

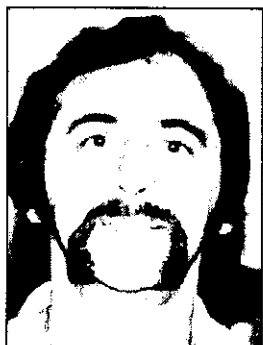
# *MULOOBINBAH*

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO THE RESOURCES OF THE HUNTER REGION

by John Heath

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**About the Author - John Heath**

John Heath, although maternally of the Birripai and Dunghutti peoples, has spent most of his life in the Hunter region where he is a traditional custodian.

His links to the region can be traced in the non-indigenous historical record as far back as the days of the Australian Agricultural Company and although currently living in Canberra, John maintains a continuous association with the Hunter.

He was the first student to graduate from Newcastle University under the Abstudy

Scheme and has been actively involved in Aboriginal affairs in the Hunter for thirty years.

This involvement has included fundraising to build Durungaling Hostel, establishing the Awabakal Co-op, setting up an Abstudy Office in Newcastle, developing Aboriginal student support programs and curriculum at Newcastle University and Hunter Institute of Technology.

Additionally, John was instrumental in establishing the Awabakal XI Cricket Team in which he still plays; was a player in the Newcastle All-Blacks Football Club in its formative years, and was actively involved in setting up the Newcastle Aboriginal Support Group.

He had also been a member of many national, state and regional committees. These include the National Aboriginal Education Committee, the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, and advisory bodies to ODEOPE and the Australian Heritage Commission.

His main goal is to achieve justice for his people.

**Illustrations**

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## Acknowledgments

There are many persons too numerous to mention by name who have contributed in part to enable this work to come to fruition. I thank you all.

Special acknowledgment is made to the many thousands of Gooris\* who contributed in their own ways to ensure the continuance of our peoples to the Dreaming of the Hunter Region. Without them this work could not have occurred.

Muloobinbah is a place of sea ferns, and refers to the area around what is now known as the Port of

Newcastle. It is from the language of the Awabakal people and further illustrates recognition of the endurance of Goori culture.

Finally I wish to acknowledge you, the reader, for taking the time to share some of my perceptions of our people's contributions to the development of the Hunter Region. Hopefully, my work will encourage you to question, inquire and challenge perceptions and beliefs which are still held by many and which impinge upon the need for justice.

*\*Goori, in its different forms was, and still is, the most common traditional word used from the Hawkesbury to the Tweed, on the coastal region of NSW, to describe indigenous men. Its current use includes females, and its use throughout this document to refer to all indigenous Australians is not meant to offend.*

## Synopsis

Economic theory, and hence non-Aboriginal thought, groups resources into the categories of land, labour, capital and enterprise. In the Goori world, all things are intricately linked. An understanding of this is essential to an understanding of an analysis of the Goori contribution to the resources of the Hunter Region.

Land is the lifeline of existence as we know it. Without it, no community will survive. In the Goori way, it is seen as a mother - we come from the earth, we return to the earth, we live off the earth, we seek solitude in her, we are protected by her, we dare not desecrate her, we do not covet that which does not belong to us, our law is enshrined in her and we carry out our rituals accordingly.

The non-Aboriginal world's philosophy towards the land, and hence other resources including labour, is somewhat diametrically opposed to that of the Goori way. This enabled invasion and additional atrocities to be imposed on the Goori world.

The last 200 years in the Hunter Region is characterised by an upheaval of the Goori world. This upheaval included the loss of land, a challenge to the sense of being, subjection to practices of extermination, assimilation and segregation, official re-instating of citizenship rights, policies of self-determination and self-management, and recognition of native title rights. Throughout this upheaval, Goori people have survived, using many different strategies, and have also participated in the imposed society in many different ways. The survival of Goori people in the Hunter Region, to a point where today's population may well number that of 1797, is a triumph over adversity. Additionally, cultural values have survived.

This essay highlights both the struggle over 200 years and the triumph over adversity. It does so by focussing on some very diverse characters and institutions from each period. Data was obtained through a literature review, archival searches and a recording of oral histories through personal interviews.



# *Part 1: Pre-European occupation of the Hunter Region*

## *Introduction*

### **Creation Era**

Whilst non-Aboriginal knowledge, restricting itself to its own scientific methodologies such as archaeological and anthropological studies, limits non-European occupation of the Hunter Region to some 30,000 years (Turner, 1995: 11), Goori knowledge upholds that the occupation of the Hunter Region extends back into the early reaches of the Dreaming.

The term the 'Dreaming' is used commonly to describe the Aboriginal creative epoch. Each language group had its own term to refer to this epoch. While there is a sense in which the Dreaming activities occurred at the beginning of the world, and are past, there is a sense also in which they are still present. Through ritual, humans are able to enter into a direct relationship with the Dreaming. (Edwards, 1994: 67)

This Goori view of the occupation of the Hunter Region is made clear by James Miller in his 1985 work, *Koori: A Will To Win*.

The spirits interacted, shaping what was nothing, into something. They gave life to the whole valley ... After further interaction amongst the spirits the valley floor parted and what was to be the keeper of life was formed. The river now flowed. The land was ready. Both man and animal descended from the spirits and moved over the earth. (Miller, 1985: 1)

### **The Land, The People**

Thus through the Dreaming, the major groups of people emerged. Identified by their mother-tongues, social customs and spiritual attachment to specific geographical areas, these groups have subsequently been described as Awabakal, Worimi, Gringai, Kamilaroi, Wonaruah, Geawegal and Darkinung.

The coastal areas of the Hunter Region were occupied by the Awabakal centred on Lake Macquarie and its mountainous hinterland; to their north were Gaddang speaking tribes, who included the Worimi centred on Port Stephens, possibly the Gringai of the Dungog area, and the Birpai, who were north of the Worimi. To the south of the Awabakal were the Kuringgai (or Guringgai), living both north and south of Broken Bay. Inland of the Kuringgai and bordering both the Awabakal (sic) and the Wonaruah were the Darkinung tribes, whose territory extended from the Hawkesbury River northwards towards the southern drainage of the Hunter River. (Brayshaw, 1986: 40)

As shown in the accompanying map (page 40), the Kamilaroi extended into the north-western reaches of the valley, the totality of land to which they belonged covering a much wider area outside of the Hunter Region. Additionally, the Geawegal, shown to the north of the Wonaruah, may well have been a subgroup of the Wonaruah. At best, the map provides an indication of the areas that these peoples belonged to, although specific boundaries are not marked. Additionally, as we shall see below, these groups interacted with each other as well as with neighbouring peoples outside of the valley. However, because of the limitations of this project, study is restricted to the lower-Hunter area with only minor reference given to the groups other than the Awabakal, Worimi and Gringai.

## *Mother Earth and the Social Organisation of her People*

### **The Concept of Tribes**

**T**he peoples in the map (p 40) are usually referred to as tribes, a definition which emerged from early non-Aboriginal observers. Included in each area were a number of clans or family groups whose spiritual attachment to their land was derived from the Dreaming, with descent amongst these peoples handed down through male lineage. Each group was distinguishable from the other by the predominant speaking of the mother tongue of the area as well as through their knowledge of the laws, ceremonies and customs handed down through the Dreaming. Gooris thus distinguished between themselves in terms of their mother tongue and the land from which they descended.

### **Population Numbers**

The numbers of people who made up each family group and subsequent language group varied throughout time and geographical area. It would appear that numbers were influenced by the laws, ceremonies and customs handed down through the Dreaming as well as by climatic changes, the ecology and other natural phenomena. Butlin estimates that the likely figure was much greater than was most commonly held by early non-Aboriginal observers. His reasoning is based on comparatively more advanced mathematical

models than used by commentators such as Curr (1883), Radcliffe-Browne (1930), and Birdsell (1953). He also appears to take into account, to a larger degree, considerations of the impact of venereal disease, smallpox and massacres. Butlin's estimate for the total number of Gooris in NSW in 1788 is about 250,000. (Butlin, 1983: 147) This would suggest a Hunter Valley population of several thousand, given the number of recognised groups, landforms and ecology.

### **Role of Kinship**

Kinship, which was derived from the Dreaming and was woven throughout Goori society, created

... a very complex dynamic in which every individual had a specific relationship with every other individual, with the food they ate, and with the land. This wide network of kinship ties and obligations extended economic and social links far beyond the core territory in which each horde habitually moved about collecting food, and it meant that others' territories could be visited, for example in pursuit of patchy resources, and when social, marital and other exchanges took place. These extended rights and ties were promoted and maintained by regular gatherings or corroborees. (Brayshaw, 1986: 36)

## *Pre-European Contact and Use of Resources*

### **Basic Relationship**

**T**he land held the key to life's secrets. Man was given the knowledge to read the land and for every rock, tree and creek he found an explanation for existence. He did not own the land, the land owned him. To know the land was to know life. (Miller, 1985: 1)

These words of James Miller provide an understanding of the basic relationship between Gooris and Mother Earth. This relationship determined the Goori use of resources prior to European contact.

While early non-Aboriginal observers saw traditional Goori societies as having simple hunter-gatherer economies, it is more obvious

today, through knowledge of technological, climatic and hence geographical changes, that these economies were more complex.

The elements of dynamism in the Aboriginal economy in more recent millennia are indicated also by regional differences in consumption patterns, production structure, division of labour and other characteristics. ... This dynamism might be summed up in the proposition that Aborigines evolved in Australia from hunter gatherers to resource managers and 'improvers'. (Butlin, 1993: 55)

### **Gooris as Resource Managers**

As with all economic units, decision-making must occur to determine the use of resources to satisfy the needs and wants of the economic unit. The

most basic economic unit is the individual, whilst the largest economic unit in the traditional Goori societies of the Hunter would have been a gathering of the clans, including clans from other language groups.

Kinship structures and other laws handed down through the Dreaming ensured that most social, including economic, activity was carried out on a group basis, although some pursuits were restricted to the individual. Collective decision-making was an important component of traditional life and this allowed a system of resource allocation to be achieved through the division of labour.

### **Division of Labour - A Process of Resource Management**

Aboriginal bands had an array of ends that extended far beyond simple productive activity in food gathering and tool making. Like modern households, Aboriginal bands had ends including the satisfaction of food consumption, leisure, education, learning-by-doing, ritual and religion, order, reproduction, investment, warfare and so on. (Butlin, 1993: 56)

The many and varied ends outlined above were essential to the well being of the Goori communities. As such, they created demand upon the often overlooked resource of 'time'. In order to meet these ends, given the constraints of time, as well as the limitations imposed by territorial, customary and climatic restrictions, division of labour was practised extensively. This division was based upon both gender and age. It is illustrated through an examination of uses of resources, the role of taboos, and the interactions of exchange and ceremonies.

### **Most Commonly Used Resources In the Hunter Region**

Prior to European contact, Goori communities of the Hunter Region could be described as labour-intensive. Labour, combined with the other most significant resource, land (including the sky, wind and sea), produced both consumable and capital goods to meet the demands of the people.

#### **Land**

Man's relationship to the land as set down in the Dreaming determined the manner in which it could be used as an economic resource. This relationship saw the land as the Mother with all beings, creatures and topographical features being intricately linked and possessing rights of being.

Land is the lifeline of existence as we know it. Without it no community will survive. In the

Goori way it is seen as a mother; we come from the earth, we return to the earth, we live off the earth, we seek solitude in her, we are protected by her, we dare not desecrate her, we do not covet that which doesn't belong to us, our law is enshrined in her and we carry out our rituals accordingly.

This relationship ensured that the land would not be exploited. Clans were restricted to designated areas for day to day activities, and these restrictions included areas to which access was limited by both gender and the level of instruction one had received in traditional law. An example of this is referred to in the following extract from *The Port Stephens Blacks*.

Farm Cove was taboo after the sun had fallen, and no native would linger in the vicinity when the shadows began to lengthen. I once inquired the reason of this fear of the place and was quaintly informed that 'too many shark' were there. There was, I knew, another and more pregnant reason that no one would disclose. (Bennett, 1982: 8)

#### **Fire**

As pointed out by Geoffrey Blainey (1975: 71), fire was so much a part of Goori life that the Goori economy has been described as a fire economy. Throughout the Hunter, its use was many-fold and included providing light, cooking, hunting, protection from evil spirits, communications, ceremonial applications, medical applications, art, manufacture of weapons and tools, and as a tool itself in altering the landscape.

It was this latter use that was observed by Captain Cook and Abel Tasman before him, and which prompted Robert Dawson to write

... on ascending a gentle acclivity we saw the grass had all been burnt as far as the eye could reach. (Dawson, 1830: 118)

Through this process of fire-stick farming, the vegetation was undoubtedly changed.

Repeated burning over countless thousands of years resulted in the survival and flourishing of plants, animals, birds and insects which adapted best to the situation. Many Australian species of plant are relatively fire-resistant and some need extreme temperatures for germination. Continuous burning turned forests into grasslands and increased the carrying capacity of edible grass-eating animals. Nearly all the larger native animals were grass eaters. (Bourke, 1994: 18)

Apart from the advantages for hunting and food gathering yielded by the fire-stick farming processes, an additional gain was that large masses of undergrowth were not able to build up. Thus the risk of fire to the community was minimised.

### Water

The Goulburn, Karuah, Paterson, Williams and Hunter Rivers along with their tributaries, billabongs, wetlands, lagoons, and creeks provided fresh water essential for the dietary, hygiene and ceremonial needs of the Hunter Gooris, whilst on the coast, the sea and the lakes provided an additional resource.

Water was also used in the manufacturing process of tools and weapons where sharpening of points or wearing of edges was necessary. In order to ensure continuous availability of water to meet these and other needs, small wells were often made in rock surfaces.

The incidence of poison in a number of species of native plants saw an additional use for water. For example, Burrawang nuts, a form of cycad, were used as one of the sources of flour for damper-type bread. Although of high nutritional value - about 43% carbohydrate and 5% protein, in the raw state they are quite toxic. To render the plant edible, the nuts were left to leach in running water for several days. The burrawang was, additionally, one plant that flourished through fire-stick farming.

Regular burning also could increase kernal production by seven or eight times and make them all ripen at the same time. This meant that they could be used to support large gatherings of people on ceremonial occasions. (Flood, 1983: 201)

### Stone

Stone was used to make implements. It was also used for food preparation and cooking. Many artworks in the region are on stone. These were often created using ochre obtained from stones or from seams within rock formations. Stones were also used in ceremonial activities.

Common implements made from stone were flints for making fire, stone headed axes, scrapers, knives, chisels and grinding stones. The nature of pre-European lifestyle ensured that stone work was usually done on site with only the finished product, such as utensils, being carried any distance. Geographical variations in availability of differing stone types led to ongoing trade, enabling all groups to benefit from the comparative advantage one might hold.



*Photograph of Tiddalick site near Wollombi. Tiddalick was a large frog of the creation period who through greed consumed all the water in the Wollombi Valley. Tiddalick finally released the water following the agitation of the other animals but was turned into stone as punishment. His presence in this form reminds us of traditional law. Photograph: John Heath.*

The incidence of sandstone formations throughout many of the ridges in the high country areas enabled much artwork to be carried out, by both men and women. This artwork, sometimes of ceremonial significance, was most often in the form of charcoal drawings, ochre and charcoal paintings, or rock engraving sites.

### Timber

The degree of vegetation throughout the Hunter Region at the time of first European intrusion varied from densely wooded forests to thinly wooded flood plains. The range of timbers included ash, cedar, iron bark, box, gum, mangrove and swamp oak. Timber was used for many purposes. Both men and women used bark to make shelters for accommodation. Women also used thin strips of bark and grasses to weave baskets and nets, as well as make fishing lines. Men made canoes from sheets of bark that had been worked over a fire. In these instances, the bark was carefully removed to avoid 'ring barking' and thus strangulation of the tree. Cutting trees down was rarely done for economic ends.

The blacks seldom troubled to cut down a tree for the honey it contained, the usual prodigal method of the white man. (Bennett, 1982: 25)

Hardwood was generally used in conjunction with fire and stone to manufacture spears, throwing sticks, woomeras, shields and boomerangs for the men. Digging sticks were made by women using the same processes. Many toys for children were made from timber.

They could throw their little spears with deadly accuracy; they could use a shield with the skill of their fathers. They learned



Apart from the advantages for hunting and food gathering yielded by the fire-stick farming processes, an additional gain was that large masses of undergrowth were not able to build up. Thus the risk of fire to the community was minimised.

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They could throw their little spears with deadly accuracy; they could use a shield with the skill of their fathers. They learned

to track the native animals, became wise in the ways of fish and bird, and made a game of life generally. (Bennett, 1982: 15)

Bark from ti-trees (*Melaleuca*) was important for healing purposes when used as a bandage, whilst new-born babies had their navels covered in a similar fashion. Death would see the departed wrapped in ti-tree bark and bound with vines prior to burial. Sap from trees was also valued with some gums providing medicines. The sap from some wattle trees was eaten as a confectionery.

## Vegetation

Types and degree of thickness of vegetation varied throughout the valley. With climatic changes over time, there is little doubt that the nature of vegetation that was part of the Goori lifestyle immediately prior to the advent of Europeans would not have been the same as that shared with distant ancestors.

As already noted, fire impacted on the vegetation as did other social and economic practices of Gooris. The maintenance of campsites and the holding of various ceremonies ensured that small pockets of land remained cleared. This in turn affected the habitation of birds and animals.

Nonetheless, there existed many types of yams, tubers, grasses, vines and water lilies throughout the valley that were used in the manufacture of baskets, nets, water carrying and drinking vessels, fish and bird traps, or as articles of food. It was, for the most part, the role of women to collect and gather grasses, yams, tubers, and so on, and care was taken when harvesting to ensure that an ongoing supply would not be interrupted.

While the men procured meat from the chase, it was the particular function of the gins to provide what represented the vegetables of the daily dietetic regimen. Principal of these was wombie, a species of yam, the root of a slender vine that flourished in the scrubby gullies. The young, tender stalks of the gigantic lily (pooloongearn), was another form of vegetable delicacy. (Bennett, 1982: 24)

Grass trees were also used extensively for food, as a shaft in spears, and as a source of resin that was invaluable in the manufacture of a glue-like substance.

## Animals, Fish, Bird Life, Plants, Berries, Insects

An abundance of resources ensured that Gooris, particularly in the lower Hunter area, lived in a land of 'milk and honey' long before the arrival of the European bees and cows.

At Port Stephens the tribe was happily situated in the manner of provender. The waters of the bay teemed with fish of every description, easily taken at all times. The foreshores were covered with oysters, which formed a staple part of the diet. The bush abounded with game in the form of kangaroos, wallabies, possums, emus, flying-foxes, wild duck, swans, parrots, pigeons. There were edible roots in the gullies, wild fruits in the brushes. It required but little effort to keep the communal larder filled to repletion. (Bennett, 1982: 17)

Insects were another useful resource. Their common uses include as an aid in indicating changes to the weather (ants), in assisting gatherers to acquire food (bees), and as a source of food themselves. One of the most popular of all foods was the witchetty grub which is the larvae of wood or ghost moths and is commonly found in wattle trees. Another delicacy with medicinal properties was the worm found in rotting logs in streams. This was called cobra by the Worimi, whilst Threlkeld attributed this word in Awabakal to the witchetty grub. (Gunson, 1974: 55)

Animal skins provided for the limited clothing needs of Hunter Region Gooris, especially the cloaks used in the colder months. These served the additional function of blankets.

For the most part full dress consisted of a possum-fur belt, with narrow stripe (sic) of skin pendant therefrom both in front and at the back. This was all their bodily protection against the elements. The rugs they used were made of animals' skins, principally those of possums. They were very neatly made and provided both warmth and protection from rain when occasion arose. (Bennett, 1982: 5)

## Role of Taboos

Scott's picture of a land of milk and honey, as reported by Bennett, was reflected throughout the Hunter Region and many other parts of Australia. Flood argues that while the areas of highest rainfall were generally the richest in food, most areas provided Gooris with a diet that was 'more balanced, varied and nutritious than that of many white people'. (Flood, 1983: 232) This was the result of an economy that was flexible and took advantage of a wide variety of foods that were seasonally abundant. Flexibility enabled Awabakal Gooris to take advantage of such chance events as the stranding of a whale on the beach.

Another reason for the comparative abundance of food was the teachings handed down through the Dreaming which reduced a propensity to exploit. Many sites and stories relate to the evils of greed and the value of sharing. Additionally, traditional law made explicit practices of resource use. Included in these were taboos against the use of certain implements, foods, plants and areas of land. These taboos varied between the various groups and within the groups. They were based on gender, age and level of learning. The nature of taboos enabled an intricate system of conservation to operate. Threlkeld made several references to taboos around Lake Macquarie:

Large lizards are a favourite article of food, for the privileged class of society, amongst the aborigines. ... Snakes form another tit-bit, when roasted, for a certain description of Elders among the tribes; and as for the flesh of the wild dog, that is a dainty dish fit to set before their king! No uninitiated person dare presume to taste the forbidden food under the penalty of 'standing punishment' for the 'breach of privilege'. (Gunson, 1974: 55)

Taboos were also acknowledged by Scott regarding Port Stephens Gooris:

The animal or bird representing the respective totem is of course sacred to the particular person to whom it belongs, and though he may not kill or eat it, those in other groups are free to do so. (Bennett, 1982: 6)

### Role of Inter-tribal Ceremonies

As with other Gooris throughout the land, inter-tribal gatherings were a feature of everyday life.

## Conclusion

**P**rior to the intrusion of Europeans in the Hunter Region, Gooris led a plentiful lifestyle. Food was seemingly abundant. In harsh times such as drought, family groups would overcome food shortages by travelling further within the traditional boundaries determined through the Dreaming in order to meet their economic needs.

In a rich environment the food quest will only occupy an hour or two each day in the good season. ... Even during drought, only two or three hours of collecting by the women can provide a day's food for the whole group. (Flood, 1983: 233)

The different language groups met periodically for ceremonies and exchanges. Goods exchanges were limited since most groups were basically self sufficient, had vast distances to travel, and transportation was either by foot or canoe. Other exchanges included song and dance as well as marriage partners. In all instances, strict protocol had to be observed in keeping with the laws of the Dreaming. The result of these interactions were well established 'trade routes'.

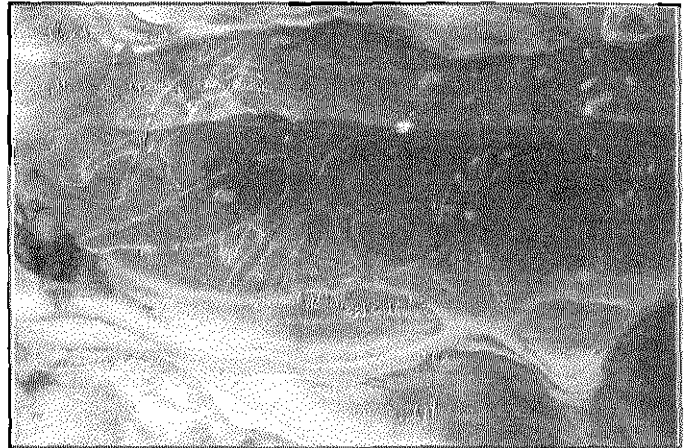


Photo of Whale Painting in cave near Wollombi. Photograph: John Heath

Large gatherings which consisted of several hundred people together over many days, coincided with 'seasons of plenty' and were planned by the host. However, it was not unusual for other large gatherings to occur, such as the consequence of an unforeseen event.

A whale cast on shore, is quite a feast, and messengers are despatched to all the neighbouring tribes, who assemble and feast upon the monster of the deep so long as the treat lasts. (Gunson, 1974: 55)

This balance was the result of many thousands of years of technological and social development based on a philosophy of caring and sharing. It provided significant leisure time to devote to spiritual and cultural pursuits, and an indifference to obtaining material possessions beyond the basic needs. These outlooks on life were in contrast to the intruders who were to invade their country and, from 1788 onwards, have direct consequence on the Goori economy, the widespread fertile grasslands that were the product of fire-stick farming and the distinctive trade routes that traversed the entire Mother Earth.

## Part 2: Transitional Society

### Enter the Colonists

#### Impact of Europeans Prior To Shortland

Cook's voyage up the east coast in 1770 would not have gone unnoticed by Gooris in the Hunter. If they did not see the strange sea-craft with the oddly clothed, ghost-like people on board, they would have soon learnt about them as news travelled the trade routes telling of the landing at what the white-man was to call Botany Bay. An additional item for discussion was no doubt added to the agenda for the next corroboree! Perhaps the tale would also be presented in dance form. Another aid for memory would have been to record the event in the form of rock art.

Cook's landing was not the first encounter of this kind. Oral traditions throughout the country recorded the visits of many different strangers. There was no reason to believe that its consequences would be any different to those of similar earlier events. Thus day to day life continued as before, whilst thousands of miles away across the sea, Cook's discoveries, following much debate and an unforeseen chain of events, led to a decision by the elders' council of the ghost-like people to effect an invasion of the Goori lands.

The invasion began in 1788 with the arrival of Governor Phillip onto the lands of the Eora people who belonged further south than the Darkinung. Although it was to be several more years before any of these men were to set foot in the lands of the Hunter Region Gooris, their presence was soon to be felt in the most insidious of ways. As David Collins of the First Fleet reported in 1789:

Early in the month of April, and through its continuance, the people whose business called them down to the harbour daily reported, that they found, either in excavations of the rock, or lying upon the beaches and points of the different coves which they had been in, the bodies of many of the wretched natives of this country. The cause of this mortality remained unknown until a family was brought up, and the disorder pronounced to have been the smallpox. (Collins, 1804: 57)

While Collins was speaking in regard to the immediate area being occupied by the British, the official report to Britain, as cited in Butlin, 'declared that half the aborigines between the Hawkesbury and Botany Bay died during April and May'. It also concluded that the disease must

have 'spread to a great distance'. (Butlin, 1983: 20) Given the nature of the disease and the interactions of Hunter Gooris with those from the Hawkesbury, this distance would have included the Hunter Region.

Pock-marked Gooris were observed in the Hunter Valley in 1810. (Butlin, 1983: 24) The extent of the impact of smallpox may never be known, but its presence was soon followed into the lands of the Worimi by four intruders.

In September, 1790, four convicts seized a small boat in Port Jackson and made off to the North. After hugging the coast for some miles they put into Port Stephens where they landed and fell in with a tribe of aborigines with whom they lived for five years. In 1795, they were picked up by Captain Broughton in the HMS 'Providence'. It is more than probable that these men in their wanderings with the natives would have visited many parts of the Hunter River. (Goold, 1981: 4)

The fact that the convicts were accepted into Worimi society is in keeping with custom and would have necessitated the runaways' observance of traditional law. As with all group members, a breach of law would have to be reciprocated by punishment. Being convicts, the way of life afforded to them in Goori society, although quite foreign, would have appeared a much better option than that already experienced. One of the challenges to them, however, would have been the severe discipline needed to remain part of the group.

This discipline was not exhibited by some of the next whites to reach the area. In June 1796, a small party found themselves taking shelter in a bay near Port Stephens, after being blown off course when fishing off South Head. The bay, in all probability, was Port Hunter.

About the same time the people of a fishing boat returned from a bay near Port Stephens, and brought with them several large pieces of coal, which they said they found at some little distance from the beach, lying in considerable quantity on the surface of the ground. These people having conducted themselves improperly while on shore, two of them were severely wounded by the natives, one of whom died soon after he reached the hospital. (Collins, 1804: 328)

This discovery of coal by whites was to have significant impact on future relationships between Goori and European, as was the first spilling of European blood on the Mother Earth of the Goori peoples of the Hunter Region. The supply of coal was officially verified by Lieutenant John Shortland who, in pursuit of escaped convicts in September 1797, landed and camped on the river's southern shore. His report also confirmed the presence of vast timber resources, particularly cedar and ash.

### **Interaction following Shortland**

These reports encouraged merchants to send small vessels to the Hunter (Coal) River to secure shipments of cedar and coal. That these activities on their own were not in conflict with traditional law can be seen through the examples of the Awabakal working in cooperation with the whites. However, traditional law would have been broken by seeking these resources in taboo areas. The issues of protocol and reciprocity would also determine interactions. At this time, guerrilla warfare was being waged quite successfully by bands of Gooris around Parramatta and the Hawkesbury, particularly under the leadership of Pemulwuy.

This savage was first known in the settlement by the murder of John McIntyre in the year 1790, since which he had been a most active enemy to the settlers, plundering them of their property, and endangering their personal safety. (Collins, 1804: 405)

Collins provided further reference of guerrilla warfare in April 1798.

Toward the latter end of the month, the settlers at the northern farms were much annoyed by the natives, who came down in a body, and burnt several houses. (Collins, 1804: 449)

The Hunter Gooris were no doubt well aware of the open conflict being experienced by their southern neighbours as the invaders aggressively consumed resources. However it appeared that they only resorted to arms when traditional law was breached. This is alluded to by Goold in reference to the crews of the trader vessels.

In March, 1799, whilst two of these vessels were at the river loading cedar, the crew of one fell foul of a party of natives and in the fight that ensued the whites got the worst of it and were forced to take to the bush. The aborigines were greatly incensed at something these men had done, and gathered in great numbers on the foreshores at which the other boat put off in all haste to Sydney to give the alarm. (Goold, 1981: 6)

As a result of the second boat reaching Sydney, Governor Hunter sent his well-armed whale boat, in the charge of Henry Hacking, to rescue the men. On meeting a large group of Awabakal, the rescue party was informed that the crew in question were on their way overland to Sydney. (Language appeared no barrier!) Refusing to believe the Gooris, Hacking provoked a confrontation which resulted in four Gooris being shot, three perhaps fatally. Hacking's party retreated unmolested and returned to Sydney where some time later the missing crew appeared at the settlement.

This lack of credibility amongst whites does not appear to have destroyed the potential for positive relations. In November 1800, six convicts of a party of fifteen who seized the 25-ton boat NORFOLK, which was subsequently wrecked on the point of present day Stockton, made their way across the harbour and joined a camp of Gooris on the banks of present day Throsby Creek.

Here they lived for months in a very primitive manner until at last three of the men, who were 'fed up' with the conditions under which they were existing, decided to make their way back to Sydney and give themselves up to the authorities. Assisted by the natives, two of them succeeded in reaching Broken Bay. (Goold, 1981: 7)

By this time, the value of Gooris as guides was already recognised and was becoming significant in terms of Goori contributions to the resources of the invading peoples. A further example occurred in August 1800, when William Reid entered Lake Macquarie by mistake and was directed by Awabakal Gooris to a spot from which he was able to obtain a cargo of coal before heading back to Sydney.

### **1801 - Competition for Resources Increases**

The continued success of the merchants in obtaining cedar and coal led to Governor King assessing the viability of establishing a white settlement at what Shortland had called the Hunter River. Following a survey and favourable reports, this was duly done in June, 1801. The settlement consisted of a small number of soldiers and convicts. Its main aim was to exploit the coal supplies. As the result of adversity, it was abandoned in February 1802, with only the vessels of the merchants continuing to impose upon the lives of the Awabakal.

Following an uprising at Castle Hill in 1804, which consisted mainly of Irish convicts, Governor King decided to rekindle the Hunter River settlement. Its emphasis was to be as a punishment camp for recalcitrant convicts. His renewed settlement came into effect on 30 March, with the arrival of

three small vessels under the charge of Lieutenant Menzies. The lives of Gooris of the Hunter Region were to change forever as the exploitation of cedar, coal and salt gained momentum.

### Relationship of Gooris to convicts

Whilst initial relationships as outlined above seem generally peaceable, as the result of continued closer association it appears that a change of attitude occurred by Gooris towards convicts.

Abscinding convicts were always the bane of the early Commandants at Newcastle. Usually the fate of these unfortunate wretches was to be speared by hostile natives, or else stripped of all their clothing and left to wander in the bush. On September 11th, 1804, John Hughes, John Coleman and Edward Mundy took to the bush. Two days later they were attacked by natives who wounded Coleman and took all their clothing and provisions. (Goold, 1981: 12)

It is certain that escaping convicts would have inadvertently walked into taboo areas, thus raising the ire of the Gooris. An additional source of conflict was to arise through the disproportionate numbers of male and female convicts and the heterosexual desires of men. The first group of convicts under Lieutenant Menzies numbered thirty-four males and, although they were joined by some female convicts who arrived on the 'Francis' in September, the disproportion continued. This situation was not restricted to convicts. It was not until some forty years had passed that anywhere near an equal distribution of the sexes was attained in the colony. This provided an additional source of conflict between the Gooris and the invaders of their lands. Threlkeld gives reference to this in his mission report of 1838.

There are also White Gentlemen whose taste, when in the Bush, leads them to keep Black Concubines:- no wonder that the unhappy convicts, whose state of bondage generally precludes marriage, should readily follow the example of their betters, for whose conduct no such plea exists. (Gunson, 1974: 172)

As noted by Reece, (1974: 52) the custom of 'lending wives to visitors was widespread in Aboriginal society', although the concept of wives was different to that of the non-Goori society and led many observers into the misbelief that the practice of polygamy was widespread. That not all whites were ignorant in this regard is illustrated by the following reference by Braim, 'the elder or influential men, possessed of a plurality of wives, being, in reality, only the keepers of them'. (Braim, 1846: 237)

Central to the custom, as with all exchanges, was the concept of reciprocity. Lack of understanding or care in this regard would have very quickly led to conflict.

Additionally, not all such liaisons were amicable, nor in line with traditional law. As Reece (1974: 53) points out, Threlkeld repeatedly refers to instances where Goori women, including girls as young as eight, were subject to kidnapping and assaults from 'the vile men of Newcastle'.

### Continuing non-convict interactions

That the ongoing relationships between Gooris and non-Aborigines were not always amicable is illustrated by the following incident in 1808:

One of Villiers first duties was to conduct an inquest upon the bodies of a man and a boy. The evidence disclosed that the two seamen of the schooner 'Halcyon' accompanied by a boy of eleven years of age, went across to the North Shore to see the remains of the wreck 'Dundee'. On the beach they met a Port Stephens aborigine who seemed friendly, but when the men were off guard he brained Spillers with his nullah, and speared Bosh through the arm. Bosh made his escape, by plunging into the sea and after a long swim, reached the settlement. An armed guard sent across the harbour found the bodies of Spillers and the boy with their heads fearfully battered. (Goold, 1981, 16)

Ensign Villiers was the Commandant at Newcastle in 1808.

At this stage, interaction and hence hostility in the area was limited to isolated incidents such as outlined above. This was more the result of the relatively small number of whites, and the limited demands being made to Goori lands and resources. In 1810, the population of the settlement was 120, made up mainly of convicts who were sent to Newcastle from Sydney for short terms of punishment before returning to Sydney. The main activities of the settlement centred around the production of coal, cedar and lime.

It was the Goori practice to discard at a designated site, known today as a midden site, empty oyster, mussel, pippi and other mollusc and crustacean shells. This inadvertently led to an additional resource which was put to use by the newcomers as early as 1809, to produce lime.

The lime kilns were situated near Fullerton Cove, where there was an immense deposit of oyster shells, probably an accumulation of centuries, and which made excellent lime. This lime was used in the erection of many of the early buildings of Old Sydney. Here the worst and most desperate of the convicts were employed. (Goold, 1981: 17)

Governor Macquarie was later to resort to violence to resolve the question of ownership of land in the Grose, Nepean and Hawkesbury River areas. A military expedition was sent out, with instructions to capture all Gooris they came into contact with, or shoot resisters and leave their bodies hanging in trees to deter others. However, at the time of Macquarie's first visit to Newcastle, in January 1812, he was still attempting to reconcile Gooris through peaceful means. During the visit, he inspected the coal mines, lumber yards and lime kilns. Perhaps of greater consequence was his journey some twenty miles up Hunter's River. This inspection was to prove just as destructive to Gooris of the Hunter Region, as his later orders were to those living about the southern rivers.

Macquarie was reputedly delighted with the rich and fertile lands adjacent to the river bank. This led him to allow the establishment of a few small farms on what was called Wallis' Plains and Paterson's Plains. Here, the cultivation began of wheat, maize, barley and other produce for the use of the settlement at Newcastle. The dispossession of the Hunter Gooris from their land entered another phase.

Between 1810 and 1814, the population of the new settlement had more than doubled, reaching 272, and 'runaways were still a source of considerable worry. Although most of the convicts who bolted suffered terrible privations and even death, many others still persisted in attempting to escape'. (Goold, 1981:18)

The population continued to increase and on Governor Macquarie's second visit, in July 1818, a crowd of about 600 persons attended a Divine Service at Christ Church, the site of today's cathedral.

Under the command of Major Morisset, Commandant at Newcastle from December 1818 to 1823, the convict settlement at Newcastle continued to grow, its population reaching 1179 persons in 1821. During his term, Morisset issued a number of written permits to prisoners of good conduct, authorising them to take up small farms along the river. (Goold, 1981: 23)

During Morisset's term, the cedar gangs working seventy miles up the Hunter River, were absent from the settlement for a month

at a time. A guard consisting of a corporal and three privates accompanied the gangs, and there was an overseer and deputy for each thirty convicts. (Goold, 1981: 24)

In 1823, Morisset was succeeded by Captain Henry Gillman. Gillman's instructions were to reduce the convict population at Newcastle to 100, although additional men were to work the mines and lime kilns. Port Macquarie was to be the new penal colony and the lands of the Dungatti, Birpai and Ngamba peoples, who interacted with the Hunter Region Gooris for ceremonies and trade, were next to feel the impact of invasion.

At Newcastle, Gooris showed a mixed response to the encroachment on their lands as evidenced by the part they played during Governor Brisbane's visit in November 1823 when:

... the party was entertained by Captain and Mrs Gillman at a banquet, after which the Governor attended a corroboree staged by the aborigines. (Goold, 1981: 27)

Two years after the establishment of the penal settlement at Port Macquarie, the population of Newcastle had declined to 708. However, the influx of free settlers was soon to follow.

In the Hunter River district where, according to Henry Dangar, previous to March 1822, the only inhabitants were aborigines, 372,141 acres had been taken up by 792 persons as at November 1825. Besides this, 132,164 acres had been allotted for Church and School purposes and 100,000 acres reserved by the Government. (Goold, 1981: 27)

The influx was not restricted to the rich fertile plains that had impressed Governor Macquarie. In 1823, Henry Dangar commenced surveying the town of Newcastle. The survey, when completed, showed 192 allotments.

These actions were undertaken without the consent of the Awabakal who were thus further dispossessed of their land and the ability to carry out traditional pursuits. The fact that complete detachment was not experienced is illustrated by examining ongoing interactions between the two groups.

## Conclusion

Numerous free settlers came to Newcastle, some of them being grantees of large estates. One of the early settlers to receive a large grant of land was John Laurio Platt, whose 2000 acres extended along the river bank from

Waratah to Ironbark Creek. (Goold, 1981: 28) Whilst such grants dispossessed Gooris, ironically Platt's Estate was to provide shelter for Gooris some 120 years later.

## *Assimilation, Segregation and Genocide*

### **Australian Agricultural (AA) Company**

**A** company was formed in Britain for carrying on the usual operations of a colonial settler's pursuits; only on a gigantic scale, and for the benefit of a great number of individuals. Agriculture and stock breeding were the chief objects of the society, although mining for coals was added with considerable profit to the company, and benefit to the colony. The capital of the association was raised in shares, nominally to the amount of one million pounds sterling. As private parties obtained their grants of land, so this public company applied for a grant, and had several grants given to them, in separate blocks, to the extent of a million and a half acres. The first grant, containing 1 million acres, was chosen by Mr. Dawson, the original agent, in the neighbourhood of Port Stephens. (Bram, 1846: 62)

Nominally, the land that had been provided in the Dreaming for the Worimi and the Gringai, and the lifestyle that had evolved through many thousands of years was swept away through the issue of a new land title from the administrators of the invading society.

In reality, the Gooris on the land occupied by the Australian Agricultural (AA) Company continued to live as best they could with increasing constraints placed upon them. Their experience mirrored that of Gooris elsewhere, that is, their response was varied. Unlike the Port Hunter clan of the Awabakal, they were not confronted by a burgeoning town that had allotments providing for relatively close living conditions. Rather, the immediate needs of the AA Company were for vast tracts of sparsely wooded lands for grazing, and resources such as timber and road making supplies to provide a supporting infrastructure. This situation, along with fast-increasing flocks of sheep, inadequate labour supplies and imbalance of males to females, led to a demand for Gooris on the estate.

### **Negative interactions**

One Goori response was to attack non-Aboriginals when isolated and make use of their provisions, as illustrated by the following reference from an AA Company memorandum dated August 1830.

Issue and send up to Stroud by the first opportunity for Matthew Delaney, at Lawler's Station, one blanket, two shirts,

three-quarter pound tobacco, in lieu of the same articles stolen by the blacks when he was speared. (Gregson, 1907: 78)

The reasons for this conflict were no doubt varied and while material possessions were apparently obtained 'by the blacks', it would be reasonably unlikely that the need to acquire them would have been a prime motivation, given the fact that the Gooris in this area would still have been relatively active in traditional pursuits.

As mentioned earlier, conflict arose over women and the value of Goori women to the economic well-being of the AA Company took many forms, some of which raised official comment in the white community.

In June 1838, Sir George Gipps, the Governor, complained to the acting commissioner that the Company's assigned servants were in the habit of taking aboriginal women with them when they were sent away on duty. (Gregson, 1907: 97)

The number of employees on the AA Company estate in December 1845 was 399, made up of 281 free men, 103 ticket of leave men and fifteen convicts. Additionally, there were 124 205 sheep, 7189 cattle and 850 horses. Therefore, Goori women were not used exclusively for lustful purposes, but were also seen as a source of labour. Of particular need was support for shepherds tending to the flocks. Not until the late 1860s did the company begin to introduce enclosure and subdivision of land with wire fencing, a method used successfully by Victorian graziers. This technique was said to increase the carrying capacity of a run by at least 50%. Up until then, sheep were moved en masse by the shepherd and his dog (and his Goori companion) to feeding grounds, and then returned to an enclosure each evening.

There were six shepherds at this station, and several old black women, who seemed to be of great service in (looking) after the sheep, bringing in firewood, etc. (Hodgkinson, 1844: 91)

One such relationship was to see the birth of Mary-Ann Bugg, a forebear of the author. Mary-Ann attracted public attention as the wife of the bushranger Thunderbolt and also was the subject of activities that were to lead to legislative reform.





## Ongoing interactions

The many economic roles performed by Gooris for the AA Company grew out of necessity by both parties. On the company's part, this was because of the scarcity of labour, and females, and for the Gooris, for protection and the possibility of retaining aspects of traditional life.

William Scott, who was born at Carrington, Port Stephens, in 1844, was the son of an AA Company employee. His story provides some insight into the roles played by Gooris who survived on the property, albeit during a period of reduced activity following the company transferring its interests elsewhere. Among others, Scott tells the story of a Goori woman who, on discovering the dead body of one of Scott's dogs, performed mourning rites. On completing her ritual, she demanded payment for having carried out the activity even though unasked by the Scott family. 'To get rid of her we complied with her demand for some *plour, chugar and tea*'. (Bennett, 1982: 4)

As illustrated below, it appears Scott's family enjoyed a positive relationship with the Worimi on the property and made good use of their availability:

During my long experience with them I always found that they treated those with whom they associated with the greatest deference and consideration. The members of our family could command any service from any of the tribe and it would be cheerfully rendered, even at the cost of great personal inconvenience. (Bennett, 1982: 10)

That the company had a relatively positive attitude towards the Gooris, as long as they acquiesced and worked when required, is further shown by Threlkeld, who when commenting that he had hoped to obtain the labour of the Worimi, acknowledged that the AA Company induced the Gooris by liberally rewarding them for their labour.

Our blacks were taunted by those of Port Stevens (sic) which almost produced a strike amongst our tribe:- 'You', said the Port Stevens black operatives, 'work for rations of cornmeal, but we have wheaten flour!' 'Massa', said one of our Aborigines, 'You must give us flour too'. (Gunson, 1974: 50)

Although Scott makes mention of Gooris 'spearing the big sea mullet which swarm into the harbor in countless millions at certain seasons of the year', he makes no reference to them using fish as an item of trade. However, it is likely that they did so, given the experiences elsewhere that such exchange took place.

Several of them had found in their interest to sell or exchange fish among the people of Parramatta, they being contented to receive a small quantity of either bread or salt meat in barter for mullet, bream and other fish. (Collins, 1804: 135)

Another economic activity related by Scott was the seasonal gathering of huge quantities of honey 'to trade with the white families of the district who were always eager to purchase it. ... They would supply a quarter cask of strained honey, with the clarified wax from which it had been extracted, for the small sum of 1 pound'. (Bennett, 1982: 26)

As was to happen elsewhere, the value of Gooris as stockmen was also recognised and this was referred to by Scott.

## London Missionary Society Background to Mission

At the time when one million acres was granted to the AA Company, hundreds of thousands of acres in the Hunter Valley were apportioned to numerous free settlers, and many allotments of town land were marked out at Newcastle, 10 000 acres were reserved at Reid's Mistake (Lake Macquarie) for an Aboriginal mission station to be run by Reverend Threlkeld under the auspices of the London Missionary Society.

The background to the mission extends from the first attempts by Governor Phillip to capture Gooris and attempt to assimilate them for the benefit of the invaders. One notable experiment was Bennelong, a Goori whom Phillip brought to the settlement at Sydney in an attempt to learn from him more of the natives' customs and language. Many similar efforts were subsequently made, usually restricted to capturing children. The results were contrary to the expectations of the whites.

Another notable experiment was the setting up of the Native Institution at Parramatta in 1814 and this had further influence on the emergence of the Lake Macquarie mission, which was to provide protection for Gooris from ongoing atrocities. An example of some of the sentiments behind the initiative at Lake Macquarie is shown in the following extracts from a letter from Governor Macquarie to Wesleyan Missionaries dated 12 March 1821.

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter ... on the subject of forming an agricultural establishment for the civilisation of the aborigines. ... Your pious and humane proposal of directing

your labours towards the civilisation of the natives, is highly praise-worthy, and demands my best acknowledgment on the part of this Government, as well as on the part of these poor ignorant people themselves ... whom I consider as also placed under my immediate protection. (MMS: Australia 1)

Similar sentiments were displayed in a letter, signed 'Philanthropus', and published in the *Sydney Gazette* in 1819.

I was a few days ago conversing with a friend on the subject of evangelising the wandering tribes of New Holland, who are literally perishing by lack of knowledge. He very highly applauded the benevolent institution established by the Government in 1814 for the instruction of the children whom these aborigines may be willing to have educated and bring to the school; but a question then arose respecting the many hundreds of adults, and the children who continue in a state of barbarism on the sea shores and through the woods, 'what can be done for the improvement of these, old and young? or what plan can be adopted to raise them out of their present low, very low, and wretched condition, that they may know the heights of Christianity, become an honour to our nation, and future blessing to this land?' (MMS: Australia 1)

Whilst sentiments such as those expressed above provided a springboard for the establishment of missions for Gooris, they were not held by all. Recognising this, but holding hope for the future, Threlkeld wrote in February, 1825:

In some parts of the Colony there is quite a hostile feeling against the Blacks. And those who ought to be their champions are silent on the subject. A Gentleman (Mr. Cox) ... recommended at a publick (sic) meeting in this Colony that the best mission towards the Blacks would be to 'Shoot them all and manure the ground with them!!!' It is a little encouraging however that the disposition towards them in the part where our operations commence is very different. (Gunson, 1974: 178)

Whilst Threlkeld is perhaps best remembered for his linguistic studies, his instructions in setting up the mission included 'the conversion of the debased Aborigines of this Country to Christianity, and their instruction in the arts of civilised life' including 'industry in cultivating land, and building themselves houses'. Threlkeld believed that to attain these ends, he needed to

become conversant in the local language. This he was able to do through the persistent support of Biraban, an Awabakal Goori who had been taken to Sydney when quite young and used as a servant for one of the officers at the military barracks. Biraban, also known by the English name of Johnny M'Gill, spoke 'very fair english'.

### Use of Goori Labour

When Captain Francis Allman received instructions to establish a penal settlement at Port Macquarie in March 1821 he took with him M'Gill and two other members of the Newcastle tribe, Jemmy Jackass and Bob Barret. There as Surgeon Cunningham records, 'they proved of eminent service to him as bush-constables in tracing and apprehending runaways'. (Gunson, 1974: 6)

Cunningham also recorded how Biraban and Jemmy Jackass cleared ten acres of heavy-wooded land for Threlkeld at Bahtabah (now Belmont) 'as well and as quickly as could be done by white people'.

Prior to clearing the mission site, Threlkeld made use of black labour to prepare a road between what was to become Belmont, and Newcastle. His first excursions to the mission site had been by water.

My difficult work will be to literally work our way out to the place of our residence, ten miles out of the sixteen must be subject to burning, falling, clearing etc. to make a road to get out and to convey our provisions etc. and even corn to mill if we grow it. (Gunson, 1974: 201)

Whilst Threlkeld depended on the Gooris to mark the way in the first instance, he was sometimes at a loss without a guide.

Although we have chopped the trees and gone the marked road so often yet attempting it a little while back without a black guide we lost ourselves and with much difficulty arrived home at midnight. (ibid)

Threlkeld's perception of a mission station, reflecting the instructions from the London Missionary Society, included the need for homes for parents to confine them to one spot, schools for the children, and the means of subsistence through agriculture. He was to be much criticised for his interest in stock raising, which, as Gunson suggests, may have reflected his desire to establish his sons as successful pastoralists. Nevertheless, the stock were important for meat and employment for the Gooris and his large family.

... his own ideas for 'advancing' the Aborigines were more enlightened than those of most of his contemporaries. He grasped the importance of making land available to Aboriginal applicants, despite their reputation for wandering. His desire to see them employed in responsible positions showed his confidence in their natural abilities. (Gunson, 1974: 27)

Among the many other references Threlkeld makes that reflect the value of Goori labour to the non-Aboriginal development of the Hunter Region, were the use of Gooris as 'bush constables', as the procurers of bush foods such as wild geese, as entertainers through the staging of corroborees, as servants in households, and as guides for such explorers as Ludwig Leichhardt. The role of guide often included the additional task of being a packhorse as seen in the reference below:

... they determined to walk to Lake Macquarie, and for this purpose they resorted to the natives as guides. They were thus obliged to walk ten miles further ... and refused to proceed. ... Through the kindness of Mr. Warren [Warner], this obstacle was overcome, by his offering to send his son as a guide, with a horse to carry the portmanteau. (Gunson, 1974: 156)

Additional reference to the 'packhorse role' of Goori guides is also provided by Hodgkinson who wrote: '... having tethered our horses, whilst the blacks were still toiling up the lateral ridge with the provisions' (Hodgkinson, 1844: 36). On such expeditions, Gooris also furnished whites with bark canoes and shelters as well as the provision of bush tucker.

Threlkeld also made reference to the possibility of Gooris working the coal seams of Lake Macquarie but it appears that much of this work in the mines he developed was carried out by miners who formerly worked for the AA Company, together with assigned convicts.

### Payment for Labour

Remuneration for Goori labour varied and was often decided by the bargaining skills and influence of the Gooris. Rum was often seen as being of great use in inducing Gooris to perform tasks, whilst the guide referred to in the above quote received a couple of shillings 'which he forthwith converted into a loaf of bread and a bottle of grog'. In his annual report for 1839, Threlkeld states that while 'several Blacks have been engaged as servants in this and other places ... it is not improbable that cases may arise in which the Aborigines may be discharged without

that remuneration for which they agreed to serve'. Threlkeld himself rewarded Goori labour with clothing, sugar, tea, tobacco and fishhooks whilst paying wages to the free-persons and convicts in his employ.

### End of the Mission

Due to ongoing disagreements, particularly regarding the cost of establishing and maintaining the mission, along with a perceived likelihood of failure given that the mission had not attracted the number of Gooris that was predicted, the London Missionary Society withdrew support for the venture in 1828.

Threlkeld was able to carry on his work until 1841, at a new site called Punte (present-day Toronto). This was done through financial support from the government. Here he commenced coal mining operations in defiance of a monopoly granted to the AA Company which, in the 1830s, had extensive mining operations in the Newcastle area. In 1839, Lady Franklin, as cited in Gunson,

... noted that the missionary's labours were 'having less and less fruits' and that 'at first, he had 160 blacks - now only 30 come to him, and then not domiciled ... had only one living with him constantly.' (Gunson, 1974: 26)

Apart from his missionary, linguistic and entrepreneurial activities, Threlkeld was also active in campaigning for equal treatment for Gooris before the courts. This, along with his knowledge of Goori languages, led him to become an interpreter in the courts. In this role, he was ably assisted by Biraban. This role forced him from the favour of many whites as confrontation between the defenders of Mother Earth and the invaders continued.

### Myall Creek and other Massacres

Threlkeld makes reference to a number of atrocities committed upon Gooris by both the military and civilians. In a letter written in 1826 he states:

I do not mention half what I know of cruelties to the Aborigines, only what comes under my own cognisance and then I can face any one that dares to contradict. ... Mc Gill ... remembers a white settler ... shot a native who was stealing indian corn out of the field as it grew, he then hung him up on a tree with a cob of corn stuck between his teeth! and left him there until he rotted off the branch of the tree. No man, who comes to this Colony and has ground and cattle and corn, can dispassionately view the subject of the blacks, thus interest says annihilate the race. (Gunson, 1974: 213)

In reporting a massacre in the Bathurst area at a time when martial law was proclaimed, Threlkeld gives light to a secondary interest held by some whites working towards annihilation of Gooris:

A large number were driven into a swamp, and mounted police rode round and round and shot them off indiscriminately until they were all destroyed, Men Women and Children! ... But forty-five heads were collected and boiled down for the sake of their skulls! (Gunson, 1974: 49)

In the interests of science, learned members of the white community were trying to establish the existence of an innate mental deficiency in Gooris through an examination of Goori skulls.

Another incident relating to the abuse of official power and Hunter Valley Gooris is as follows:

A Black, who was supposed to have committed a murder up the country, was taken and brought down at night to the new Jail at Wallis Plains, now called Maitland. ... The next morning he was brought out, tied to two saplings and the Officer commanded the Soldiers to shoot him. (Gunson, 1974: 49)

Whilst Lieutenant Lowe, the officer referred to above, was acquitted on a charge of murder, he appears to have been punished by being forced to return to England, and evidence exists that Governor Macquarie had occasion to ensure the execution of a white for the murder of a Goori constable from Newcastle. Usually, the white justice system was inequitable in its treatment of Gooris and whites. Saxe Bannister, who was Attorney General in the colony from 1824 to 1826, was deeply concerned about the unjust system and made public his concerns in his work 'Humane Policy', first published in 1830.

... in 1826, as foul a murder as is possible to be conceived was perpetuated upon a little native boy at the Myall River, near the Australian company's settlement; and the conviction of the three men was secured ... yet the men are said not to have been executed. (Bannister, 1968: ccxl)

It appears that the lives of the white men were spared in consequence of a shepherd being speared on the AA Company property in April 1827.

Atrocities continued throughout the region with Gooris usually spearing individual males, and sheep and cattle, and the plundering of food supplies. The white response was more orchestrated and as pointed out by Elder:

Throughout 1836 and 1837 the frontier skirmishes reached a level that the settlers found unacceptable. They felt that too much effort was being expended in removing the Aborigines from the land; the settlers were constantly seeking new runs and the Aborigines were constantly resisting. (Elder, 1988: 65)

The scene was thus set for the Myall Creek massacre. As a massacre, it was not unusual. It was unique, however, because it was one of the few instances where the white justice system provided anything approaching equitable treatment for Gooris.

The massacre took place outside of the Hunter Region but it impacted on the Hunter Region, and elsewhere, for many different reasons. The site of the massacre was on a northern property of Henry Dangar and the event followed closely on the genocidal deeds of Major Nunn, carried out in north-western NSW upon the orders of Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth Snodgrass 'who as a landowner at Raymond Terrace ... was eager to assist troubled property owners'. (Elder, 1988: 69)

More than forty Gooris had set up camp on Dangar's Myall Creek property and had established a friendly intercourse with the station hands, including two Gooris who were employed there as servants. On 9 June 1838, they were approached by a posse of armed non-Aboriginals. Fearing for their lives, they sought protection in one of the station hand's huts. From here they were:

... all roped together and weeping uncontrollably. There was the giant figure of Daddy with tears streaming down his face. There were women with their babies wrapped in possum coats. There were people looking bewildered and trying to understand what was happening. Little Charlie, the three-year-old who had been a favourite with the stockmen, ran behind trying to catch up to his mother. (Elder, 1988: 76)

The next description as depicted by Elder is the scene of the stockyard:

Near the stockyard was a pile of twenty-eight bodies lying in a lake of blood. It seemed that the murderers, not wanting to waste ammunition, had drawn their swords and cut the Kwiambal to pieces. They had decapitated most of the babies and children. Heads had been hurled far from the bodies. One man had been burnt to death. ... They had kept one of the attractive young

Kwiambal women alive ... after the killing the men turned on her and, with the blood of her family on their hands, they raped her over and over again. (Elder, 1988: 76)

That those responsible for the massacre were brought to trial depended largely on William Hobbs who was in charge of the station at the time and sent notice of the atrocity to the police magistrate at Muswellbrook. This led to a trial, an acquittal, a retrial and the eventual hanging of seven men, a result that received a mixed reception throughout the colony.

Henry Dangar's responses are worth noting, for in reference to the trial he stated, as cited in Elder: 'You can depend on Hobbs and everything he says', and he then informed Hobbs that his term of employment would not be renewed in October. At the same time, a Hunter based organisation gathered funds to fight the charges.

In October 1838, a month before the first trial, the Sydney press reported the formation of an organisation of Hunter River and Liverpool Plains land holders and squatters, known as the Hunter River Black Association, whose avowed aim was to raise money for the legal defence of the eleven accused. Thanks to the energy of its chairman Robert Scott, a sum of £300 was collected at a meeting at Patrick's Plains, the subscribers including Henry Dangar. (Reece, 1974: 147)

The pleas of those found guilty were based around their belief that the killing of blacks was so common it was legal. One response to the hanging of the seven men was to ensure that future massacres went unreported, whilst another was to increasingly depend on the use of poisoned flour to reduce the Goori 'problem'.

### **Aboriginal Protection Policies**

Among the varied responses to the Myall Creek massacre was an increase in the debate over Goori rights. As a result, many pieces of legislation were enacted to help clarify the issue, one of which established the Border Police to try to make consistent the responses of the white community as it further encroached on Goori lands. In May 1839, Governor Gipps republished the order forbidding forcible detention of Goori women in the squatting districts, thereby raising the ire of the AA Company.

Gipps raised further anger by trying to enact legislation that allowed Gooris to give evidence in court, leading to such outbursts as Wentworth comparing Goori evidence with 'the chatterings of

the ourang-outang'. (Reece, 1974: 181) Other legislative moves that reinforced the inequality to which Goori were subjected before the British law included a clause in the Publicans' Act of 1838 forbidding the transfer of alcohol to Gooris, and a Bill forbidding the use of firearms by Gooris without permission of a magistrate. The latter was not enacted. Debate was also entered into regarding proper payment for Goori labour and the processes of interbreeding of the races. Of the latter, a response by Bishop Broughton is worth noting:

Broughton disapproved of mixed marriages on the grounds that the Aborigines were unbelievers and when the Rev. William Cowper requested permission to (perform a marriage ceremony between) an Aboriginal woman and an employee of the Australian Agricultural Company at Stroud and to baptise their children, the Bishop allowed the baptisms but forbade the marriage. (Reece, 1974: 206)

These discriminatory measures reflected the continuing uncertainty of how best to deal with the 'Aboriginal problem', with responses ranging from hostility through humanitarianism to protectionism. Resultant were discriminatory policies which were introduced periodically and existed continually, although not applied universally, until the 1970s. They included the forced removal of Gooris onto mission stations or reserves such as at Karuah and St. Clair, Singleton, the removal of Goori children from their families, the exclusion of Goori children from the public school system, exclusion of Gooris from the public welfare system, the exclusion of Gooris from award wage entitlements, and the denial of Goori rights to land and cultural pursuits. Whilst perhaps half of the Goori population managed to survive 'off the missions', all of the above policies and practices affected the Goori contribution to the resources of the Hunter Region.

### **Margaret White and the survival of the Awabakal**

With the abandonment of Threlkeld's government funded Ebenezer mission, and amid the aftermath of the Myall Creek massacre, the Awabakal around Lake Macquarie and Newcastle survived as best they could in smaller family groups, often reflecting the degrees of assimilation they had experienced before and during the Threlkeld era. Work was carried out in exchange for a kind of squatting right, and with it some escape from the savagery still being experienced by kin elsewhere. The last official massacre of Gooris recorded in Australia was about 1930.

Such was the impact of colonisation that in 1871, a small family group consisting of 'Old Ned, his wife Margaret, his four or five children, and his blind mother' were described as the last surviving remnants of the Awabakal. (Clouten, 1967: 79) The Reverend John Shaw, in a letter to the editor of the *Newcastle Chronicle*, as cited in Clouten, described them as follows:

Ned is a hard-working inoffensive old man. Margaret, his wife, is an ornament to her sex ... some of the family are baptised. The house they live in is divided into rooms. Margaret also acts as a dressmaker and is an excellent needlewoman. ... She is a skilful cabbage-tree hat maker, and her hats realise from £2 to £4. ... Ned grows a little corn, a few vegetables, a little tobacco, attends sporting parties on the lake, and maintains his old mother. (Clouten, 1967: 79)

A dispute over whether or not Ned's family could remain on their land, which was now the subject of free selection, was finally resolved by order of

the Minister for Lands, Sydney, in March 1880, when forty acres were reserved for the use of Margaret (Ned having died in 1873). Margaret remained here until her death in 1894, at Newcastle Hospital. She was buried at Sandgate Cemetery as Margaret White. One of the last references made about her was by John Fraser in 1892:

'Old Margaret' is the last survivor of the Awabakal. She is now living in her slab-hut on a piece of land near Lake Macquarie Heads, and supports herself by her own industry. She had the advantage of early training in an English home in the district. (Fraser, 1892: x)

Fraser appears to ignore the claims of Margaret and Ned's children as being Awabakal, nor does he acknowledge the other Goori families who were still living in the Swansea area. In doing so, he purports a myth whose ramifications are being felt some 100 years later.

## *Survival and ongoing responses to enforced living conditions*

**F**rom the emergence of the Protectionism era in the 1840s, government policy moved through a number of different stages including segregation, welfare, assimilation, self-determination, and more recently self-management. All eras determined Goori contributions to the resources of the Hunter Region and impacted on the ability of Gooris to survive. Whilst it was generally felt by the non-Aboriginal population that the Awabakal had 'disappeared', this view was harder to hold for the Worimi, Gringai, Wonaruah, Geawegal and Darkinung whose presence was still obvious, if somewhat out of sight, either on the reserves and church missions, in the small town camps or on the properties of the landed gentry.

### **Karuah Mission**

Like the mission station at St. Clair, Singleton, a mission was established for Gooris on reserved land at Karuah in the early 1900s. The mission was initially run by the newly formed Aborigines' Inland Mission whose basic objective, as cited in Miller, was 'the carrying of the gospel to the many camps in the interior of our State'. (Miller, 1985: 121) As with Threlkeld's Bahtabah and Ebenezer missions, the church soon gave way to the state, and control over the mainly Worimi resident on the mission reverted to the Aboriginal Protection Board and its successor, the Aboriginal Welfare Board.

An examination of some of the legislation referring to the operations of these boards regarding reserves provides a good indication as to why past residents referred to them as 'concentration camps'.

Regulation No. 25. Any person found entering, trespassing, or remaining upon any station or reserve without lawful authority shall be liable to a penalty not exceeding ten pounds. (NSW Government Gazette, 3 Feb 1915, p. 602)

Regulation No. 28. Every able bodied aborigine, half-caste and other person resident on one of the Board's stations shall do a reasonable amount of work, as directed by the Manager; and whilst so engaged shall be remunerated at a rate to be arranged by the Manager. Anyone persistently refusing to work when required to do so, by the

Manager shall have all supplies for himself and his family withdrawn until he resumes work and shall be liable to be removed from the station.

Regulation No. 28 (c). All quadroon, octoroon and half-caste lads in the Board's stations and reserves of or above the age of eighteen (18) years shall leave same on or before the 31st May, 1915, and shall not again be allowed upon a station or reserve, except for a brief visit to relatives, at the discretion of Managers of stations, or local officers in charge of Police in the case of reserves where there are no Managers. In all cases such visits shall not extend beyond ten (10) days and a report shall forthwith be made of permission so granted. (NSW Government Gazette, No. 97, 9 June 1915)

Gooris were thus directed into manual labour tasks and often 'farmed' out to local proprietors as a cheap source of labour. Most activities at Karuah centred around agriculture and the emerging oyster industry, with Gooris supplying sticks for the leases as well as labour.

### **Survival off the Mission**

Life off the mission offered many different challenges for Goori survival. Goori people were still in fear of being shot, with knowledge of massacres handed down verbally through the generations being supplemented by media reports of such incidents as the Conniston massacre in the Northern Territory in 1928. The long-standing practice of removal of Goori children from their community held further fear. These concerns, along with experiences of exclusion from basic citizenship rights, led some Gooris into a strategy of 'identity denial' in order to survive. Where children were the offspring of less caring whites, a double denial of heritage often occurred if the white men refused to face up to their responsibilities. This was usually due to the outward contempt expressed by their race towards Gooris. This identity denial often saw Gooris claim ancestry such as Maori, Islander, or Afghanistan. Of course, not all Gooris adopted this approach and many survived through following various employment opportunities, some seemingly at odds with logic and the laws of the time. Such an example is provided by Scott:



During the year 1922, I paid a visit to Forster and there found a full-blooded aboriginal named George working at the hotel. He belonged to the Myall Lakes tribe. (Bennett, 1982: 43)

The fact that a Goori was being employed in a hotel appeared at odds with legal restrictions placed on Gooris (legislation restricting the serving of alcohol to Gooris in hotels was not totally repealed in NSW until 1966) but also illustrated the benevolence of some, or perhaps the willingness to 'turn a blind eye' if the situation was to the benefit of the non-Goori community. Another such example, displaying even greater contradictions, is found a few years earlier when at least fourteen Gooris from the Hunter Region enlisted into the armed services to fight in World War One, 'for their country'. As Huggonson points out:

The original Commonwealth Defence Act of 1903 made no mention of debarment from service on racial grounds. However, Section 61(h) of Joseph Cook's 1909 amendment, which introduced a universal obligation in respect of naval and military training, exempted those 'not substantially of European origin or descent'. (Huggonson, 1985: 2)

It appears that most Goori volunteers had to wait until war casualties were so high that their presence became expedient. This also coincided with the failure of the conscription referenda of 1916 and 1917. By May 1917, official policy moved to include 'half-castes' and 'the enlistment of full-blood Aboriginals is also being advocated'. Among the Hunter Region Gooris who served overseas in World War One was William Jonas.

### William Jonas

William James Albert Jonas was born at Salisbury near Dungog in 1889. Whilst little is recorded of his early years, by 1911 he was renowned for remarkable horse riding and whip cracking skills. As such, he reflected the prowess of many Gooris who had shown an uncanny affinity to horses, as displayed by the following quote from a white pioneer in 1884:

I don't know what we pioneers should have done without the blacks for they can't be beat at looking after horses and cattle. (Reynolds, 1982: 172)

However, Jonas was to use these skills in a unique way which was to provide greater returns than the normal sugar, tobacco and tea paid to Goori stockmen. He used these skills to develop a career



The photo shows members of the cast of a skit, set at Glen Rowan, about the bushranger Ned Kelly. This was part of Neave's 'Wild Australia' program that performed in London as part of the celebrations for King George V's coronation. William Jonas is seated second from right. Photograph by courtesy of Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra and Dr W. Jonas.

as a showman performing throughout Australia in such well-known travelling sideshows as Martini's Buckjumping Show and Neave's Australian Buckjumpers. It was in the latter that he 'went to England to perform for King George V's Coronation'. (Studdy-Clift, 1996: 154) This was not to be his only trip overseas as along with his brother John he fought in World War One and obtained military decorations and rank:

Temporary Corporal William Jonas enlisted at Stroud in April 1916 joining the 34th Battalion, 'Maitland's Own'. Jonas sailed from Sydney in August 1916 accompanied by his brother John. ... John was wounded in 1918, but returned to action. William was mentioned in despatches for bravery under fire. He was awarded a clasp of oak leaves to be worn with his British War and Victory medals. (*Shadows of Wire* Exhibition, Newcastle Regional Museum)

Following the ending of his performing career, 'Bill' Jonas returned to the Hunter Region and, like a great number of other Gooris, obtained employment in a wide range of activities including coal-mining in the Cessnock area, timber cutting in the Booral and Stroud areas, oyster farming and fishing on the Karuah River, and clearing properties in the Karuah and Williams River valleys, until his death in 1945. No doubt his profile gained whilst being billed 'the best bareback rider ever seen' (Studdy-Clift, 1996: 155) helped in his endeavours to obtain employment. Such prominence was to benefit many other Gooris who appeared to obtain a degree of acceptance from the white community and this helped provide various opportunities later in life. More often than not, these were Gooris who managed to stay out of the clutches of the Aboriginal Protection Board.

### Aboriginal Protection Board

Many Gooris who 'fought for their King and country' returned to Australia as disillusioned as ever. Not only had they received lower wages than their fellow, fairer skinned Anzacs but they soon found that they were to miss out on land grants enjoyed by other returned servicemen. To further rub salt into their wounds, it was realised that quite often these land grants were portions of land previously reserved by the Crown for Goori communities. In addition, the Aboriginal Protection Board, which was established in 1883, had significantly increased its powers of repression. James Miller wrote in 1985:

In the period between 1850 and 1880 the government of the day did very little towards the betterment of the Kooris' (sic) lot. Probably the only thing that they did

was to distribute blankets to the Kooris on the anniversary of the Queen's birthday. (Miller, 1985: 66)

Apart from acquiring reserves for Gooris, allocating rations, and farming out labour to the white community, the Board operated draconian controls over Gooris within its clutches. It was also very active in extending these clutches, as illustrated:

... the Board accepted a philosophy outlined in the 1888 report of the Aborigine's Protection Association which stated that action be taken in giving full power to remove to the mission stations such of the children, as they deem necessary, from the control of their parents or professed guardians, who continue to roam the country or live in those hot beds of immorality - camp life near large towns. (Miller, 1985: 98)

However, it was not until 1909 that the Board acquired the legislative power to remove Goori children from their parents at age fourteen, to be 'apprenticed to any master of whom the board approved'. Not satisfied with this, continuing lobbying of government led to an amendment of the Aborigines' Protection Act that provided the Board with powers over Goori children of all ages who were 'full-blood' or living on reserves. In 1918, the Act was further amended to include all Gooris. It was to this environment that Gooris who fought and survived World War One, returned.

### Australian Aborigines Progressive Association (AAPA)

The first Aboriginal protest group to be formed was the Australian Aborigines Progressive Association which held meetings in Sydney between 1924 and 1927 under the leadership of Fred Maynard. (Broome, 1982: 166)

Fred Maynard was born at Hinton in 1879, of Worimi background, and was the nephew of a Goori farmer, Tom Phillips, who farmed the St. Clair mission, which was taken over by the Aboriginal Protection Board (APB), from the Australian Inland Mission, in 1916.

In 1913 the local committee of the APB recommended that the Kooris' (sic) land at St. Clair be revoked and their bullocks sold. They further suggested that the Kooris should be induced to work the local farms rather than the farms on the mission. They looked at Kooris as a cheap form of labour. (Miller, 1985: 125)

By 1923, this land had been resumed and Fred Maynard emerged as an outstanding spokesman for Goori rights. He formed the AAPA to fight the injustice being imposed on Gooris by the Protection Board through its practices of removal of Goori children, its removal of Goori lands, and its denial of basic Goori civil rights. Other Hunter Gooris who were actively involved with Maynard included 'William and John Ridgeway (who) had been fighting for land against white encroachment at Tea Gardens and Forster since the early years of the century, and had only lost Forster in 1923'. (Goodall, 1990: 23) The AAPA operated from Sydney but Fred Maynard travelled extensively, voicing his opposition in trying circumstances, having been barred from entering the reserves. The support of the AAPA was quickly shown by its membership growing to more than 500 spread over eleven branches. Letter-writing was one of their methods of attack although very few papers would publish them. 'One exception to this rule was the Newcastle newspaper, *Voice of the North*. (Maynard, 1996 [a]: 6)

Among the demands put forward by Maynard at a large meeting in Newcastle in late 1925, were the granting of freehold land for Gooris, the cessation of the removal of Goori children by the Board, a Royal Commission into Aboriginal affairs and the complete abolition of the APB. (Maynard, 1996 [a]: 7)

One method of response by the Protection Board was to launch personal attacks on Fred Maynard and, by the end of 1927, the AAPA appeared to succumb to the might of the Government body, being 'harassed out of existence by police acting on behalf of the Protection Board'. (Maynard, 1996 [a]: 12) Although his active political life appeared to come to an end, Fred Maynard continued to work as a wharfie in Sydney until a tragic accident cut short his life. At the time of his death, in 1944, he had observed increased Goori political activity, but it was not until some fifty years later that the majority of demands of the AAPA were to be met. Miller states:

The 1920s and 1930s were the decades in which Koori people in New South Wales suffered the greatest oppression at the hands of the Board. Hundreds of children were abducted and transported to Cootamundra, Kinchela and the infants home at Bomaderry. (Miller, 1985: 148)

It was during this period that the white community felt the effects of the Great Depression. Some of them endured, for a time, the life of deprivation long experienced by many Gooris. In fact, a number of families sought a makeshift home at 'Platt's Estate' near Newcastle, sharing the camp site alongside Gooris.

### Platt's Estate

The Aboriginal Protection Board and its successor, the Aboriginal Welfare Board, opposed the gathering of Gooris in groups off the reserves. The aims and objectives of these bodies:

... could never be achieved until the children were removed from the low surroundings of the camps, and placed in a position where they would be sought after for healthy occupations. In that way the children would be saved and the camps abolished. (Parliamentary Debates, 1915: 1353)

Perhaps the closeness to town of such camps embarrassed the boards who were unable to maintain total control over these Gooris' lives (it was easier to hide children off the mission than on it.) Or perhaps the boards were threatened by the close proximity of Gooris to avenues where concerns could be voiced for relatives living on the 'concentration camp'-type reserves. Whatever the reasons, these 'low surroundings' were home to many Gooris, and whilst often lacking in facilities found in the homes of the majority of the white population, they provided a keen sense of community to the Goori inhabitants.

Platt's Estate, in Waratah, was one such camp. It accommodated several Goori families from at least the 1930s up until the 1960s, as well as providing a focal point for Gooris coming to Newcastle to visit relatives or to obtain work. It was ironic that part of one of the first large land grants in Newcastle became a place of refuge for Gooris some 120 years later. The settlement at Platt's Estate was not used exclusively by Gooris during the Depression years. In their efforts to survive the economic downturn, a large number of whites shared the same type of housing conditions. Whilst hardship had obviously forced them into accepting similar living conditions as Gooris, it could safely be assumed, given the prevailing prejudices and general high levels of unemployment, that Gooris were still comparatively more disadvantaged. As Miller points out:

During the Depression the dole for an unemployed white man was five shillings and nine pence a week, which rose to seven shillings a week in 1936. Food rations for a Koori, however, amounted to only three shillings and five pence per week. Kooris living on reserves were not entitled to receive old age or invalid pensions and child endowment for Koori women was only paid out in food coupons obtainable from the local police. (Miller, 1985: 150)

Additionally, Gooris were denied opportunities of maintaining cultural practices and were forever in fear of losing their children to the boards. As the economy moved out of the Depression, and employment opportunities increased, the non-Aboriginal community moved out of Platt's Estate, although, as noted by Greg Blyton:

The *Newcastle Morning Herald* reported a Newcastle City Council inspection of this community in 1954, noting that there were 62 structures made of tents, caravans, bagging and iron huts, and that the population of the area was 125 adults and 109 children, including about 8 coloured families. (Turner and Blyton, 1995: 64)

It was not until the 1960s that Gooris were completely forced from Platt's Estate. During the years of life at 'Platto', employment was found, most often by men, in a wide range of labour-orientated vocations. These were usually in the mines, on the wharves, on the railway, or in the light steel-related industries such as Lysaght's. One of the familiar faces at Platt's Estate was Ted Wotherspoon, later to become the first Goori publican in NSW.

### Dot and Ted Wotherspoon

Ted and Dot Wotherspoon were married in 1954. Ted's wedding car left his mother's home at Platt's Estate to go to the Cathedral. Ted had been born at Smedmore (Maryville) in 1932, but spent much of his life at 'Platto'. Dot was from Moree and had fallen in love with the young Goori boxer on a visit to Newcastle some years before. Ted, at that time, was fighting under the name of Ted McCoy. In a career of some 120 fights with eighty wins, Ted, a feature fighter at Newcastle stadium, at one stage had fifty-two contests (some of them interstate) in one year. Apart from boxing, Ted was employed as a coal conveyor with the electricity authority from the age of twenty-one. Dot, in turn, held a number of jobs including working as a process operator at Newcastle Glassworks with 'about another six Gooris', doing clerical work, and then assistant nursing. In 1971, after having three children, Dot and Ted became the first Gooris in Australia to be granted a hotel licence. Six years later, they became the second Gooris to own the freehold of a hotel. They were 'beaten to the punch' by another Goori fighter of renown, Lionel Rose. Rose bought the Railway Hotel near Melbourne in 1973. Ted's apprehension - 'I was a little bit worried about going into a business. I did not know how the patrons would take an Aboriginal as their publican' - was unfounded, and the Wotherspoons continued with the lease of the Wallarah Hotel

until February 1981. Unfortunately, Ted died some months later. Apart from this venture, both Dot and Ted were instrumental in founding the Awabakal Cooperative.

### Gooris and Sport Boxing

During the Depression and post-Depression years of the 1930s and 40s, the sport of boxing provided an escape for many from the disappointments in life, and for a great number of Gooris, an opportunity to obtain income greater than that available through labouring avenues, and perhaps the opportunity to attain 'full, dignified, human status within a prejudiced community'. Newcastle Stadium was at the centre of the sport outside of Sydney with such advertisements as:

The most flourishing Stadium in the Southern Hemisphere, where twenty fighters per week take part in contests. Fighters imported from all parts of the world to provide Newcastle with Australia's BIGGEST, BRIGHTEST and BEST PROGRAMMES! (Corris, 1980: 97)

By the end of the 1940s, the stadium's success depended greatly on the presence of Gooris, in particular the six Ritchie brothers who fought under the surname of Sands. Their careers extended over a number of years throughout the 1940s and 50s and many of their fights were outside of Newcastle, including at boxing rings in New Zealand, France and England. In total they

... forged a unique record in world boxing: between them 607 fights, 249 knockout wins, one Empire (Commonwealth) title, one Australasian, four Australian, and three State titles. (Tatz, 1995: 132)

The many fights that Gooris fought at the stadium generated large sums of money for the Newcastle economy but, behind the glamour, many of the stars slept in bunks at the stadium once the crowd had dispersed. That they fought on demand suggests further exploitation. The purses earned were often spread throughout the Goori community, because of widespread disadvantage and the retention of some traditional practices. Even so, by the time Dave Sands, arguably one of the greatest boxers of all time, lost his life prematurely in a road accident near Dungog in 1952

... magazines contended that he was the victim of bad match-making, that for a triple champion and Empire title-holder his ring earnings were 'lamentably small', and that through blunders he was 'robbed of a crack at the world title'. (Tatz, 1995: 133)

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It was not until the 1960s that Gooris were completely forced from Platt's Estate. During the years of life at 'Platto', employment was found, most often by men, in a wide range of labour-orientated vocations. These were usually in the mines, on the wharves, on the railway, or in the light steel-related industries such as Lysaght's. One of the familiar faces at Platt's Estate was Ted Wotherspoon, later to become the first Goori publican in NSW.

### Dot and Ted Wotherspoon

Ted and Dot Wotherspoon were married in 1954. Ted's wedding car left his mother's home at Platt's Estate to go to the Cathedral. Ted had been born at Smedmore (Maryville) in 1932, but spent much of his life at 'Platto'. Dot was from Moree and had fallen in love with the young Goori boxer on a visit to Newcastle some years before. Ted, at that time, was fighting under the name of Ted McCoy. In a career of some 120 fights with eighty wins, Ted, a feature fighter at Newcastle stadium, at one stage had fifty-two contests (some of them interstate) in one year. Apart from boxing, Ted was employed as a coal conveyor with the electricity authority from the age of twenty-one. Dot, in turn, held a number of jobs including working as a process operator at Newcastle Glassworks with 'about another six Gooris', doing clerical work, and then assistant nursing. In 1971, after having three children, Dot and Ted became the first Gooris in Australia to be granted a hotel licence. Six years later, they became the second Gooris to own the freehold of a hotel. They were 'beaten to the punch' by another Goori fighter of renown, Lionel Rose. Rose bought the Railway Hotel near Melbourne in 1973. Ted's apprehension - 'I was a little bit worried about going into a business. I did not know how the patrons would take an Aboriginal as their publican' - was unfounded, and the Wotherspoons continued with the lease of the Wallarah Hotel

until February 1981. Unfortunately, Ted died some months later. Apart from this venture, both Dot and Ted were instrumental in founding the Awabakal Cooperative.

### Gooris and Sport Boxing

During the Depression and post-Depression years of the 1930s and 40s, the sport of boxing provided an escape for many from the disappointments in life, and for a great number of Gooris, an opportunity to obtain income greater than that available through labouring avenues, and perhaps the opportunity to attain 'full, dignified, human status within a prejudiced community'. Newcastle Stadium was at the centre of the sport outside of Sydney with such advertisements as:

The most flourishing Stadium in the Southern Hemisphere, where twenty fighters per week take part in contests. Fighters imported from all parts of the world to provide Newcastle with Australia's BIGGEST, BRIGHTEST and BEST PROGRAMMES! (Corris, 1980: 97)

By the end of the 1940s, the stadium's success depended greatly on the presence of Gooris, in particular the six Ritchie brothers who fought under the surname of Sands. Their careers extended over a number of years throughout the 1940s and 50s and many of their fights were outside of Newcastle, including at boxing rings in New Zealand, France and England. In total they

... forged a unique record in world boxing: between them 607 fights, 249 knockout wins, one Empire (Commonwealth) title, one Australasian, four Australian, and three State titles. (Tatz, 1995: 132)

The many fights that Gooris fought at the stadium generated large sums of money for the Newcastle economy but, behind the glamour, many of the stars slept in bunks at the stadium once the crowd had dispersed. That they fought on demand suggests further exploitation. The purses earned were often spread throughout the Goori community, because of widespread disadvantage and the retention of some traditional practices. Even so, by the time Dave Sands, arguably one of the greatest boxers of all time, lost his life prematurely in a road accident near Dungog in 1952

... magazines contended that he was the victim of bad match-making, that for a triple champion and Empire title-holder his ring earnings were 'lamentably small', and that through blunders he was 'robbed of a crack at the world title'. (Tatz, 1995: 133)

Among the many tarnishes on the image of boxing was the often used practice of having Gooris deny their racial background. Many were billed as Puerto Ricans, Afghans or Islanders. Perhaps this was done to provide greater acceptance of the boxers, to avoid the clutches of the Welfare Board, or perhaps to try to glamorise the sport.

### Horseracing

Another charismatic sport is horseracing. As with boxing, it generates large amounts of income and can be quite lucrative for those who are winning. With the perceived affinity of some Gooris to horses, it is not surprising to find Gooris successful in horseracing. Noel Saunders of Cardiff rode trackwork at Newcastle racecourse during the 1930s (Saunders, 1992: 5) and Norman Rose, originally from Dirrinbandi, was one of Newcastle's leading jockeys from the 1960s to the late 80s. Norm is still resident in Newcastle, along with his mother and other family members.

Merv Maynard, the son of the Goori political activist, Fred Maynard, was another local Goori jockey who reached prominence in the 1950s. He began his racing career as an apprentice at Broadmeadow in the season of 1948/49.

... before he was 21, Merv had ridden in three successive Caulfield Cups: 1951, 1952, 1953. Rode in Epsoms, Metropolitans, Doncaster's, Doomben 10,000s, Doomben Cups, LKS Mackinnon Stakes and of course the dream of every jockey the chance to ride in the Melbourne Cup. (Maynard, 1996 [b], 8)

His riding took him overseas to New Zealand in the late 1950s, and to Singapore and Malaysia in the early 1960s. Merv's success in the saddle led him into establishing a thoroughbred bloodstock agency which he operated to such an extent that he only rode part-time for the next twenty years, and usually only on country tracks. In 1982, he took a heavy fall in the saddling enclosure at Broadmeadow, suffering three broken ribs, a punctured lung and a broken collarbone, but it was not until 1994 that he handed in his rider's licence. His career ensured that he was comparatively more wealthy than most Gooris in the Hunter and he generated a large amount of income within the Hunter's economy. Among the many tributes paid to the son of the Goori political activist is the following:

Merv Maynard is one of the legendary horsemen who have graced the pigskin in postwar Australia. There have been few finer ambassadors for the 'Sport of Kings'. (Howe, 1983, 9)



*Merv Maynard photographed after a win on Salamanca (at 50-1) in The Queens Cup, Randwick, 1952. Photograph: John Maynard.*

### Other Sports

Whilst Merv Maynard was able to make a livelihood out of sport, most Goori involvement in sport has been at either amateur or semi-professional level. Goori involvement with European sports in the Hunter Valley dates back at least to 1867 when the Goori cricket side that toured England in the following year played a white team at Maitland in front of 3000 spectators. Many Gooris over the years have played cricket throughout the Hunter, with all-black teams being a feature of the Newcastle City and Suburban competition from the late 1970s until the present. One of the most prominent of Goori cricketers in the Hunter has been Todd Ritchie, a son of Clem Sands of boxing fame. Todd was a stalwart of the University First XI throughout the 1980s and 90s.

Compared to cricket however, the sport of rugby league attracts a much larger spectator base and offers greater financial returns to players at most levels. Its profile in the community, as reflected by media coverage, affords successful players a demi-god status. Many Gooris have been able to achieve this status and through their deeds on the football field have gained opportunities that might otherwise have been denied them. Among the legendary Goori players of recent times have been Merv Wright (Maitland) and Ron Munro (Waratah). Together, they dominated many local games in the 1960s and displayed skills that were

appreciated by all. In doing so, they helped break down discrimination. Financially, they did not receive the returns that today's stars do, but their presence on the field generated much income for their clubs. Merv has remained a member of the Maitland community and has retained his employment at the brickyards at East Maitland for thirty years. Similarly Ron Munro, a cousin of Dot Wotherspoon, has remained in the Waratah area working continually in the furniture removalist industry.

At the district level, another outstanding Goori footballer was Mitchel Knight who, in response to the Aboriginal Family Resettlement Program, in the 1970s, moved with his family from Bourke to Newcastle. In 1978, he won the Australian National Schoolboys 200-metre sprint title and

played several seasons with the Awabakal Cricket Club. In the early 1980s, Mitchel was a leading tryscorer during a number of seasons for Western Suburbs, Newcastle. Mitchel, and his brothers, were outstanding all-round sportsmen.

Another outstanding league-player of the 1980s and early 90s was Ashley Gordon who, whilst still at school, became the first player signed by the Newcastle Knights football club. Like Mitchel Knight, Ashley came to Newcastle from Bourke, as a child, when his family sought to obtain better opportunities in the city. The game of rugby league has provided good financial returns to Ashley, and other Gooris and their presence on the field has in turn generated much income within the Hunter.

## *Part 3: Contemporary Society: A Triumph Over Adversity*

### *1967 Referendum - the way ahead*

**T**he struggles for justice reflected in the lives of Pemulwuy, Fred Maynard and many thousands of other Gooris, obtained a partial reward in 1967 with the carrying of the 'Yes' vote in the Federal Referendum.

89% of all Australians of voting age agreed to the referendum proposals that Aborigines should be included in the census count and that the federal government should be given power to legislate for Aborigines. (Broome, 1982: 178)

This result was widely believed to impart citizenship rights on Gooris and led to a reduction of state-based control of Gooris as the Aboriginal Welfare Board gave way to federal Aboriginal Affairs bodies. Conditions did not improve, however, and the continuing frustration of Gooris were displayed by the setting up of the Tent Embassy on the lawns of Parliament House, Canberra, on 26 January 1972. This act, perhaps more than any other before, was significant in bringing the plight of Gooris before the eyes of the media worldwide. The Goori struggle for justice could now be more readily monitored from a distance away from the oppressors. The Goori flag also emerged from the Tent Embassy as a symbol of the struggle for justice and a unifier of the many different Goori peoples. The Embassy

provided a springboard for a renewed struggle, with Gooris no longer having to fear the wrath of the Boards as ramifications of their political actions. A change of federal government in 1972 saw official policy towards Gooris change from 'assimilation' to 'self-determination'. Whilst government practice did not reflect the concept, a number of important initiatives emerged. These included limited land rights for some communities and government funded Goori organisations.

#### **Aboriginal Family Resettlement**

In 1972, an federally-funded, incorporated body, the Family Resettlement Aboriginal Corporation, was set up in NSW. It was predominantly administered by Gooris and had the primary objective:

To relieve misfortune, poverty and distress suffered by Aboriginal families living in regions of low employment by assisting them to resettle if they so desire in centres offering better opportunities. (McLeod, 1982: 58)

To achieve this, the scheme bought houses which were then administered by the NSW Housing Commission. It also sought to provide counselling, and material and medical assistance,

as well as assistance in finding employment, and support regarding 'personal, social, community and educational problems'. As such, the scheme was a mixture of assimilation, self-determination and paternalism. From 1972 until 1979, it operated in the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie area by purchasing approximately thirty homes into which more than forty families moved, with at least 25% of them subsequently returning to their former homelands of Brewarrina, Bourke and Walgett. The program's locally-based counsellor, a non-Aboriginal who ironically had been an administrator of the Aboriginal Welfare Board, helped the families obtain employment. Mostly, the types of employment for men were unskilled and semi-skilled labouring positions at BHP, Pasminco, Bradmill Kotara, Newcastle Abattoirs and Cardiff Engineering. A small number of women who sought employment became machinists at Rundles.

Our men are disadvantaged in finding employment because they lack trade skills. Often the only jobs that are offered to them are unskilled labouring jobs, the lowest paid of all. (McLeod, 1982: 13)

Of course their employment opportunities were limited by their work experience and educational background, however questions arose over the suitability of some of the workplaces especially in regard to the culture shock of coming from a small work environment in places such as Bourke to such a site as BHP. Additional issues arose regarding the practices of deliberately spreading the families throughout the area and thus reducing their opportunities of interacting, of placing families in situations where they depended on an inadequate public transport system, of Goori children attending high schools populated by more than 1000 whites after coming from places such as Bourke where the population was much less and where they had been in the majority, and of such additional burdens as 'returning home' for funerals.

The program ceased in the local area in 1979, but continued on in other parts of the state. The families that remained developed an infrastructure that helped meet their needs and are now an integrated part of the local Goori community.

### **Smiths General Contractors Pty Ltd**

This organisation was somewhat unique in that it was formed by three Goori brothers originally from the New England area. Initially, the company was independent of government funding. Its main activity was railway line construction although it diversified to include labour hire.

Robert, Roy and Bill Smith had many years experience working on the NSW Government Railways and although lacking in formal qualifications, they knew how to construct railway track, including surveying and costing. Bill moved into the Maitland area in 1955 and after fifteen years service on the railways, formed Smiths General Contractors in March 1969. The company's paid up capital was six dollars. The company tendered for work and was successful in carrying out projects in many areas of NSW. The first year of operations yielded a turnover in excess of one million dollars. When working outside of Newcastle, Smiths often employed local Gooris to support the Newcastle work crews. The company ensured that 75% of its workforce was Goori. Perhaps the company's most noted local achievement was the laying of the track for the coal loader at Port Waratah and during this time Smiths employed more than 100 persons.

The organisation had a major impact on Goori employment. Throughout the 1970s, many Gooris came to Newcastle, knowing they could get a start with Smiths. This workforce contributed materially to the local economy. Smiths also sub-contracted Goori labour, for example to the BHP, although they often found this difficult, as some Gooris might have been looking for only 'a few days work' on passing through Newcastle. Additionally, Gooris who had been brought up on an often-inadequate mission diet, found hard-labouring work difficult to sustain. Some Gooris also felt the practice of labour sub-contracting was one of exploitation.

In its efforts to expand, Smiths borrowed from the federally-funded Aboriginal Loans Commission and by 1980, control passed to the Aboriginal Development Commission, which sold the company up, leaving the founders with little more than the clothes they stood in. Nonetheless, Smiths General Contractors had played a major part in the rebuilding of the local Goori Community and had been one of the first organisations to try to accommodate Goori cultural practices within the mainstream production process.

### **Awabakal Newcastle Aboriginal Cooperative Limited**

Bill Smith did not limit his time or energy to Smiths for he shared the vision of Fred Maynard, Kevin Gilbert and others. In doing so, he strove to improve the lot of his people not just by providing employment opportunities but also by trying to develop infrastructure that would help meet their needs, including the retention of some traditional practices



By 1973, along with other Gooris and some non-Aboriginal supporters, Bill was instrumental in establishing the Newcastle Aboriginal Advancement Society which, a year later, obtained a federal grant to carry out a cultural awareness program in Newcastle.

Due to funding difficulties, this organisation was superseded by the Awabakal Newcastle Aboriginal Cooperative Limited which commenced activities in 1975 and, in February 1977, was formally registered as a Community Advancement Cooperative Society. In 1982, it obtained a second registration as an organisation under the Charitable Collections Act. The decision to register under the Cooperative Societies Act was based on the feeling that the spirit of cooperative societies better reflected the philosophies of traditional Goori societies than that of other incorporated bodies which basically reflect competition. Whilst Bill Smith was the inaugural chairperson of the cooperative, the setting up of the organisation and its continued success was the result of the work of a great number of Goori and non-Aboriginal people in both paid and unpaid positions. Since its inception, more than fifty persons have served on the Board of Directors. Early directors include Clem Sands and his sister Lillian, Aunty Amy Ridgeway who had lived at Platt's Estate, Jack Thorpe who fought at the Stadium and his wife June, Ted and Dot Wotherspoon, Robert and Shirley Smith, Zelma Moran, Victoria Matthews, and George and Ann Ritchie.

The cooperative's objectives were deliberately broad and centred around providing for members' needs in areas of employment, culture, health, welfare, sport, housing and education. These objectives are reflected in the proposed initiatives for the forthcoming year, as documented in the 1977 Annual Report.

- a. Hold a cultural camp for 9 to 15 year olds at Rathmines the week before Christmas
- b. Establish an Aboriginal Health Centre
- c. Reclaim the Sacred sights (sic) at the Wattagans and establish a permanent reserve and cultural centre
- d. Establish an Aboriginal Pre-school
- e. Obtain an Aboriginal legal service field officer to work from the Co-op
- f. Set up a loaning and Homework Centre which would include such teaching programs as; the teaching of the Awabakal dialect
- g. Establish our own club

- h. Set up our own housing Co-op. This can be done but it needs the support of all our own people. (Minutes, Awabakal AGM, 1977)

The above 'wish list' was made in the context of a \$20,000 grant from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs for the 1976-77 financial year. This was a time when support for the organisation was at a minimum. By the end of the 1995-96 financial year, the organisation boasted several hundred members and most of the 'wishes' had been obtained. The cooperative had developed to such an extent that it owned more than three million dollars in assets including approximately twenty-five houses. It was operating a great range of programs and had initiated and nurtured several other independent Goori organisations in the area. All this is testament to the self-determination of many Gooris. Throughout these years, the cooperative's board was led by several fine persons including Kevin Anderson who came to Newcastle in the late 1970s to work on the wharves. Kevin was subsequently instrumental in helping establish the Newcastle All Blacks rugby league team in the local competition.

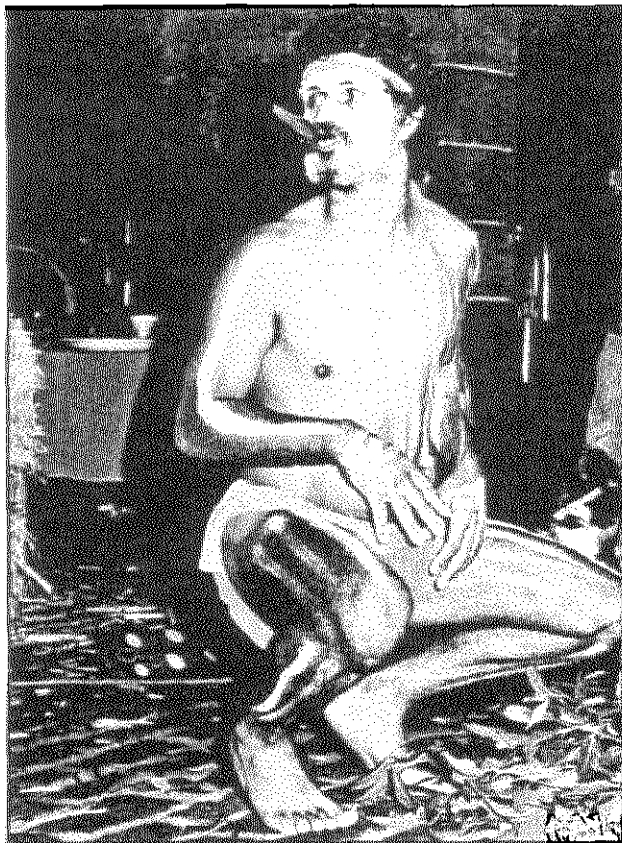
Another former board chairman is Bill Jonas, the grandson of William Jonas. During his term of office, Bill was appointed to the Maralinga Royal Commission. He was the first Goori to obtain an academic appointment at Newcastle University. He resigned this position to become Principal of the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra. His most recent appointment is Director of the National Museum in Canberra. However, he is still actively involved in Goori community matters in Newcastle, particularly through the Goori Management Committee at Newcastle University.

The history of employment at the Awabakal Cooperative, as with most Goori organisations established in the 1970s and 80s, has often reflected the uncertainty of government funding and the willingness of many people to put up with hardship whilst working to improve the conditions of their people. In its early years, the cooperative depended almost exclusively on funding from the Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA). The process involved making annual submissions and waiting for their approval. It was thus difficult to make long term plans. Further problems arose because of delays between the time of approval and release of monies. Thus, even if the same program was continued from one year to another, a lack of funding during the 'supply' period often meant that employees would work without pay for several weeks. The hardship was quite severe because of the low (if any) savings levels of most

Gooris, and the dependence of single income families. These problems were gradually overcome through changes in funding arrangements with the DAA, and through gaining other sources of funding. However, another employment issue, that of award payments and basic entitlements, such as long service leave and superannuation, has only recently been addressed.

The Awabakal Cooperative's 'wages and salaries' expenditure for 1994-95 was over \$1.1 million and, since most of this income is spent in the local area, it provides an important contribution to the Newcastle economy. This is without consideration of administrative expenditure by the cooperative, such as the purchase of medical supplies, equipment and electricity, the payment of telephone and rates accounts, and the purchase and maintenance of cars.

In addition to these fiscal contributions to the region's economy, the cooperative's cultural programs make an immeasurable contribution to the educational and spiritual enrichment of the Hunter community.



Ray Kelly Jnr, Chief Executive Officer of the Awabakal Cooperative, during a traditional dance performance. Photo by courtesy of Ray Kelly Jnr.

The success of the Awabakal Cooperative, and different outlooks on Goori community development, led some members to establishing, in 1981, a Lake Macquarie based organisation, the Biraban Cooperative. Although the new

cooperative was funded by a small grant from the DAA, its life was short and some of its founders returned to the Awabakal Cooperative while others became involved in the local Aboriginal Land Councils, established following the NSW Land Rights Act of 1983.

In 1991, a more successful organisation, Yarnteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation, was developed through the Awabakal Cooperative.

### Yarnteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation

Yarnteen is incorporated under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation Act and is unique in that its membership is restricted to ten persons. However, the corporation attempts to provide for the education and training of the wider community through a number of programs, as well as operating the federal government funded 'work for the dole' Community Development Employment Program (CDEP). The corporation is the largest single employer of Gooris in the Hunter Region, with a workforce of some 215 persons. Two hundred of these people are supported by CDEP. Yarnteen's vision statement is the advancement of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders community through provision of employment, training and enterprise opportunities, and maintaining and promoting cultural identity.

Yarnteen has been successful in obtaining funds from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), a federal government created body which was designed to give Gooris a degree of self-determination and assumed some of the roles of the former DAA. Yarnteen currently holds several million dollars of assets. A number of innovative programs have been developed, including a bulk grain handling plant at Kooragang Island. Additionally, it is involved in cultural programs, particularly at Wollombi, and is currently constructing a bush tucker and traditional medicine walk, and cultural centre, at Garden Suburb.

Yarnteen is making a notable contribution to the resources of the Hunter Region and much of its success is due to the work of, among others, Jim Wright. In the early 1960s, Jim, then a schoolboy, moved to the Maitland area and, after many years of diverse employment, became a successful administrator at the Awabakal Cooperative before moving to Yarnteen. Jim resigned from his Yarnteen position on being elected to ATSIC as a Commissioner.

## Local Aboriginal Lands Councils

A number of other Goori organisations exist throughout the Hunter Region including eight Local Aboriginal Land Councils. These organisations are actively participating in the development of the Hunter Region through the use of resources, both in spite of, and as a result of, 200 years of oppression.

The white colonialists took the Aboriginals' land without acknowledgment and without treaties and compensation. ... Today, the citizens of New South Wales live on Aboriginal land in affluence, whilst the Aboriginals live in poverty. Aboriginal children die because of this. Elderly Aboriginals are a rarity. Their housing is often substandard and overcrowded. Their unemployment rate is high, their health and educational standard low. ... Nearly two hundred years later the citizens of New South Wales have a unique opportunity to right a terrible wrong. The first State to dispossess the Aboriginals of their land can be the first to repay a debt nearly two hundred years overdue. White acknowledgment of black land rights may be the essential ingredient needed to break the vicious circle of poverty. With the support of people of goodwill and humanity, justice for the Aboriginal people of this State can become a reality in our time. (Foreword, NSW Parliamentary Select Committee Report on Aboriginal Land Rights, 1980)

The NSW Land Rights Act 1983, and subsequent amendments, provides some Goori communities with the opportunity to claim Crown land that is not required by government. Additionally, the Act provides a source of funding to land councils through money raised by the state government through land tax. All of the Hunter land councils have been successful in acquiring land. Koompahtoo, based around the western reaches of Lake Macquarie, has been perhaps the most successful in terms of area of land claimed, although each council operates programs, including housing programs, for the benefit of members. Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council operates an extensive market garden and, like most others, is actively involved in working with developers to ensure minimum risk of destruction of Goori sites through economic development.

## University of Newcastle

Among the many non-Goori organisations which employ Gooris, the university is one of the largest, currently employing Gooris in a variety of positions at senior academic, academic and non-academic levels. However, one criticism of the

university's employment practices is that most of these positions are contract positions. This denies Aboriginals, as well as other staff, the opportunity of job security.

In keeping with equity policies of government organisations, the university is embarking on a Goori employment strategy whereby, within five years, 2% of the workforce will be Gooris. These positions will be spread throughout the university and at a number of levels.

The university's involvement with the Goori community is worthy of note. In 1963, when land was acquired for a university, many Gooris were removed from the site.

In April, the Newcastle City Council ordered the removal of nineteen squatters, mainly Aboriginals. ... It took eighteen months of effort by the City Council, the University, the Department of Education, the Crown Solicitor and the Aboriginals Welfare Board (which had to rehouse the settlers) to reach a solution. (Wright, 1992: 84)

In 1975, the university provided administrative facilities for the field officer of the Newcastle Aboriginal Advancement Society. In the same year, the first Goori educated under the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme, graduated. In 1984, the Goori medical students program was commenced. Following amalgamation with the former Newcastle College of Advanced Education (NCAE), the Wollotuka Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre, along with many Goori alternate entry and support programs, were brought under the university's management. This centre, although much needed, was built in 1987 amid great controversy when agreement was reached by the college and the NSW government to fund its construction from Bicentennial funds. The Goori member of the NCAE Council continually opposed this move although a number of Goori students and staff supported it. They were led to believe that no other source of funding for the much needed facility would be forthcoming in the near future. The *Newcastle Herald* reported the general Goori community feeling under the banner of 'Awabakal group rejects \$250,000 grant'.

If the centre could only be established with bicentennial funds the cooperative would prefer that it not be built at all. ... In August, 1985, the cooperative voted not to participate in any Bicentenary celebrations and the decision was endorsed at last month's annual general meeting. ... 'We believe we should have a centre but not with Bicentenary funds'. (*Newcastle Herald*, 2 Sept 1986)

However, by 1995, the centre, and Goori education programs at the university, had achieved such success that more than 100 Gooris had graduated since 1975, including eleven doctors. In 1996, there were 195 Goori undergraduate and post-graduate students.

In October 1990, the university provided the site for the first traditional corroboree held in the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie area for perhaps 150 years. Ironically, one of the dances included the story of Gooris playing 'two-up', an activity that was part of the lifestyle of the Gooris who were forced from the land immediately prior to the building of the university. The corroboree was convened under the direction of 'Uncle' Lennie de Silva who was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Letters at a university graduation ceremony in 1992, in recognition of his scholarship in traditional Goori lore and the value of such to the development of society.

Goori students and staff at Newcastle university are involved in learning and teaching, in developing policy, curriculum and resources, in research, in community activities, and in providing general service to the university. As such, they are making a significant contribution to the resources of the Hunter and often in a somewhat hostile environment. The relationship of the Goori community and the university reflects all of the contradictions that are found in the wider community.

### **Descendants of 'Old Margaret'**

Aspects of traditional Goori culture have survived in the Hunter Region through family lore, the teachings of 'Uncle' Lennie de Silva, and the efforts of the Awabakal Cooperative, Yarnteen, the Local Aboriginal Land Councils and the Newcastle University.

Margaret White ('Old Margaret') has been referred to in an earlier chapter. In the latter years of the nineteenth century, she lived with her own family, and others, in the Swansea area. Questions arise

as to the whereabouts of Margaret's grandchildren, and the descendants of the other local families. Blyton makes reference to the White family in his recent publication:

Another Aboriginal family living in the Swansea district were the White brothers, Adam, Ike, and Tom. It is believed that Ike was employed at the general store in Swansea, and that Tom was a coal miner at Catherine Hill Bay colliery. Tom was not the only Aboriginal person working at this coalmine in the 1920s. As many as six other Aboriginal people are believed to have been employed at the mine. (Turner and Blyton, 1995: 56)

Goori genealogy studies are often difficult to pursue because of the disruptions and severances that families have experienced due to welfare policies of various governments. This can make establishing family descent through the written record a difficult matter. For example, in 1990, a woman known as Eliza Jane Stanley died at Charlestown, aged one hundred years. Eliza Jane's grandson, Stephen Siever, believes that her original given name was Selina, and that she was the daughter of Ellen who was a daughter of 'Old Margaret'. Ellen, who died in 1902, had children from two marriages. These children are said to have been taken by the Aboriginal Protection Board and raised in foster care through the Church of England. They were placed with John Stanley, an elderly West Indian immigrant who lived at Belmont. Eliza Jane, who worked as a domestic in Narrabri throughout her teenage years, brought up her own family in the belief that they were West Indian.

Circumstances such as these, combined with ambiguous records that indicate changed names, make establishing family connections, and identity, a difficult task and illustrate another aspect of the disadvantages that Gooris have experienced in their attempts to live and work in the wider community.

## *Conclusion: Triumph Over Adversity*

...they are now in the highest degree, oppressed, through the founding of a convict colony among them, and through their utter destitution of property. They offer, in regard to commerce, no motives for the consideration of private traders. Their position is such with respect to other Europeans, and they are so weak, that no political inducement exists for the government to conciliate them. ... Justice towards them on our part has never been thought of. (Bannister, 1968, ccxxxix)

The position of Gooris in 1830, as outlined by Bannister, depicted the initial impact of European invasion of Goori lands - an impact on the lives and customs of peoples that, before the coming of the Europeans, extended through the Dreaming and was ordered and sufficient. Throughout the next 137 years, until the 1967 referendum, the condition of Gooris continued to deteriorate. This deterioration was brought about by the non-Goori imposed policies and practices of segregation,

assimilation, annihilation and self-determination. By 1990, official policy had shifted to reconciliation.

Throughout these traumas, and until the present, Gooris have survived by adopting strategies reflecting Goori involvement in the new, imposed society. That Gooris have resisted much of the imposition, and have influenced much change, recognises Gooris as agents of change. Without these influences, there would be no land rights legislation, no recognition of Native Title and no movement towards reconciliation. The assimilation policies would have triumphed. Instead, in the Hunter Region today, we have several thousand Gooris maintaining their identity and culture, fighting for justice, and trying to attain a standard of living that was theirs inherent in the Dreaming. In all instances, Gooris have contributed to the economic resources of the Hunter Region and will continue to do so as an integral part of the many societies occupying Mother Earth.



*Corroboree Dancers, Wollombi Brook September 1990. Photograph by courtesy of Binghai sites traditional custodians.*

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