah because of the poor conditions there.[101] In early April 1901 another party of ten Aborigines turned up in Maryborough, having escaped from Bogimbah, claiming they had had nothing to eat for three days. They were supplied with rations and camped at Granville, across the Mary River from the town of Maryborough (now a suburb of the City of Maryborough and still home to many Aborigines). It was thought that after the matter had been reported to the proper authority they would all be sent back to the Mission.[102]

Gribble, however, continued to react to Meston's objections and was proactive in criticising both Harold and Archibald Meston. In doing so he was also defending himself, and the broader cause of missioning to Aborigines on Church-run reserves. Gribble had come reluctantly to the missionary calling, but once he embraced it, he was not about to concede that any other approach was more legitimate. He wrote later:

> Others again urge that the care of the Australian Aborigines should be the duty of the Government and not of the Church. This may be true up to a certain point but there must be a Christian effort in order that any degraded and depraved race may be uplifted. A purely secular effort can never be successful in the truest sense. We have not a single instance of

[99] *Ibid.,* p. 2.

[100] *Ibid.,* p. 2.

[101] *M.C.* 15 March 1901, p. 2 and 8 April 1901, p. 2.

[102] *M.C.*, 8 April 1901, p. 2.

> such an effort producing successful results in Australia, although much has been attempted by secular action.[103]

Elsewhere, he opined 'It is remarkable how little purely secular efforts have achieved for the race'.[104] So while Meston believed and stated that every religious mission had been a failure, Gribble declared every government reserve a failure. It did not augur well for the future of the Butchulla and other Aborigines transplanted to Bogimbah.

Meston probably truly believed that the altered way of life that he had imposed upon the Wide Bay Aborigines, and those he had removed there, was close enough to their traditional lives as to see them happy and content under his controlling but paternalistic care. To Gribble and the Church it was anathema, because Gribble was in the business of denying old ways, forcing them out of Aborigines, to be replaced with new Christian ways, involving a strong work ethic and the worship of God.

The Church further criticised Meston, and his earlier administration of Fraser Island, in numerous articles in *The Church Chronicle*, reflecting on how 'The New Administration' has corrected the key faults of old, namely by introducing religious influence, schooling for children, and an attempt to get the Aborigines working.[105] This article, like others, was a means of proclaiming who was really in control of Bogimbah Mission. Moreover, it was a firm statement of principle with regard to the differences in opinion over how best to manage the 'Aboriginal problem'. It was an unequivocal rejection of Meston's idea that Aboriginal culture should be preserved, and that Aboriginal bodies were more important than Aboriginal souls, and a reversion to the necessity of Christianisation. To reinforce their message, the Church noted 'the Frasers (sic) Island Mission is under the sole control of the Brisbane Board of Missions, who is responsible to the Government for the well being of the Blacks upon the Station'.[106] In the middle of these two stories was another, told while the

[103] Gribble, *Forty Years,* p. 121.

[104] Gribble*, Problem*, p. 117.

[105] *Ibid.,* p. 160.

[106] *The Church Chronicle*, 2 April 1900, p. 130.

men walked around the Yarrabah Mission, reinforcing how well Gribble was doing at Bogimbah with the startling claim that:

> a walk around the station with Mr Gribble as guide, proved quite a revelation to one who had always regarded the Australian Aboriginal as incapable of steady application to work, and averse to a settled and regular life. That the problem of dealing with the race has been solved at Yarrabah is evidenced by the long and stoutly built jetty, and by the numerous buildings erected by the men themselves.[107]

This celebration was premature, in the light of the difficult years ahead. The settled life, and the 'steady application to work', had more to do with the authoritarianism of Gribble and the fact that Aborigines were confined to the island, than to the willingness of Aborigines to be converted and civilised. The rigid daily program of work, 'education' and prayers ensured a 'regular and settled life', but it was not necessarily the Aborigines' choice, as was obvious from the frequent 'escapes' to Maryborough.

A further war of words then broke out between Archibald Meston, still Protector of Aborigines, and the Church, via Ernest Gribble, with claims and counter claims concerning the treatment of Aborigines, past and present, on Fraser Island. The disagreement was played out in the local press and via letters between Harold and Archibald Meston and the Home Secretary. A report in the *Colonist* newspaper was attached to a letter sent to the Home Secretary complaining bitterly about a meeting in St Paul's School Room in Maryborough. Reverend Gribble had addressed the meeting, making some serious charges about the previous administration of the mission. Gribble was reacting to favourable press of Meston's time on the island in the *Brisbane Courier,* which claimed among other things that 'the blacks had been encouraged to be truthful and honest, polite and courteous to one another and kind to their women. That report stated that the rule was of the mildest and most flexible kind'. Gribble seized the opportunity to ridicule Meston and his previous administration by offering what he insisted were instances of that 'mild and flexible rule':

> a woman was handcuffed and secured to a tree in the burial ground, where she remained all night… other women were handcuffed and secured in a boat which was then moored off the

[107] *Ibid.,* p. 130.

> shore… and another was given a hiding with a board, requiring hospital treatment… Yet another man who had had an eye and a hand blown off with dynamite at Gympie, was tied to a post and teased with lighted fuses, being told that he was to be blown up. He escaped during the night… Another girl, well educated, who had been legally married by a Presbyterian clergyman in a southern town was mated with a black boy against her will. Yet another girl, supposedly a Salvationist, was sent to the settlement and took her Bible with her, which she read to the children, but it was taken from her and burnt'. [108]

It is noteworthy that Gribble was not wholeheartedly defending Aborigines per se, but 'Salvationists' and 'Presbyterians'. Gribble was offended at Aboriginal women 'mating' with black boys, whereas Meston saw it as a natural and desirable way of preserving the 'race'. Gribble would not have agreed either with the discouragement of Christian activities such as possessing and reading a Bible. Meston, not surprisingly, leapt to his own defence. No doubt, as a father he was also defending his son Harold, who had day to day supervision of his father's charges. While not stated openly, Gribbles' accusations were as much against Harold as against Archibald Meston. Meston's accusations against Gribble were that some Aborigines left the station and died in the bush, and that Aborigines were again gaining access to opium. The new Archbishop admitted 'Gribble made a bad start by slandering his predecessor'.[109]

Gribble 'circulated glowing accounts of Bogimbah's progress under church control' while he accused the former administration of being responsible for 'more than seventy bodies being buried in the Island's two cemeteries when the church took over'.[110] Unfortunately, his record in this respect was no better. Edward Morey, the local Magistrate at Maryborough, responsible for the whole of the Wide Bay area, reported to the Home Secretary that he had conducted an inquiry into the cause of deaths of four Aborigines who had died at Bogimbah. The inquiry was held on board the *S.S. Llewellyn*, moored off Fraser Island.[111]

The Maryborough police magistrate, Morey, also backed up Aboriginal complaints of lack of food and chronic boredom. Previously, under Meston,

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[108] Harold Meston to Home Secretary, 5 April 1900, Col. Sec. 483A, No. 5602, attachment.

[109] Meston to Under Secretary, Home Office, Col. Sec. 483A, undated but after 22 July 1901, p. 2

[110] Halse, *Terribly Wild Man*, pp. 59-60

[111] *FIT,* pp. 198-199.

Aborigines were allowed some limited opportunities to hunt, fish and practise traditional culture. Under Gribble, their lives were far more regimented. Morey overheard comments from people who had gone ashore from the *S.S. Llewellyn* which suggested that Aborigines were seriously upset by the scarcity of food on the island. They had only dry bread and maize meal porridge, and no milk or meat. While these were not part of their traditional fare, they had become essential to the Aboriginal diet, and the lack of them severely impacted on Aboriginal health. Aborigines told Morey that 'fish [was] very scare' and he noted that there were insufficient clothes and coverings, 'particularly for those who camp in their native gunyahs'. Aborigines also complained that they wanted more to do, as 'we sit here all day nothing to do', a complaint that contradicted the prevailing view that Aborigines were 'lazy' and unwilling to work, but which also conflicted with the Church's claim that Aborigines at Bogimbah were being made busy and productive. Morey felt it was his duty to report these circumstances to the Home Secretary, 'Knowing that you take much interest in the Bogimbah settlement', and requested Archdeacon Rivers be informed 'that I should like to confer with him or someone having authority as to the measures that should be taken to remedy all of this - if the facts are as stated they cannot be allowed to continue'.[112] Morey, it seemed, had a conscience where the Aborigines of his area were concerned, even though earlier Meston had complained about Morey and his treatment of his son Harold.[113]

Upon hearing this report, Archibald Meston wrote to the Home Secretary, questioning both the numbers of Aborigines still alive on the island and why they should be dying. He suspected some 'creative accounting'. He numbered thirty-three deaths, including three men and a boy who had died in a boating accident.

> The twenty nine aboriginals who have died were all in good health when the station was handed over sixteen months ago, as there were none sick at the time of transfer. I am satisfied that under proper care at least 20 of them would be alive and well today. During the three years under the old system, only one black was ill while away from the station, and four men were sent to carry him over from the outside beach, a distance of ten miles, on a litter, and he recovered. It appears that some leave the station now in a weak state in search of food and die from exposure and physical exhaustion. [114]

[112] Edward Morey to Home Secretary, Col. Sec. 483A, 3815, 6 June 1901.

[113] Harold Meston to Ryder, 12320, 26 September 1897.

[114] *Ibid*.,

Harold Meston was incensed that, because the Church used the local press to carry their claims, he had no 'official' way of forcing the government to investigate the Church's claims.[115] He wanted the Church to put their claims in writing and wished the government to mount a proper investigation. The Church was probably fearful that, should the true state of the mission be made public, the donations of clothing and money would dry up. The government, however, was not inclined to hold an inquiry that would probably reveal the hopelessness of Aboriginal lives on Fraser Island. Archibald Meston considered that 'it would be well if the Anglican Church people were to send in all grievances or subjects requiring explanation to the Home Secretary's Office in writing. It would save all concerned from misunderstandings and their dubious effects'.[116] This was Meston's way of deflecting criticism against himself. Neither of these demands was acted upon. The scales had definitely swung Gribble's way.

Meston believed carrying the Christian word to Aborigines did not combine well with the working of the station. He believed strongly that the Superintendent should be kept separate from any religious instruction and only be responsible for the administration of the settlement. Meston's plan was to 'place the whole life of the settlement … under a regular system then to stand apart … with absolute authority to order work to be done, tolerating no disobedience, always kind, dignified and firm; stern and severe if necessary'.[117] In a strange way, although slightly later, the Church also saw a separation of duties on the missions. They had disagreed with the government over the financial arrangements for Aborigines being removed from Ayr to Barambah, and when the government threatened the Church with financial penalties the Archbishop replied: 'so far as food and clothing are concerned it is the Government's business to support the natives: the Missions are responsible for their moral and spiritual welfare'.[118] This probably had more to do with budget restraints than religious principles.

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[115] *Ibid*, p. 3.

[116] Archibald Meston to Home Secretary, 17 Feb 1900, 2378, p. 2.

[117] Evans, '*Steal Away'*, p. 90.

[118] Archbishop to Home Secretary, QSA, A/58858, 15 Feb 1909.

Throughout the whole time of the Mission, Gribble and the Church could not resist swipes at Meston and his secular ways whenever they could:

> The Rev. E.R. Gribble, who is on a visit to the Island, has given a whole new impetus to the work of the Mission. Amongst other things he has started a night school for adults, and great keenness is shown by the Northern Boys to learn reading and writing … The health of the Mission remains good. This has especially struck Mr Gribble, who saw the aboriginals at Fraser Island when the Church first undertook the work there. The contrast, (Mr Gribble says) is remarkable, and the result is due, no doubt not only to medical treatment when need arose, but to the orderly life of the Mission.[119]

The 'orderly life of the mission' meant a strict timetable of Christianising and civilising. Gribble went about changing the lives of Aborigines on Fraser Island the same way he had at Yarrabah. That model was seen as successful and the plan was to extend it, much as Meston had seen his model extend at other Reserves at Durundur and Deebing Creek. The language used was not intemperate but the message was that Aborigines were better off under the mission system than they were under a secular-station regime.

Later in the same year there was a flurry of correspondence about Tom McKenzie, who begged to be allowed to leave the island to be able to work for a Mr McDonald.[120] He wrote a poignant letter to McDonald, which ended by saying: 'I hope you will get me out'. He wrote again after McDonald's reply saying: 'I want you to get me out from here please Sir. I want to work for you again this is no good of a place atal [sic] - no meat only dry damper and tea we get here nothing else. I hope you will get me out'.[121] These melancholy notes from McKenzie show how Aborigines on the island had grown to depend on white man's food instead of their own traditional and sustaining diet of seafood and native flora and fauna, and how that new diet was now failing the Aborigines. It is a telling comment that McKenzie preferred to be working for a white man than live with his own people, simply because the conditions at the mission were so horrendous. Meston, as Protector, wrote supporting the application. Tom was granted his wish and was sent back to

[119] *The Church Chronicle,* 1 March 1904. p. 124.

[120] Brisbane Diocese to Home Sec. 18147, 13 November 1901, 18660, 27 November 1901.

[121] Tom McKenzie to McDonald, Col Sec 483A, 17463, 6 Nov 1901.

McDonald, but not before the ABM had objected and suggested that he first fulfil his obligations under a six-month work contract.[122]

Halse reports that 'the mission developed such an appalling reputation under Gribble's administration that Aborigines were reportedly terrified of being sent there. More than seventy absconded and those who were recaptured begged not to be returned'.[123] Peter McLean, an agricultural adviser sent to the mission by the government, reported that he 'was in doubt of being able to find any land at all likely to meet the requirements' and that 'no one on the island had the faintest knowledge of agricultural pursuits or of the preparation of the land'. He did think, however, that the situation could be changed and sent some vegetable mould to Mr Brunnich for analysis.[124] McLean, Meston and Gribble thus encountered a long and characteristic Aboriginal resistance to the imposition of agricultural pursuits at the expense of their own more successful ways of feeding themselves.

In October 1901, the Church conducted an effective public relations exercise. 'The trip in the steamer Muriel Bell on Saturday last to the Bogimbah Aboriginal Settlement on Frazer's Island was successful, and the object in view was certainly achieved'. This aim was not elucidated in the newspaper, but it certainly must have involved showing the public how well Gribble was managing the mission, how contented the Aborigines were, and how his administration was better and more successful than Meston's. Around twenty people from Maryborough went to the island and were 'entertained' by the Superintendent, Anderson, 'who had organised a corroboree', which 'certainly pleased and astonished the visitors'. 'The blacks were gaily painted and got up in the most grotesque style. The visitors were so pleased at the entertainment that they took up a collection on behalf of the blacks'.[125] Meston had also exhibited Aborigines in this fashion, but it was a potentially more problematic event for Christian missionaries. Although it partially reinforced 'old ways', the event was permitted for the sake of fundraising. This report in the local newspaper shows how the Aborigines were being exploited to demonstrate to the

[122] Meston to Home Office, *Ibid.,*

[123] Halse, o*p. cit.,* p. 59.

[124] Peter McLean to Home Secretary, Col. Sec. 483A, 23 January 1901, pp. 1-2.

[125] *M.C.*, 29 October, 1901, p. 2.

white population how well the Aborigines were living and how they were 'allowed', albeit at times suitable to the Church, to amuse white visitors. More importantly the visitors were told of the daily routine of the inhabitants, including the daily religious observances, as evidence of how Gribble was changing the lives of his charges and systematically replacing their traditional lifestyle with a Christian ethic.

As polite visitors do, those brought over on the steamer professed themselves 'pleased and surprised at the way the blacks were being cared for and treated under their altered conditions of life'. The mission staff was complimented 'on what they had done to make the blacks happy and contented under their altered conditions of life':

> They are taught to be obedient and cleanly...The freedom of the blacks is not hampered in any way as those who desire it receive a week's rations in advance and they can go into the bush and indulge in their free and native style of living.[126]

No doubt Ernest Gribble was pleased at the 'evolution' of his charges but it seemed a far cry from Meston's hopes and dreams for the noble people he had brought to Fraser Island only four years earlier. However, there was not much left of their traditional life at this stage. In February 1902 the *Maryborough Chronicle* told its readers that there were one hundred and seventy Aborigines on the island and upwards of forty children at the school. The 'boys were building new houses, shingle splitting, gardening and looking after the cattle'. Superintendent Anderson, anticipating what was to become an important facet of male Aborigines' lives, noted that the chore of looking after the cattle 'promised to be the most productive in the future'.[127] The portrait was of a regular Eurocentric enterprise in the same fashion as Yarrabah. This report certainly seemed to prove that Meston's grand vision for keeping the Aborigines happy and healthy, saved and preserved as specimens of a once fine 'race', and importantly, free from white influence, was now undone. There was no mention of Meston objecting, as Protector, to any of these new arrangements. It is also illuminating that the Minister thought it desirable that the men could travel to the mainland to 'take up work there', as Aborigines at Yarrabah

[126] *Ibid.,* p. 2.

[127] *M.C.*, 7 February 1902, p. 2.

did, 'leaving their wives and families at the Mission, and on their return dividing their earnings with the mission'.[128]

By late 1902 *The Church Chronicle* was pleased to announce that 'Choir boys at the mission have recently been put into surplices. This has the value of giving distinctiveness to their work as choristers. Two of the men act as Church Officers and the King has his place in the procession of choir and catechists at the opening and closing of service'. Gribble saw the 'King' as a symbolic figure and broker in Aboriginal/mission relations rather than a genuine source of authority.[129] Paul Smith suggests that Gribble's elaboration of Church ritual paralleled the formality of Aboriginal spiritual life and therefore made Christianity more attractive to Aborigines.[130] But it is doubtful whether the surpliced choirs were entirely relevant to people coping with starvation and disease.

Meston's scathing prediction of missions releasing good news right up to their closing was about to be vindicated. In July 1904 the *Church Chronicle* had the sad duty of informing the Church's congregation that:

> A communication has been received from the Minister for Lands (under whose charge the aboriginals of the State are placed) informing the Diocesan Board of Missions that the grant to Fraser Island would have to be reduced by nearly one half. It was felt that it would be impossible to carry on the work with an income so seriously diminished and it has consequently been decided to withdraw from Fraser Island.[131]

The Church felt compelled to print in the *Church Chronicle* in September of that year:

> It may be necessary to warn readers of the *Chronicle* that statements are being made about the closing of Fraser Island, which are unreliable. The motive and reason of the change was (1) that the Government insisted on making retrenchments; and (2) that Bogimbah is an unsuitable site, while Yarrabah is eminently suitable. No hardship is being imposed on the aboriginals by their removal. The Diocesan Board of Missions is not afraid of any criticisms of its actions in this respect, being assured that the fullest information will justify the policy pursued as being the wisest and most beneficent course open to them.[132]

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[128] *Ibid.,* p. 2.

[129] *The Church Chronicle,* 1 Sept 1902, p. 23.

[130] Paul Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

[131] The *Church Chronicle*, 1 July 1904, p. 192.

[132] *Ibid.,* 1 September 1904, p. 27.

Aborigines on Fraser Island, the remnants of the Butchulla, and others, had suffered and would soon suffer more as they were removed far from their home and their traditional lands. Meston and Gribble seem sometimes to have been more interested in scoring points against each other and shoring up their respective ideologies, than actually putting the best interests of the Aborigines first. It seems that both Meston and Gribble, during those years, worked with one eye on each other. Although Meston and Gribble had disagreed about many practical aspects of running the mission, the fact remained that they were still poles apart in ideology. The differences between Meston, on the one hand, and Ernest Gribble and the Australian Board of Missions on the other, boiled down to basic beliefs about the way that reserves and missions should be managed. The government for its part wanted immediate and demonstrable results with minimal fuss, and minimal expense.[133] Aborigines were effectively financing their own upkeep by working for white people as domestics and station hands. The missions were putting minimal money into the pot, for reasons discussed earlier in this thesis, and were getting on with 'saving souls'. Whether this was successful will be addressed at the conclusion of this thesis.

[133] Kidd, *op. cit*.

Chapter Seven

Yarrabah: The Sad Finale

By 1905, Gribble, at Yarrabah in North Queensland, had received the last of the Aborigines sent from Bogimbah Mission via the steamer *Rio Loge*, after the closure of the Fraser Island mission.[1] A new era of mission life awaited the Aborigines who had formerly resided on Fraser Island. The experience would change their lives, and that of their descendants, forever.

Yarrabah, initiated by Ernest Gribble's father in 1892 as the Bellenden Ker Mission, was now well established. If not a total success, it was at least still operating, and Gribble could now finally be free of the omnipresent influence of Archibald Meston as Protector of Aborigines, and the unfriendly soils of Fraser Island, which were blamed for the failure of Bogimbah. Although Yarrabah is not the primary concern of this thesis, it deserves some discussion to illuminate the plight of Aborigines from the Wide Bay area, now far removed from their traditional homelands, and also to illustrate some of the defects in Gribble's philosophy and methods.

John Brown Gribble had set up Yarrabah to help protect the Aborigines from settler violence and illness. When his son, Ernest, took over in 1892 he had to start afresh, practically building the mission from scratch and attracting Aborigines, who had no great desire to leave their traditional life and lands, despite the influx of white settlers to the Cairns area. He was not well supported by local European settlers, who held little regard for Aborigines, believing they were 'thieving, treacherous, murderous, irreclaimable', and 'innately inferior, incapable of learning anything useful and destined to quick and certain annihilation'.[2] While such views were somewhat mainstream in the late-nineteenth century, they were intensified in the far north by the anxieties and extremities of what was one of the most hostile

[1] Another thirty Aborigines went to Durundur, *Maryborough Chronicle*, 24 Aug 1904, p. 1.

[2] *Cairns Post*, quoted in Christine Halse, 'The Reverend Ernest Gribble and Race Relations in Northern Australia', PhD Thesis, University of Queensland, 1992, p. 48.

and violent frontiers Australia had known. Local settlers fretted that the mission would ruin the local economy and there were wildly improbable allegations that it had already destroyed the local beche-de-mer industry, which had been set up on Green Island by Philip Garland in 1868.[3] Green Island, over the years, was the site of several attacks by Aborigines on white men and, probably, by white men against Aborigines.[4]

At first Ernest Gribble was unsuccessful in persuading local Aborigines (two to three hundred Kongkandji people, living in scattered families of about forty to fifty)[5] to move onto the mission, although they certainly monitored the operation, until Gribble received the help of Menmuny, a local Aborigine who had lived in Cairns and who probably saw the mission as a necessary refuge for his people. Menmuny was pragmatic and persuaded the first Aborigines to move onto the mission land, forsaking their traditional life, at least for most of the time. Aborigines were not, at first, willing to stay at the mission permanently, and their presence was generally temporary, as had been the case with frontier missions throughout the colonial period. Aborigines were initially cautious, willing to leave their children there for limited periods, to be fed with Gribble's gooey rice or maize meal porridge, while they hunted, socialised and fulfilled their cultural obligations. They were more reluctant, however, to allow Gribble to attend to their children's spiritual needs. Tribal elders were definitely Gribble's competitors for the hearts and minds of the Kongkandji at Yarrabah, and they, as Jones claims, 'were to prove stubbornly conservative in their views'.[6] Gribble is said to have breathed a sigh of relief when one of the most trusted of the tribal women, the mother of Menmuny, died. 'It was a difficult matter to get her to wear clothes, and she had a great objection to the Mission, holding that we would make the young folk "too much like white fella"'.[7]

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[3] *Ibid.,* p. 48.

[4] Jeremy Hodes, 'Conflict and Dispossession on the Cairns Frontier to 1892', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland* (1988), v.16, no.2, Nov 1998, pp. 543-544.

[5] Halse, 'Reverend Ernest Gribble', p. 25.

[6] D. Jones, *Trinity Phoenix: a history of Cairns and district,* Cairns and District Centenary Committee, 1976, p. 335.

[7] Ernest Gribble*, The Problem of the Aborigines*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1932, p. 90.

It is unclear whether Gribble's determination wore down the Aboriginal resistance or whether circumstances and curiosity got the better of them, but on 12 December 1892 'about eighty aboriginals, old and young, and of both sexes, put in an appearance'.[8] Gribble 'immediately gathered them together, and at once knelt down and asked God's blessing upon the work of the mission'.[9] More were brought in from the Cape Grafton area, and others came from all over North Queensland, often against their will. Gradually, Gribble succeeded in building up his little 'Indian village' of Aborigines.

Arrival of the Butchulla

The Fraser Island people were forcibly removed to Yarrabah in 1905, arriving onto another people's land. At Yarrabah, agriculture, religion and authority were all-important. Gribble's authority was not to be brooked and he set about assimilating the Butchulla people into his already established village.

> Dad Gribble was very strict and even when the people were grown up they had to go to church…If there's a man missing in that church Dadda Gribble will look around to see if everybody is in the church. If he missed one person he would go out in his surplice and all and pick them up and bring them into the church … as soon as he got near the church he'd carry them and put them in the church where they had to sit.[10]

Gribble imposed a strict order at the Yarrabah, as he later did in Western Australia, with the residents becoming, in Halse's words, 'inmates', their lives characterised by drilling, marching, church services, the singing of religious hymns and patriotic anthems and the saluting of the flag. 'Throughout the day the strident tones of the mission bell split the air, reverberating through the settlement and echoed off the hills to dictate the rhythm of life in defiance of the weather, day or season'.[11]

Yarrabah was seen as having two main aims. The first was to save souls, the second to save various clans, from the Cairns area, and later from the Wide Bay area, from extinction. According to Zalewski:

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[8] Ernest Gribble, *Forty Years with the Aborigines* Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1930, pp. 61-62.

[9] Gribble, *Ibid.,* p. 67.

[10] Geoff Higgins, *James Noble of Yarrabah,* self published, Lawson NSW, 1981, p. 15.

[11] Halse, 'Reverend Ernest Gribble', p. 41.

> The first method failed and the second method, backed up by the hated 1897 Act and subsequent amendments that provided a safe haven from attacks and abuse by white settlers, at least gave basic medical services. … The methodology was the saving of a people by imposing the will of another culture on them. Yarrabah today is neither wholly Christian nor a self sufficient Aboriginal Reserve. Yarrabah's history shows by example what not to do by denying its people the medium of choice of how they want to live. This was a choice denied to them since the mission's inception.[12]

Gribble wanted his settlement run as a contained, self-supporting and independent village, and to that end he had men building, cutting wood, toiling in the gardens, felling scrub and ploughing, although, as at Bogimbah, the financial strain soon caused the ABM to request the Queensland Government take over all secular aspects of the mission.[13] The government, however, was not interested, failing to accept that self-sufficiency and financial independence could not be achieved. Meanwhile, the regimented routine of life at Yarrabah continued.

Gribble continued charting his own course for the Aborigines at Yarrabah. After 1900, when white settlement increased markedly in the Cairns area, he embarked on a campaign to collect as many children as could be found. These were often separated from their families to be remade as Christian children – baptised, renamed and forbidden under threat of punishment from speaking their own languages.[14] Children were kept under close surveillance, including the use of dormitories, this being necessary, in Gribble's words, 'to ensure that these Mission children, growing up under Christian teaching, lose all touch with native laws and regulations'.[15]

Remarkably, children who grew up at Yarrabah, later remembered their master with fondness and gratitude. 'Despite the irrevocable changes to the lives of the Aboriginal people caused by the establishment of the mission', writes Thomson, 'no one today at Yarrabah speaks unkindly of that first Missionary, Ernest

[12] Pat Zalewski, 'Yarrabah: from Dreamtime Myths to 1998', *Royal Historical Journal of Queensland,* August 2007, p. 94.

[13] Halse, 'Reverend Ernest Gribble', p. 70.

[14] Halse, *Terribly Wild Man*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2002, p. 56.

[15] Gribble, *Problem of the Aborigines,* p. 39.

Gribble, or Dadda Gribble as he is still called'.[16] It seems to say much about the gentle and forgiving nature of Aboriginal people, that they were able to find positive aspects to what appears to us a harsh and unremitting regime of control and interference. It says something also about the success of Gribble's religious teachings, for many Yarrabah Aborigines eventually embraced Christianity. Among the first was Menmuny, who was made King of Yarrabah, and was put forward as a successful convert, although ten years later he abandoned his Christianity in order to perform customary burial rites when his sister died.[17] Later, others such as John Stewart, Bert Hollingsworth and Arthur Malcolm, joined the Christian church. Indeed, Malcolm was appointed Assistant Bishop to the Aboriginal people in the Diocese of North Queensland in 1985.[18]

When Gribble established Yarrabah Mission he did so with a clear vision of what he wanted for his charges – a good Christian life for all on the mission. Thus the first Christian marriage at Yarrabah was performed with all the trappings of a 'white society' wedding, a religious ceremony with bridesmaids, a mission staff member giving the bride away and a reception of sorts, with the older girls and boys of the mission in attendance.[19] There was great emphasis at Yarrabah on the 'romance' of the wedding, perhaps to convince Aborigines that this new civilised European way was good for them. By 1908 there were white wedding dresses and veils, men dressed in suits and ties, 'eight bridesmaids in white dresses wearing wreaths of flowers and fern on their heads'.[20] So much had the wedding ceremonies at Yarrabah become like European ceremonies that in 1908, when Albert Maywhe and Lottie married, the event carried the hallmarks of a 'royal' wedding, with a photo and description in *The Aboriginal News* and best wishes being sent to Prince and Princess Albert.[21] (These 'royal' titles reflected their place in the Yarrabah Aboriginal hierarchy). Gribble succeeded, in some measure, in using marriage as a way of

[16] Judy Thomson (ed.), *Reaching Back: Queensland Aboriginal people recall early days at Yarrabah Mission,* Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1989, p. 115.

[17] Gribble, Journal, 10 August 1909, quoted in Halse, 'Reverend Ernest Gribble', p. 168.

[18] Halse, 'Reverend Ernest Gribble', p. 115.

[19] Thomson, o*p. cit*., p. 65.

[20] *Ibid.,* p. 65.

[21] *Ibid.,* p. 70.

erasing traditional customs, in this area at least. It is certainly the case that most women from Yarrabah, interviewed by Thomson, saw marriage as a way out of the dormitory, and a path to domesticity and independence. However, the results were not often idyllic, as the young couples were often too-hastily and badly matched, often in defiance of traditional rules.[22] Soon, there were no partners of the 'right skin' left.

In 1902 all Gribble's attitudes, values, beliefs, hard work, pronouncements and his own family collided to deal him a devastating blow. His sister Ethel had fallen in love with a Butchulla man, Fred Wondunna. Fred was eight years younger than Ethel, but more seriously, the union of an Aboriginal man and a white woman was well outside the moral boundaries of the time.[23] Ernest and his family were horrified and Ernest quickly decided that Ethel should marry Gribble's colleague at Yarrabah, William Reeves. Halse claims that Ethel delayed the marriage for as long as possible but eventually married William and they had a child, Faith. William died in 1906.[24] Fred Wondunna had arrived with the rest of the Butchulla people from Fraser Island in 1905 but after her husband died Fred and Ethel rekindled their romance and this led to Ethel falling pregnant in 1907. After unsuccessfully requesting her brother to marry them at Yarrabah, they eloped to New South Wales in order to marry.[25] The whole affair confronted and affronted Gribble and went against all his beliefs and principles.[26] It laid waste to his whole life's work missioning to Aborigines. He was trying so hard to control the marriages of the Aborigines under his care and protection, ensuring they married 'suitably' and this was undermined by his own sister. He had to control the Aborigines' behaviour and morals at Yarrabah otherwise his whole raison d'etre would count for nothing.

One reason Gribble enjoyed the partial 'success' attributed to him at Yarrabah were the outstations scattered over the mission and on nearby Fitzroy

[22] *Ibid.,* p. 65.

[23] For more detailed analysis of this topic see Victoria Haskins and John Maynard, 'Sex, Race and Power; Aboriginal Men and White Women in Australian History'*, Australian Historical Studies, Vol. 37,* No. 126, 2005, pp. 191-216.

[24] Halse, *Terribly Wild Man*, pp. 82-85.

[25] NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages Cert. number 150/1908, see also Halse loc. cit.

[26] Halse notes that all records of Ethel have been erased from the records of the ABM, Halse *ibid*. p. 85

Island. These were at Reeves Creek, Karpa Creek, Bukka Creek, Rocky Island, Gerragah, Murragan, Balanbah and Myro.[27] These outstations gave Aborigines 'space' and allowed for more sanitary conditions than those suffered at Bogimbah, while allowing Aborigines living there a sense of self-determination.[28] These villages were run by Aboriginal people and through cropping and dairy farming they became self-supporting. Gribble set up these camps because he saw a difference between 'Christianised' Aborigines, who were permitted to live on the mission, and those he saw as not yet saved, who were relegated to 'camps' and did not live quite the same life as those within the mission proper.[29] The *Mission Notes* record that the Christians were in camp and the others were outside.[30]

Fitzroy Island was also under lease to Gribble. Here, 'several ex-Fraser Island people, seeking detachment from the main station, persuaded Gribble to allow them to farm'.[31] It is noteworthy that it was the Butchulla who wished to be sequestered again on an island, removed from the regime of the main mission. They chose to be independent, to raise their own food and sustain themselves, as they had done in their previous home on Fraser Island. At Yarrabah the people from Fraser Island constituted the largest tribal group and provided the most concerted and persistent opposition to Gribble's methods. Their numbers strengthened their social cohesion and unity, as demonstrated by Blake at Barambah. They gave the Government a 'great deal of trouble and Gribble blamed them for the escalation in escapes and

[27] Higgins, o*p. cit*. p. 12; Jones, *op. cit.,* p. 349.

[28] Between 1893 and 1907 there were twenty four deaths recorded at Yarrabah and, although there was a hospital, there was no doctor available.

[29] Kidd reminds us that Gribble had a second reason for setting up these outstations, not necessarily as altruistic as they seemed and which reflected Gribble's aspirations of power: 'partly to occupy a greater reserve area and thus minimise the risk of land excisions, and also, as with other missions, to utilise scattered fertile pockets of land'. Kidd, *op. cit*., p. 63, In one case, learning that the Government was about to lease an area at Bubbabadoo, he delayed answering a telegram until he had removed some married couples to the site and then told the officials that the land was already occupied. Gribble, *Forty Years,* p. 34.

[30] *Mission Notes,* August 1899, p. 80.

[31] Gribble to Roth, 29 Aug 1905, A70007, QSA.

crimes during 1905'. By 1911 the Church had abandoned efforts to control them and seventy were allowed to leave the mission and return south'.[32]

Zalewski concludes: 'Yarrabah's development is a story of one culture superimposed on another, in an effort to save a people from extinction through a Christian frame of reference'. So here we have both aims of not only Gribble, but many well meaning people in Australia, elucidated in the same sentence. Meston's aim, as stated before, was to preserve the Aborigines; he did not want the Christian frame of reference but he was unsuccessful. Gribble, however, 'went from obscurity to being the foremost Aboriginal missionary Australia has produced. Yarrabah was presented as a showcase of what an Aboriginal mission should be'.[33] Yet Yarrabah has never been either a Christian mission nor a self-sufficient reserve.

Before Gribble, the local Kongkandji and the Butchulla people from Fraser Island had their own deep spirituality and a self-sufficient lifestyle, around the Cairns area in the case of the Kongkandji, and in the Wide Bay area in that of the Butchulla people. But the measures imposed by Meston and Gribble, acquiesced to by governments not wanting the responsibility of providing for the first inhabitants, and bereft of real ideas on how to incorporate and deal with the original inhabitants of Australia, led to the destruction of traditional lifestyles and the erosion of Aboriginal freedoms and health. Both Meston and Gribble are heavily implicated in these results.

Yarrabah Mission struggled along, firstly under Ernest Gribble, and under other Superintendents after he left, although twice the government was asked to take over the Mission – in 1933 and in 1959.[34] In 1957 the Aborigines at Yarrabah felt strong and confident enough to stage a strike, protesting against inadequate rations, poor working conditions, and the autocratic rules of the Superintendent. Since 1952 Yarrabah's Superintendents had come from the ranks of Anglican Church Army Officers who, it was thought, had the discipline, training and commitment to

[32] Queensland Parliamentary Papers, Vol.2, 1906, p. 937; D. Craig, 'The Social Impact of the State on an Aboriginal Reserve in Qld. Australia', PhD Thesis, University of California, Berkely, 1979, p. 65.

[33] Zalewski, Thesis, p. 93.

[34] *Ibid*., p. 91.

evangelism to be successful.[35] In 1960, after an inquiry and allegations of cruelty, the mission was finally handed over to the Queensland Government. After Yarrabah, Gribble moved on to Forrest River in Western Australia, where he spoke out about massacres of Aborigines in the area, and was pilloried for it, but returned to Yarrabah to be among 'his people' before he died in 1957.

The story of the Butchulla tribe, Bogimbah on Fraser Island, and Yarrabah near Cairns is epitomised in the story of Beengho, Victor Alfred Leftwich, one of the original Fraser Island inhabitants removed to Yarrabah. His name was pronounced Bin-gooh, meaning 'Black Pearl' in the Butchowlla language. Born on Fraser Island on 4 March 1893, to an Aboriginal mother, Bessie, and a white father, Alfred Lejust, a few years before Meston's experiment began, he died in Cairns on 5 July 1977.[36] His story encompasses the time period of this thesis. He is named as one of the Aboriginals in Meston's *Report on the Recently Formed Station on Fraser's Island* in March 1897, as being six years old. He divided his time between living with his mother's clan group on Fraser Island and with his father who lived on Mud Island, between the mainland town of Urangan at Hervey Bay and Fraser Island. His mother died when he was about five and his father departed for the goldfields of Western Australia leaving Beengho in the care of his brother Arthur Leftwich.[37] His story is typical of many. When Bogimbah Mission closed in 1904 he was torn away from his ancestral lands and sent on the *Rio Loge* to Yarrabah, along with the others who were the victims of Meston's and Gribble's failures at Bogimbah. There he married Julia Nunn, removed by Gribble from the Cairns area, in 1912, and they had a family. They had to apply for a permit to marry and after the birth of their sixth child Madge they applied for a Certificate of Exemption.[38]

While Beengho was employed on the *Dove*, a boat ferrying passengers and goods between Yarrabah and Cairns, he saw people he knew who tempted him, on behalf of the Leftwich family, to return to Fraser Island. Some Aborigines had

[35] Noel Loos, 'From Church to State: The Queensland Government Take-over of Anglican Missions in North Queensland', *Aboriginal History,* 1991 15:1 p. 78.

[36] Judith Leftwich, The Black Pearl of the Butchowla People, unpublished manuscript, p. 1 copy held by author.

[37] *Ibid.,* p. 1.

[38] *Ibid.,* p. 3.

managed to beat the system, running away from Gribble. He never did, saying later that he was torn between staying with his wife and children at Yarrabah and returning home to the Maryborough area. When he was an old man, he went to Hervey Bay and stood on the shore, with his eldest son Fred by his side, looking over at Fraser Island, where he and countless generations of his ancestors had once lived. As he stood there, he identified the places of personal significance on the island, which could be seen quite well at that distance, and the memories they evoked. Suddenly, the pent-up grief and longing of many years were finally shed as he broke down and sobbed at the thought of so many years away from his home, his land, his people.[39]

Beengho's story is only one of many shared by dislocated Aborigines from the Wide Bay area, who, after Meston's and Gribble's failures, had to live their lives away from their traditional lands. Beengho was only one of many Aborigines affected by Meston's social experiment, the *'Act',* that was supposed to save, preserve and protect Aboriginal people, and Gribble's missioning and attempts to civilise and Christianise. The story of his life is typical of the 'half-caste' babies born at that unfortunate time and in that particular place and the policy of civilising and Christianising Aborigines. His parents' stories, subject to the strict controls under the 1897 Act, are also typical. They exemplify the attitudes and behaviour enshrined under Meston's Act and the missionaries' zeal.

So here we have two very different men, Meston and Gribble, both convinced they knew the best means to 'save' Aborigines, experimenting with the lives of Aborigines in Queensland. This thesis has plainly concentrated on the philosophy and beliefs of both Archibald Meston and Ernest Gribble, particularly in regard to religion, with a particular focus on the Butchulla. Meston's romanticism has been thoroughly discussed, as has Gribble's religious and missionary background. There is no doubt that there was one further attribute which played into their relationship. Both men had strong and formidable egos that drove them into positions of power. Both sought control - absolute control. Gribble's ego is illustrated by the fact that he wrote *six* autobiographies over his lifetime,

[39] *Ibid.,* p. 4.

demonstrated just how highly he rated his own experiences and beliefs. It is also demonstrated by his statement that only he could save Aborigines 'from utter extinction'.[40] His ego was helped along by the praise of others such as the Bishop of Carpentaria, Gilbert White, the *Cairns Morning Post* and Police Sub-Inspector Cooper who was the local Protector.[41] It is also possible that his lack of education triggered a sensitivity to taking orders from others, goading him to insist that he was right when confronted by those with superior knowledge.

Even a superficial examination of Meston's letters and reports reveals his tendency to place himself as the person who had achieved or whose views were most important. Such phrases as 'the six men were brought before me in my *magisterial capacity*', 'I ordered clothes for them', 'I would again specifically repeat here *my fixed opinion*', flow freely from Meston.[42] He was not a man given to compromise. Both men seemed to live in a world of their own where they believed that 'their way was the only way' and officialdom was simply an untimely intrusion into their life's work. At times it seems entirely possible that both men's principles and values took second place to their relative egos as they tried to prove that they were the 'best' and 'knew best'.

Although they were nominally representing State and Church, these were two strong, independent individuals, basically operating on an independent basis and resisting the demands of their official masters. Although Meston used the Queensland Government to set up and finance his scheme, and Gribble had the ABM to back him, both were largely independent of those institutions in terms of the daily running of their operations. Meston had pushed, as an individual, for his scheme of preservation to be introduced. Both were stubborn, single-minded, dogged and resolute. It was definitely Meston and Gribble, not the state or the church, who determined the lives of the Aborigines under their care. The personalities and backgrounds of the two men had set the scene for the devastating changes that

[40] Ernest Gribble, *Forty Years,* pp. 115-123
[41] *Mission Notes*, July 1898, p. 2, *Morning Post,* 9 June 1897, p. 5, unidentified newspaper clipping, 13/20/4 Gribble Papers
[42] Meston to Home Secretary, Colonial Secretary's Correspondence 483A, 16 February 1901, 2645, QSA, author's emphasis

overtook the Butchulla and other Queensland Aborigines at the turn of the twentieth century.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the ways in which Bogimbah on Fraser Island, and also Yarrabah Mission near Cairns, impacted on the lives of Butchulla people in the first ten years of the *Aborigines Protection Act*, through particular reference to the differing ideals and approaches of Archibald Meston, a public servant representing secular policies of 'preservation', and Reverend Ernest Gribble, a Christian missionary. Meston's aim was to keep the 'noble race' of Aborigines preserved on Fraser Island. Gribble's aim was to Christianise and civilise them. This thesis has shown how Bogimbah and Yarrabah transformed the Butchulla people into Aborigines dependent on white man's money and welfare, mediated by educational and work practices.

The long debate about Christianisation versus civilisation lay at the heart of the antagonism between Meston and Gribble, and helps explain their differing approaches to 'improving' the condition of Australian Aborigines. Meston and Gribble did not act in a policy vacuum. The aims of the Queensland government in the nineteenth century were coupled to colonial expansion. In order to expand and consolidate its economic base, the Queensland government needed to support the burgeoning pastoral and mining industries, and encourage immigration. There was massive migration into Queensland in the second half of the nineteenth century, and especially into the Wide Bay area through the Port of Maryborough. These immigrants, along with imported 'Kanakas' and Aboriginal workers, provided labour for numerous industries. The education and training of Aborigines was largely geared to this end. Both Bogimbah and Yarrabah Missions contributed to the provision of a cheap labour force.

In hindsight it is easier to see both the aims and problems of state and Church policies towards Aborigines in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The rise of the missionary movement, coinciding with the discovery of new lands in the Pacific, opened up new vistas for missionaries. Gribble's beliefs stemmed from these accidents of history. Both Meston and Gribble believed they had a solution to the long running 'Aboriginal problem'. Both failed, and by 1905 the Bogimbah Mission on

Fraser Island was closed; Aborigines would never find a true home there again. The remnants of the Butchulla people were transferred to Yarrabah, along with Aborigines from other areas. Meston moved on in his career, and Gribble became a tormented man at Yarrabah.[1]

Meston's aim was to preserve the remaining members of the ancient Butchulla people, and those from other areas, by removing them from the pernicious effects of contact with Europeans, and allowing them to live in a 'sanitised' traditional community. His model quickly failed and Bogimbah was handed over to the control of the ABM in 1900, where Gribble found the Aborigines in a deplorable condition. Meston failed to 'protect' them or to 'restore their previous traditional lives'. The proud, healthy and self-sufficient people who had occupied the area around Maryborough, Hervey Bay and Fraser Island for thousands of years was reduced to a demoralised, half starved and depleted remnant, ready for the social experiment to come. Meston's efforts to protect and preserve 'his Aborigines' were like Gribble's, well intentioned. Meston certainly cared about their fate and, ostensibly, his idea that removing them from white influence would be beneficial seemed entirely reasonable at the time. However, Meston had three factors working against him on Fraser Island. He did not have the support of the local white population. He lost the support of politicians and bureaucrats, and the physical resources of Fraser Island were against him. Moreover, his egocentric and combative personality led him to disregard those factors working against him. Meston was unrealistic in believing that he could keep Aboriginal culture static and quasi-traditional, and his ideas about traditional Aboriginal culture were, in any event, highly romanticised.

According to Meston, the Butchulla had lived in a paradise before the coming of the white people to the Wide Bay area.[2] In 1905 Meston stated that fifty years before there had been 'from 2000 to 3000 aboriginals (sic) on Fraser Island, an

[1] In a curious twist, Meston applied for the position of Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory in 1911, along with Daisy Bates, but both were rejected in favour of Herbert Basedow, an Adelaide doctor, geologist and anthropologist who lasted only forty five days after his idea of scarification of each Aborigine for identification purposes, (in effect, branding) was rejected.

[2] Archibald Meston, *Report on Fraser Island,* March 1896, no number, p. 5.

exceptionally fine race of people. Today there are about twenty left on the island'.[3] In his first report on Fraser Island to the Queensland Government, Meston boasted about the abundance of fresh water, the plentiful supply of seafood and the healthy climate. 'That one island … kept two thousand aboriginals in perfect health and contentment with abundance of food … swans and swan eggs and water fowl were in great abundance … the western shores were covered in crabs and oysters'.[4] By 1900 his charges – those who were not in the 'very full cemetery' – were severely reduced in terms of population numbers and were disease ridden and half starved.

Both Meston and Gribble possessed ideologies that demanded that Aborigines not live their full traditional lives, in Meston's case because he needed strict secular control over them, in Gribble's case because he needed them to 'stay put'. Keeping Aborigines 'imprisoned' on Fraser Island meant that they were prevented from going to the mainland. Meston was prepared to allow some aspects of their previous life because of his fixation on preserving and protecting Aborigines as 'specimens'. While it is true that in time the new white settlers, with their lust for new land, would probably have further decimated local Aboriginal society, Archibald Meston, by virtue of his heavy involvement with the *Aborigines Protection Act,* put in motion a series of inexorable events which led directly to a severely controlled and restricted life for the Butchulla, and which also impacted on other Queensland Aborigines for many decades after his 'experiment' had failed.

Gribble's aim, of Christianising the Aborigines while assimilating them into a white European lifestyle living in a protected 'village' atmosphere, were unsuccessful, particularly on Fraser Island. There, Aborigines had a healthy scepticism about the religion of the white men, preferring their own beliefs and ways of living that had stood them in such good stead for so long. Missionaries such as Fuller had come and gone, but just being on that island, which had been their home for such a long time, reinforced Aboriginal beliefs, as they came across familiar places and items in the course of their everyday life. Gribble's authoritarianism was not enough to change thousands of years of Butchulla culture. He also was thwarted

[3] *Maryborough Chronicle*, 30 November 1905, p. 3.

[4] Archibald Meston, *Report on Fraser Island,* March 1896, no number, p. 5.

by the physical environment of Fraser Island, unable to produce enough food or income to keep his charges from starving and dying.

Gribble was more successful once he removed Aborigines from Bogimbah to Yarrabah, where Aborigines founded what is known as 'the Yarrabah Church'. Corner claims 'an embryonic indigenous Church also emerged to provide Aboriginal missionaries, synod representatives and the deacon, James Noble'.[5] Another view was that 'Yarrabah's success story lies in the formation of Christian values and an organisational structure which was duplicated in other mission settlements in Queensland and Western Australia'.[6] Missionaries were sent to study Gribble's methods; he led expeditions in 1902, 1904 and 1905 to pioneer the Mitchell River mission, and was invited to establish others.[7]

The Gribble era ended at Yarrabah in 1909 with a population of five hundred at the mission, including 200 communicants, 120 married couples, 87 school children and a community of 15 villages with dormitories, a school, hospital, homes for each married couple and five churches.[8] In September 1899 they baptised six boys and one girl after careful preparation and four girls and three boys were under instruction for confirmation, but there was still only limited success for Gribble's new Christian ways.[9] As late as 1908 Gribble complained 'there was still trouble with 'silly old blackfellow things'',[10] 'converts would abscond to attend corroborees in Cairns and the graveyard adjacent to the Church had to be moved because the people

[5] Kaye Lorraine Corner. Yarrabah: A Mission for the Aboriginal People in North Queensland, The Effect of Government and Church Policies 1900-1912, Partial requirement for the Postgraduate Diploma of Arts (History), University of Queensland, 1994, at Brisbane Diocese Anglican Church Archives, Brisbane Queensland, p. 14. Noble came from the Cape York area and was a Christian long before he came to Yarrabah, having lived and worked in Scone in New South Wales, but such achievements still won Gribble acclaim. Bishop Arthur Malcolm was to thank God for Noble. He 'helped to open the way for me to be the next Aboriginal from Yarrabah to enter ordination'. Geoff Higgins. *James Noble of Yarrabah,* self published, Lawson NSW, 1981, p. 1.

[6] Corner, *op. cit*., p. 57.

[7] Christine Halse, 'Gribble, Ernest Richard Bulmer (Ernie) (1868 - 1957)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 14, pp. 330-331.

[8] Missionary Notes, quoted in Christine Halse, 'The Reverend Ernest Gribble and Race Relations in Northern Australia', PhD Thesis, University of Queensland, 1992, p. 224

[9] *The Church Chronicle,* 1 Feb 1900, p. 102.

[10] Missionary Notes, cited in Halse, *op. cit.,* p. 232.

continued to fear spirits'.[11] Despite years of being inculcated with Gribble's preaching, there were still those who preferred the old traditions to the new ones. Christianisation was not the success it was meant to be, although the Aborigines at Yarrabah could now, at a stretch, be said to be 'civilised'. Corner concludes: 'but for missions like Yarrabah there would probably have been a complete annihilation of the Aboriginal race from the beginnings of white settlement to the institution of enlightened government policies'.[12] There is no doubt that Gribble was a compassionate man and had real concern for Aborigines. As a missionary however his prime loyalty would have been to the Church and to God. He was at least partly successful in convincing some Aborigines to adopt European ideas and Christian principles.

One of the contentions of this thesis was that the policies of both Meston and Gribble induced a dependence on white society. The Butchulla Aborigines had no need for money in their traditional society. They did not have to work in order to be fed. Their traditional tribal areas provided food, adequate clothing and warmth. Anything they needed came from their land or was bartered with neighbouring tribes. They were a self-sufficient people. The first step on the slippery slope was to send Aborigines out to work for white people, in order to earn money to help inadequate budgets from the Government. This made them dependent on those same white people for food and shelter (often sub-standard), and not much else. They were forced into practising agriculture on poor, sandy soil on Fraser Island. Aborigines were not interested in a material culture until white people imposed a culture of dependency on them. Now both white society and Aborigines complain about and regret that very dependency.[13]

Both Meston and Gribble attempted to remove any measure of self-determination from the Butchulla, and thus reinforced the dependency of Aborigines on the state. They became the victims of learned helplessness. The people charged with their welfare during the nineteenth century had destroyed Aboriginal culture

[11] Interview with M Smith, Halse, *op. cit.,* p. 232.

[12] Corner, *op. cit.* p. 4.

[13] Peter Jull, 'What does Cape York want?: Howard, Pearson and 'new directions' in Aboriginal policy', *Arena Magazine,* Fitzroy, Vic, no.80, Dec 2005-Jan 2006: 49.

and lifestyles. This made it more difficult, as the twentieth century progressed, for the remaining Aborigines to retain their way of life - nor were they permitted to fully participate in a European way of life.

The issue of unpaid wages and the position of Aborigines in the work force is not the subject of this thesis but it is relevant. While sacrificing their lifestyle, which had provided their every need, Aborigines were used as unpaid slaves, given virtually no 'white' money and made dependent on welfare to survive. This was a direct result, as asserted in the Introduction, of both Meston's and Gribble's policies. Criticism was then levelled, and is still levelled, at them for utilising welfare payments. Many Aborigines in Australia continue to subsist mainly on welfare and have lower life expectancy than white people. Aborigines, in general, make up a disproportionate number of prison inmates and violence, alcohol and drugs are major problems.[14]

Ros Kidd and Thom Blake have extensively detailed the work experiences of Aborigines in Queensland post Bogimbah and Yarrabah. Blake claims that the settlement at Barambah, was nothing more than a money making enterprise for the Government and a slave depot which exploited Aborigines as unpaid labour for the white settlers in the area.[15] This stemmed directly from Meston's practices at Bogimbah where, after claiming that he wished to segregate the Aborigines and let them lead their traditional lives, instead he sent Aborigines out to work in order to supplement his meagre budget. Ros Kidd researched the bank accounts and money held by the Government on behalf of the Aborigines and concluded that Governments in the early twentieth century stole money that rightfully belonged to the Aborigines who had earned it. This was done in many different ways and although it attracted notice and criticism from auditors, it continued for many years, and under successive Queensland governments. There is a general consensus that the pastoral industry in particular could not have survived except for the (mainly)

[14] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples,* 2005, p. 5.

[15] T. Blake, *A Dumping Ground: A History of the Cherbourg Settlement,* University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2001, pp. 155-160

unpaid labour of Aboriginal men and the 'drover's boys'.[16] As the twentieth century wore on and government reserves replaced Church Missions, this became a way of life for Aborigines. Others gravitated to urban areas where they rebuilt a sense of kinship with other Aborigines.

Gribble, both at Bogimbah and Yarrabah, forced Aborigines into a white man's education system that fitted them out for only low-paid and low-caste occupations.[17] Education was considered an essential part of the civilising process and formed a cornerstone for the belief that Aborigines needed to be civilised before they could be converted to Christianity. There was a deliberate policy of educating the Aborigines only in vocational areas. It would take many decades for educational opportunities approaching that of white people to be made available to Aborigines. As Eckermann notes, 'The standard of education available to Aboriginal children was therefore well below that of their European counterparts with white officials urging as a matter of policy that the former should not be schooled to the same level as those in the white community'.[18] Education would have meant white society losing its low-paid or unpaid work force and enabling Aborigines to mount a challenge to the dominance of white society over them. Aborigines had long been conditioned to accept that they were second class citizens. Even today, Aboriginal education is generally considered below par.

In sum, Meston and Gribble disagreed vehemently and publicly. Meston wanted the state to maintain Aboriginal reserves, and to keep the Churches and the mission societies out. His failure allowed Gribble and the Church the chance to extend its control over Aborigines. However, Gribble also failed to obtain enough funding to allow for his aim of converting souls while saving the remnants of the Aboriginal race. The Aborigines had to be saved by white man's means, whether that was by civilisation, missionisation or simply some sort of preservation.

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[16] Henry Reynolds and Dawn May, in Ann McGrath Ed. *Contested Ground*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1995, p. 179.

[17] Ann-Katrin Eckermann, 'The Economics of Aboriginal Education', *International Journal of Social Economics,* 25.2/3/4, 1998, p. 305. Ros Kidd, *The Way We Civilise,* University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2000, p. 22.

[18] Eckermann, *op. cit.,* p. 141

A touch of condescension shows in the statement by a contemporary writer of the area's history: 'Today a part of Fraser Island has been set aside for the descendants of the first Island tribes in order that they may come together and keep alive their skills, crafts and the folklore of their ancestors'.[19] The descendants of the Butchulla people are scattered, and the only trace of their long history in the area is an interpretive centre on Fraser Island. Very few descendants live locally.[20] Many Aborigines now living in the area come from other places in Queensland and Australia, as does a sizeable proportion of the general population of the Wide Bay area. A four wheel drive expedition by Bill Thorpe in 1995 revealed 'no trace of any buildings, foundations etc., although a good archaeologist would no doubt uncover things … At certain timber camps and other non-Aboriginal sites, signs are up proclaiming their historical significance but absolutely nothing to show for Bogimbah and that history … not surprising really but the "great Australian silence" continues'.[21] Williams states that 'since 1991 many of the Aboriginal cultural sites have not been protected by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and as a consequence the last remaining traces of these peoples' ancestry has been trammelled crushed and tramped into shell grit by up to 300,000 tourists per annum'.[22]

Attitudes and factors in place at the turn of the twentieth century prevented any group of white people, be they Church or government representatives, from successfully operating missions or reserves for Aboriginal people. Despite over one hundred years elapsing since the first settlement in New South Wales and first contact with the Aborigines, and despite Meston's positioning of himself as an 'expert', very few people fully understood traditional Aboriginal society. This failure led to Aborigines from different area and language groups being grouped together haphazardly at Bogimbah, and at other Reserves and Missions. The most important of these was the imperative to civilise Aborigines which meant mixing clans, 'tribes'

[19] Joan Christiansen *They Came and Stayed*, Hervey Bay, 1991, p. 173.

[20] Irene McBride, personal interview with the author, 6 Nov 2008.

[21] Bill Thorpe to Ray Evans, quoted in Ray Evans, *Fighting Words*, *Writing About Race*, UQ Press, Brisbane, 1999, p. 113.

[22] Fred Williams, *Princess K'gari's Fraser Island,* no place, 2002, p. xv.

and Aboriginal nations, interfering with marriage customs, refusing to let Aborigines keep their own language, trying to convert them to Christianity and attempting to impose a European, agricultural based lifestyle on a people who had lived successfully for thousands of years with their own lifestyle. These are typical ways of imposing a culture on a colonised people, and the result was that Aborigines were left in a twilight world somewhere between their old culture and the new white society.

An important factor in the failure of both Church and state to make a success of Bogimbah and Yarrabah, was either not understanding, or ignoring, the importance of Aboriginal connections to land, which was made subordinate to the settler's need for land. Davis and Prescott's study, mentioned earlier, showed the importance of land in this context. Clearly both Meston and Gribble, on behalf of state and Church, disregarded these natural relationships. The two men should not be singled out however, because they represented society's attitudes at that time.

Meston pushed and promoted both the '*Act'* and himself. He did this because he had a genuine belief that his was the only way to save Aborigines. There were limited alternatives in preserving Aborigines and both Meston and Gribble knew this. One alternative would have been to allow the Aborigines to live a traditional life on their traditional lands, similar to Myora Mission. An earlier chapter referred to Myora mission on North Stradbroke Island and examined what made Myora a more successful one. The living conditions of the residents of Myora Mission demonstrated what Aborigines' lives might have been like without the emphasis on Christianising and civilising, and how that life was different because neither Meston nor Gribble brought their individual influences to the administration of Myora Mission.

This thesis has not attempted a serious discussion on what the alternatives to Bogimbah might have been. Any alternatives would probably, and necessarily, have included all of Queensland, if not Australia, and this thesis is about the Butchulla tribe of the Wide Bay and what happened to them under Meston and Gribble. Neither man was considered radical. They represented their times, society's values, and contemporary debates. After Bogimbah failed the Aborigines were set on the

path of life as it is for them today. There was no turning back. The alternatives in their lives were limited but this thesis deserves some minor consideration of what might have been as well as what did happen. Other scholars have written and will continue to write on that subject.

Australia is a large country and Gribble himself suggested that there were no problems with the isolated Aborigines still living in unoccupied areas of the North. He argued that there could easily be a central area proclaimed for segregation.[23] Similarly Meston pragmatically declared:

> It may be said that the natives could be most easily preserved by leaving them undisturbed on their native hunting grounds, but as the conditions of colonisation preclude all possibility of anything of the kind, we must accept some practical alternative and make the best of it. Fate has willed that the Australian Aborigines be forced into a changed environment so as to save him perishing from the face of the earth bequeathing to us in his dying breath the dreadful responsibility of his annihilation.[24]

In 1902 he 'confirmed Roth's estimate of numbers of North and Central Queensland Aborigines at two hundred thousand (sic) but considered that '50 years will finish it'.[25] Gribble also canvassed the idea of proclaiming segregated areas in the north of Australia being used on behalf of the original owners.[26] Even in 1970, Bridges claimed that 'there was plenty of land unused in the early years of colonisation and opportunities given to acquire such ownership rights then'.[27]

Bora rings and sacred sites could have been protected, as they are now, to allow Aborigines unfettered access to areas of their traditional spiritual lives. The Butchulla tribe lived mainly on an island. (Later on, Palm Island, although set up for the wrong reasons as a penal reserve, and used in an unproductive manner, did come into existence as a home for Aborigines). Fraser Island today is largely unpopulated and visited mainly by tourists and backpackers to appreciate its unique

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[23] Ernest Gribble, *The Problem of the Aborigines*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1932, p. 116.

[24] Archibald Meston, *Queensland Aborigines, Proposed System for their Preservation and Protection,* Govt. Printer, Brisbane, 1895, p. 27.

[25] Archibald Meston, *Bulletin,* 12 July 1902, p. 16, quoted in Cheryl Taylor, 'Constructing Aboriginality: Archibald Meston's Literary Journalism,1870-1924', *Journal for the Association of Australian Literature,* Vol. 2, 2003, p. 127.

[26] Ernest Gribble, *A Despised Race, The Vanishing Aboriginals of Australia*, Australian Board of Missions, Sydney, 1933 p. 26.

[27] Barry Bridges, 'The Aborigines and the Land Question: New South Wales in the Period of Imperial Responsibility', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical* Society, 1970, 56(2) p. 94.

natural beauty. It is on the World Heritage Register to be protected – but not for Aborigines. It could have formed a natural home for the Aborigines of this area, had not the white settlers wanted to fell the trees, run cattle and raise horses on it, but population increases would have imposed a major strain on the resources there. A major part of the Aborigines' life was their spirituality and it would have been possible for missionaries and churches to have respected this area of the Aborigines' lives. Meston came closest to this philosophy.

True assimilation was another option. This, of course, would have required quite different attitudes and beliefs, and there was little in contemporary philosophy or ideas to recommend this option. Even today true assimilation has not occurred. The disadvantages in terms of health, housing, education and life span, even one hundred years later, are testament to that. There were certainly humanitarians and forward thinkers around at the time, but, given the influence of Darwin's ideas, these alternatives would have seemed far-fetched even to them. In addition, in practice, this would have meant a dilution of the white race as Indigenous and European married and interbred. To a certain extent this is what happened. There are estimates that up to ten per cent of Australians have Aboriginal ancestry. Evans concludes, 'this process might be seen as at least ensuring some chance of numerical survival for the indigenous population'.[28] But 'miscegenation' was of course deeply feared around the turn of the twentieth century.

The issue of treaties has been discussed since the early nineteenth century, since Batman's abortive attempt with the Aborigines of Port Philip. Governor Arthur considered it 'a fatal error in the first settlement of Van Diemen's Land that a Treaty was not entered into with the Natives'.[29] Countries such as America and New Zealand drew up treaties which protected the rights of both indigenous people and the new settlers, but Bridges claims 'they provided no protection against white expansion when it proved inconvenient to respect them'.[30] At times during the twentieth century this solution has been revisited and there are contemporary calls

[28] Ray Evans, 'Steal Away', *Journal of Australian Studies,* 61, June 1999, p. 85.

[29] Marnie Bassett, *The Hentys: An Australian Colonial Tapestry*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1955, p. 251.

[30] Bridges, *op. cit*., p. 94.

for this to happen. The system used in America for their indigenous people was studied but rejected, mainly because of the English law concerning land ownership. Meston applied parts of it to his plan, those that reinforced his control, but did not seriously think of adopting all of the system. Neither did Roth in 1901 when he asked 'how can we keep 18 000 or 20 000 blacks on reserves?'[31] They could not even successfully keep those they already had there. Meston was not devoid of feeling about the treatment of Aborigines by the British. Thorpe says: 'the de facto occupation of Aboriginal land without compensation in the name of untrammelled 'development' was, for Meston, a regrettable but inevitable set of circumstances which could not be undone'.[32] Meston wrote:

> In Australia there have been no treaties, and no terms with the aboriginals, from the landing of Governor Phillip to the present time. No compensation whatever had been given to them for land occupied and game destroyed. Their exclusive right to any land or game has never even been recognised. They have been treated as trespassers, instead of the original owners of the soil – a race whose title deeds of occupation were old when Britain was occupied by tribes of painted cannibals and the modern British race had neither a habitation nor a name. Their sacred rights have not been recognised, because they were too disunited and too weak to enforce recognition.[33]

Meston also recognised that 'The making of equitable treaties and the preservation of the native races was work of too vast a magnitude for the handful of early settlers, and the ordinary process of pioneering colonisation made any satisfactory arrangement a difficult problem'.[34] Despite the alternatives briefly canvassed here, it is a reality that none of them were used or even seriously considered. The fact remains that politicians and humanitarians today have no answer to the problems of the indigenous people of Australia, so it can hardly be expected that in the late nineteenth century viable policies would have emerged.

Nothing will change the fact that, despite their good intentions, both Meston, because of 'The Act', which he strongly influenced, and Gribble, because of his

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[31] *Ibid.,* p. 86.

[32] Bill Thorpe, 'Archibald Meston and Aboriginal Legislation in Colonial Queensland', *Historical Studies,* Vol. 21, No. 82, April 1984, p. 63.

[33] Archibald Meston, 'Mestonian Flashes: Australian Aboriginals' quoted in Cheryl Taylor: 'Archibald Meston's Literary Journalism, 1870-1924', *Journal for the Association of Australian Literature,* Vol.2, 2003, p. 129.

[34] Archibald Meston, *Queensland Aborigines, Proposed System for their Preservation and Protection,* Govt. Printer, Brisbane, 1895, p. 5.

power both on Fraser Island at Bogimbah and also at Yarrabah, along with his influence with Foxton, adversely affected the lives of the Fraser Island Aborigines, and those on the mainland, forever more. Evans called it 'a form of local genocide'.[35] While this was certainly not the aim and both Meston and Gribble would have been horrified at the thought, it was an unintended outcome of their policies. It has been mentioned before that there are very few Butchulla descendants in their own traditional Wide Bay area. While it is true that Aborigines in other parts of Australia lost their traditional lives eventually, in the case of the Butchulla people most of it was achieved in a very short time in the late nineteenth century, and, uniquely, it was taken from them by the two men charged with preserving and protecting them between 1897 and 1905.

The traditional Butchulla way of life is gone, and while Meston and Gribble are not solely to blame for this, they certainly played a significant part. Call it assimilation, necessary change, call it a social experiment or call it religious fervour. Whatever it is attributed to, Bogimbah on Fraser Island sounded the death knell for the Aborigines of Fraser Island and their traditional life. Both Meston and Gribble, with their respective ideologies and backgrounds, were sure but certain accomplices in the destruction of the Butchulla and their way of life, whether that destruction was unintended or not. They were shackled by contemporary attitudes and beliefs and also by their own idiosyncratic personalities. As discussed earlier, they were also both strong individuals and the same outcome for the Butchulla people might not have eventuated had other individuals been in the positions of power that Archibald Meston and Ernest Gribble enjoyed. They were also victims of their own and white society's strongly held beliefs about the eventual fate of Aborigines, their preservation, and particularly the implementation of ideas about Christianisation/civilisation.

[35] Evans, '*Steal Away*', p. 10.

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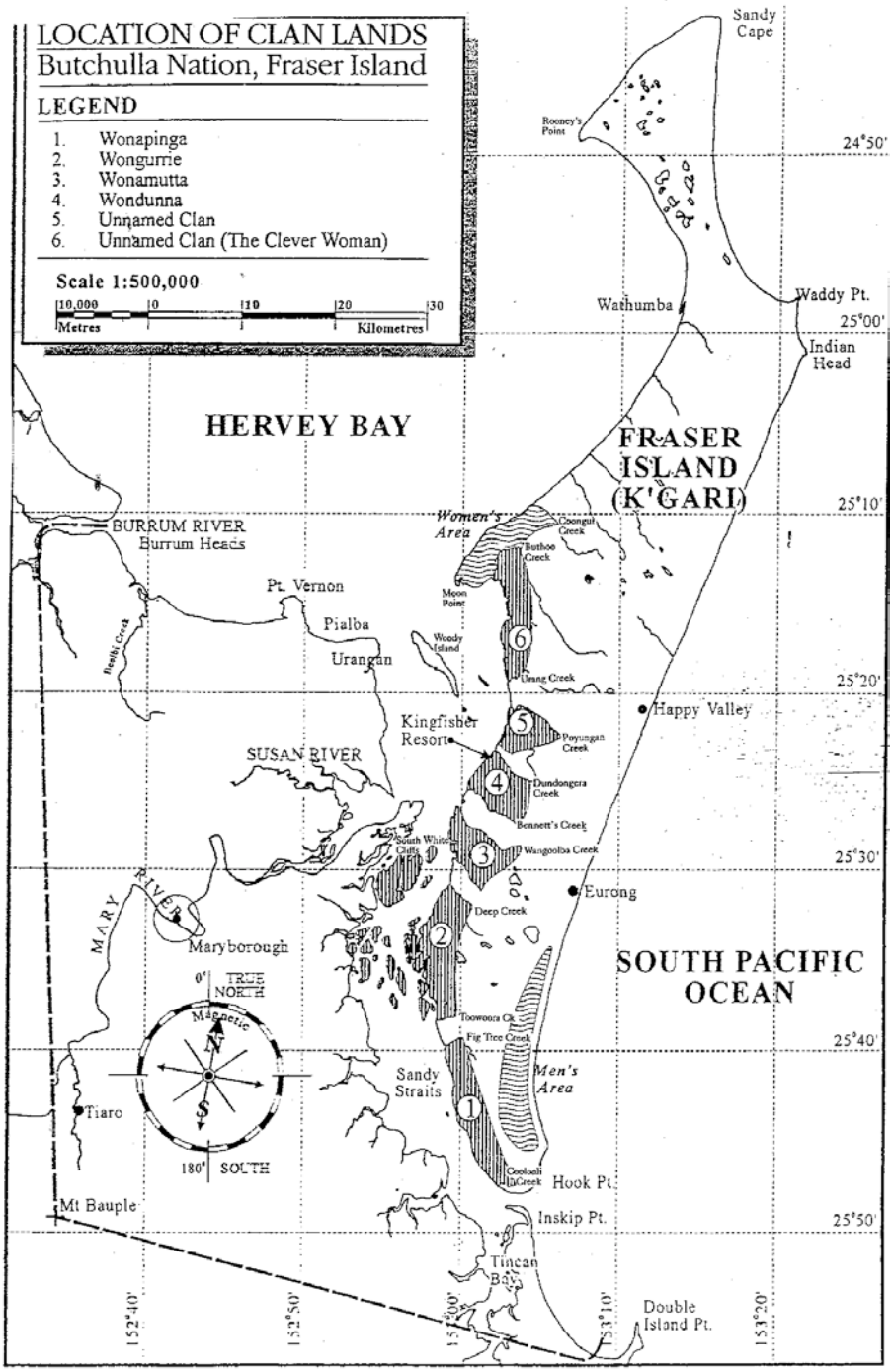
Appendix 1
Map of Fraser Island



Aboriginal clan lands locations on Fraser Island. **Reproduced with permission of Mrs Olga Miller.**