

HISTORY OF ABORIGINES

Field research carried out by Mr. P.A. Haslam, Convocation's Visiting Scholar, into aboriginal culture has been rewarding, yet much more remains to be done.

"During a visit to the North Coast I was taken to sacred sites and I did three interviews on tape with elders or initiated people.

"One person taped was initiated 65 years ago at the age of 15," Mr. Haslam said.

"With the permission of an elder he described how women took part in the finale of his first initiation ceremony, which took place two days and two nights in thick forest. The old man also sang in his language songs of lament and one corroboree chant."

He has completed the first segment of Awabakal myths and legends using material from both Rev. L.E. Threlkeld and early settler sources.

Threlkeld established a mission at Belmont in the 1820's. Of special interest to Mr. Haslam are the legends dealing with the making of coal and the creation of the boomerang.

The real key to understanding the aboriginal culture and history was an understanding of a language. While in the North in recent weeks it became evident to Mr. Haslam that the sacred language of the eastern coast of NSW was understood outside the tribal boundaries of origin.

"I was asked questions by very old people about the Kamilaroi and Awabakal, both tribes being well-known and respected by the forefathers of the questioners.

"In our own region some interesting photographs have been taken and more will come from the North Coast of aborigines in their native state. Some of these scenes were posed a long time ago; others were taken by the same photographer who had access to tribal activity.

"Historical authenticity is given to these photographs - some held by the Hastings District Historical Society and others by the family concerned - by the fact that the great grandfather of the man who permitted all these photographs to be copied for this University and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, was appointed first official tanner of the penal settlement of Port Macquarie in 1839.

"The family claims that though individuals and some organisations have obtained copies of these scenes, only Cambridge University has got the full set."

Mr. Haslam's research has included visits to private family museums. These visits have resulted in access to private material, such as early stories about aborigines and lists of aboriginal words of now extinct tribes and their meanings. Much of this material has been checked with initiated people of tribes still speaking a mother tongue, with valuable results.

Mr. Haslam has had preliminary talks with tribal people about some exciting finds in an area from Lake Macquarie to beyond Kempsey. This has excited the interest of Mr. Ray Kelly, anthropological officer of the National Parks and Wildlife Service at Grafton, an initiated man of the Thanghetti tribe and a man with a high degree of tribal responsibility. He has invited Mr. Haslam to join a proposed expedition from the North Coast down to investigate the exciting sacred site areas and down to Port Stephens, Lake Macquarie and the Lower Hunter Valley region to examine, and possibly interpret in tribal fashion, paintings and carvings still regarded as mysteries.

Mr. Kelly has also arranged for Mr. Haslam to meet other mother-tongue speaking people of tribal status to compare their languages and that of this district.

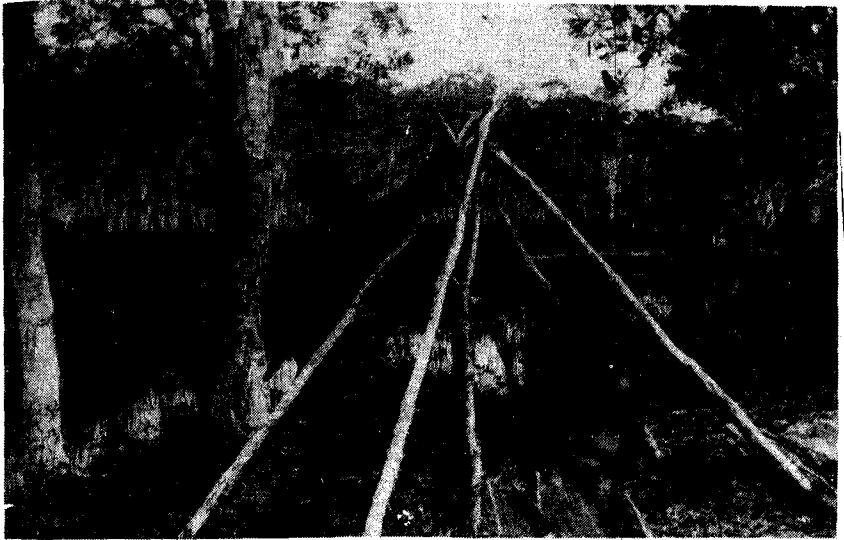
Mr. Haslam said that while it was obvious ever so much valuable history had been lost forever some had been revealed to be preserved and possibly built upon as relationships between European and initiated aborigines improved.



While due consideration must be given to what had already been recorded, notwithstanding some areas of conflict, grass roots research involving people still able to recall some of the vital history and culture of a tribe had an urgent priority.

Mr. Haslam's appointment ended last week.

In an address, The First Culture of Our Region, to be given at Newcastle Masonic Club on April 5 at 7.30 p.m. Mr. Haslam will discuss the culture of the Awabakal aborigines. The talk will be illustrated with weapons and slides. Mr. Haslam's appointment as Visiting Scholar was arranged by Convocation, which has organised the lecture. Everybody is welcome.



These pictures are from a selection obtained by Mr. Haslam for the University's Archives. They were made available by Hastings District Historical Society, with the permission of the Dick Family, of Port Macquarie. The family through Mr. Ray Dick, has agreed to make available, for the first time, other photographs, which will be added to the archives. The set portrays members of the Ngamba tribe as they were in their tribal state. The weaponry, canoes and other artifacts revealed in the pictures would be worth a considerable fortune today. Very little of tribal origin has survived.

1. A tribal elder, decorated in the hunting totems, ready to sing and dance at a "creation" (or increase) corroboree.
2. The housing problem solved overnight. A couple erect a crude bark on the banks of the Hastings River, not bugged by labour and material problems.
3. At Muddy Creek, on the Hastings River, at Port Macquarie. Warriors, using wooden plugs and stone axes, cut the bark of a giant grey mangrove with which to make a shield. Note rare glimpse of native bark canoe.