

Selected lectures on North Queensland History from the
CityLibraries Sir Robert Philp Lecture Series

9 June 2008 – 11 May 2009

Sir Robert Philp Lecture Series

Townsville City Council

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Cover image: View of Flinders Street, featuring the Burns Philp building, c. 1913, courtesy John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland

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Thanks also to all those people who attended the lectures month after month. Your support of the series was extremely encouraging.

Trisha Fielding
Lifelong Learning Officer
CityLibraries

Foreword

To quote from Dr Janice Wegner, one of the lecturers in the Sir Robert Philp Lecture series, 'we tend to value heritage when we understand the history behind it'. This lecture series, hosted by CityLibraries Townsville, provided an opportunity for us to understand the history and heritage of the north and our place in the history of Queensland. We thank the Queensland Government for a Q150 Community Funding Grant which made the lectures possible.

The series was launched in June 2008 by Professor Janet Greeley, then Pro Vice Chancellor of Arts, Education and Social Sciences at James Cook University, and was named for Sir Robert Philp who was the Premier of Queensland twice in the early 1900s. Philp was a partner in the successful shipping agents and merchants, Burns, Philp and Co. which was founded in Townsville in the late nineteenth century and which became well known throughout the Pacific region.

The series of ten historical lectures ran from June 2008 to May 2009 and covered a wide array of topics that focused on the north's important role in the political, economic and social history of the state.

I congratulate CityLibraries staff on their choice of participants and I thank the presenters for their enthusiasm. The series attracted notable academics including Emeritus Professor Geoffrey Bolton. His 1963 publication *A Thousand Miles Away: a History of North Queensland until 1920* remains the definitive history of European settlement of North Queensland to 1920.

The lecturers who participated in this series have provided a unique window into the past and this booklet will ensure that future generations also have the opportunity to learn from their insights. I believe that this lecture series has renewed awareness of the rich history and heritage of our region and I commend CityLibraries for its vision in hosting the series. It seems fitting that the library was awarded a Silver Governor's Heritage Award for excellence in heritage conservation works or action at the National Trust of Queensland Bendigo Bank Heritage Awards this year.



Councillor Les Tyrell
Mayor of the city of Townsville

November 2009

Introduction

This introduction was delivered by Professor Janet Greeley at the inaugural lecture on 9th June 2008.

This series is part of the Townsville celebration of Queensland's 150th birthday. Through these ten lectures the new Townsville city is bringing the history of north Queensland to the north Queensland community. They were aided in this worthwhile enterprise through the generous support of the Q150 Community Funding program. The Sir Robert Philp Lecture Series is the brainchild of CityLibraries - Thuringowa Central. The team at CityLibraries: Judith Jensen and Trisha Fielding, has put together an outstanding series of lectures, covering a wide range of important local developments and key individuals. The lecture series focuses on north Queensland's important role in the political, economic and social history of the state and the nation. It has been named in the honour of an influential politician and business figure, Sir Robert Philp. Sir Robert was a rather controversial figure and a man of strong convictions and it is wonderful to have such an eminent historian as Emeritus Professor Geoffrey Bolton to deliver the inaugural lecture of the series. I am sure Professor Bolton will give us a unique insight into the intriguing figure that was Sir Robert Philp.

It is particularly pleasing for me to see the significant contributions being made to this lecture series by James Cook University's historians, archaeologists and literary experts, past and present. JCU has a long and proud history of producing top-class regional history. This lecture series is an opportunity to showcase to Townsville and the north Queensland community what we have done. The following lecture (after tonight's) will be presented by Dr Noel Loos who will expound upon black-white relations and the settlement of the north and in so doing reflect on how he came to be one of Keith Windschuttle's targets in the recent History Wars. Drs Nigel Chang and Shelley Greer will explore aspects of the archaeological history of the north. In his lecture *The White Man in the Tropics*, Dr Russell McGregor tells of the early medical research and political forces which influenced the pace and direction of development in north Queensland. Dr Jan Wegner from our Cairns campus will tell of the vital influence of the mining industry and of the outstanding mining heritage places that survive today. Dr Claire Brennan, our newest staff member and a special import from New Zealand will tell us of the trials and tribulations of establishing a livestock industry in the tropical landscape. The arts in north Queensland will be portrayed through an exploration of its writers by Dr Cheryl Taylor, adjunct Associate Professor in literature at JCU, and by Dr Judith McKay of the Queensland Museum, who will focus on artistic representations of north Queensland through the work of Ellis Rowan, an impressive woman and one of the most celebrated flower painters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The life of businessman and politician William Lennon is investigated by Dr Rodney Sullivan and finally Dr Dorothy Gibson-Wilde, local historian and JCU alumnus ends the series with a challenge. Who was the true discoverer of Townsville? Robert Towns or was it John Melton Black?

I hope you've made a monthly booking in your calendar for the next nine months so you can witness the re-birth of north Queensland through its history being brought to life right here, in this new Townsville city. On behalf of the Townsville community, I would like to thank the CityLibraries –Thuringowa Central team for their foresight and imagination in putting together this outstanding array of speakers and it is my great pleasure to officially launch the Sir Robert Philp Lecture Series.

Professor Janet Greeley

Why is Robert Philp worth remembering?

Professor Geoffrey Bolton

**Lecture presented by Professor Bolton at Riverway
9 June 2008**

**SIR ROBERT PHILP LECTURE SERIES
Number 1
9 June 2008**

I warmly welcome the opportunity to deliver this first Sir Robert Philp lecture, not least because Philp has been crossing my path for nearly fifty years. I first encountered him in 1959 when I was researching for a history of North Queensland, and a few years later as a by-product wrote an article about the rise of the firm of Burns, Philp. This led to a chapter on Philp in Dennis Murphy and Roger Joyce's anthology *Queensland Political Portraits* (1978). Later I read the two-volume history of Burns, Philp and Company by Ken Buckley and Kris Klugman, as well as Lyn Megarrity's research on his role in the Queensland mining industry. Now that I've reached years of maturity, if not discretion, it is time to see whether I need to change my judgments of a man whom I've described as "the capitalist as politician". Maybe I do.

Robert Philp was born at Glasgow on 28 December 1851, the year of the mighty gold discoveries in New South Wales and Victoria. At the age of ten, in 1862, he emigrated with his parents to Queensland, there to embark on a success story to delight any nineteenth-century Scot. After two years of schooling he went to work for Bright Bros., shipping merchants and agents, with whom he stayed until 1874. He remembered the job as offering little scope for the young: 'The pastoral industry was not much in those days, there were a few stations, and shepherds got from £20 to £30 to go out and take the chance of being knocked on the head by the blacks'. The prospects improved when the firm sent him to the Gympie gold rush of 1867. In a game of cricket with a visiting Brisbane side he struck up a friendship with James Burns, a brother Scot five years older than Philp. In 1873, following the even more promising gold rushes to Ravenswood and Charters Towers, Burns set up business in Townsville. His health didn't allow him to stay long in that tropical environment, but he believed that Townsville had the strategic advantages to outstrip Bowen and other rivals for the inland trade. He needed a reliable manager who would take responsibility for the North Queensland end of the business while he built up wider connections from a base in Sydney. Twice he invited Philp, and twice Philp after visiting Townsville refused. When in December 1874 Burns improved his terms to an annual salary of £250 with use of a cottage, Philp could refuse no longer. Thus began one of the great commercial partnerships of Australian history.

Burns opened the firm's Sydney office in April 1877 and offered Philp a partnership. When it turned out that Philp had only £1,000 of his own Burns advanced him another £4,000, mostly in stock. From then on the two corresponded on the closest terms. Never a week went by without letters passed between them, co-ordinating every aspect of the firm's operations, both as importers and retailers. Burns made sure that no ship left for the North with empty freight space that could be used for cargo for Burns, Philp. Philp hired teams to transport their goods inland, and built up what they called their 'mosquito fleet' of flat-bottomed lighters to get cargo to shore over the shallow waters of Townsville's harbour. As Burns wrote nostalgically: 'Your letters recall a sort of memory of night work, teams loading, and bustle in general, which is totally different to my business here.'

After Philp's marriage in 1878 he definitely committed himself to Townsville. He built a substantial house at Mundingburra, 'Ellerslie', apparently the only house at that time on high blocks. He threw himself energetically into the town's political and business life, serving like nearly all the other businessmen at that time as an alderman on the town council. With the firm's main competitors, Aplin, Brown & Company, Philp enjoyed an oddly comfortable relationship. More than once the two rivals agreed about sharing trade in the Gulf country, and in 1879 they co-operated with others in promoting the North Queensland Meat Preserving and Boiling Down Company to provide a market for the surplus cattle of inland pastoralists. As Burns commented: 'It is far better to have opponents who you know and who will not cut trade too much than to have wretched outsiders ... coming in and spoiling everything'. Because they knew when to abstain from

cut-throat competition and when to co-operate the Townsville businessmen proved more effective than those elsewhere in pushing for government expenditure in the district. It was a system admirably suited to Philp, whose genial personality, sporting interests, and Scottish sense of humour made him popular even with those who did not share his opinions.

With the decision to build a railway to Charters Towers and beyond Townsville's future was secure, and by 1881 the Townsville business was showing an annual net profit of at least £10,000 a year, in some years nearly fifteen per cent of turnover. But Burns, Philp was not merely a Townsville firm. They set up half-a-dozen branches in other North Queensland centres, usually preferring to buy out some storekeeper who had already established a business rather than starting from scratch. In these pioneering years it needed good judgment to decide which settlements were destined for a bright future and which would speedily decay. Burns, Philp scored a win when they chose to set up in Cairns at a time when most investors were attracted to Port Douglas; indeed their only disappointment was at Charters Towers, perhaps because their manager there was too sociable. By 1880 the firm's credit was so sound that an order on Burns, Philp was considered as good as negotiable currency. As well, the years between 1878 and 1883 saw a great boom in the North Queensland sugar industry, and Burns, Philp seized their opportunities. The most promising lands for sugar-growing were often those with the best stands of cedar, and the firm shipped cedar to Sydney at a time when the price trebled in fifteen months.

By 1883 the firm's interests were so diversified that they had to be consolidated under the control of one limited liability company with a capital of £150,000. Burns held about thirty-four per cent of the stock and Philp about sixteen per cent, so that between them there was a controlling interest. Most of the remainder was held by veteran employees of the firm, and as Burns told Philp: 'Now I always consider that you and I are the directors, at least I never trouble my head about what any of the other *nominal* directors may suggest, and I hope it will be a very long time before any of them hazard an opinion about us one way or the other.'

All the same, Burns had some concerns about Philp, who showed a distinct element of the gambler. As early as 1877 James Burns wrote that he was 'a little bewildered at your proneness to speculation and wish you would hold to the old grooves'. For instance it was Philp who decided to solve the problem of getting their Atherton Tableland cedar to market by logging it downriver, Canadian style, over the Barron Falls to Cairns. This was tried in the wet season of 1883-84. By March, although some of the cedar had moved eighty kilometres, none of it was over the Falls. Then a cyclone struck, and in the ensuing flood most of the cedar was swept out to sea and smashed. Report has it that only one million out of a consignment of fifteen million feet was ever recovered, and it is certain that two years afterwards their Cairns manager, the aptly named Daniel Patience, was still putting in time looking for cedar on the beaches north of Cairns.

Philp's speculative instincts found plenty of temptations in the mining industry. Burns, Philp were agents for the sale of mining machinery, but in his private investments Philp showed himself, in Megarrity's words, 'an extravagant and somewhat undiscerning buyer of scrip.' He was not an armchair punter, accumulating a considerable first-hand knowledge of the industry, and some of his speculations were innovative; thus at Ravenswood he was agent for two technologically advanced but ultimately unprofitable gold extraction plants. But he lost money on the Star River silver rush of 1881 and again on the Comet gold-mining company on the Palmer in 1883, and although investments in

the pearling industry off Thursday Island eventually became profitable after 1886 it was only after a long wait.

It was also Philp who ventured into what was known as 'the Kanaka trade', shipping Pacific Islanders under indenture to work in the North Queensland cane fields, using some of the ships in the firm's fleet that were unfit for general cargo. The *Minnie* was originally bought for freighting cedar and the *Heath* was intended for a coal freighter but was found not strong enough. It took some months to find an insurer for the *Heath*, but the firm's luck held; the first claim for damage was made just two days after the policy started. Philp grew quite enthusiastic about the 'Kanaka trade'. Ships could be bought for about £1,500 and could make three voyages a year to the Solomon Islands or the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), each time accommodating between fifty and one hundred Pacific Islanders for whom the price landed at Cairns (at any rate in March 1884) was £23 a head. This made for a tidy profit, even allowing for running expenses, crews' wages, and trade goods for the Islanders. It is easy for us in the 21st century to deplore Philp's readiness to engage in this traffic, but it should be remembered that the conditions for steerage passengers on immigrant ships at that time were not much better, if at all. At the time it seemed that the major risk would be involvement in political controversy.

Most of the early generation of businessmen in Townsville took part in politics, and Philp was no exception. He was a keen Freemason, and was remembered as having said early in his Townsville career: 'one of the first things we should do now is to clear out the Roman Catholic element, as it dominates the place.' Before long however he was supporting John Murtagh Macrossan, the leading politician in North Queensland and a minister in the cabinet of Thomas McIlwraith, whose plans for big developmental borrowing appealed to businessmen like Philp. By 1883 Burns could describe his partner as 'Macrossan's No. 1 man'. 'I note your name in Townsville papers like plums in a pudding', he wrote a few months later, adding thoughtfully 'meetings and other matters must absorb a lot of your time'. Unfortunately late in 1883 the McIlwraith government was defeated at the polls by the Liberals led by Samuel Griffith, whose platform included the abolition of the recruitment of Pacific Island labour for the sugar industry. It helped Griffith's cause when in 1884 two of Burns, Philp's recruiting ships struck trouble. The captain and the boatswain of the *Hopeful* were brought to trial for illicit recruiting and murder. They were convicted of cutting the throat of one recruit and throwing a small boy overboard to drown. They were given death sentences which, after much public agitation, were commuted to penal servitude for life, with the first two years to be spent in chains. Government agents then seized the *Heath* for illegal recruiting and repatriated the Islanders. Burns, Philp retaliated by prosecuting a claim against the Queensland Government for demurrage and other losses, and the case dragged on for at least six years. But the partners saw that the trade was 'not worth troubling ourselves about just for the sake of making a little more money', and were already out of it by the time Griffith legislated in 1885 for an end to the traffic after 1890.

Unfortunately Griffith brought in his reforms at a moment when, after several years of prosperity, the sugar industry was entering on a prolonged slump. Caught in this economic downturn, it was not surprising that North Queenslanders began to think of becoming a separate colony free from Brisbane control. Philp was well to the fore in the Townsville Separation League formed in 1884 and he was one of the delegates at the Townsville convention of May 1885 planning a campaign for Queensland's partition. It was not that he felt himself to be a brilliant orator, a fanatical partisan, or a seeker after high office in the new legislature of North Queensland. It was more that he enjoyed the sociability and the excitement of the movement. He loved to be one of the group. Griffith tried to appease the movement by creating two new parliamentary seats. Townsville got a

second member, and the newly settled districts to the north were lumped together in an electorate called "Musgrave". In the first week of 1886 Philp was returned to the Legislative Assembly as member for Musgrave. He would be in parliament for nearly thirty years.

He took his time about making his maiden speech, and when he did so it was in the debate on Macrossan's motion for the separation of North Queensland. Although the majority of the House rejected Macrossan's proposal by nine votes to forty, Philp made a good impression. If unpolished, his speech was forthright and backed by a wealth of statistics. Characteristically, he compared North Queensland's push for autonomy with his own Scotland, where there were thirty members of parliament favouring Home Rule, 'and if England does not want a repetition of Bannockburn days, I think she will consent to give it to them.' With this one exception Philp hardly spoke in parliament during his first two years, but he was a conscientious local member. He also looked after the firm's interests, and when the Griffith government decided to serve the Gulf country with a railway inland from Normanton Philp helped to ensure that instead of going to Cloncurry, as at first intended, it served a new goldfield at Croydon where Burns, Philp happened to have a number of irons in the fire.

Business preoccupied him. In 1887 and 1888 Burns, Philp launched the Australian United Steam Navigation Company and the North Queensland Insurance Company, and took a major part in setting up the Bank of North Queensland. In those years also the firm built up a base at Cooktown from which they began expanding into the South-West Pacific, first Papua-New Guinea and then the New Hebrides. Though the sugar industry was in trouble, British capitalists were pouring investment into North Queensland goldmining. Philp was involved in at least one major flotation on the London stock market, and his investment in the Great Cumberland mine on the Etheridge showed rich dividends in 1887. Everything seemed to be going well for him, and his popularity in Townsville stood high. At the elections in 1888 he stood as one of the two members for Townsville in tandem with Macrossan and found himself at the top of the poll ahead of his veteran colleague.

He did his duty by Townsville. He urged that government officials should visit the North more frequently. He successfully argued for the transfer of the Northern Supreme Court from Bowen to Townsville. He campaigned for the restoration of Pacific Island labour, asserting that they were not seen as competitive with Australian workers, and forecasting that machinery would be the salvation of the sugar industry in the long run – a good prophecy, but it would take nearly a hundred years for it to come to pass. When Griffith and McIlwraith formed a coalition ministry in 1890 Philp found it easy to support its plan to import Italian labourers for the cane fields, not least because his firm was the local agent for the scheme. But the Italians deserted the sugar industry for other jobs that paid better, so that in February 1892, to Philp's unconcealed relief, Griffith conceded that the import of Pacific Islanders would have to be resumed.

This change of heart came too late to avert the recession that now touched every aspect of the North Queensland economy. Philp himself was in serious trouble. His mining investments were badly hit. The Great Cumberland mine and the entire Etheridge goldfield went into a rapid decline. It was said that Philp had once refused to pay £120 for a half share in the Day Dawn mine at Charters Towers, preferring to use the money on buying a horse and buggy. It was an expensive horse and buggy, as the Day Dawn was to yield £638,000 in dividends by 1903. By April 1892 Philp was unable to meet a personal debt to the firm of Burns, Philp for £2,657, and despite a personal guarantee from Burns his debt went on increasing until in February 1893, having ceased to hold

enough shares to qualify as a director, Philp was required to resign from the board of the firm that bore his name, though he was to remain on the Queensland board. 'It must have been very hard for Mr Philp to lose the substance for the shadow, so to speak', commented Burns, 'Mines, mortgaged properties and such specs are very chimerical.' To add to Philp's troubles his wife had died in 1890 leaving him with a young family of five daughters and two sons. After some years he was to marry his wife's cousin, but in the early 1890s his fate must have presented a cruel contrast to the prosperity of the 1880s.

Politics remained. The depression gave a great stimulus to the rise of the labour movement, and in Townsville wharf labourers, foundry hands and railway workers formed the nucleus of a working-class challenge to the snug little junta of businessmen who ran the town hall. Labor came close to victory at Townsville at a by-election following Macrossan's death in 1891 and again in 1893, but Philp's standing enabled him to fend off the challenge, and he had his reward. McIlwraith, premier for the third time, appointed Philp Minister for Mines and Works on 25 May 1893. Philp thus began the longest uninterrupted stint that any man had so far served in a Queensland cabinet; he was to hold office for more than ten years with a break of one week during the interlude of Anderson Dawson's brief Labor government. This gave him a breadth of practical experience rivalled by few Queensland politicians. From May 1893 to December 1899 he was Minister for Mines, retaining Public Works until May 1896. He was also Minister for Public Instruction from August 1894 to March 1895, Minister for Railways from that date until February 1897, and Acting Treasurer or Treasurer from 1897 to December 1899. This must have enabled him to rebuild his financial position and to recover any loss of confidence shaken by his enforced retirement from Burns, Philp. It also no doubt encouraged in him a faintly proprietorial attitude towards government, for, though not personally over-ambitious, he came to take it for granted that Queensland should be governed by men who thought as he did. He was not corrupt, and Labor spokesmen were often careful to distinguish their liking for Philp the man from their distrust of Philp the friend of big business and cheap imported labour. As he rose in seniority within Cabinet he may have helped inadvertently to foster an attitude of what seemed to outsiders an easy-going cronyism, and this would eventually provide his critics with ammunition.

He was a good administrator. His most lasting achievement during those years was the Queensland Mining Act of 1898. It was Philp who deserved credit for piloting this measure through Parliament, when all allowance is made for the pressure arising on this issue from management and labour, as well as the part played by the Under-Secretary for Mines, Philip Sellheim, a veteran North Queensland mining warden of great experience and sagacity. Philp spoke 170 times in defence of the Bill, and when some Labor members requested its withdrawal to allow for further consideration he quelled them by asserting: 'There are only nine or ten mining members who thoroughly understand the Bill. Let them discuss it and let everybody else look on and listen to what they have to say.' The result was to equip Queensland with the most streamlined and up-to-date mining legislation in Australia, offering greater authority to the mining tribunals and security of tenure for investors and managements. If during the remainder of Philp's lifetime mining found it hard to maintain its prominent place in the Queensland economy this could not be blamed on his ministerial policies. The government subsidised deep sinking in mines, and it was Philp more than anyone else who could claim credit for the establishment of the Charters Towers School of Mines in 1900.

As Minister for Railways he began economically. He cut salaries and reduced the number of Commissioners of Railways from three to one. In 1895 he judged the financial situation sound enough to bring to Parliament proposals to extend the Cairns railway to Atherton and to Georgetown, but was obstructed in the Upper House. At that time the Legislative

Council consisted of nominees who were elected for life, and its elderly members have been described as conservatives who, given the opportunity, would have voted against the invention of the wheel. They rejected Philp's proposals because they could not agree on the routes. Philp then turned towards private enterprise. In 1897 the development of copper and silver-lead prospects in the Chillagoe district called for the extension of the Cairns railway in that direction. Philp accepted a proposal from a consortium including John Moffat of Irvinebank to build the railway in return for a fifty-year mining leasehold on favourable terms, the right of leasing the railway wharf at Cairns, and permission to erect a plant for the reduction of ore above Barron Falls, generating electricity from the river's flow. All the government required was the right to purchase the line after fifty years. The Labor party denounced what they saw as a victory for monopoly capitalism. Philp, wrote the Brisbane *Worker*, was 'the godfather of black labour and patron of the Northern boodler'. Yearning for a return to the days of the individual prospector when miners did not work for wages, Labor would not accept that the future of the industry lay with company investment of modern technology. They were on sounder ground when they complained that the legislation had been prepared too hastily and pushed through without enough information, but Philp claimed that it was necessary to clinch the deal while international copper prices were at a high level that might not last. If Chillagoe produced gold, he said, he might have hesitated, 'but it was only copper country, and it was a pure speculation whether anything were made of it.'

Within his own territory Philp fended off the Labor challenge, although Anthony Ogden, an earnest young wharf labourer, Wesleyan preacher and militant teetotaler won the other Townsville parliamentary seat for Labor in 1894. 'I am positive he is not a bad fellow', said Philp, 'but he was so puffed up with being elected a Member of Parliament that there was no holding him.' He took good care to ensure that in 1896 at the next election Ogden was defeated by a stalwart of the Townsville City Council, the master butcher William Castling, and when Castling retired in 1899 he was followed by the elderly Patrick Hanran who had been mayor of Townsville before Philp ever set foot in the place. Hanran was not much of a speaker, but he brought in the Catholic vote – for Philp had long since discarded his prejudices in that direction – and fought six elections successfully before his retirement, aged nearly eighty, in 1909.

In September 1898 the premier, the promising young T J Byrnes, unexpectedly died and Philp, as Treasurer, was expected to take his place. As was to be the case several times during his career Philp proved oddly reluctant to push for the leadership. As in his business career with James Burns he seemed more comfortable in the role of dependable second-in-command. Instead the premiership went to the sixty-six year old James Dickson. 'Dickson has the honour and the abuse', wrote the *Worker*, 'and Philp the power.' Together they steered Queensland into accepting federation with the other Australian colonies. Philp's support was lukewarm, but it gave him an excuse for breaking with the movement for the separation of North Queensland, as that movement was by now too much infiltrated by Labor supporters. Dickson was less successful in holding his party together, and after his majority was reduced to one vote he resigned on 1 December 1899. Sir Samuel Griffith was by now lieutenant-governor, and in order to shock the squabbling conservatives into getting their act together he commissioned Anderson Dawson to form the world's first Labor government. Dawson was defeated after six days, and Philp came under pressure to assume the leadership. When he was nominated at a party meeting, he protested; he even seconded a motion that Dickson should continue. But this amendment was defeated by thirteen votes to fifteen with several abstentions, and by a margin of twenty-three to fifteen Philp became premier. He was to be the first of only three members from North Queensland constituencies to be premier. (Theodore and Forgan Smith were the others).

He kept most of Dickson's old cabinet, including Dickson, adding to it J.G. Drake, who until that moment had been the vocal and self-righteous leader of the non-Labor Opposition. Drake became Minister for Public Instruction and government leader in the Legislative Council, displacing Andrew Barlow who Philp thought had not been vigorous enough in pushing his railways legislation. With some changes caused by deaths and retirements this team lasted for three years and nine months. From outside the cabinet looked to some like a collection of old friends, with hangers-on such as the government whip, John Hamilton, a raffish old bachelor from the northern goldfields who was reputedly provided with sleeping quarters in Parliament House. Eventually this would cause discontent among backbenchers who felt excluded from the charmed circle.

For the present Philp was seen as the most accessible of leaders, indefatigable in touring the rural electorates, genial, and genuinely modest. It was widely believed that he refused a knighthood at the time of Australia's federation. Partly to dodge the unwanted honour he arranged to visit South Africa in May 1901 during the royal visit of the duke and duchess of York (later King George V and Queen Mary). Instead the acting Premier, Arthur Rutledge received the knighthood. Philp certainly refused to enter the first federal cabinet as Queensland's representative despite three requests from the Prime Minister, Edmund Barton. Philp put Dickson forward, and when Dickson died of excitement and diabetes a few days later replaced him with Drake. Philp explained that 'as he had been a Minister in Queensland in her years of prosperity, now as they were likely to have years not so prosperous, it was his duty to stay here. It was possible that some day, Queensland might have to fight the Commonwealth.'

He soon had his fight. One of the new Commonwealth government's first decisions was to end the traffic in Pacific Islanders for the Queensland cane fields. Although the change was phased out so that the last Pacific Islanders would not be repatriated until 1907, Philp used every negotiating and administrative device to defer the impact of the new policy on the sugar industry and to ensure that growers were protected by tariffs and bounties. But the most damaging effect of federation was on Queensland's finances. Revenue stood at around £4.4 million in each of the three years 1899 to 1901, while expenditure went from £4.2 million to £4.9 million. After 1901 the Commonwealth, and not Queensland, collected customs, excise and postal revenue, and Philp was soon to feel the consequences.

Meanwhile he continued with his developmental policies for Queensland. In 1900 he submitted to Parliament five more proposals for the construction of private railway lines to serve the mining industry. These were so strenuously resisted by Labor that the Legislative Assembly often sat after midnight, and the guillotine had to be introduced for the first time in Queensland parliamentary usage. All this argument took so much time that Philp had to abandon a number of constructive initiatives he had been expecting to bring forward: legislation for Aboriginal protection, early closing legislation for shops, and a reform of the electoral laws. Philp had also hoped to move for the establishment of a university, of which he was a lifelong advocate, especially because of its role in scientific and technical training, but this too had to be left undone. A private member's bill for workers' compensation also perished. Other possible reforms, such as the admission of women to the vote, seemed a lower priority, and here Philp blundered, as the women's vote might have proved a conservative counter to the increasing Labor orientation of the largely masculine mining and pastoral areas. Only an improved Health Act survived. In the face of these setbacks Philp persisted and managed to sponsor a number of measures of support for primary industries. Besides setting up research and experimental stations for the sugar industry his government legislated for guarantees to mills established by growers' co-operatives, a move which greatly facilitated the survival of small farming

canegrowers. Another important help for all farmers was provided by the creation of the Agricultural Bank. Not surprisingly the Philp government received a renewed mandate at the 1902 general elections, with forty-four members considered either government supporters or friendly Independents as against twenty-eight Labor men.

By 1902 however the effects of the great drought were hurting. In that year revenue fell by a million pounds – more than twenty per cent – from £4.4 million to £3.4 million. Philp toured the country districts to see conditions for himself, and brought forward legislation to extend pastoral leaseholds and to allow graziers ten years in which to pay their arrears of rent. He dismissed more than four hundred public servants, and moved for the reduction of parliamentary salaries from £300 to £250. But this was too much for the backbenchers to accept, nor were they much keener on a plan to reduce the number of members of the Legislative Assembly by about a quarter. Postponing this idea, Philp pushed on doggedly, introducing Queensland to the hardships of income tax, with a level of 2.5 per cent on personal income and five per cent on property. Predictably there was much opposition, and the measure scraped through by a margin of one vote. Through these measures Philp was able to reduce government expenditure to £3.7 million by 1903 but this still left a deficit of £1.5 million accumulated during his term as Premier, and rather dented his reputation as a financial manager.

Although the drought broke in the early months of 1903 Philp's luck was running out. Some of his backbenchers thought that their sectional interests were unduly neglected. Others were ambitious for office. The *Brisbane Courier*, usually a faithful supporter of conservative governments, began to publish ominous editorials about the dangers of drift and inefficiency in Queensland's leaders. Its motives were suspect, since the editor's father-in-law was Sir Arthur Rutledge, Philp's attorney-general and the man most likely to supplant him, but it caught the prevailing mood. In August 1903 the Philp government sought to improve its finances by a wide-ranging increase in stamp duties. On 31 August a powerful deputation of businessmen confronted Philp in protest, and Philp promised to abandon or modify a number of the objectionable proposals. The *Brisbane Courier* thundered: 'How can a Government displaying so complete an absence of self-respect and decision ... expect to retain the support of members?' In September when Parliament resumed Philp tried to pacify the critics with a workers' compensation bill and the promise of a vote for all adults, but it was too late. He survived one motion of no confidence, but when the stamp duties legislation came before the Legislative Assembly several members crossed the floor, so that it passed by only thirty-three votes to thirty-one. As three Labor members were absent, Philp knew that the numbers were now against him, and he resigned office.

This time Labor was not to be caught trying to form a minority government. Instead they formed a coalition with the dissident Liberals with the Speaker, Arthur Morgan, as premier. Andrew Barlow, whom Philp had dropped from his cabinet in 1899, agreed to serve Morgan as leader of the Legislative Council. As Leader of the Opposition Philp showed a distinct lack of the killer instinct, even when it became apparent that some of the members who had deserted him were ready to return to his side. Though the Morgan government had only the narrowest of margins Philp failed to play a hard game of parliamentary tactics. When eventually after nine months of skirmishing Morgan resigned, Philp did not try to form a government himself, but advised the Governor to send for Rutledge, under whom he was prepared to serve. But apart from Philp and one other, Rutledge could find nobody to serve with him. Morgan was recalled and Parliament was dissolved. The election of 1904 was a disaster for the conservatives. Morgan was returned at the head of twenty Liberals with support from 35 Labor members. Rutledge was beaten at the polls,

and Philp survived with the loyal support of Townsville, to resume, without obvious enthusiasm, the leadership of an Opposition of no more than seventeen members.

He was the most mild and obliging of opposition leaders. He made few serious criticisms of the coalition's land and financial policies, supported their attempts to abolish plural voting, and agreed that the nominee Legislative Council stood in need of reform. In time he was to put forward an ingenious scheme for reforming the Upper House, proposing to divide Queensland into electorates, to assign each of the existing members of the Legislative Council to a specific electorate, and as they died or resigned to fill the vacancies on a liberal franchise. Had this plan been accepted, Queensland today would probably still have had a bicameral parliament like the other Australian States, and from time to time the Legislative Council might have acted as a restraint on headstrong Premiers.

But party politics were to become stormy after the elections of 1907. By now the former Labor man, William Kidston, was premier, and an increasing number of Labor members were concerned that he was drifting away from the party's pure beliefs. Philp made gains, to have thirty-one members in the Legislative Assembly as against twenty-four for the coalition and seventeen Labor cross-benchers. In a prolonged election for a new Speaker Kidston was obliged to withdraw his candidate and throw his weight behind Philp's nominee. Keen to maintain his credentials as a reformer, Kidston proposed a system of compulsory wages arbitration which would include farmers and their labourers. This was unwelcome to rural employers, and Philp and his followers unsuccessfully opposed it, but the measure was thrown out by the Legislative Council.

This provoked the constitutional crisis of November 1907. Kidston requested the Governor, Lord Chelmsford, to appoint enough new members to the Legislative Council to give him a working majority. Chelmsford refused, Kidston resigned, and Philp was asked to form a ministry. He succeeded in doing so, if only by bringing in close personal friends such as his brother-in-law, his old Townsville friends, and his business associates. Kidston seized control of business in the Legislative Assembly, and with forcefulness worthy of Gough Whitlam, rammed through a motion of no confidence, and composed an address to the Governor condemning the Legislative Council for its obstructiveness. But in a precedent which Sir John Kerr would later invoke, Chelmsford replied that although the parliament was only six months old, it was essential to test the feeling of the voters in another election. Parliament was dissolved, and finance for the Philp government was provided by a series of writs under the Governor's authority.

It was a hard-fought election and Philp campaigned with gusto. He pitched his appeal especially to the rural voters. Kidston stumped the country on the cry "Home Rule for Queensland", painting Philp as a muddled reactionary propped up by an autocratic governor. Most of the respectable press were against Kidston, but he had the support of the *Worker* and the *Sydney Bulletin* which during that election took more interest in Queensland than at any time before or since. Cartoons and articles lampooned Philp as an "old financial clown" who "has never in all his long career risen above the level of the suburban alderman". According to the *Bulletin*: 'Nature meant him for a cheerful, slipshod, shambling Bohemian – happy, out-at-elbows, always in debt, always irresponsible, and always pursued by duns and bailiffs. Then accident made him a politician, and there seems to be no remedy for mistakes like that.' At the February 1908 elections Philp made a couple of gains in the country, but lost six metropolitan seats and two at Charters Towers to the coalition. Even at Townsville, where Philp and Hanran had been 750 votes ahead of Labor in 1907, their majority twelve months later was little more than one

hundred. It was a decisive result. Impassively Lord Chelmsford accepted Philp's resignation and swore in a renovated Kidston ministry.

Yet nothing had changed. Philp and Kidston were close in most essentials, notably bold policies of economic development. Within two months Philp supported Kidston against Labor in approving two more privately constructed railways. Before the year was out Philp brought all his followers but one into a merger with Kidston, declaring himself a lifelong believer in two-party government. He sought no office for himself, preferring to concentrate on his business interests. More than once he remarked that he had come into politics a very rich man and would leave very poor. Parliamentary life, he said, was one of the hardest jobs he had ever tackled: 'Without a doubt it makes a man's life shorter than it would otherwise be.' Although these assertions might seem odd in a man who had just become a partner in the noted Thylungra sheep station and would leave well over £100,000 in his estate, it was probably sincerely meant. He wanted to enable his two sons to set up as pastoralists, and to support one of his daughters in becoming one of Queensland's first women doctors.

From 1909 to 1915 he was "Father of the House" in the Legislative Assembly and enjoyed the role. He relaxed and took to enlivening his speeches with funny anecdotes. When a young Labor member attacked his past record, he replied: 'Why, what does the honourable member know about that? He was only a boy at that time, he was only in swaddling clothes.' At times he gave sage and pertinent advice on financial matters. He would applaud yet another project for a developmental railway, or utter a warning against newfangled concepts such as price control, but mostly he left policy to the younger men. A founding father of the University of Queensland, he enjoyed returning to Scotland, prosperous and successful after fifty years, as its representative at a conference of universities at Glasgow in 1912. He would not have been human if he hadn't enjoyed the dinners and welcomes given him before and after his trip by Queensland admirers.

But he may have been losing his grass roots in Townsville. As a sympathetic biographer put it: 'The workers of the eighties and nineties who knew and loved 'Bob' Philp had been swamped by a generation that loved the 'Union Boss' better.' He had not lived in Townsville for years, and the easygoing democracy of North Queensland may not have liked his eventual acceptance of a knighthood in 1915. Later that year there was a landslide election towards Labor, and Philp was one of the casualties, though only by a margin of 200 votes. Outside Parliament he developed into a more wily and tenacious opponent of the Labor government than ever he showed himself in parliament. He successfully fought the Labor-sponsored referendum of 1917 to abolish the Legislative Council. In 1920, when Theodore as premier threatened to remove the limit to the rents that could be charged for pastoral leaseholds, it was Philp who led a delegation to London to lobby effectively for the support of British political and financial interests, so that Theodore was unable to raise capital on the London money market. Philp wielded influence more deftly than he had managed political office.

He died aged seventy on a winter morning, 17 June 1922. Obituary tributes followed honouring him as a pioneer of commerce, a gentleman in all his dealings and a man beloved by even his political opponents. His well attended funeral testified to his Scottish background. A sprig of white heather lay on the coffin, and a piper played a lament. The Brisbane *Courier* even published a rather bad poem in his honour. But the last word was left to his old critic, the *Bulletin*: 'We had no idea how good a man he was till we found out how rotten subsequent men could be.'

So why should we in 2008 remember Robert Philp? Thirty years ago, in common with most historians, I would have echoed his critics. I wrote: 'The politician who lacked the imagination as a young man to see anything wrong with trafficking in Pacific Islanders, and who as an old man could not understand why the Brisbane tramwaymen persisted in wanting to wear their union badges, simply had not the capacity to expand his personal kindness and geniality into a social conscience.' I am now nearly not so sure. His advocacy of private investment in infrastructure for the mining industry may not have produced great results in his time, but it has been the mainstay of the prodigious developments in Queensland and Western Australia since the 1960s. His initiatives such as the Charters Towers School of Mines and the Agricultural Bank show a strategic appreciation of the role of government in fostering industry and training that has not always been matched by later political leaders, though it could be seen as forming part of a distinctive Queensland tradition. And at a time when there is serious discussion of the need to overcome labour shortages in the extractive industries of northern Australia by bringing contract workers from Southeast Asia and the Pacific, it is not so easy to throw stones at the sugar growers' use of indentured labour. Indeed we often forget how many Australians of his generation, perhaps Queenslanders especially, were aware of the potential of neighbouring regions, and Philp because of his business and political interests was prominent among them.

If Philp had lived and held office a hundred years later than he did, he might have made a very effective State premier. And he should be given credit for bringing into the political arena standards of personal decency and honourable conduct that even today cannot always be taken for granted. He is worth remembering.

Geoffrey Bolton

***The History of North Queensland in Black and White:
A Personal Retrospective***

Associate Professor Noel Loos

**Lecture presented by Associate Professor Loos at
CityLibraries - Thuringowa
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**SIR ROBERT PHILP LECTURE SERIES
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After completing my study of Henry Reynolds' first Australian History course at James Cook University, I was invited to enrol in the new third year honours course and eventually to undertake the associated 20,000 word research thesis. As I was the first research student in the new History Department, Professors Brian Dalton and Reynolds asked me, like Mrs Beaton, to find a suitable topic. I read the small handful of useful available books, Geoffrey Bolton's, *A Thousand Miles Away*, and Dorothy Jones', *Cardwell Shire Story*, being two I can remember, and came up with thirteen possible topics.¹ Their eyes glazed over as I went through them all and outlined what possibilities each one posed. One, the history of Aboriginal-white relations in North Queensland mentioned very early in my list was the one that captured and retained their interest. It had also been my preferred topic but I thought it would be difficult, if not impossible to research. They both assured me with great conviction that I would find the sources although there were no specific leads forthcoming as to where and how I would discover them. Like Mrs Beaton I had first to catch my hare before I could cook it, but before I could even do that, unlike Mrs Beaton, I had to discover how to find it. Dalton and Reynolds, I suspect, were probably almost as clueless as I was where the search would lead and how it could be done. But as well as our collective ignorance, we had something else in common: the passion to begin the search. For this, I am deeply in their debt.

My initial topic for the honours thesis was "Aboriginal-European Relations in North Queensland 1861–1897", 1861 being the date of the first white settlement in North Queensland at Bowen. The first comprehensive *Aboriginal Protection Act* was passed in 1897. It made the Aborigines wards of the state thus removing their theoretical British citizenship. I read the *Port Denison Times*, the only North Queensland newspaper that had an unbroken coverage of the period. Paul Wilson, then in charge of the Queensland State Archives, was able to direct me to where material on Aborigines would reside in the official government records, mainly in the Colonial Secretary's files, and I leafed through hundreds of large bundles of inward correspondence, and numerous letter books of outward correspondence. In addition, I read all the diaries, reminiscences, explorers' and navigators' journals, Dutch and British, and every contemporary and later publication that seemed at all relevant. I then told Brian Dalton I needed to modify my topic somewhat. It became: "Frontier Conflict in the Bowen District 1861–1874", 1874 being when the Aborigines were finally 'let in'. My original topic became the title of my doctoral thesis, which in a greatly modified version became the subject of my first book: *Invasion and Resistance: Aboriginal-European relations on the North Queensland frontier 1861–1897*². These changes in scope and titles do a lot more than reflect our initial collective ignorance of the writing of the history of Aboriginal-European relations in North Queensland.

When I submitted my first honours topic, I thought I would have one chapter on frontier colonial expansion and the rest of my thesis would deal with the post-frontier experience in which Aboriginal people, theoretically British citizens, were forced to accept the role of an inferior caste in a racially stratified society that rendered the phrase "black but British", at best nonsense, and at worst an obscenity. However, my reading of the primary source material surprised, even shocked me as it graphically revealed the almost uniform nature of violent dispossession. This had developed in the first half of the 19th century as a consequence of the rapid expansion of the pastoral industry in New South Wales and in what is now Victoria and southern Queensland. The process was referred to as "keeping the blacks out" and "letting the blacks in".

¹ G. C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away: A History of North Queensland to 1920*, Brisbane, 1963; D. Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story*, Brisbane, 1961.

² Noel Loos, *Invasion and Resistance: Aboriginal-European relations on the North Queensland frontier 1861–1897*, Canberra, 1982.

When the pastoralists in North Queensland took up their runs, they adopted the same practice that had developed in the south. They “kept the blacks out”. In November 1869, a pastoralist sympathiser described in the *Port Denison Times* what this meant in North Queensland, not to criticise the process but to urge caution where the Aborigines were being “let in”. Most Aborigines were not hostile at first, he declared, but as some had been “treacherous” (presumably when they realised the significance of the alien presence) the pioneers were forced “to keep them out”:

[that is] never to allow them near a camp, out-station, head-station, or township; consequently they were hunted by anyone if seen in open country, and driven away or shot down when caught out of the scrub and broken ground. This course adopted by the early settlers and pioneers was unavoidable and quite necessary under the existing circumstances.

Although extra men were employed to protect the runs, he asserted the Europeans would have been at the mercy of the Aborigines if they had been “let in” and realised the weakness of the squatters. He admitted:

This system of keeping them out, however has led to dreadful results . . . every bushman had to take the law into his own hands in self-defence, and for a time every man’s hand was against the blacks, and their hands against every man — as those who had been peacefully inclined towards the settlers at first became revengeful, and committed several most horrible murders, . . . and [killed] sheep, cattle, and horses.

Despite the fact that it was a violation of one of the conditions of lease to deny the Aborigines free access to a run, there was no expectation by the government that the squatters would comply with this stipulation.³

The pastoralists were supported by the Native Mounted Police Force, commonly referred to as the Native Police, a paramilitary force divided into detachments of four to six Aboriginal troopers, led by a white Sub-Inspector. Each detachment was stationed in an area where Aboriginal resistance was occurring and remained there patrolling to break up large assemblages of Aborigines; they also carried out punitive expeditions at the request of the settlers until Aboriginal resistance was broken. They would then be transferred to a new area of Aboriginal resistance on the expanding frontier.

In the pacified area, Aborigines could be then controlled, by the ordinary police stationed in each locality following expansion and by the settlers themselves, often by extra-legal methods. The Native Police remained the only instrument of Queensland’s frontier policy until 1897.

The degree of violence acceptable to the settlers, the Native Police, and the Queensland Government is perhaps best illustrated by an account I discovered of one of the few punitive raids described in detail.

The officer in charge of both the native and ordinary police in the Burke District stretching south from the Gulf of Carpentaria, Sub-Inspector Uhr, had previously earned the respect of the residents with the limited force he had at his disposal. With the increase in conflict between the settlers and the Aborigines he soon won enthusiastic approval for his

³ *Port Denison Times*, 20 November 1869, “A Black Protector”; 13 April, 1867, A.L. McDougall referred to the regulation to the Under Colonial Secretary, reproduced in the newspaper.

ruthless reprisals. In one of the few extant detailed accounts of a Native Police dispersal, the Burketown correspondent to the *Brisbane Courier* exulted at Uhr's success in killing fifty-nine Aborigines in retaliation for the slaughter of "several horses" near Burketown and the killing of a Mr Cameron near the Norman River while the 'dispersal' was in progress:

I much regret to state that the blacks have become very troublesome about here lately. Within ten miles of this place they speared and cut steaks from the rumps of several horses. As soon as it was known, the Native Police, under Sub-Inspector Uhr, went out, and I am informed, succeeded in shooting upwards of thirty blacks. No sooner was this done than a report came in that Mr Cameron had been murdered at Liddle and Hetzer's station, near the Norman. Mr Uhr went off immediately in that direction, and his success I hear was complete. One mob of fourteen he rounded up; another mob of nine, and a last mob of eight, he succeeded with his troopers in shooting. In the latter lot there was one black who would not die after receiving eighteen or twenty bullets, but a trooper speedily put an end to his existence by smashing his skull.

The complacent tone of this report and the absence of any hostile reaction or of an official inquiry suggest that this was, perhaps, only a successful act of revenge and bloodshed. The Burketown correspondent concluded: "Everybody in the district is delighted with the wholesale slaughter dealt out by the native police, and thank Mr Uhr for his energy in ridding the district of *fifty-nine (59) myalls*".⁴

In Queensland in the nineteenth century, this was apparently considered a good news story. I first read it in the *Port Denison Times*, 4 July 1868, where it was reprinted from the *Brisbane Courier*. It also appeared in the *Queenslander*, 13 June 1868, under the by-line "Carpentaria". It may well have appeared in other newspapers.

This and numerous other reports in newspapers, the Queensland State Archives, and other sources are remarkably frank about the murderous attacks upon Aboriginal people. Most of these were justified as being part of the warfare with Aboriginal people to assert their legal authority as British settlers against a people with no legal right to the land. In defending their land, Aborigines were thus criminals. In Queensland, the settlers and Native Police were not held to account for actions taken against the Aborigines on the expanding frontier. They were the agents of British imperial expansion, the agents of progress.

If my research into Aboriginal-settler relations in the Bowen District had shown me the violent nature of frontier conflict, my doctoral research revealed an even more surprisingly complex situation. Once again, I expected to write one chapter on dispossession throughout North Queensland. I discovered that there were four quite different frontiers which resulted in the dispossession of Aboriginal people.

I had realised that the discovery of gold, tin, and copper had caused colonial expansion into areas where there had been no or little pastoral expansion, for example, in Cape York Peninsula (gold), on the Atherton Tableland (tin), and in the Cloncurry District (copper), but thought I could deal with this as a brief addenda to the pastoral frontier. However, mineral exploration and the environment in which the discoveries were made and exploited produced a very different, more chaotic and more violent frontier than even the pastoral industry.

⁴ Loos, *Invasion and Resistance*, pp.36–37. See p.257, footnotes 23–29 for this account.

Indeed in North Queensland, it is possible to study four different frontiers of contact. The pastoral industry led to the colonisation of most of North Queensland. However, large areas of Cape York Peninsula that had been considered unfit for pastoral settlement were opened up by miners. Indeed, for a time the Aborigines of such goldfields as the Palmer, Hodgkinson, and Gilbert encountered the largest numbers of invaders. The extensive rainforests of north-east Queensland had also been largely avoided by the pastoral industry; but, when timber-getters revealed the fertile soil, farmers began clearing the rainforest, thus creating another frontier. Finally, in far North Queensland, fishermen in the pearlshell and beche-de-mer industries needing the labour of previously uncontacted or little contacted Aborigines made a frontier of the sea which was in many ways the most interesting of all. Thus there was in North Queensland a frontier contact situation unparalleled elsewhere in Australia.

The nature of each industry posed different challenges to both Aborigines and settlers; the environment in which each occurred provided varying opportunities for Aboriginal resistance and for co-operation between the Aboriginal people and the settlers. The Queensland government found that its frontier policy, which had been developed on the pastoral frontier of New South Wales, was nowhere near as effective in meeting the challenges of the other frontiers. Indeed, successful Aboriginal resistance forced alternative government intervention to cope with the resistance offered from the rainforests and on the sea frontier. On all frontiers, Aboriginal resistance was for a time a major obstacle to economic exploitation. The European response, however, cost the Aborigines dear and resulted, in all areas, in the imposition of European authority.

Of course, it is not possible here for me to explore further how richly different each of these frontiers was. As I have indicated, frontier contact had never been my main interest, but, given the wealth of primary sources, I found it impossible not to incorporate them as an important part of the history of North Queensland. They can be still read as four chapters of my 1982 monograph, *Invasion and Resistance*.

My prime interest had always been how Aboriginal people had been incorporated into the society that was developing on their land. The titles of chapters eight to twelve of my doctoral thesis indicate broadly my conclusions: chapter 8, "Aboriginal Relations in the Pacified Areas 1860–1897: The Creation of a Multiracial Society", a caste-ridden society determined by race; chapter nine, "Aboriginal-European Relations . . . : The Doomed Race - Theory and Practice"; chapter ten, "Control by Kindness: The Mission of the Christian Churches to the Aborigines of North Queensland"; chapter eleven, "The Decent Disposal of the Native Inhabitants': The Aborigines and the Queensland Legislature"; and chapter twelve, "European Racial Thought and Action in North Queensland". Each of these chapters was at least twelve thousand words in length except the chapter on the missionary enterprise in North Queensland. It is twenty thousand words which reflected my fascination for the topic. I incorporated the highlights of these five chapters in the final chapter of *Invasion and Resistance*.

Again, the role of the missions was an area about which I initially knew very little. It was only when I explored the missionary archival records of the Lutheran, Presbyterian and Anglican churches and read their contemporary mission journals, created to win the support of their various congregations, that I realised that here was another area of the history of Aboriginal-white relations that had to become known to all Australians.

Most of the existing large Aboriginal communities in northern Australia owe their existence to their origin as missions. They had literally been refuges where Aboriginal people could be safe and could have their health, education and housing needs met, at least at a basic

level. Moreover, the missionaries were taking Christianity to Aboriginal people under the worst circumstances imaginable: as the religion of the colonists who were dispossessing them with as much violence as considered necessary. They could then use their land only as the settlers decreed, which frequently denied them adequate means of support and made them mendicants, beggars, whose labour and women were commonly exploited. This resulted in inadequate, unbalanced diets, living in fringe camps which became killing fields. These permanent camps were new to the Aboriginal people, and became unsanitary disease-producing sites that were also effective distribution centres of the exotic diseases the settlers communicated to them. The ensuing catastrophic depopulation had created the concept in the settlers' minds, from the first decades of the nineteenth century, that Aborigines were a "doomed race" so there was little point, by those few who were concerned, in trying to fight what was seen as a law of nature or the will of God.

The missionaries were inextricably part of the colonising culture that had destroyed much of the Aboriginal way of life and inflicted upon them the miseries with which they were afflicted. The missionaries also shared the belief that European culture was superior, that the Aborigines were a child race, at best only ever able to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, needing protection, control and isolation from white society in perpetuity. It fascinated me, as disciples of their Prince of Peace in a religion that preached the "brotherhood of man" and had Christ demonstrating sacrificial love for others, especially the marginalised, that they had the unquestioning confidence to attempt to convert the Aborigines. The missionaries were not just other colonists. Despite the fact that every aspect of their presence in Australia, their churches, cathedrals, all their property, their wealth, their income, their salaries, and their organisational structure resulted from the dispossession of Aboriginal people, they knelt before a cross that was a rejection of such misuse of power, authority and corruption of religion.

I was aware that this situation was historically common in Christian and Islamic history, but I wanted to hear the voices of all concerned and to understand them: the Aborigines on the missions, the missionaries, the decision makers on missionary boards and the people in the pews. My interest was increased because I knew Aboriginal Christians on the old mission-communities I had visited, as well as in Townsville and in my classes at James Cook University. John Harris had claimed that a greater percentage of Aboriginal people were Christians than white Australians, a statistic that initially surprised me.⁵ In both cases, the worshipping Christians were only a small percentage of the total population of each group I also realised that on the missions, the fringe camps that the missionaries had created, the doomed race theory was quickly proved wrong, a comforting fallacy in the minds of the colonists that motivated their callous, casual neglect.

I decided to focus on the history of one missionary society, the Australian Board of Missions, the official missionary agency of the Anglican Church in Australia, the largest of the churches in Australia throughout the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth. This missionary body is now renamed more humbly, the Anglican Board of Missions Australia, and has been referred to throughout most of its 160 years' history as ABM. Four out of five of the communities it established were in North Queensland: Yarrabah, Kowanyama (formerly Mitchell River Mission), Lockhart River, and Pormpuraaw (Edward River Mission); the fifth, Oombulgurri (Forrest River Mission) is in the Kimberley District of Western Australia.

⁵ John Harris, *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope*, Albatross Books, Sydney, 1990, p.659.

I was aware of the movement within the Anglican Church in North Queensland to create an Aboriginal and a Torres Strait Islander bishop, each to have Episcopal oversight within North Queensland. I had also been an informal participant observer of the process. I made four visits to Sydney to study ABM's archives, visited the North Queensland missions, especially Yarrabah where a religious revival was occurring led by the Aboriginal priest, Arthur Malcolm, who was to be consecrated the first Aboriginal bishop in 1985.⁶

In 1973, the few worshipping Aborigines at Yarrabah had suggested "one of their own", Arthur Malcolm, be asked to replace the retiring white priest. After seven dry years, a revival of Christianity had occurred and enthusiastically endorsed the movement to appoint an Aboriginal bishop as assistant to the diocesan bishop to minister to their own people.⁷

These Aboriginal Christians on the old mission communities were well aware of the missionary paternalism that persisted into the 1960s, the separation of children from their parents into dormitories, the suppression of Aboriginal languages, the very limited range of food, education, employment and housing the church could provide. Yet, they remained Anglican and continued to express their commitment within this structure. Even a schism did not result in permanent withdrawal from the Anglican Church as it had among Torres Strait Anglicans.

I had completed the manuscript for *White Christ Black Cross*, except for the introduction and the conclusion – or so I thought - when the Mabo High Court decision establishing native title was handed down in June 1992, five months after the death of Edward Koiki Mabo, the leading litigant. Koiki had been a close friend since 1967. As I had interviewed him in 1984, after the High Court decision it seemed urgent to complete his biography. It was now of interest and importance nationally and even internationally. As there was no one out there waiting anxiously for a mission history, I put aside *White Christ Black Cross* and worked for the next two years or so on the Mabo biography, which included an autobiographical section, Part II "Koiki Mabo's Story", consisting of five of the nine chapters, told in Koiki's own words. The book was published at the end of 1996, coinciding with my retirement from James Cook University.⁸ I had read myself back into the book on two occasions but been again diverted from finishing it. Eventually in 2004, I determined to complete the book, but by then the History Wars was being vigorously waged by Keith Windschuttle and his supporters on one side, and a group of academic historians on the other, led *inter alia* by Henry Reynolds, Robert Manne, Neville Green and Bain Attwood.⁹

A revisionist history of the 1926 Forrest River massacres by Rod Moran had concluded that no Aborigines had been massacred at all, that it was a vicious rumour manufactured by the missionary superintendent, the Rev. Ernest Gribble, to divert attention from his alleged sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women on his mission. This was one of the sparks that ignited the History Wars in Windschuttle's mind, and, as Forrest River Mission,

⁶ Noel Loos, *White Christ Black Cross: The emergence of a Black Church*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2007, pp.1–8.

⁷ Loos, *White Christ Black Cross*, pp.5–10; 163–170.

⁸ Noel Loos and Koiki Mabo, *Edward Koiki Mabo: His life and struggle for land rights*, University of Queensland Press, 1996, *passim*.

⁹ Bain Attwood, *Telling the Truth about Aboriginal History*, Allen and Unwin, Crow's Nest, NSW, 2005, pp.2–3, details the controversy, the associated "travelling circus", and the articles, debates, and radio and television coverage.

now Oombulgurri, was one of the five missions in my study, I clearly had to join the debate. Moreover, Windschuttle had targeted me in one of the *Quadrant* articles which began his revisionist attack upon the post-1970s wave of allegedly left-wing, academic historians who described the violence of dispossession and the consequences of white domination.¹⁰

In an article we were collaborating on in the 1970s, Henry Reynolds had asked me to estimate from my doctoral research, how many Aborigines had been killed in conflict by the colonists. I replied that it was “impossible to do anything but guess” but conservatively suggested at least ten times as many as the number of colonists killed by Aboriginal resistance which I had been tabulating as an incidental aspect of my doctoral research.¹¹ Reynolds agreed with this conclusion for his area, southern Queensland. Windschuttle claimed that our estimate was unsubstantiated and had been uncritically accepted by later historians. He praised my empirical method applied to the colonists and criticised the failure to use such an approach when estimating the Aboriginal death toll. Such detail was not possible and, to be limited by the historical method advocated by Windschuttle, would produce a “seriously defective”, whitewashed history. I devoted a whole chapter, ‘Of Massacres, Myths, Missionaries and History Wars’, to the History Wars in *White Christ Black Cross* exploring the alleged “invention of massacre stories”, in this case the twentieth century Forrest River massacres,¹² and another chapter, “Agents of the Aboriginal Holocaust”, in part exploring the alleged exaggeration of frontier conflict.¹³

White Christ Black Cross is, however, primarily concerned to explore the emergence of a black church from within the Anglican Church. The black church emerged in North Queensland and led to the creation of the first Aboriginal bishop, Arthur Malcolm. As mentioned above, Christianity was taken to the Aborigines in the worst circumstances imaginable, while frontier conflict and catastrophic depopulation was still occurring. I have called this the “Aboriginal Holocaust”. It was so devastating that the white missionaries accepted the inevitability that the Aboriginal people would be swept aside by the ‘superior’ European culture, their culture. To preserve ‘the remnant’ that was left, they imposed a paternalistic control, separated the children from their parents so that they could change their culture, and planned a future for their Aboriginal “inmates” of separation in perpetuity from the white colonising culture, at least as far as was possible. In losing much of their Aboriginal culture and language they would become a dependent caste limited by the mission way of life, which was not traditionally Aboriginal and not the same as the white colonists experienced. This situation persisted to the 1960s among all of the Christian missionary bodies that I have studied. Yet, from this mission experience, a small minority of Aborigines, well aware of the limitations of the life that had been imposed upon them, remained committed Christians. Some became missionaries to their own people. This was especially so in Yarrabah. Like all of the other areas I have researched, the response of Aboriginal people and the developments in the wider society are still emerging as the historic past conditions and moulds the present and the future.

¹⁰ Keith Windschuttle, “The myths of frontier massacres in Australian History, Part I. The invention of massacre stories”, *Quadrant*, vol. XLIV, no. 10, October 2000; “The myths of frontier massacres in Australian history, Part II. The fabrication of the Aboriginal death toll”, *Quadrant*, vol. XLIV, no. 11, November 2000.

¹¹ H. Reynolds and N. Loos, “Aboriginal Resistance in Queensland”, *Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 22, no. 3, 1976, pp.214–226.

¹² See chapter 6, “Of Massacres, Missionaries, Myths and History Wars” in *White Christ Black Cross*.

¹³ See chapter 2.

I found it amusing to be considered part of an academic, left wing conspiracy producing pre-ordained conclusions in the areas I have researched. In this retrospective, I hope I have clearly indicated how I have been surprised by the conclusions the primary sources have led me to make. These conclusions will no doubt continue to be modified as part of the historic process, hopefully by people who will consult and expand the Aboriginal oral histories I and others have made in the last forty years, and by people who will use *all* available sources to achieve the most revealing history possible. Australians deserve nothing less.

Noel Loos

Ellis Rowan: Flower –Hunting in the Tropics

Dr Judith McKay

**Lecture presented by Dr McKay at CityLibraries - Thuringowa
11 August 2008**

**SIR ROBERT PHILP LECTURE SERIES
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Who was Ellis Rowan and why was she so remarkable? She was Australia's most celebrated flower painter of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. An emancipated woman far ahead of her time, she turned what her fellow Australian artists deemed a 'genteel' female pastime of flower painting into an adventurous and profitable career that took her all over the world. In a career spanning fifty years and ending with her death in 1922, she produced the phenomenal number of more than 3,000 paintings, many of which she succeeded in placing in public collections. Rowan exhibited her work as far afield as London and New York and achieved acclaim at the great world expositions of her day, winning some ten gold, fifteen silver and four bronze medals. Also a skilled writer, she recounted her travels in the popular press and in a book entitled *A Flower-Hunter in Queensland and New Zealand*, published in 1898. As a reviewer wrote, 'there's not an uninteresting page in the whole book'. However, sometimes Rowan laced fact with fiction, as in her depiction *Suspense!* which shows her supposed encounter with a crocodile at the Bloomfield River - it is one of several illustrations from her book that I'll be using in this talk. Not only a writer, she was a shameless self-publicist, with an extraordinary ability to influence people. Despite her success, she managed to convince her contemporaries that she was a neglected artist and had a memorial committee lobbying for her during her lifetime. This is the portrait by John Longstaff the committee commissioned after her death. As a contemporary of Rowan concluded: 'To those fortunate enough to meet her, the painter was more wonderful than her work - and that is saying a great deal.'

I'll now outline Ellis Rowan's remarkable life and work. She was born in 1848 to a wealthy pastoralist family of Victoria. Besides a position of privilege, she inherited a talent for art and natural history. Her father, Charles Ryan, was creator of the noted garden, Derriweit Heights, Mount Macedon, while her maternal grandfather, John Cotton, was a pioneer naturalist in Victoria and a competent bird painter. Following her education in Melbourne, Rowan visited England and probably took art lessons, though she claimed, with characteristic exaggeration, to have been entirely self-taught as an artist. She began exhibiting her paintings at about the time of her marriage in 1873 to Frederic Charles Rowan, a British army officer then serving in New Zealand and later a successful Melbourne businessman. It was probably while accompanying Frederic on his business trips around Australia that she met the world-travelling English flower painter, Marianne North, at Albany, Western Australia, in 1880. This eccentric woman with a strong sense of vocation provided a role model for Rowan, who later wrote: 'I became her devoted admirer, and she became the pioneer of my ambition'. Thereafter she took up a life of travel and adventure.

Following Marianne North's practice of depicting her subjects *in situ*, Ellis Rowan trekked to remote and distant places — to the tropics of Queensland on at least six occasions. Also like her mentor, saw she herself more an artist and public educator than botanical illustrator and was determined to place her paintings in the public domain. In 1911, urging the Queensland Premier to inspect her work, Rowan explained: 'The collection is painted with a view of showing the general public how the flowers grow with their surroundings. While they are all botanically correct, you cannot in the one painting make a picture of the flower and also show it scientifically in sections, which is quite a different study'. In other words, Rowan sought to record not the structure of flowers, but to show how they grow in their native habitats: by sea or swamp, in sparse desert, or as here, in dense rainforest (at the Johnstone River). It was the recording of habitat that made distant travel so crucial for Marianne North and Ellis Rowan, and their paintings bear comparison. This is North's painting of Australian Bottlebrush, followed by Rowan's of the same subject; and note that Rowan's is more subtle because she worked in watercolours and gouache, whereas North used oils. Also, as we see here, Rowan sometimes added complex landscape settings to

her paintings. Her mastery of landscape resulted from lessons she had received from the Melbourne artist, John Mather. So much for her claim to have been self-taught!

Both Marianne North and Ellis Rowan continued a tradition of 'Picturesque' flower painting made popular in the early 19th century by the most famous of all florilegia, Robert Thornton's *Temple of Flora*. This, a work scorned by botanical purists, provided inspiration for traveller-artists like North and Rowan who catered for public curiosity in the flora of distant places. This great volume was issued in several parts between 1799 and 1807 and no expense was spared to make it the grandest botanical publication yet produced. Publisher Thornton engaged England's leading artists - not botanical artists - to make paintings for the volume's so-called 'Picturesque plates'. For this work, the artists were to set plants not against the plain backgrounds generally used in botanical illustration, but in the full richness of their native habitats. Hence we have the *Sacred Egyptian Bean* by the artist Peter Henderson in a distant setting of the Nile and the Pyramids. This device of setting plants against distant sky or scenery was often used by Rowan. Her painting of *Lotus-lilies* compares closely with the previous plate, except that the Egyptian setting is replaced by a familiar Queensland swamp. Her bold, close-up compositions, often extending beyond the picture frame, set her apart from other Australian flower painters of her era.

Though Ellis Rowan placed artistic effect over scientific record, the subjects of her paintings are accurate enough to be readily identified. Throughout her career she called on botanists to identify her subjects, sometimes sending specimens as proof. At first she called on her friend Ferdinand Mueller, the eminent Government Botanist of Victoria, and later, after his death in 1896, his Queensland counterpart, Frederick Manson Bailey. In fact, the botanists' writings on the reverse of the paintings provide vital clues for dating because early in Rowan's career she gave up dating her work. Here we have the distinctive writing of Mueller on the reverse of a painting. Colonial Botanist Bailey regarded Rowan's paintings as accurate enough to choose sixteen for colour plates in his massive work, the *Comprehensive Catalogue of Queensland Plants*, published in 1913 - here is the plate of Flinders Poppy. Bailey also named plants after Rowan, including a large spotted orchid which he called Mrs Rowan's Phais; this she had collected at the Murray River, north of Cardwell in 1912 - her painting. Bailey also named a pitcher-plant *Nepenthes Rowanae*; this she had collected at Somerset - a drawing of the plant by F. Wills. Sadly, the names no longer stand as the species had already been described.

Not only the plants can be readily identified in Rowan's paintings. My former Queensland Museum colleagues can name the insects and other creatures, such as this Carpet Snake painted at Harrisville in southern Queensland. However, my colleagues point out there is no biological association between the plants and creatures, and that sometimes the creatures are dead. It seems that the Hawk Moth here was painted from one of Rowan's own collection of dead specimens for its legs are in the attitude of *rigor mortis*!

From 1887, Ellis Rowan travelled extensively in Queensland and Western Australia in an ambitious scheme to record the Australian flora. She found the tropical flowers 'more beautiful than all' and returned again and again during the winter months. To explain her long absences from her husband and young son while on her travels, she invented a socially acceptable excuse: that she had 'only a bit of a lung' which could not withstand the severity of Melbourne's winters. 'It must be a splendid bit', observed a resident of Murray Island, in the Torres Strait, in September 1892 when Rowan was the only one of a party of tourists to reach the summit of the island's highest peak. The truth is that, despite her fragile appearance, she was a woman of enormous physical stamina and determination. She was back in Melbourne only days before the untimely death of her

husband, from pneumonia, in December 1892. Thereafter she resumed her travels: first to New Zealand and later to London where she held a successful exhibition and won an audience with Queen Victoria. From 1897, Rowan travelled in the West Indies and the United States, illustrating textbooks for the American botanist Alice Lounsberry and exhibiting her paintings. While in the United States she underwent a face-lift to preserve her looks. She was one of the first Australian women to try cosmetic surgery: she was very vain.

International recognition behind her, Rowan returned to Australia in 1904 to pursue her goal of recording the flora. Then approaching her sixties, her zest for travel had not diminished and she was determined to gain recognition for her life's work. She travelled in South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria and Queensland, financing her travels with regular exhibitions. Prompted by a commission from the Sydney jewellers Flavelle's for designs for china, she made extensive visits to Papua New Guinea in 1916 and 1917. Travelling through rugged cannibal country to paint the endangered Birds of Paradise, she fell victim to malaria which eventually broke her health. Rowan's final success was to stage what was then Australia's largest art exhibition, showing more than 1,000 works in Sydney in 1920. Her takings of over £2,000 set a national record for a woman artist. But Rowan wanted more lasting success. She was determined to place her paintings in the public domain, like her mentor Marianne North, who had given her collection to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in London, and also this fine gallery to house it. For many years Rowan and her memorial committee lobbied the Australian Government to purchase her collection, even though there was then no national gallery to house it. Well-known artists protested that her work was quite 'unfit' for a gallery, let alone worth the asking price of £21,000. Norman Lindsay, the master painter of buxom flesh, had the cheek to call her work 'vulgar' and to condemn the proposed acquisition as 'a deplorable commentary on public taste'. The Bruce-Page Government eventually offered £5,000 for 947 paintings, paid a year after Rowan's death in 1922. These paintings are now housed in the National Library of Australia, in Canberra, and form the largest collection of Rowan's work in public hands.

The Queensland Museum collection, which I was privileged to care for, is Australia's second largest collection. It was acquired from an exhibition held in Brisbane in August 1912. During the exhibition Ellis Rowan orchestrated a public campaign to make the State Government purchase her work. The exhibition was well attended by the general public, but a fortnight had passed before any government ministers came to inspect it. What stirred them into action was a letter written to the local press by A.B. Wilson, President of the Queensland Institute of Architects, stressing the educational value of the collection. More letters followed, mostly written by members of the Queensland Naturalists' Club, while the Queensland Art Society remained conspicuously silent. In September 1912 Premier Digby Denham eventually gave way. He had forcibly suppressed Brisbane's rioting workers during a general strike earlier that year, but was unable to withstand the pressure of Rowan and her Establishment lobbyists. Moreover, the Premier paid dearly for the collection: £1,050 for 125 paintings. Though this may not seem much now, it represented 81 per cent of the Premier's annual salary at the time. So much for our neglected artist! After the exhibition closed, the fate of the paintings was hotly debated in Brisbane: were they works of art worthy of the state art gallery or just botanical specimens more appropriate to the museum? The curator of the gallery, Godfrey Rivers, a professional art master, had the final word: they were quite 'unfit' for his gallery. Besides, the gallery, then occupying a crowded room of a government office building, was already over-crowded and had no space for the paintings. So they were consigned to the state museum — here they are ranged along south-western wall of the former museum building, Brisbane's Exhibition Building.

I'll now look more closely at Ellis Rowan's travels in Queensland and particularly her travels in the north, which was a favourite hunting ground.

In 1887, at the age of thirty-nine, she made her first painting expedition to Queensland. Departing Brisbane by coastal steamer in August, she headed straight for Mackay where she had heard there were 'many beautiful flowers' to be found at that time of the year. Far from disappointed, she stayed for almost seven weeks. In Mackay, Rowan made her first forays into the tropical jungle: 'a scene' she described as 'of wild, mysterious beauty' - here are water poppies she described finding on a 'miniature lake' in a clearing. After Mackay, she sailed north to Townsville where she stayed at the Queen's Hotel and enjoyed the gracious hospitality of the proprietress, Mrs Jessie Cran. Rowan wrote that Mrs Cran filled her room with flowers to paint and served her tea with real Scotch scones. This was on Rowan's way to the huge sugar plantations of the Herbert and Johnstone Rivers. The Pandanus flower was painted at the Johnstone River. On this visit of 1887, she completed at least sixty-four paintings before heat and an attack of malaria drove her from the tropics in December. Back in the south, she showed many of her paintings in the Queensland Court of Melbourne's Centennial International Exhibition of 1888. Here she was the only Australian artist to win a gold medal, causing the Victorian Artists' Society to protest that a mere flower painter should have been so honoured. It is little wonder that she later distanced herself from Australia's art establishment.

Rowan returned to Queensland in winters of 1891 and 1892 for more extensive visits, concentrating her efforts in the far north and again staying at the Queen's Hotel during her brief stop-overs in Townsville. At Somerset, at the tip of Cape York, she revelled in a naturalists' paradise and painted frantically. This is the Golden Bouquet Tree painted at Somerset. On her visits of the 1890s Rowan made grand tours of the Torres Strait islands in the Queensland Government steamer the *Albatross*, as guest of the Government Resident at Thursday Island, John Douglas. Douglas's hospitality became the centre of a public outcry in September 1891 when the steamer was absent during a local crisis. The issue of the (I quote) 'lady artist's ... pleasure expedition' was debated in the Queensland Parliament. In 1891, on her return from the far north, she took a ride on the newly-opened Cairns Railway, claiming she rode on the engine to get a better view of the spectacular mountain scenery. I had dismissed this as one of her tall stories until recently my husband found a report in the Cairns newspaper of the time stating the District Engineer for Railways had 'been censured for allowing a distinguished lady artist to travel on the locomotive in order to view the scenery'. So, not all her stories should be dismissed as fabrications.

On her visit of 1892 Ellis Rowan spent some time in Cooktown - this is her 'sketch' of the view from the house where stayed. From there she made an expedition to the remote Bloomfield River and it was here that she had her supposed encounter with a crocodile. In the jungle beside the river she found much to paint, including Wonga Vine and *Ipomoea macrantha*. Rowan then made a strenuous climb of Mount Macmillan to look out over the Bloomfield valley to the coast: a scene she described as 'one of the finest in all Queensland'. According to her book, she also made a quick visit to Charters Towers - she was always interested in mining ventures and is known to have invested in mining - then journeyed on by a 'dusty train' to Hughenden. In October 1892, on her return journey to the south, she stopped off in Sydney to secure her place in the Australian exhibit for the forthcoming World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago in America. Here in 1893 she showed ninety-nine paintings in the fine display of Australian art in the New South Wales pavilion and won the last of her medals.

From 1911 to 1913 Rowan, then in her sixties, undertook her second series of visits to Queensland. She focussed her attention on the coastal scrubs north of Townsville - this is her painting of scrub along the Johnstone River. While passing through Townsville she again stayed at the Queen's Hotel, which by then had acquired an elegant new building, the present building on the Strand. At this time Rowan went flower-hunting around Innisfail, Cardwell and Lucinda Point - her painting of Cockatoo Apple was from Lucinda Point, which she described as a 'picturesque garden'. At Cardwell she checked into the Marine Hotel and, finding it not quite to her liking, wanted to leave immediately, but found herself a captive guest because she had a week's wait till the next ship. This story was told to me by a museum colleague Dr Carden Wallace whose great-grandmother, Mrs Maria Cook, was proprietress of the hotel. Rowan also visited Dunk Island as guest of the famous beach-combers E.J. Banfield and his wife Bertha; and may have ventured north to Kuranda to visit the famous F.P. Dodd collection of tropical insects, for she is said to have copied insects from the Dodd collection which is now a treasure of the Queensland Museum. Also at this time, Rowan established a useful rapport with Colonial Botanist Bailey. She sought his help in naming the subjects of her paintings before showing them in her previously mentioned Brisbane exhibition of 1912. In addition, during her later visits to Queensland she visited Cooktown. In 1913 she stayed at Kings Plains Station to paint the magnificent pink waterlilies that still grow on the lake there - this painting may have resulted from that visit. After 1913 she turned her attention from Queensland to Papua New Guinea.

Ellis Rowan was possibly the most enthusiastic of all the traveller-artists to visit the Queensland tropics in her day. In 1892, looking out over the magnificent Bloomfield valley, she exclaimed: '... if our Australian artists only knew what rich and endless subjects they would find in Northern Queensland, they would surely make up their minds to endure a little roughing and camping out ...at this time of year. It would well repay them.' She was fortunate enough to travel when much of the countryside was botanically unexplored and its natural beauty unspoilt, when she could share the joy of finding rare or even unknown specimens. Above all, it was the botanical richness of the tropics that attracted Rowan. Her writings have many references to spectacular flora, in particular the native water lilies 'as large as cheese-plates' to be found on Queensland's lagoons and rivers. Despite her passion for the tropics, she was selective in the plants she depicted. As botanist Rod Henderson of the Queensland Herbarium observes, she preferred the more showy and colourful species - such as flowering trees, shrubs and vines - to small-flowered, herbaceous plants. Her exuberant response to the tropical flora was in contrast to her disappointment with the flora of colder climes. She said of her homeland, Victoria: 'Though the plains in spring time are often a carpet of wild flowers and great masses of colour attract at a distance, taken in detail they are small and uninteresting'. Likewise, after travelling in New Zealand, she concluded: 'New Zealand is not noted for its flowers. The chief feature of its bush is the variety and beauty of its foliage.' Her words are borne out by her paintings, for she produced very few Victorian and New Zealand paintings compared with her prolific output from Queensland and New Guinea.

Though Rowan stressed the importance of recording her subjects *in situ*, she usually painted in the comfort of a nearby plantation house or hotel. Her book recounts how she laboured into the night, painting specimens collected on excursions or presented to her by local residents. Though executed indoors, the paintings generally have the freshness of works painted in the open air, for she was a rapid and direct worker, proud that she could apply her paints without the aid of pencil under-drawing. According to her niece, the late Lady Casey, Rowan wielded her 'forest of brushes' with 'ferocious concentration' and speed. She rarely recorded where or when she executed her paintings, and she made

multiple copies of many, which adds greatly to the difficulty of cataloguing her vast output. Indeed, she is a curator's nightmare!

To conclude, though Ellis Rowan did not claim to be a botanical artist, her evocative paintings and writings did much to raise public appreciation of the Australian flora. She has left a precious record of the Queensland landscape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and of plant species that are now disappearing. And, as the late Joan Kerr writes in *Heritage: the National Women's Art Book*: 'the fact that a colonial woman could make an international reputation from the despised female "hobby" of flower painting - normally consigned to an artistic "no-man's land" without scientific, economic or artistic value - was a considerable achievement.'

Judith McKay

***William Lennon (1849-1938): a North Queenslander of
'perpetual contradictions'***

Dr Rodney Sullivan

**Lecture presented by Dr Sullivan at CityLibraries - Thuringowa
22 September 2008**

**SIR ROBERT PHILP LECTURE SERIES
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William Lennon, in many respects, was the ebullient Irish counterpart of Robert Philp – the entrepreneurial Scot who forged a notable commercial and political career from Townsville, which he represented in the Queensland parliament for twenty-seven years. Like Philp, Lennon was a leading Townsville businessman who also became a North Queensland member of the Legislative Assembly. When Philp was elected to the Assembly in 1886, Lennon succeeded him as the local manager of Burns Philp & Co., North Queensland's pre-eminent trading and shipping firm. From then on their careers and fortunes were intertwined. For the next decade they were friends and closely aligned in business and politics. They were politically conservative capitalists, committed to North Queensland development and territorial independence. That their biographical trajectories diverged sharply from the late 1890s was partly due to their different cultural heritages. But the divergence also arose from their markedly different reactions to economic misfortune which visited both men during the 1890s depression. Robert Philp survived financial adversity with his capitalist attitudes and values intact; William Lennon, on the other hand, emerged from bankruptcy to develop, in mid-life, what appeared to be a radically new set of attitudes and values, which propelled him, eventually, into the forefront of the Queensland Labor party. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Philp and Lennon, their close friendship behind them, were on opposite sides of some of Queensland's most divisive political issues. The apparent contradiction between Lennon, the energetic, entrepreneurial businessman and Lennon the Labor convert, led Philp to label him a 'wobbler'. That Lennon moved so far from the political position he initially shared with Philp lends weight to the later assessment made by Charles Bernays, the historian of Queensland's parliament, that Lennon's career appeared 'to be one of perpetual contradictions.' It is significant that Bernays came to this conclusion without fully taking into account the political about-turn that dominated Lennon's pre-parliamentary public life. He was analysing only Lennon's parliamentary career and marvelled at his un-Labor-like appearance and deportment, his 'haughty attitude and distinctly cultivated manner.' He was, wrote Bernays, 'quite a distinguished looking, well-set-up man with a proud carriage and genial mannerisms' conveying the impression that his sympathies would lie more with 'the silvertail branch of humanity' than with working men and women. Lennon's career in Townsville, at least up until the late 1890s, also tended to convey this impression.¹

Arriving in Australia at the age of six, Lennon was educated in Victorian state schools and, later, by a private tutor employed by his father, a draper. In 1881 Lennon was transferred from Victoria to Townsville to open a branch of the Bank of Australasia. He subsequently supervised the establishment of further branches in Cairns, Winton, Charters Towers and Herberton. After 1886, as well as managing Burns Philp, William Lennon was one of Townsville's business and civic leaders. He was involved in a wide range of entrepreneurial and speculative activity, much of it in association with Robert Philp. He was a Townsville director of the North Queensland Insurance Company, founded with Burns Philp capital in 1886, which grew into a notable national enterprise. As a former banker, Lennon's expertise was crucial in the foundation of the Bank of North Queensland in 1888, a development believed at the time to be an important step towards North Queensland separation. Philp chaired the shareholders' meeting which elected Lennon a foundation director of the Bank, underlining his status as a 'leading businessman of the

¹ *North Queensland Herald*, 13 March 1899, p. 3; Lyndon Megarrity, *Robert Philp and the Politics of Development in Queensland, 1890-1903*, PhD thesis, University of New England, Armidale, 2001; Geoffrey Bolton, 'Robert Philp: Capitalist as Politician', D. J. Murphy and R. B. Joyce eds *Queensland Political Portraits, 1859-1952*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia Qld, 1978, pp.193-220; *Daily Mail*, 11 August 1904, p. 5; C. A. Bernays, *Queensland-Our Seventh Political Decade, 1920-1930*, Brisbane, 1931, p. 330

town'. Lennon was also a director of the Townsville Gas and Coke Company of which Philp, in the early 1880s, was a prominent founder. In the late 1880s Lennon joined Philp and other shareholders in the Comet Gold Mining Company which held leases on the Palmer River. The prospect of coal deposits also lured Lennon, and in 1887, in partnership with another prominent businessman, William Ackers, he applied for a 350 acre coal mining lease in the vicinity of Townsville. In the same year he helped found the Townsville Bond and Free Storage Company Ltd., of which he became a director, and, in 1888, chairman. The land boom in and around Townsville during the 1880s provided a further opportunity for Lennon's speculative bent. Unafraid to borrow for investments, he traded in town allotments and bought 791 acres southwest of Townsville. He was also involved, as investor and company director, in at least two other major land development companies.²

A remarkable aspect of the Lennon-Philp affinity in the 1880s and much of the 1890s was that it thrived despite sectarian obstacles. Philp a Presbyterian and freemason, had entered Townsville politics with a view to dislodging what he regarded as the dominant 'Roman Catholic element'. The Dublin-born Lennon, on the other hand, was one of Townsville's leading Irish Catholic laymen, in a town where estimates of the proportion of Irish in the population were as high as one-third, reflecting the greater numbers of Irish and Catholics in the northern portion of the colony. A Townsville Irish cohort approaching that size would help explain the shrewd Philp's early retreat from anti-Catholicism and his practice of running collaboratively for the two-member electorate of Townsville with Irish Catholics such as John Macrossan and Patrick Hanran. Indeed, the sectarian fault line beneath Townsville society was largely hidden, but it did, nevertheless, sporadically challenge the town's social cohesion. One such challenge, in September 1888, was sparked by a distant constitutional and power struggle in Brisbane, between Premier Thomas McIlwraith and the Queensland Governor, Sir Anthony Musgrave, over the latter's sole right to exercise the prerogative of mercy. Lennon was among the speakers at a public meeting called to support McIlwraith and his government. His theme, was that Queenslanders, or 'free born Britons', with representative self-government should be subject neither to the whims of a British governor, nor to distant officials in Downing Street. The meeting attracted more than 150 people and a furore erupted when Alfred Henry, a former Police Magistrate and parliamentary candidate for Townsville, used his evening newspaper, the *Telegraph*, to brand the meeting an exercise by disloyal Irishmen intent on undermining the British Empire. In the following month Lennon spoke at another public meeting to offer support to Charles Parnell, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party in the House of Commons, who had been falsely accused by the London *Times* of complicity in atrocities. The gathering also affirmed support for Irish Home Rule, with Lennon, for the first time, publicly identifying himself with this cause. He assumed chairmanship of a Charles Parnell defence fund committee, with the meeting immediately contributing £77. Lennon was careful to disassociate himself from extremism and violence and insisted that the campaign for Irish self-government must be peaceful and

² *Queenslander*, 5 February 1881, p. 168; *North Queensland Herald*, 13 March 1899, p. 3; G. C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away, A History of North Queensland to 1920*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1972, pp. 163-166; for a general history of the company see K. Buckley & K. Klugman, *The History of Burns Philp, The Australian Company in the South Pacific*, Burns Philp & Co., Ltd, Australia, 1981; *Townsville Herald*, 7 September 1889, p. 12
North Queensland Herald, 3 March 1899, p. 3; QSA ID 211405 Gold Mining Lease No. 226 and QSA Item ID 211412 Gold Mining Lease No. 40; *Townsville Herald*, 15 January 1887, p.10; 5 March 1887, p. 8; 31 March 1888, p. 5; 12 May 1888, p. 11; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 16 August 1888 p. 2; 11 October 1888, p. 2; 16 November 1888, p. 2
Notes on William Lennon, by John Mathew, Local History Collection, CitiLibraries, Townsville (Notes); QSA ID 63139, Land Selection File Series ID 14033

constitutional. Exploiting his oratorical skills, he recited a stanza from Charles MacKay's poem 'British Freedom' to illustrate the point that the Irish struggle was essentially an intellectual one:

We want no flag, no flaunting rag for Liberty to fight,
We want no blaze of murderous guns to struggle for the right,
Our spears and swords are printed words, the mind our battle plain;
We've won such victories before, and so we shall again.

Lennon sat down to sustained applause and approval from his ally, Townsville's Protestant Mayor, Arthur Bundock, who, in chairing the meeting, identified himself as an Australian, a liberal and a Home Ruler.³

Lennon's ecumenical strategy in promoting Irish Home Rule was again apparent, if not entirely successful, the following year when he organised the Townsville visit of British parliamentarian, and Irish Home Rule delegate, John Dillon. Dillon addressed 800 people, the largest crowd that had ever assembled in Townsville. Lennon was chairman, Mayor Bundock moved the vote of thanks, supported by Reverend CH Haggar, a Congregational minister. The meeting raised over £500 for Irish Home Rule, a solid contribution to the £8,000 collected by Dillon in Queensland. Not all Townsville's citizens shared the enthusiasm of Dillon's audience. On the same night, in the Masonic Hall, another crowd attended an Anti-Home Rule Meeting. This crowd was smaller though it filled the hall. It was chaired by Captain Alfred Henry, on whose entry the audience arose and stood for several minutes, cheering and waving hats. The counter-meeting opened with the singing of 'God Save the Queen' and 'Three Cheers for the Queen'. Henry declared it was an assembly of 'Loyalists, rightly so named' and attributed the relatively smaller attendance to ignorance, Dillon's reputation as an orator and local businessmen's fear of retaliatory Irish boycotts. He made it plain that his meeting was designed to dispel any impression, conveyed by the crowds flocking to hear Dillon, that Australians were unanimous in their support for Home Rule. Secondly, he feared for the fate of Irish Protestants should Home Rule, a childish Irish aspiration in his opinion, be attained. Amid evocations of shootings, murder and vengeful priests in Ireland, he posed the rhetorical question: 'Ireland a nation, and what might the landlords there expect, what of the loyal minority?' Henry's supporters proposed instead 'unswerving attachment and loyalty to the British Crown and Empire.' In opening Dillon's meeting, Lennon made a gracious reference to this rival event, defending the right of his opponents to air their views: 'Another meeting was being held that night, and he did not question the right of those who had convened it; it would ill become him to do so when presiding at a meeting of Mr Dillon's – the champion of Liberty and free speech. It would ill become him to deny to any man a right for which he himself was contending.'⁴

The campaign for Irish Home Rule was only one of Lennon's various civic activities. He was appointed to the management committee of the Townsville orphanage in 1883. In August 1885 he sang 'Thou Art So Near' at a Townsville Liedertafel Concert to such effect that he was required to sing 'Pretty Jane' as an encore. In 1887 he was vice president of the Mercantile Cricket Club and a member of the Roman Catholic parish building fund committee. In the following year he was appointed a Justice of the Peace and served on the hospital committee. He ran in local government elections for the Thuringowa Divisional Board, which covered an extensive area including most of what are now Townsville's

³ Bolton, 'Robert Philp', pp. 198-9, 206; Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, pp. 159, 171; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 11 September 1888, pp. 2, 3 (p. 3 for Patrick Geaney's claim that the Irish constituted a third of Townsville's population); *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 31 October 1888, p. 2

⁴ *Townsville Herald*, 22 June 1889, pp. 13, 14-5

western suburbs. In the late 1880s Townsville was a small municipality around the base of Castle Hill. Lennon campaigned on a generally narrow conception of the role of local government. Putting aside his own taste and talent for public performance, he rejected a proposed hall on the grounds that Divisional priority should be allocated to roads rather than 'balls and theatrical performances'. He was elected, despite a claim that he owed one pound and six pence in outstanding rates. At his first Board meeting, in March 1888, he complained that the rate assessments were inaccurate and called for them to be calculated by an external assessor. This was in keeping with his disapproval of day labour and preference for the contracting out of all work. When, late in 1888, Lennon mooted resigning from the Board, a public meeting of fifty ratepayers unanimously urged him to continue. The chairman praised Lennon as 'a most useful and energetic worker in their interests', citing his investments in Thuringowa land, a 'big stake in the district', his role in the Townsville Gas and Coke Company's decision to pipe gas as far as the Hermit Park Hotel and his work on a water supply scheme. Lennon delayed his resignation until the end of 1889, allowing him time to usher through the Board a motion approving North Queensland separation on the grounds 'that proper justice to the North can never be obtained from any Government sitting in Brisbane.'⁵

In the late 1880s Lennon was particularly active in the Townsville Chamber of Commerce. He served as vice president from September 1887 and assumed the presidency in August 1889, voluntarily retiring after a year on the grounds that such offices required annual change. His principal causes, as a Chamber office-holder, included improvements to the Townsville harbour, establishment of a harbour trust, extension of the northern railways and the relocation of the Supreme Court from Bowen to Townsville. More controversially, he helped throw the weight of the Chamber behind moves to undermine legislation passed by the Queensland parliament in 1885 to terminate the recruitment of Pacific Islanders as workers in northern sugar fields by the end of 1890. He argued for an extension of the period during which Pacific Islanders could be recruited, on the grounds that sugar planters received less favourable government treatment than pastoralists and, moreover, that the hard times being experienced by sugar planters were depressing Townsville's economy. The Chamber's support for the maintenance of the Pacific Island labour trade was controversial because it complicated efforts to enlist white workers in a revived North Queensland separation movement. The Townsville Trades and Labour Council brandished the slogan 'Queensland for the white man' and refused to make any exception for Pacific Islanders. It suspected separation was a device to bypass the Brisbane ban on Pacific Island labour and viewed with deep cynicism Lennon's support 'for the affirmative side of the present phase of the coloured labour question' at the Chamber of Commerce when he was also a prominent separationist.⁶

In 1889, Lennon surged into prominence in Townsville as a North Queensland separationist at a time of organisational renewal; the dysfunctional and debt-ridden Separation Council was disbanded and replaced with a resuscitated Townsville

⁵ *Queensland Government Gazette*, vol XLIV, no 62, July 1888, p. 875; *Townsville Herald*, 6 August 1885, cited Notes, p. 2; 10 September 1887, p. 2; 25 February 1888, pp. 9, 23; 17 March 1888, p. 12; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 10 October 1887, p. 2; *Queensland Government Gazette*, vol XXXIII, no 62, October 1883, p. 1081; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 3 August 1888, p. 2; 16 June 1888, p. 12; 15 December 1888, p. 2; 28 December 1888, p. 2; Judith Jensen, *Serving Thuringowa: Chairmen and Mayors, 1879-2004*, Thuringowa City Council, Thuringowa Qld, 2004, p. 6

⁶ *Townsville Herald*, 17 September 1887, p. 11; 1 June 1889, p. 16; 3 August 1899, p. 14; 10 August 1889, p. 13; 9 August 1890 p.11; 24 August 1889 p. 5; 13; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 3 August 1888, p. 2; 12 September 1888, p. 2; W. J. Doherty, *The Townsville Book: a complete sketch of the story, topography and prominent early residents of Townsville...*Edwards, Dunlop, Brisbane, 1919, p. 62

Separation League. In May 1890 Lennon spoke as a 'commercial man' at a Townsville banquet honouring the visiting Governor, Sir Henry Wylie Norman. He objected to federation before the achievement of separation, citing the Depression and the appropriation by the 'Southern Government' of the North's surplus wealth. He expressed faith in the ability of Townsville's parliamentary representatives, John Macrossan and Robert Philp, to deliver separation for the North. Indeed, Philp kept Lennon informed of parliamentary manoeuvrings on separation matters as they increasingly collided with the movement for the federation of the Australian colonies. Lennon was not only one of the League's most successful fund raisers, but also provided a personal guarantee of more than £300 for its overdraft. Moreover, he was the moving force behind a giant Separation Carnival, staged in Townsville in October 1890 to coincide with a parliamentary debate on the subject. It involved an excursion train from Ravenswood, a procession to the showgrounds, a carnival, a banquet, fireworks and a ball. It was financially successful, realizing a profit of over £800, and perhaps constituted the last vital sign of the North Queensland separation movement in Townsville. A trade union boycott had little effect but it pointed to continuing labour suspicion of separation. Lennon was part of a move to allay this suspicion in the run up to the carnival when he was associated with the Separation League's repudiation of 'coloured labour' in North Queensland, a reversal of the position he espoused in the Chamber of Commerce thirteen months earlier.⁷

The ambiguity which characterised Lennon's attitude to race and labour in 1889-90 also appeared in his reaction to the growing trade union presence in North Queensland at that time. In Townsville the Wharf Labourers' Union, founded in 1887, fought a running battle with Burns Philp over the employment of non-union labour, with the company finally agreeing to employ only unionists in early 1890. The concession was made as the wharf labourers and other Townsville unions, increasingly conscious of the class interests they had in common, affiliated with the ambitious Brisbane-based Australian Labour Federation, establishing the Townsville District Council of the Federation in May 1890. Lennon appeared to sympathise with the principle, but not the practice, of local trade unions. He maintained that 'he was in sympathy with labour organisations wherever oppression existed', but, at the same time, contended that there was no oppression in Townsville. His ambivalence about unions disappeared during the maritime strike of 1890, one of the great industrial struggles in Australian history. The strike began in Melbourne in August and spread rapidly along the eastern seaboard to North Queensland. When unionised seamen and wharf labourers ceased work in the port of Townsville on 22 August, Lennon helped found an Employers' Association, withdrew Burns Philp's recognition of unions, and, more provocatively, joined his own clerks as 'blacklegs', leading them down to work on the wharves with such non-unionists as could be speedily recruited to replace the strikers. In a considered defence of this action, almost nine years later, Lennon claimed his sympathy for trade unions had never wavered but was over ridden by a higher loyalty to Burns Philp, for whose Townsville operations he was responsible. With several ships arriving daily, and no one to unload them, Lennon recalled telling his office staff, 'We cannot sit down and see this big firm brought to a standstill, let us go out and discharge these steamers'⁸

⁷ Christine Doran, *Separatism in Townsville, 1884-1894: 'we should govern ourselves*, Department of History, James Cook University of North Queensland, Townsville, 1981; *Townsville Herald*, 18 February 1888, p. 23; 17 March 1888, p. 21; 16 June 1888, p. 5; 16 February 1889, p. 5; 23 February 1889, pp. 5, 13; 3 August 1889, p. 16; 7 September 1889, p. 12; 3 May 1890, p. 3; 13 September 1890, p. 12; 11 October 1890, p. 14; 6 December 1890, p. 12; Lennon to Philp, 15 November 1890, Letter 1/20, OM65-32, Sir Robert Philp Papers, John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, Australia

⁸ *Townsville Herald*, 10 May 1890, p. 9; 30 August 1890, p. 7; 13 September 1890, p. 8; 1 November 1890, p. 9; RJ Sullivan, *The A.L.F. in Queensland, 1889-1914*, MA thesis, University of Queensland, Brisbane,

As economic depression deepened, and land prices plummeted from the late 1880s, many indebted speculators of the previous decade faced financial ruin. In early 1892, the forty-three year-old Lennon, with a wife and six children to support, was on the brink of bankruptcy. His position as a director of the Bank of North Queensland became untenable and he resigned in January. The following month, in a desperate attempt to remain solvent, he borrowed £9,000 from his friend and fellow director of the Idalia Land Company, Patrick O'Brien, and a further £1,066 from his brother Rheuben, a Townsville draper. However, he owed £13,249, including £8,000 to the Bank of New South Wales and £300 to the Bank of North Queensland, a guarantee for the defunct North Queensland Separation Council. He also owed over £5 to the Townsville municipal council for unpaid rates. On the 8 April, 1893, Lennon sought voluntary liquidation in the Townsville Supreme Court, citing 'pressure of creditors and depreciation in the value of lands.' He was counselled by Robert Philp, himself no stranger to financial woes and who, as a Justice of the Peace, witnessed signatures on liquidation documents. Lennon successfully discharged his debts but lost assets accumulated over the previous twelve years, notably sixteen holdings of North Queensland land. Other losses were stakes in the companies with which he had been associated including 5,000 shares in Burns Philp & Co and smaller investments in mining companies. A final humiliation ensued: Lennon was required to relinquish his commission as Justice of the Peace.⁹

By 1896 Lennon's position seemed to have recovered and he launched himself into two new roles, one with the newly created Harbour Board and the other as head of a new business. He began the year as a government nominee on the Townsville Harbour Board, after nomination by the Townsville Chamber of Commerce. The appointment probably also owed something to Robert Philp, then Secretary for Public Works and Mines: at Philp's Townsville campaign launch in March, Lennon was on stage as a prominent supporter. About the same time, Philp tried to intervene in growing conflict between Lennon and James Burns, the principal of Burns Philp, who believed Lennon somewhat cavalier in his observance of company procedures. Philp was unable to effect a reconciliation and Lennon resigned from the firm. The timing was propitious in one respect: it enabled Lennon to become inaugural chairman of the Townsville Harbour Board after James Macintosh, whom Lennon had nominated for the position, was forced to decline. As manager of Dalgetys, a stock and station agent and large port user, he was deemed to have a conflict of interest. Lennon's election as chairman was an appropriate honour which acknowledged his long commitment to harbour improvements and his intimate knowledge of local trade and shipping. Indeed, the establishment of the Board was the culmination of almost a decade of lobbying by the Chamber of Commerce in which Lennon had played a prominent role. As Board chairman, Lennon was entitled to an allowance of only £150 a year, a long way short of the £1,000 a year salary he had received as manager with Burns Philp. He needed a new source of income. In partnership with his brother, Rheuben, Lennon launched his own firm, Wm. Lennon & Co., in mid-1896. It operated out of temporary premises in Flinders Street while a substantial warehouse was constructed on the corner of Denham and Cleveland Streets. The firm specialised in supplies for rural properties, hotels and store-keepers. It also acted as a commission agent for insurance, liquor, forwarding and shipping companies. With his business unable to tender for Harbour Board contracts because of his privileged position,

1973, p. 159; *North Queensland Herald*, 6 March 1899, p.18; R. J. Sullivan, 'The Maritime Strike, 1890', D. J. Murphy ed, *The Big Strikes: Queensland 1889-1965*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia Qld, 1983, pp. 65-79; Bolton, *Thousand Miles Away*, p. 190;

⁹ *Townsville Evening Star*, 16 January 1893, p. 2; *Townsville Herald*, 12 April 1893, p. 12; QSA ID 211405 William Lennon liquidation proceedings No. 28, 1893; *QGG*, vol LVIII, no. 100, 22 April 1893, p. 1118

and under immense pressure to succeed in his new venture, Lennon reluctantly relinquished his prestigious and hard-won Harbour Board role, resigning as chairman in November and as a member two weeks later. The sacrifice was in vain. William Lennon & Co. failed to thrive and its advertisements disappeared from Townsville newspapers in mid-1897.¹⁰

The triple shocks of voluntary liquidation, resignation from Burns Philp and business failure that Lennon endured in the 1890s precipitated a gradual but profound revolution in his outlook on society and politics. This was in marked contrast to Robert Philp, who also teetered on the brink of financial ruin in the early 1890s. However, Philp's core political values – those of capitalism, limited government and individual enterprise, never wavered. But, as Lyndon Megarrity has shown, Philp had advantages - unavailable to Lennon - that assisted his gradual financial recovery. Philp was well-connected to an influential Scottish-born commercial class that was prepared to bail him out. Moreover, he already had an established political career which became more remunerative after he became a Minister in 1893. Lennon, on the other hand, despite his considerable local prominence, had no such advantages. His fellow Irish Catholics were predominantly working class and a career in politics had not yet materialised. Yet, as the 1890s proceeded, Lennon responded to his failures by embarking on a political career and significantly re-orienting many of his social and political values. He slowly, even tortuously, shifted his political loyalty from the 'haves' to the 'have-nots', and his partisan allegiance from the conservative side of politics to the emerging Labor Party. The major landmarks in this reinvention of his political self included two unsuccessful bids to represent the seat of Townsville in the Queensland Legislative Assembly, one as an Independent in 1899 and the second as an endorsed Labor candidate in 1904. His third attempt at a political career was successful in 1907, when he unexpectedly won the electorate of Herbert for Labor from the former sugar plantation manager and prominent conservative, Sir Alfred Cowley, who had held the seat since 1888. While Herbert was a noted sugar seat, including the centres of Ingham and Geraldton (Innisfail after 1910), it also extended well southwards to completely surround Townsville. A redistribution of electoral boundaries in 1910 created the new seat of Mundingburra, which shrank Herbert, so that its southern boundary was well north of Townsville, but by then Lennon was well established as the local member.¹¹

Lennon's political transformation proceeded spasmodically and there were, at times, retreats to previous loyalties. In the late 1890s and early 1900s Lennon pursued ambitions to be a conservative political candidate while, at the same time, courting Labor's local political organisation. In 1898 he offered himself to Philp as a fellow candidate for Townsville, suspecting that the incumbent, William Castling, would not seek re-election in the following year. His advantage - Lennon told Philp - was that he would attract 'a large number of Labour votes', a prediction borne out by the personal following Lennon was able to mobilise. 'Lennonites' were a considerable faction in local labour affairs, with a disgruntled observer complaining, in January 1899, that ninety of them had stacked a meeting of the Townsville Workers' Political Organisation (WPO). Their object was to manipulate the outcome of Labor preselection to improve Lennon's prospects of winning the seat in the March elections. Lennon was correct in anticipating the retirement of

¹⁰ Buckley & Klugman, *The History of Burns Philp*, p. 222; *North Queensland Herald*, 5 February 1896, pp. 5, 12; 18 March 1896, p. 28; 1 April 1896, p. 24; 6 May 1896, p. 4; 1 July 1896, p. 4; 5 August 1896, p. 39; 14 October 1896, p. 11; 11 November 1896, pp. 4, 16, 17; 25 November 1896, p. 4; 2 December 1896, p. 14; *North Queensland Register*, 27 February 1899, p. 15

¹¹ Megarrity, *Robert Philp and the Politics of Development*, pp. 99-101; D. B. Waterson and John Arnold, *Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament, 1930-1980 with An Outline Atlas of Queensland Electorates, 1859-1980*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1982, pp. 117, 120

Castling but mistaken in his expectation that he would succeed him. Instead, Philp chose another Irish Catholic, Patrick Hanran, a former mayor, as his running mate, provoking the pugnacious Lennon to run as an Independent, albeit on a platform designed to appeal to workers. He embraced some issues with which he was long associated, such as separation and economic development. He also appealed to the worker's vote by attacking monopolies, 'alien labour', and even his old employer, Burns Philp. However, he rejected the 'extreme planks of the Labor platform.' Disarmingly, he admitted that the parliamentary salary of £300 a year was a crucial consideration in his candidature. In 1901 Lennon again sought Philp's help, somewhat sheepishly asking him to overlook his 1899 'political idiosyncrasy', and requesting his support in securing conservative endorsement for the new federal seat of Herbert. There was a note of desperation in Lennon's plea and certainly no reference to his pro-worker views of two years ago. It was a naked request, trading on an old friendship, for help in launching a political career: 'Now I have a very strong desire for politics, and hope some day to have that desire satisfied. Will you for the sake of old times help me?' Again, Philp could not provide Lennon with the patronage he sought. Three years later, in 1904, Lennon announced, very much like a religious convert, 'that he had got over all doubts and difficulties and secured a true resting place in the bosom of the Labor party.' The announcement was part of his campaign as the endorsed Labor candidate for Townsville. Lennon was unembarrassed neither by this political somersault nor another, at almost the same time, in which he jettisoned an ardent belief in free trade for 'staunch' protectionism, the result, he claimed of reading and thinking.¹²

In his early electoral campaigns, particularly those of 1899, 1904 and 1907, Lennon had to contend with charges of opportunism and hypocrisy. Thus in 1899 the *North Queensland Herald* mocked his profession of labour sympathies, pointing out that until quite recently he had been 'a monopolist of monopolists, a capitalist of capitalists, and a coloured labor man of coloured labor men'. During the campaign, Philp and Hanran distributed a pamphlet entitled 'What Wm. Lennon has done for the Workers'. Inside there was nothing but blank pages. In 1904, after Lennon had announced his conversion to Labor, the *Herald* dubbed him a 'pervert' for his repudiation of old values and loyalties. Even Philp, though with residual affection and respect, lamented that Lennon, once his 'staunch supporter', was now subject to volatility in matters of political faith. During the 1907 contest for Herbert, Lennon was denounced as a 'weather-cock, a rail-sitter, a triple-dyed political renegade.' His opponent, Sir Alfred Cowley, lampooned him as 'a man who had tried to get into parliament on both sides', and revealed that Lennon had even previously sought his (Cowley's) help to secure conservative endorsement for the seat when it appeared Sir Alfred might move to federal parliament. Such allegations of political opportunism and inconsistency did Lennon little harm. During the 1899 election, as an Independent, he attracted some defectors from Philp's Ministerial camp and significantly more from Labor, to finish behind Philp and Hanran but ahead of both Labor candidates. The lesson was not lost on the Labor camp. In the plebiscite to secure Labor's endorsement to contest Townsville in 1904, Lennon easily topped the poll with 538 votes, ahead of his nearest rival who managed 479. He then came within seventy-eight votes of winning the seat. The Herbert WPO not only recruited Lennon to contest the seat but also made him their delegate to the 1907 Labour-in Politics convention in Rockhampton, where he secured Townsville as the location for the next convention. After a history of failed candidates, the Herbert WPO judged Lennon their best prospect of success. Although the

¹² Lennon to Philp, 1 July 1898, Letter 1/37; Lennon to Philp, 4 February 1901, Letter 1/84, OM65-32, Sir Robert Philp Papers, John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, Australia; *North Queensland Herald*, 30 January 1899 p. 23; 20 February 1899, p. 18; 6 March 1899, p. 3; 13 August, 1904, p. 38; *North Queensland Register*, 20 February 1899, p. 8; *Johnstone River Advocate*, 2 May 1907, p. 2

hostile *Johnstone River Advocate* derided Lennon as ‘the Townsville toff’, it acknowledged his high profile and extensive connections. Lennon had the presence and eloquence, the skills of performance, to cross the gap between the haves and have-nots, provoking his enemies’ accusations of inconsistency. A good example was Lennon’s presidency of the Townsville Early Closing Association during the early 1900s. Under Lennon, the Association became the only plebeian body to be included in elite gatherings, such as a reception for the Governor, Sir Herbert Chermerside, in June 1903 or, later in the same year, a social occasion hosted by businessman and former mayor, John Parkes, otherwise comprising representatives of such establishment organisations as the Chamber of Commerce and Northern Importers’ Association. Lennon was equally adept in less privileged environments: at his Herbert victory celebrations in Ingham he entertained 130 Labor supporters with ‘a comic song and...three recitations.’¹³

In the early 1900s Lennon moved more and more openly towards Labor without forfeiting his high social status and public visibility in a town that consistently returned conservative political representatives. He made his living as an auctioneer, commission agent and land valuer. He also served as a licensing justice, regulating the local liquor trade. Pre-eminently though, he was a public man, active in Irish Catholic affairs, music and politics, as his activities in 1903 and 1904 show. In mid-February 1903, he sang and spoke at a farewell to the popular Irish Catholic Bishop, Joseph Higgins. Lennon could have been speaking of his ideal self when he emphasised the Bishop’s dual identity, his maintenance of loyalty to Ireland while simultaneously exercising ‘in the fullest measure the highest duties of Australian citizenship’. As president of the Townsville Liedertafel, Lennon, and his wife, Mary, were in the official party for a concert honouring the visiting Governor Chermerside in June; Charles, the Lennon’s eldest son, performed a solo. In September Lennon chaired Townsville’s centenary celebrations of the execution of Irish nationalist rebel Robert Emmet, lamenting that England’s treatment of Ireland ‘was the one indelible stain on the Empire’s escutcheon’. He looked forward to Irish Home Rule which he defined as the same ‘autonomy of government...as was enjoyed in Australia’. Continuing, Lennon returned to the subject of dual identity, asserting that, though he was ‘an Australian by experience’, having emigrated as a boy and been in the country for nearly 48 years, ‘he had Irish blood in his veins, and loved to talk and think about Ireland’. Later the same month he wrote to the *Northern Miner* on the subject of Premier Philp’s curtailment of government spending as drought shrank the state’s finances. Philp sacked 400 public servants but Lennon, with his Irish disdain for the symbols of British power and privilege, demanded that retrenchment start at the top, calling for the abolition of the office of state Governor and the upper house, the Queensland Legislative Council. In November, he was again on the platform to support the re-election campaign of former Labor pioneer, and now Protectionist Senator, Irish-born Thomas Glassey. Lennon was singled out by the Senator as ‘one of Townsville’s most distinguished citizens’ and he responded by attacking Glassey’s conservative opponents and praising New Zealand’s radical social welfare reforms. In the following March Lennon was particularly conspicuous at Townsville’s St Patrick’s Day celebrations. He was a judge at the Show Ground races which attracted a crowd of 2,000. At the evening banquet his name, along with that of the mayor, was added to ‘The Visitors’ toast. In the same month he was made a trustee of the Townsville Grammar School; in the following year he was reappointed a Justice of the Peace.¹⁴

¹³ *North Queensland Herald*, 27 February 1899, p. 11; 6 June 1903, p. 22; 12 December 1903, p. 42; 13 August 1904, pp. 15, 40; *North Queensland Register*, 13 March 1899, p. 23; 13 March 1907, p. 77; *Johnstone River Advocate*, 18 April 1907, pp. 2, 3; *Worker*, 23 March 1907, p. 12

¹⁴ *North Queensland Register*, 13 March 1899, p. 3; *North Queensland Herald*, 14 February, 1903, p. 36; 8 April 1901, p. 4; 30 May 1903, p. 10; 6 June 1903, p. 23; 19 September 1903, p. 57; 28 November 1903,

Lennon was an energetic and ingenious local campaigner. Dorothy Jones, historian of the Johnstone shire, described him riding around the countryside on horseback speaking in private homes where residents had assembled and, later, making his way, illegally, by pump trolley along the extensive sugar mill tramways, to address gatherings of unionists. Lennon's wife, Mary, was a formidable political ally, though few records of her activity survive. One Townsville election day vignette revealed her, with one of her daughters, in a tent opposite the Courthouse polling booths directing 'operations on behalf of Mr Lennon...and other socialistic candidates in town.' While the Sugar Workers' Union could claim that they were responsible for the Herbert electorate at last returning a Labor member, Lennon also cultivated new elements in the coalition which eventually propelled Labor to power: Catholics and farmers. Sectarianism played some part in the 1907 campaign for Herbert, with its substantial Irish Catholic and smaller Italian minorities. Cowley, a Presbyterian and son of a Baptist preacher, was aligned with the Bible in State Schools League, a Protestant lobby, while Lennon, along with his Irish co-religionists, opposed bible reading in theoretically secular government schools. The source of this opposition was a deep fear of proselytisation to which, historically, the Irish had been subject. Lennon could be very forthright on this matter, claiming in parliament that the English, through the Church of Ireland, had attempted to 'kill all patriotism in the breasts of Irish children', compelling them to sing:

I thank the goodness and the grace
That on my birth have smiled
And made me in those Christian days
A happy English child.

A "yes" vote in the 1910 referendum on bible reading in state schools alarmed Lennon as 'the beginning of the time when we shall have proselytising teachers in our State schools.'¹⁵

While sectarianism tended to be a subterranean issue in Herbert election campaigns, the sugar industry, the area's major source of wealth and employment, was always prominent. Until Labor assumed office in 1915 Lennon was able to allege serious neglect of the electorate, and highlighted the absence of central, co-operative sugar mills and the notable scarcity of state-funded railway lines. He also found a ready target in the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) which he accused, in and out of parliament, of monopolistic and predatory practices. The CSR, with its plantations, mills and other infrastructure, had, Lennon alleged in his maiden and subsequent speeches, become the de facto government of his electorate. Moreover, it employed Asians and was unduly indulged by conservative state governments. Sugar workers and small farmers, Lennon argued, were both exploited, and should combine to challenge the CSR's monopoly power. Lennon's attacks on the CSR eventually drew a heated response from Edward Forrest, the conservative member for North Brisbane and a director of the company in Queensland. He took particular exception to Lennon's claims, in late 1908, that the

pp. 43-4; 12 March 1904, p. 41; 19 March 1904, p. 13; *Northern Miner*, 29 September 1904, p. 2; Bolton, 'Robert Philp', p. 211 *Queensland Government Gazette*, vol LXXXIV, no. 71, 25 March 1905, p. 1194; for a portrait of Bishop Higgins see John P. Maguire, *Prologue: A History of the Catholic Church as seen from Townsville, 1863-1983*, Church Archivists' Society, Toowoomba Qld, 1990, pp. 43-50

¹⁵ Dorothy Jones, *Hurricane Lamps and Blue Umbrellas: a history of the shire of Johnstone to 1973*, Bolton Printers, Cairns, 1973, p. 301; *Johnstone River Advocate*, 25 April 1907, p. 3; 4 July 1907, p. 2; *North Queensland Herald*, 8 February 1908, p. 14; Kay Saunders, 'Cowley, Sir Alfred Sandlings (1848-1926)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol 8, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1981, p. 127; *QPD*, 17 August 1910, p. 491

company was making exorbitant profits, evading its obligations under the Workers' Compensation Act, and involved in dubious land transactions on the Johnstone River. An outraged Forrest accused Lennon of factual inaccuracies and of pursuing a vendetta against the CSR. Lennon's assaults on the company continued. In 1911 he played a prominent role in the sugar strike, which severely disrupted the industry from early June until mid-August. Lennon worked with the militant Amalgamated Workers' Association of Queensland (AWA): under the deft leadership of future Labor premiers, Edward Theodore and William McCormack, the AWA had recently absorbed the Sugar Workers' Union, along with other unions in northern and western Queensland. The AWA took up the grievances of sugar workers in an industry notable for harsh working conditions and intolerant employers, especially at CSR. In the early stages of the conflict Lennon joined a delegation of Labor parliamentarians to the Treasurer, Walter Barnes, seeking to have government-controlled central sugar mills concede 'one pound ten shillings a week and keep, and an eight-hour day', thus setting an industry standard. When no response was forthcoming, Lennon, as Acting Leader of the PLP, moved the adjournment of parliament to focus public attention on the upheaval. Although the motion was defeated on party lines, Lennon used his personal knowledge of working conditions in mills to highlight the fairness of the AWA's case. There was little doubt that Lennon blamed the intransigence of the CSR for the prolonged strike, which only ended when employers, despite tacit support from the government, largely conceded defeat. Soon after, Lennon warned that the CSR's stranglehold over his electorate was extending into other parts of Queensland, and that even parliamentarians were willing 'to bow down and worship that company.'¹⁶

Lennon represented Herbert in the Queensland Legislative Assembly from 1907 to 1920. He contributed to the renaissance of the Queensland Labor Party that enabled it to win government in 1915 and retain it, apart from a short break during the Great Depression, until 1957. That he was an Irish Catholic and from a business background exemplified the broadening of Labor's appeal, particularly after the debacle of the short-lived Anderson Dawson Labor Government of December 1899. It was also symptomatic of a developing alliance between Labor and Irish Catholics. An early example of what Denis Murphy called the 'drift of Catholics towards the Labor party' was Frank McDonnell, a prominent Brisbane merchant, who won Fortitude Valley for Labor in 1896. Like Lennon, he had been active in the Early Closing Association and the Irish Home Rule movement. Lennon's close friend, the fiery Irishman John Fihelly, a noted footballer and public servant, began writing for the *Worker* around 1906 and won Paddington for Labor in 1912. The most talented of the Irish Catholics who made their way into Queensland Labor about this time was undoubtedly Thomas Joseph (T. J.) Ryan, also a friend of Lennon, and a successful Rockhampton barrister. Ryan became a Labor parliamentarian in 1909. In the same year, Lennon was part of the leadership group of the Parliamentary Labor Party (PLP) and was elected Deputy Leader to the ailing David Bowman. Because of Bowman's frequent absences Lennon was often *de facto* or acting Opposition Leader. The Liberal Attorney-General, Thomas O'Sullivan, a fellow Irish Catholic, noted that Labor benefited from Lennon's frequent exercise of leadership, because, unlike some of his predecessors, he was free of personal rancour and dealt with issues on their merits. He had a quick wit and a mind well-furnished with English literature, which he would sometimes deploy

¹⁶ *North Queensland Register*, 6 May 1907, p. 7; QPD, 7 August 1907, p. 204; 27 November 1908, pp. 257-264; 13 July 1911, pp. 34, 36, 37, 80; 24 August 1911, p. 693; 1 December 1911, p. 2565; 8 November, 1912, p. 2285; 19 June 1913, pp. 86-9; 3 July 1913, p. 301; Betty Crouchley, H. J. Gibney, 'Forrest, Edward Barrow (1838-1914)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol 8, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 543; D. W. Hunt, A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland: trade unionism, politics and industrial conflict, 1900-1920, PhD thesis in History, James Cook University, 1979, pp. 162-182

against parliamentary opponents. Thus he was able, in 1912, to get the better of a government minister in a good-humoured exchange by depicting him in Alexander Dryden's words:

Strong in his opinions, always in the wrong,
Everything by turns, and nothing long.
For in the space of one revolving moon,
Is blatherer, bluffer, boaster, and buffoon.

But Lennon never became leader. Age, the lack of a trade union background and enormously talented younger rivals told against him. In 1912, the year Lennon turned sixty-three, the thirty-six year-old T. J. Ryan was elected leader and the twenty-seven year-old Theodore defeated Lennon for the Deputy Leader's position. When Labor won office in 1915 Lennon was rewarded with the Ministry of Agriculture and Stock, bringing to the new cabinet valuable business expertise and detailed knowledge of the sugar industry, which he saw as crucial to 'the great principle of white Australia'. He was animated with sympathy for producers and consumers and contempt for 'middlemen', whom he sought to eliminate. He believed in the ideal of social co-operation rather than competition and had sought, with mixed results, to implement the ideal in his 1913 chairmanship of the board of directors of the Queensland Co-operative Cash Store Ltd. As Minister, Lennon set out to shake up a 'sleepy department'. He embarked on a program of decentralisation and gave a high priority to science, not missing the opportunity to establish an experimental sugar farm in his own electorate. He played a key role in stabilising the sugar industry through state regulation of production, pricing and marketing. It was an historic intervention secured by working co-operatively with the industry. This model was gradually extended to other agricultural commodities, establishing a pattern that was to persist, in various forms, until challenged by the 'free market' and 'deregulation' enthusiasms of our own day. Lennon held the agriculture and stock portfolio for over four years, longer than any previous minister. While he presided over substantial reforms, Lennon was disappointed with his budget allocations; in October 1918 he accepted the judgement that agriculture and stock remained the 'Cinderella of all the departments.'¹⁷

Lennon's reputation as an innovative and competent minister tended to be overshadowed by a short speech he gave to the Queensland Irish Association on 2 September 1916. It was at a time of great national and international tension. The British Empire, including Australia, was at war with Germany. There was fierce debate in Australia in the lead up to the following month's conscription referendum, with Irish Catholics and Labor particularly prominent in the anti-conscription camp. Earlier in the year, the Easter uprising in Dublin, and the disproportionately brutal reprisals that followed, had aroused new interest in

¹⁷ D. J. Murphy, *T. J. Ryan: A Political Biography*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia Qld, 1980, pp. 7, 17; M. R. MacGinley, 'McDonnell, Francis (Frank) (1863-1928)' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol 10, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1986 pp. 256-7; Betty Crouchley, 'Fihelly, John Arthur (1882-1945)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol 8, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1981 pp. 495-6; Thomas O'Sullivan, 'Reminiscences of the Queensland Parliament 1903-1915', Typescript, pp. 128-129, 2916, John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, Australia; QPD, 15 October 1912, p. 1713; 25 October 1912, p. 1793; 9 September, 1914, pp. 830, 832; 25 August, 1915, p. 414; 6 September 1917, p. 1001; 8 October 1918, p. 3075; *Daily Standard*, 2 January 1913, p. 7; *Truth*, 18 February 1917, p. 4; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 18 May 1917, p. 3; Diana Shogren, 'Agriculture:1915-1929', D. J. Murphy, R. B. Joyce and Colin A. Hughes, eds, *Labor in Power: The Labor Party & Governments in Queensland, 1915-1957*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia Qld, 1980, pp. 183-4; Rodney Sullivan, 'Lennon, William (1849-1938)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol 8, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, pp. 75-76

Ireland. Lennon's speech was mild, compared to the militantly Irish nationalist tone and content of John Fihelly, who preceded him. Fihelly, the Assistant Minister for Justice, provocatively honed in on the emotive subjects of Gallipoli, 'where thousands of good Australians lost their lives through the bungling and ineptitude of British military chieftains' and conscription, suggesting that 'every Irish Australian recruit means another soldier to assist the British Government to harass the people of Ireland.' Though directing his fire at 'the English governing classes' rather than the English people, Fihelly rather over stated his case in declaring, 'England was the home of cant, humbug and hypocrisy.' Lennon's speech was more moderate. However, he said, to loud applause, that 'he admired Mr Fihelly for his outspoken utterance' and the 'time had come when the Irish should speak out and refuse to allow their country to be the doormat of England for ever.' He also confessed to shedding tears for some of the innocent victims of the reprisals that followed the doomed Dublin uprising. The ill-timed speeches became a public scandal, partly because conservative forces ensured their widespread dissemination in a form that unfairly branded Lennon with Fihelly's extremism. For his part, Lennon felt betrayed that a speech he gave without notes at the Irish Club should be published verbatim in the anti-Labor *Daily Mail*, ensuring that it reached an audience for whom it was not intended. This circulation of the speeches, with hostile editorials in the *Brisbane Courier* as well as the *Daily Mail*, revealed the gulf between Irish Australians and their Anglo-Scottish fellow citizens. It also showed how unsettling Protestants found a Labor Government with a majority of Irish Catholics in the ministry. The Wesley Church in Kangaroo Point, for example, was draped with the Union Jack and the Rev A. C. Plane opened his service with the singing of 'God Save the King.' He took as his text Ezra: 9-3, 'When I heard this thing I rent my garment and my mantle, and sat down astonished.' He called on 'loyal' Queenslanders to resist domination by the Irish, who constituted only a quarter of the population. What particularly distressed him was the composition of State Cabinet, where, he claimed, there were almost twice as many Catholics as Protestants. The Catholic archbishop of Brisbane, James Duhig, tactfully tried to defend Fihelly and Lennon by blaming the conservative press, whom he accused of whipping up anti-Irish sentiment, even while Irish-born soldiers, their homeland under martial law, died for the Empire in France. Nevertheless, Lennon and Fihelly were the subjects of an unsuccessful parliamentary no-confidence motion on the grounds of their 'disloyal utterances' and of their failure 'to adequately assist...the Empire in its need of reinforcements for the troops in the field.' The motion was moved by the member for Toowoomba, James Tolmie, a Scottish Presbyterian. In an eloquent defence, Lennon rejected the disloyalty allegations. He cited Ireland's history of troubles, his own forty-three year association with the Home Rule movement and the right of the Irish to constitutional government as enjoyed by Australia and other British dominions. In his long campaign for Home Rule he had always rejected violence and advocated only legal methods. He ridiculed 'loyalty-mongers'. He reiterated his fervent hope 'that the Irish people should not remain forever the doormat of England'. Underpinning his defence was a preference for loyalty to Australia rather than his critics' pre-occupation with loyalty to Empire. Loyalty to Australia, Lennon insisted, did not require him to forgo his Irish origins or attachments. For his conclusion he turned to lines from 'Patriotism', by the Scottish poet, Sir Walter Scott:

Breathes there a man with soul so dead
Who never to himself has said:
This is my own, my native land.

Less than a week later, a somewhat chastened Tolmie had the grace to move a motion of congratulations to Lennon. Lennon's youngest son, Austin, a lieutenant in the Australian Imperial Forces, and one of three Lennon sons to enlist, won the Military Cross. He was

cited for distinguished gallantry in repulsing a German counter-attack against the captured French village of Pozières, in one of the bloodiest engagements of World War One.¹⁸

Outside parliament, Lennon, in 1916 and 1917, was a conspicuous campaigner for Labor objectives which many conservative Queenslanders found unpalatable and, in some cases, sinister. In particular, the anti-conscription campaign and the movement to abolish the Legislative Council could appear not only disloyal but also seditious. From a Labor perspective, they were progressive causes. The Labor parliamentarian and journalist, Alfred Jones, early in 1917, identified the dominant progressives in the Queensland PLP. They were Ryan, Theodore, Fihelly and Lennon. All were Catholics and three, Ryan, Fihelly and Lennon, were Irish Catholics. Jones judged Lennon as the most persuasive orator, 'the man who would take with a crowd.' He described Lennon addressing one of the largest anti-conscription demonstrations in Brisbane, how 'his voice worn with continual campaigning, his simple homely utterances, his strong human note, swayed the crowd as he denounced the powers who would shackle Australia for the purposes of political wire-pulling.' Lennon's long standing opposition to the Legislative Council as a citadel of privilege was intensified by its role in obstructing much of his agricultural reform legislation. In an unsuccessful campaign in 1917 to have a referendum approve the abolition of the Council, Lennon directed a particular appeal to farmers for their support.¹⁹

In September 1919 Lennon was elected Speaker of the Queensland Legislative Assembly. The appointment recognised his competence as a Minister, his lack of partisanship in the discharge of his ministerial duties and his mastery of parliamentary tradition and procedures. Lennon had been a life-long student of the British House of Commons, following particularly the debates on Ireland. In 1910 he was able to correct the Deputy Speaker on a point of order and, the following year, listed the criteria which defined an exemplary Speaker: long parliamentary experience, knowledge of Standing Orders and impartiality. By 1919, political foes, as well as Labor colleagues, were satisfied that Lennon met his own criteria. Edward Macartney, the conservative member for Toowong, noted for his hostility to Labor, acknowledged that Lennon had 'the education and experience which will fit him to do the fair thing between the parties'; while the slightly-less-conservative John Appel, who represented Albert, told the Assembly that Lennon had 'inherited all those attributes of manner and deportment which, when coupled with education, so much add to the honour and dignity of a member who is chosen to fill the most honourable position within the gift of members of this House.' Such was his reception that Lennon was able to 'thank the House most heartily for what is practically a unanimous appointment'. In line with his democratic bias, Lennon was the first Queensland Speaker to discard the office's traditional gown. Despite a promising beginning, Lennon's tenure as Speaker was brief, as he resigned from the position on 9 January 1920 to become Lieutenant-Governor, an appointment made on the recommendation of the Governor, Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams. His new office, previously unremunerated, was allocated an annual salary of £1,000. The position was constitutionally and politically significant, as there were often extended periods when a Lieutenant-Governor was in possession of full vice-regal powers. These occurred when a Governor took leave or a new Governor was yet to arrive following the departure or death

¹⁸ *Daily Mail*, 19 September 1916, pp.6, 8; 25 September 1916, p. 6; *Daily Standard*, 21 September 1916, p. 5; *Brisbane Courier*, 22 September 1916, p. 6; QPD, 21 September 1916, pp. 721, 752-754; 27 September 1916, p. 878; Murphy, *T. J. Ryan*, pp. 195-197; Austin Lennon, World War One Military Record, item 8198174, National Archives of Australia, Canberra

¹⁹ *Truth*, 18 February 1917, p. 4; Murphy, *T.J. Ryan*, pp. 211; QPD, 8 October 1918, pp. 2927-8; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 27 April 1917 p. 3

of his predecessor. The reception accorded to Lennon's appointment as Lieutenant-Governor was very different from the warm welcome he received on becoming Speaker.²⁰

Lennon's accession to vice-regal office polarised the Queensland community. It also threatened to overshadow his competence and fairness as Minister and Speaker. His appointment as Lieutenant-Governor, after so brief a term as Speaker, raised the suspicion that his Speakership was merely instrumental, a stepping stone to the Lieutenant-Governorship, since direct elevation of a Minister to the sensitive position could be deemed too partisan. Having an ally in Government House would add significantly to the Labor's Government arsenal in its determination to abolish the obstructive Legislative Council. From Lennon's perspective, his attenuated Speakership was probably less conspiratorial and overshadowed by the death of his thirty-six year-old eldest son, Austin, three weeks after his appointment. This added a widowed daughter-in-law and two fatherless granddaughters, aged six and four, to his private concerns. The overwhelming weight of public protest, directed at Lennon, centered on two allegations. The first was that his party affiliation compromised the non-partisan nature of the vice-regal office, particularly as Labor was committed to substantial constitutional reform. This allegation was somewhat weakened by the fact that a former Liberal Premier, Arthur Morgan, had served two terms as Lieutenant-Governor, in 1909 and 1914, without controversy about partisanship. It should also have been countered by one of the highlights of Lennon's terms as Acting Governor, his impeccable hosting of Edward, the Prince of Wales, and future British sovereign, during his visit to Queensland in July 1920. Lennon met the Prince at the New South Wales border and later effusively welcomed him to Brisbane. The Prince, Lennon said was a 'real brick' and declared, as ardently as any royalist, 'that the more frequently he met him, the more he loved him.' His critics were unmoved. That Lennon had long and vigorously advocated the abolition of the Legislative Council, as well as the office of Governor, perturbed many conservatives, the more so as his power and influence increased. Members of the Opposition and the *Brisbane Courier* trawled through Lennon's speeches in the Assembly, resurrecting such attacks on the Council as his 1914 declaration that the 'only way to amend it is to end it' and his expression of similar sentiments about the office of State Governor. There was also the allegation that Lennon's speech on Ireland in September 1916, rendered him, in the words of the Brisbane branch of the Royal Society of St George, 'not a worthy representative of the King.' The speech on Ireland, though not its exact wording, was re-visited all over Queensland with a typical critical response coming from W. Burns, president of the Rockhampton Chamber of Commerce who declared it 'a piece of impertinence that such a man should receive the appointment after the opinions he expressed at that now celebrated Irish banquet...' He perpetuated the apparently unshakeable falsehood that Lennon 'endorsed every word that Fihelly said.' In the Assembly, Edward Macartney, while conceding that Lennon had acted impartially as Speaker, nevertheless termed his appointment as Lieutenant-Governor 'an insult to... the loyal people of Queensland.' Premier Theodore delighted Labor members with his ready response: 'You are attacking a man whose three sons went and fought for the Empire, and fought with distinction.'²¹

Lennon was Acting Governor from early February to early December 1920. Archbishop Duhig was delighted with the novelty of an Irish Catholic in Government House and took full advantage of the prerogatives it offered, 'to the horror of loyalists.' The Queensland

²⁰ QPD, 28 September 1910, pp. 1108-9; 11 July 1911, p. 6; 9 September 1919, pp. 639, 641, 642; *The Bulletin*, 5 February 1920, p. 14; *Brisbane Courier*, 12 March 1920, p. 4

²¹ D. J. Murphy, 'Edward Granville Theodore', *Queensland Political Portraits*, p. 317, *Brisbane Courier*, 10 January 1920, p. 5; 12 January 1920, p. 6; 14 January 1920, p. 7; 30 July 1920, p. 5; *Daily Standard*, 14 January 1920, p. 5; QPD, 9 January 1920, pp. 2113-2114

Irish Association (QIA) celebrated Irish achievement in Queensland society and politics at a great banquet on the eve of St Patrick's Day, 1920. At the top table were Lennon and Fihelly, the pariahs of 1916. They were now Acting Governor and Acting Premier respectively and, with Archbishop Duhig, flanked P. J. McDermott ISO, the chairman of the QIA. Speakers included Lennon, Fihelly, T. J. Ryan, now a federal parliamentarian, and Archbishop Duhig. Other guests included Protestant clergymen and the mayors of Brisbane and South Brisbane. The first toasts proposed were of 'The King' and then, 'The Lieutenant-Governor.' Lennon, in response, tried to put some distance between himself and his reputation for coolness towards the imperial connection. He reminded his audience that a person's politics sometimes changed as he aged. He spoke of his happy anticipation of the visit to Queensland by the Prince of Wales later in the year, and how 'he would do his level best to prove that the people of Queensland were loyal and attached to the British throne.' Moreover, he declared that he had now moved beyond politics, that 'his political opinions at the present time were practically neutral' and that he would discharge his vice-regal duties with 'a complete absence of partisan feeling.' In his address Archbishop Duhig referred obliquely to the 1916 controversy, and the subsequent onslaughts on Lennon and Fihelly: 'They had a good deal to contend against from time to time in Australia, not that they were at enmity with their fellow citizens, but because the Irish question and the Irish people were not fully understood.'²²

Conservatives refused to be placated. A week after St Patrick's Day the *Brisbane Courier* rejected Lennon's claim of impartiality: 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? And can the strong partisan of yesterday become the disinterested neutral of today? It is impossible.' Certainly, conservative Queenslanders had reason to doubt Lennon's impartiality. One of his first actions after assuming vice-regal office was, on Theodore's advice, to swamp the Legislative Council with fourteen new Labor members, ostensibly to counter the House's obstruction of financial bills and other legislation. Six months later, he invited satire by appointing himself to be both a member and President of the Legislative Council. These were antecedents to the abolition of Queensland's Legislative Council in 1922, arguably 'the most important single constitutional reform in Queensland history'. There was a strong North Queensland presence on both sides of the debate over the future of the Council. Foremost among its defenders was Lennon's former Townsville colleague, Sir Robert Philp, who had lost his seat of Townsville to Labor in 1915. In 1917 he returned to public life as chairman of the Constitution Defence Committee (CDC) which was established to defend Queensland's Upper House. Also on the CDC executive was Sir Alfred Cowley, whom Lennon had displaced in Herbert in 1907. Philp led an anti-Labor CDC delegation, including Cowley, to London in 1920. It sought to curb some of the legislative reforms of the Theodore government by blocking its capacity to raise developmental loans on the London financial market. It was also spurred by suspicion that the government intended to install Lennon permanently as Governor. One of its objectives was to have the Secretary of State for Colonies appoint 'an overseas Governor', on the grounds that 'when the Lieutenant-Governor was appointed the whole of the facts were not known to the Colonial Office.' The long friendship between Lennon and Philp was over. When Lennon opened parliament in August he read a stinging denunciation of the CDC delegation, branding them an unpatriotic, unrepresentative, self-interested 'coterie' of war-profiteers, intent on undermining Queensland's right to self-government. When Philp died in June 1922, his obituarist linked the CDC delegation to

²² T.P. Boland, *James Duhig*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia Qld, 1986, pp. 153, 174; *Brisbane Courier*, 19 February 1920, p. 7; 17 March 1920, p. 7;

Lennon's failure to become the first locally-appointed Governor. Lennon was notably absent from the *Brisbane Courier's* extensive list of mourners at Philp's funeral.²³

Lennon had a further long period as Acting Governor from September 1925 to June 1927. He again assumed the role for a brief period in mid-1929, ironically just in time to receive the resignation of the Labor government which, after fourteen years in office, was defeated in the May election. He then commissioned A. E. Moore to form a conservative government. Lennon was a victim of the new government's Depression-era austerity and hostility to locally-appointed vice-regal representatives. Despite conceding that Lennon had 'upheld in every way the dignity of the position' and that no fault could be found with his performance, the Moore government terminated his Lieutenant-Governor's annual salary from 1 October, precipitating Lennon's resignation, in his eightieth year, from the post he had held for nine years. Returning to private life, he maintained his connection with the Queensland Irish Association and regularly attended the South Brisbane Bowling Club until his health deteriorated and he was unable to leave his Kelvin Grove home. His wife, Mary, also highly regarded in the Labor party, died in 1937. Lennon followed on the 5 May 1938 at the Newmarket Private Hospital. He was eighty-eight. The causes of his death were listed as pneumonia, exhaustion and senile decay. He was survived by three daughters and two sons. Three of his children had predeceased him. Lennon was buried privately at the Toowong cemetery. In accordance with his wishes, his children declined the offer of a state funeral. His estate was valued at £6,821, far less than the £118,841 left by Robert Philp fifteen years earlier. *The Worker* remembered Lennon as 'ever faithful, a staunch Laborite, a true man, a gentleman in every real sense of the term.'²⁴

The mythology of the labour movement tended to overlook the capitalist, strike-breaking phase of Lennon's life. In honouring both William and Mary Lennon as 'very sincere friends of the workers...[who] were well and rightly trusted by Labor in politics', *The Worker* conceded that 'neither was born to working class traditions.' Among his Labor colleagues, Lennon stood out for his literary education, business background, oratory, slightly aristocratic deportment, practical idealism and contribution to establishing the party as a formidable contender for winning and holding office. He was unapologetic by his mid-life conversion from capitalism to social democracy, pointing out in his maiden speech that only the stupid and the dead refuse to change their opinions. His Irish background and loyalties provided him with an oppositional caste of mind, enabling him to challenge and defy the commercial elite which nurtured him. He found in Queensland Labor a movement which corresponded to his cherished Irish party in the House of Commons. While Lennon was ardently Irish he was no Anglophobe. He valued British literature and parliamentary tradition as part of his own inheritance. Lennon's life and career have some relevance for our own times, apart from the caution that one's political beliefs can change radically over a lifetime. His intimate connection with the abolition of the Queensland Legislative Council has ensured him a place in Australian constitutional history and debate. While the vocabulary has mutated, Lennon grappled with the challenges of free markets and multiculturalism that persist into the twenty-first century.

²³ *Brisbane Courier*, 25 March 1920, p. 6; 19 August 1920, p. 6; 19 June 1922, p. 11; 20 June 1922, p. 8; Murphy, 'Abolition of the Legislative Council', *Labor in Power*, p. 115; Justin Harding, 'Ideology or Expediency? The Abolition of the Queensland Legislative Council, 1915-1922', *Labour History*, No. 79, November 2000, pp. 169-17; Harry C. Percy, *Memoirs of the Hon. Robert Philp K.C.M.G., 1851-1922*, Watson Ferguson & Co. Ltd., Brisbane, 1923, pp.357-8, 364; QPD, 18 August 1920, p. 6

²⁴ *Brisbane Courier*, 17 May 1929, p. 15; *Courier-Mail*, 7 May 1938, p. 2; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 26 September, 1929, p. 6; *Worker*, 8 June 1937, p. 9; 10 May 1938, p. 6; Death Certificate; QSA ID 743 988, 478 of 1938, Will of William Lennon; W. Ross Johnstone, 'Philp, Sir Robert (1851 - 1922)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 11, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne 1988, p. 222

After 1915 he was part of a government confronted with market failure, particularly in regard to agricultural commodities. He believed the welfare of producers and consumers took precedence over market freedom. That he was prepared to deploy the full resources of government in pursuit of market fairness and stability outraged the conservatives of his day. The vulnerability of global financial markets in the early twenty-first century has again made radical government intervention an acceptable policy option. A religious and ethnic outsider in his day, he insisted on tolerance and respect from the cultural majority; he also emphasised that Irish Catholics must treat others with the same tolerance and respect that they demanded for themselves. William Lennon could have no more fitting epitaph than an acknowledgement that he achieved his 1903 ideal of honouring the traditions of Ireland while, at the same time, fulfilling 'the highest duties of Australian citizenship.'²⁵

Rodney Sullivan

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²⁵ *Worker*, 8 June 1937, p. 9; 10 May 1938, p. 6; QPD, 7 August 1907, p. 203; 21 September, 1916, p. 753; *North Queensland Herald*, 14 February 1903, p. 36

The White Man in the Tropics

Dr Russell McGregor

**Lecture presented by Dr McGregor at CityLibraries - Thuringowa
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In 1925, when he published *The White Man in the Tropics*, Raphael West Cilento was a young man of thirty-two (born in 1893) with an already impressive list of medical qualifications and achievements. Having graduated with First Class Honours at the Medical School of the University of Adelaide, he served as a captain in the Australian Army Medical Corps in the former German New Guinea during the First World War. After the war, he was appointed medical officer in the Federated Malay States, based at Teluk Anson (1920-21). Whilst there, in 1921, he was visited by Dr J.S.C. Elkington, Director of Quarantine in the Commonwealth Department of Health, who offered him a position as Medical Officer for Tropical Hygiene at the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine in Townsville. Before taking up the Townsville position, he attended the London School of Tropical Medicine, where he took the Diploma of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene. On his return to Australia he was appointed Director of the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine, a position he held until 1928.

According to Cilento's unpublished autobiography, shortly before leaving London he was asked by an academic from the School of Tropical Medicine, Dr Philip Manson-Bahr:

“And what would you say is the vital problem on which you will spend the life you are now beginning?”

“Populating tropical Australia” I said at once, to which, with a chuckle, he replied: “Not alone, I hope.” and waved his hand in farewell.¹

Populating tropical Australia was indeed Cilento's passion, but the word 'populating' must be understood in a quite restrictive sense. By it, Cilento meant 'populating with white people'. Tropical Australia, he was confident, could and should be densely populated with prosperous communities exclusively of European descent. He wrote *The White Man in the Tropics* to boost that project's prospects of success at a time when some experts – albeit a declining number – continued to argue the traditional line that white men – and, even more, white women – were congenitally unfitted to tropical environments.

This brief account of Cilento's early career prompts three questions:

1. Why was the viability of permanent European residence in the tropics a matter of contention?
2. Why were the arguments about populating northern Australia framed in terms of whiteness?
3. Why were medical scientists like Cilento so closely engaged in demographic questions that today would normally be seen as the province of social scientists?

To answer these questions we must go back to the beginnings of British efforts to colonise the northern parts of Australia. This lecture will then move forward in time, up to the year in which Cilento published *The White Man in the Tropics*.

By the time the British began to establish settlements in tropical Australia, an image of the tropics as disease-ridden, sweltering and hostile was well established in British minds, confirmed by experience in India and Ceylon, in Africa and Southeast Asia. The first British attempts at northern Australian settlement were made in the 1820s, at Fort Dundas and Fort Wellington, and in the 1830s at Port Essington, all in what is now the Northern Territory. They were intended to validate British claims of sovereignty over the entire

¹ Quoted in A.T. Yarwood, 'Sir Raphael Cilento and *The White Man in the Tropics*', in Roy MacLeod and Donald Denoon (eds), *Health and Healing in Tropical Australia and Papua New Guinea*, (Townsville: James Cook University, 1991), p.51.

continent, and to foster trading links with Asia. They were all dismal failures, the longest-lasting (Port Essington) struggling along for eleven years before its ailing and exhausted garrison abandoned the site. The attempted British colonisation of the north did not get off to a good start.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, new efforts were made to colonise the north. The town of Rockhampton, just over the Tropic of Capricorn, was founded in 1855-56, but the major expansion of European settlement in northern Queensland came after the Kennedy District was opened in 1861. From that time, too, European settlements were established in other parts of the north such as Palmerston (Darwin) in 1869, and Cossack and Broome in the North-West in the 1870s and 1880s. However, the designation 'European' is not quite accurate. Throughout the north, both towns and rural districts held sizable non-European populations: Chinese, Malay, Japanese, Pacific Islander, Ceylonese and, of course, Indigenous Australians. These non-European peoples performed vital roles in the northern economy, as pearl divers and market gardeners, as sugar plantation labourers and pastoral workers, as miners and domestics, and in a vast array of other activities. Most northern towns of any size in the late nineteenth century had their Chinatowns and other areas populated mainly by Asians and other 'coloured races'. Northern Australia, it seemed, was developing along the multi-ethnic lines typical of other tropical regions colonised by Europeans.

Not only was late-nineteenth-century northern Australia multi-racial, but many Europeans resident there were appreciative – if somewhat ambivalently – of the fact. Historians such as Henry Reynolds and Cathie May have shown that in the north at this time there was a high degree of tolerance for, even appreciation of, the Chinese and other 'coloured' peoples in the local community.² We should not romanticise this tolerance as if it were something akin to the modern-day celebration of multicultural diversity. Late-nineteenth-century European settlers in northern Australia tolerated 'coloured races' provided they recognised their allotted place in the racial hierarchy. Whites occupied the first rank; certain Asians (Japanese, sometimes Chinese) held positions of lesser but still substantial status, wealth and power; other Asians such as Ceylonese and Filipinos below them; Melanesians on the next rung down; Torres Strait Islanders below them; and Aborigines at the bottom of the heap. Some degree of mobility between strata was possible, but this was not an egalitarian society. The viability of the whole depended on its inequality, its racial stratification.

Nonetheless, the extent of racial diversity and tolerance in the north irked many southern-based devotees of White Australia. In the 1890s the Sydney *Bulletin* magazine disparaged the north as 'Piebald Australia', castigated Queensland as 'Queensmongreland' and complained that in Cairns white men 'ate with the Chows'. From the *Bulletin's* perspective, the tolerance shown to 'coloured races' in the north was unbecomingly decent, race-proud, white Australians. The doctrine that was gaining ground in the latter decades of the nineteenth century was White Australia, conceived as a nation free of colour and of the social tensions, racial animosities and economic inequalities that were assumed to be the inevitable concomitants of racial diversity. The desire for a white Australia was one of the primary motivations behind the movement for the federation of the Australian colonies in the 1890s; and, true to form, legislation to ensure a white Australia (the *Immigration Restriction Act* and *Pacific Island Labourers Act*) were the first substantive issues to be dealt with by the Commonwealth parliament when it was created in 1901. As prominent

² Henry Reynolds, *North of Capricorn: The Untold Story of Australia's North* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2003); Cathie May, *Topsawyers: The Chinese in Cairns, 1870-1920* (Townsville: James Cook University, 1984).

federationist Isaac Isaacs explained, the purpose of the immigration restrictions was to protect Australia 'for all time from the contaminating and degrading influence of inferior races'.³ Whiteness was to be a foundation-stone of Australian nationhood.

Contemporaneous, though causally unconnected, with the push for federation, the late nineteenth century witnessed major advances in the diagnosis and prevention of tropical diseases. The old idea that diseases emanated directly from the local environment – from putrefying organic matter for example – was being discredited by a new medical science that showed diseases to be caused by specific micro-organisms, often carried by specific vectors and hosts. A brief history of changing understandings of malaria illustrates the point. Until late in the nineteenth century, it was generally believed that malaria (literal translation: 'bad air') was caused by the poisonous vapours given off by swamps and stagnant water; the disease was a direct product of environmental conditions. This theory was overturned by the findings of medical science, beginning with Charles Laveran's identification of a parasite as the cause of malaria in 1880 through to Ronald Ross's identification of the *Anopheles* mosquito as the vector in 1897. For present purposes, the primary significance of these and similar advances in medical science is that they undermined the notion that the prevalence of disease was inherently and inevitably bound to geography, promoting in its place the idea that diseases were caused and carried by specific organisms. These organisms – whether mosquitoes, parasites, worms, or, for that matter, other people – could be controlled and regulated in ways that the physical environment could not. Location counted for less than microbes.

Despite advances in tropical medicine, older ideas about the inherent hostility of the tropics to the white race persisted into the early twentieth century. At the 1907 meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, Matthew MacFie insisted that efforts to settle a numerous white population in northern Australia were doomed to disaster. This part of Australia, he argued, should be exempt from the strictures of the white Australia policy. Citing 'the collective testimony of numerous high authorities', MacFie maintained that:

the world is divided into color-zones, and that *each climate is exactly suited by natural law to the particular human racial type evolved under its influence, but cannot be adjusted to any other.*⁴

The inhospitability of the tropics did not mean, to MacFie, that the white race had no place there at all. He envisaged in northern Australia 'large tropical and sub-tropical agricultural undertakings promoted by white capitalists and superintended by men of the same race' but worked by 'colored labor'. For the latter, he suggested 'the natives of New Guinea', or Pacific Islanders or Indians. He made no mention of utilising the labour of Aborigines, whose skin colour eminently qualified them for working under the tropical sun – not to mention the fact that they must have evolved to meet the requirements of their 'color-zone'. Perhaps MacFie considered Aborigines unsuited to plantation labour; perhaps he, like most Australians at the time, believed that they would soon be extinct; perhaps he never spared a thought for Aborigines.

MacFie's talk about 'color-zones' was in line with the long-standing idea that each race had its proper place on the planet; moving to a different place invited racial degeneration.

³ *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, vol.IV, 1901-02, p.4845.

⁴ Matthew MacFie, 'How can Tropical and Sub-tropical Australia be Effectively Developed', *Report of the Eleventh Meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science*, 1907, pp.597-99 (italics in the original).

This idea still held credibility in the late nineteenth century, among scientists and medical practitioners as well as the wider public.⁵ However, by the early twentieth century, it was coming under sustained attack. The 1907 meeting of the AAAS, at which MacFie presented his paper, was also attended by the notable Adelaide medical researcher and anthropologist, Dr William Ramsay Smith. In the ensuing discussion, Ramsay Smith pulled apart MacFie's arguments, point by point.⁶ In opposition to MacFie's claim that certain climatic zones were in themselves unhealthy for certain races, Ramsay Smith argued that since diseases were caused by specific organisms, they were amenable to control through hygienic, sanitary and other measures. According to Ramsay Smith, the white race was perfectly capable of living – and thriving – in the tropics provided they made appropriate adjustments to the environment.

In 1906 Ramsay Smith had carried out investigations on behalf of the South Australian government into the health and future prospects of the Northern Territory. His report was optimistic, Ramsay Smith claiming that as 'regards both climatic conditions and the non-occurrence of preventable diseases, the Territory is highly favoured'. He acknowledged that the acclimatisation of white people to the tropics demanded both physical and mental effort; but the human organism was adaptable since its evolution was predominantly dependent on cerebral functioning. He also raised the possibility of the moral degeneration of white people in the tropics, a fear that threaded through many earlier writings on the topic. In line with this, Ramsay Smith thought it appropriate to

conclude with a caution. In Australia, and especially in tropical Australia, we are dealing with people – I mean white people – whose physical surroundings are very different from those in which the bodily organisations they inherit and the moral code they profess to adopt were evolved; and the results of climatic influences on the bodily organisation are too often evidenced in the less fettered exercise of various passions, and in moral and immoral actions and modes of life that appear to be very different from those they would probably have exhibited in their original homes.⁷

In the torrid zone, licentiousness grew lushly. But that too, Dr Ramsay Smith intimated, could be kept under control.

A key figure in the scientific promotion of a white tropical Australia was Dr Anton Breinl, first director of the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine in Townsville from 1910 to 1921. Breinl had been trained at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine in the UK, where he was awarded the Mary Kingsley Medal for distinguished contributions to tropical medicine. His primary research interests were into disease causation and control in tropical lands. However, his work at the Institute in Townsville was directed by political interests, specifically the interest in ensuring a white tropical Australia. Consequently, he devoted most of his efforts to researching, not the causes and control of specific diseases, but the effects of climate on 'a working white race'. The central question here was whether white people could perform all forms of manual labour, through to the most strenuous and arduous, in the heat and humidity of the tropics. On a positive answer to that question depended the viability of a tropical white Australia, for only if whites could perform the heavy labour could the north avoid the contamination of colour and the corruptions of

5 Nancy Stepan, 'Biological Degeneration: Races and Proper Places', in J.E. Chamberlin and S.L. Gilman (eds), *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp.98-104.

6 *Report of the Eleventh Meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science*, 1907, pp.612-16.

7 W. Ramsay Smith, *Report on Hygiene in the Northern Territory of South Australia* (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1906), pp.1-2, 8.

racial hierarchy that were presumed to be the inevitable concomitants of racial diversity. Unsurprisingly, Breinl's research gave a positive answer.⁸

In 1911, shortly after he had become established in Townsville, Breinl was co-opted into the service of the Commonwealth government as the medical researcher in the scientific team appointed to assess the future prospects of the Northern Territory. This was immediately after the Commonwealth assumed control of the Territory from South Australia. Breinl's report on the Northern Territory took a favourable view of prevailing health conditions. On the whole, he stated, the white population showed 'a comparative freedom from disease, if Malaria be excepted'; and malaria, he explained in detail, could be easily controlled. He noted also that the Aborigines were not a major source of contagious disease.⁹

Breinl's point about the Aborigines posing little threat to the health of white people in tropical Australia was one on which there was virtual unanimity among scientific investigators.¹⁰ Unlike the indigenous peoples of other tropical lands in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the Aborigines of tropical Australia did not constitute a reservoir of diseases that might threaten white occupancy. Not only that, but the Indigenous peoples of northern Australia were relatively few in number and, according to the received wisdom of the day, were fated to extinction in the near future.¹¹ The claims about Aborigines not constituting a reservoir of disease should not be interpreted to mean that they were healthy. In the wake of the European invasion, disease and ill-health were rife in Aboriginal communities. The point, more often implicit than explicit in the statements of medical scientists, was that the flow of infectious diseases was generally from Europeans (and Asians) to Aborigines, not, as was the case in other tropical lands, from the indigenous peoples to the newcomers. Fears of contagion were certainly racialised in northern Australia, but for white newcomers the feared sources of disease were other – especially Asian – newcomers, not the original inhabitants. Asian contagions could be controlled, even completely stopped. That was one of the purposes of the white Australia policy.

In August 1920 the findings of a decade of research by the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine were presented to the Australasian Medical Congress, which met that year in Brisbane to discuss the prospects for white settlement in the tropics. The Congress declared that 'the opinion of the medical practitioners was overwhelmingly in favour of the suitability of North Queensland for the successful implantation of a working white race'.¹² A generation earlier, such a medical consensus on the viability of the tropics would have been inconceivable. By 1920, however, the combination of research carried out by Breinl and others, advances in the understanding of tropical diseases, increased appreciation of the distinctive demography of northern Australia, and political determination to secure a truly white Australia had given rise to optimism about the possibilities for northern Australia. The new generation of medical scientists insisted that white people had to make an effort to live successfully in the tropics: they had to modify their diet, clothing and

8 Lorraine Harloe, 'Anton Breinl and the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine', in Macleod and Denoon (eds), *Health and Healing*, pp.35-46.

9 Anton Breinl, 'Report on Health and Disease in the Northern Territory', *Bulletin of the Northern Territory*, no.1, March 1912, pp.32-54.

10 Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), pp.112-13, 122, 132-33, 136, 151.

11 Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997).

12 Quoted in Anderson, *Cultivation of Whiteness*, p.127.

housing; they had to be vigilant in personal hygiene and moral behaviour; but these were achievable changes for the individuals involved, and by doing so they would further the achievement of an all-white Australia.

Despite the growing consensus about the habitability of tropical Australia for the white race, medical scientists acknowledged that there were diseases endemic to the region. Perhaps the most notable was ancylostomiasis or hookworm disease, whose symptoms included severe lassitude in adults and stunted growth in children. This had been diagnosed in northern Australia since the late nineteenth century, but the campaign against hookworm began in earnest in 1916, with funding from the American-based Rockefeller Foundation. As historian James Gillespie has pointed out, the hookworm campaign in northern Australia was dominated by political considerations; it was used as a lever by senior medical bureaucrats such as Drs Cumpston and Elkington to force a greater commitment to public health initiatives on the part of the federal government.¹³ In any case, ancylostomiasis was a preventable and controllable disease. It could be cured in individuals by the drugs thymol and oil of chenopodium; while at the community level, incidence of the disease could be drastically reduced through basic sanitary and public health measures. Although the disease was found to be reasonably prevalent among whites in northern Australia, and exceptionally prevalent among Aborigines, its controllability and relatively moderate symptoms ensured that it could not overturn an increasingly benign view of the healthiness of the tropics.

Although by 1920 medical opinion had moved decisively in favour of the viability of the white race in the tropics, their optimism was not shared by all scientific experts. Some geographers, in particular, continued to argue that tropical environments inevitably set severe limits to the extent of white habitation. The most prominent – and pugnacious – of these geographers in Australia was Thomas Griffith Taylor, who insisted that the climate and resources of northern Australia ruled it out as a site of large-scale white settlement. This was a part of Griffith Taylor's broader attack on the 'boosters' of his day, who held out visions of an Australia densely populated over its entire surface, with 100 million, 200 million, even 500 million white people thriving on the continent. For denouncing these ambitions, he was pilloried as 'unpatriotic', a reputation that was exacerbated by his open opposition to the white Australia policy and his support for Chinese immigration into tropical Australia. Griffith Taylor was a keen controversialist who seems to have relished the outrage he inspired, but the fact that he continued to advance these ideas about the inhospitability of the tropics to the white race indicates that arguments over the destiny of the north were by no means over in the 1920s.

This was the context in which Cilento wrote *The White Man in the Tropics*: medical science and a considerable body of public opinion had adopted a generally optimistic stance on the viability of the Australian tropics for the white race, but there remained a small, though significant, segment of opinion pessimistic on the question. Cilento's book contained little in the way of original research, apart from a sociological survey of north Queensland conducted by nurse Annie Gorman. His strengths were not so much as a medical researcher but more as a synthesiser of the research of others and as a publicist for the ideals he cherished: white Australia, public health, and progress and prosperity in the tropics.

A large part of *The White Man in the Tropics* was devoted to the need for white people to adapt to the local environment. Nurse Gorman's survey and Cilento's own observations

13 James Gillespie, 'The Rockefeller Foundation, the Hookworm Campaign and a National Health Policy in Australia, 1911-1930', in MacLeod and Denoon (eds), *Health and Healing*, pp.64-87.

revealed that many north Queenslanders had not yet made those adaptations: houses were often hot and poorly ventilated, lacking appropriate kitchen and other facilities; locals persisted in wearing clothes ill-suited to the climate; they failed to take appropriate sanitary and hygienic measures. But Cilento's point was that the adaptations could be made, and a start was already being made. Dedicated though he was to the doctrine of white superiority, he did not hesitate to recommend architectural styles appropriate to the tropics drawn from other peoples, particularly Indians and southeast Asians. Similarly for clothing, he suggested that white people could learn from coloured peoples long resident in the tropics. Cilento was not so racist as to imagine that 'coloured people' had nothing worthwhile to offer. He simply believed that they did not belong on the Australian continent.

In *The White Man in the Tropics* Cilento referred frequently to tropical Australia's distinctiveness in 'possessing no large resident native population'. He explained that:

The tropical areas of Australia are unique in that they have no teeming native population, riddled with disease, but are occupied by many thousands of pure-blooded European settlers... These settlers, some of them the second and third generation, make up altogether the largest mass of a population purely white in any part of the tropical world, and represent a huge, unconscious experiment in acclimatization, for here the white settler is not in a position of lord of a native race, but is simply a working man, carrying out every occupation from the most laborious tasks to the higher grade of mental effort.¹⁴

The final point in this passage was vitally important to Cilento. In his view it was crucial that in north Queensland white people could and should perform every kind of labour and occupation, for that was a prerequisite for an all-white Australia. Cilento was firmly committed to the ideal of racial purity. Coloured labour in the north would inevitably introduce contaminants into the national bloodstream and debase the social order. A 'working white race' was a prophylactic against racial contamination.

Cilento argued that not only were white people adaptable to the tropics but also their adaptation was producing a distinctive type of white person. He stated that:

There is, indeed, beginning to be a very definite type of North Queenslander, or tropical-born Australian... He is tall and rangy, with somewhat sharp features, and long arms and legs. Inclined to be sparely built, he is not, however, lacking in muscular strength, while his endurance is equal in his own circumstances to that of the temperate dweller in his. This North Queenslander moves slowly, and conserves his muscular heat-producing energy in every possible way. One can pick him out in the streets by the fact that, as a general rule, he walks more deliberately. In the women this becomes a gracefulness of movement that reminds one of those nations of the East that live in similar environments.

... The race is in a transition stage, and it is very apparent that there is being evolved precisely what one would hope for, namely, a distinctive tropical type, adapted to life in the tropical environment in which it is set.¹⁵

The white man in the tropics would be different from his compatriot in temperate Australia, but he would be still, unequivocally, a white man with all the qualities – physical, moral and intellectual – that Cilento and his contemporaries assumed to inhere in whiteness.

Conclusion

14 Raphael Cilento, *The White Man in the Tropics: With Especial Reference to Australia and its Dependencies*, (Commonwealth Department of Health Service Publication no.7, 1925), p.9.

15 Cilento, *White Man*, pp.73-4.

Some might find it reassuring to imagine that a positive assessment of the ability of Europeans to live in tropical Australia represented a victory of empirically-based science over prejudice and obscurantism. But that would be simplistic. Certainly, scientific research was conducted and empirical evidence gathered on the viability of European habitation in the tropics. However, the medical and scientific studies were inextricably entangled in a political agenda: the demand for an all-white Australia. Today, many Australians look upon the white Australia enthusiasm of their forebears with some embarrassment, even guilt, but in the early twentieth century white Australia was one of the few ideals that could command assent (almost) across the political spectrum. White Australia was regarded as *the* foundation-stone of nationhood; and only if whiteness were continent-wide could the Australian nation validate its moral claim to the country. On the ground, individual people might have any number of motivations for setting up home in the north; but from the perspective of the state and of medial, scientific and other experts, it was not merely a matter of individual choice. It was a matter of national importance. The medical campaign to habituate European people to the tropics was enmeshed in the nationalist project of white Australia. Raphael Cilento's book *The White Man in the Tropics* was not the final word on the topic, but it represented the culmination of decades of medical effort to make the whole of Australia a home for the white race – and the white race alone.

Russell McGregor

***The World's Great Age... the Golden Years: Queensland's Miners,
Poets and Story-Tellers***

Dr Cheryl Taylor

**Lecture presented by Dr Taylor at CityLibraries - Thuringowa
17 November 2008**

**SIR ROBERT PHILP LECTURE SERIES
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The world's great age begins anew
The golden years return,
The earth doth like a snake renew
Her winter weeds outworn;
Heaven smiles and faiths and empires gleam
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream.
(Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Hellas*, 1822)

The term “digger,” adopted by the Anzacs at Gallipoli, but applied before and after World War I to Australian men in general, indicates mining’s importance in forming the national identity. Tropical Queensland is unique in many respects, but it is like other Australian regions in the contribution that mining has made to its economy and culture. Mining is a toilsome occupation, and miners are practical people whose work takes them away from centres of high civilisation. While researching the literature of tropical Queensland over many years, I’ve often been surprised therefore to stumble upon novels, poems and even plays associated with the mining industry. The invitation to give this lecture inspired me to delineate this group of writings as a new research field, and to explore its internal patterns and themes. Unfortunately, an attempt to write a summation convinced me that the field was too large to be covered in a single lecture. For example, the six novels relating to Mt Isa¹ certainly invite a separate study. I’ve therefore limited my discussion to works that deal with the establishment phase of the region’s mining industry, from the 1870s to the 1920s, on Cape York as far south as the Burdekin basin. It was in this time and place that the region’s mining mythologies first evolved.

Any discussion of mining in tropical Queensland owes much to research carried out by the former James Cook University History Department and maintained to the present by historians trained in that department. My own interest, however, is less in historical facts and debates than in representations. Insights into the lives of miners and their families may emerge from the discussion that follows, but my primary aim is to chart the evolution through these writings of imaginative traditions that supported the existing power structures, and to consider how later texts have infiltrated, critiqued and in some cases overturned these same traditions.

Power and politics are of course central to the works that I am considering. Mining polarises classes more than most industries, as the industrial history of Mt Isa demonstrates. In tropical Queensland relations among Aborigines, Chinese immigrants, European “New Australians,” and established Anglo-Celtic settlers and their descendants further complicate the ideological mix. Furthermore, these writings dramatise the sexual politics of men’s and women’s typically opposed attitudes to mining. Centrally, they illuminate miners, bosses and entrepreneurs as leading role and behaviour models for Australian men, but they also give scope to the feelings of women who were bound by economic or emotional ties to the fringes of the industry. Women are rarely mentioned in association with mining, yet in tropical Queensland they contributed to the industry’s success, either personally through their work as miners’ wives, daughters, mothers or mistresses, or commercially as shop-keepers, pub-owners, sex workers, house-keepers, teachers and nurses.

¹ The novels are Vance Palmer’s *Golconda* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1948; St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1972) and *The Big Fellow* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1959; St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1973); Betty Collins’ *The Copper Crucible* (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1966; ed. Ian Syson, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1996); Kay Brown’s *Knock Ten: A Novel of Mining Life* (Sydney: Wentworth Press, 1976); John Jost’s *Kangaroo Court* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1979); and Keith De Lacey’s *Blood Stains the Wattle* (Rockhampton: Central Queensland University Press, 2002).

An Adventure Playground for Bushmen and Heroes

Forces that were at base economic, but also social and ideological, drove men onto the mining fields of tropical Queensland. They were late participants in the imperialist European expansion into the Americas, Asia, and the Antipodes that began in the Renaissance and peaked in the late nineteenth century. Men of all classes journeyed to the region in search of wealth. Once arrived, some achieved remarkable feats of exploration and enterprise, of courage and endurance. However, the northern fields, remote from domestic responsibilities, also provided prospectors with an opportunity for prolonged bouts of drinking, whoring, gambling, hunting, fishing and fighting. Many briefly lived out the masculine fantasy of tropical escape, which persists in the region's culture to the present day.

Ion Idriess and Hector Holthouse

The shaping of this fantasy is to be attributed in part to the mass of pioneering stories and reminiscences subsequently published. Tales and popular histories by Ion Idriess and Hector Holthouse, both of whom began their writing careers in tropical Queensland, epitomise this tradition. From the early to mid-twentieth century, Idriess and Holthouse offered their mostly male readers an escape into an imagined past, in which pleasurable masculine self-expression was unhindered by religious institutions, and free from control by the business and civil hierarchies entrenched in southern cities. Here, for example, is a passage from Holthouse's account of Cooktown at the height of the Palmer River gold rush in the mid-1870s. He quotes a card-player, evidently a master of understatement, who reports a street scene viewed from an upstairs window:

“Here was a lady from a certain establishment, less decently dressed than one is accustomed to see in the street, and soaked to the skin by the pouring rain, running down the middle of the roadway through the mud which was inches deep. In her wake pounded a determined-looking gentleman whose enthusiasm seemed to have been inflamed by the product of one of the town's numerous shanties.”...the two of them fell together into the mud, roaring with laughter, and “went about their entertainment, and the rain pouring down on them.” (54)

Holthouse's *River of Gold: The Wild Days of the Palmer River Gold Rush* (1967) goes on to record that sixty-three publicans' licences were issued for Cooktown at the height of the rush. “Arguments over cards, women, and missing gold were settled with fists, boots, knives, broken bottles, and guns. Not a day passed without the mud of Charlotte Street being churned up by struggling bodies locked in deadly combat.” (55) Holthouse's account exemplifies the wavering demarcation between fact and fiction in much of the region's mining literature.

In *River of Gold* the enticing descriptions of glorious male wildness counterbalance sensational stories of diggers' deaths from exhaustion, starvation, fever, and floods. Aborigines suddenly displaced from their hunting and fishing grounds mount massed attacks, or more often spear miners, their horses and cattle from ambush. The following report on the fate of two diggers, which Holthouse attributes to a captured Aboriginal girl, is typical:

The men of her tribe had surrounded the two diggers and, finding them unarmed, had closed in and grabbed them and tied them up with vines. They were kept tied up until they had been carried to the blacks' camp, and then, so they would not be able to run away, their shin and arm bones were broken by being pounded between stones. Next day one of

the men was knocked on the head and roasted and eaten while his mate looked on. The following day the other man was eaten. (53)

Idriess's story, "The Lucky Opal," in his collection, *The Wild North* (1960), contains a similar tale of cannibalism. Idriess's and Holthouse's story-telling gifts partly explain their books' continuing popularity into the twenty-first century. This is attested to, for example, by a search of the Townsville, Aitkenvale and Thuringowa Library catalogue, which yielded fifty-eight books relevant to Idriess and eighteen to Holthouse. By contrast, Nobel Prize winner Patrick White scored a modest twenty-three hits and Thea Astley only thirteen.

Idriess's fifty-six books are set in many of Australia's remote places, but before World War I he prospected for tin, silver and gold in the hinterland between Cooktown and Cairns, while contributing paragraphs to the Sydney *Bulletin*. His early experiences as a miner and soldier formed him as a writer. Four books published in the late 1950s and early 1960s drew on his mining days in tropical Queensland.²

As a writer Idriess has a wider emotional range than Holthouse, who relies on transgressive delights, bloodshed and excitement to sell his books. Holthouse writes as a middle-class expert, but Idriess speaks in the first person for diggers, navvies, wharfies and deck hands. Far from being left-wing or subversive, however, this working-class alignment emphasises mateship and male community in remote parts. The solace that Idriess offers to manual workers excluded from power includes a reaffirmation of physical prowess as an aspect of the ancient warrior ideal. Despite the racist implications of much of his writing, he often distils this ideal from an individual reimagining of Indigenous cultures. As settings, he favours campfires near diggings, where fossickers and other working men gather to partake of damper, strong tea, and stories. Like Holthouse, Idriess has a filial respect for, and a comforting faith in, the "big fellows," the pioneering heroes of northern Australia - gold-discoverers like James Venture Mulligan and entrepreneurs like John Moffat. Both writers implicitly advocate development in its multifarious forms, and share their era's blindness to environmental concerns.

Idriess's stories of tropical mining nevertheless differ from Holthouse's in his narrators' boyish and cheerful, sometimes larrikin, tone. This is sometimes moderated by a longing for feminine companionship, and by regret for labour that must be carried out in the dark, away from the beauties of rainforest and bush. Contrasts between the upper and lower worlds, such as the following, recur:

A parakeet sped past on his way to his mate anxiously waiting at the creek, the hurrying beauty fairly shied at my head above the windlass logs.

"Think you're the Scarlet Pimpernel!" I grumbled as the lovely bird flashed by. "Think man is a silly insect for scratching his way into the bowels of the earth while you whistle in the sunlight sucking honey from gum-tree blossoms!..."

With a self-pitying sigh I climbed down the dark shaft to be an insect, yet eager now for work, though the sunlight was calling above. (*Back o' Cairns* 4)

In the mysterious underground, Idriess's miners confront monsters created by alcoholic delusions, such as the army of ants that one believes to be manufacturing the tin ("The Tin-makers" *The Wild North* 142-54). When someone lights the wrong fuse and a miner

² *Back o' Cairns* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1958; rpt. HarperCollins, 1999), *The Tin Scratchers: The Story of Tin Mining in the Far North* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1959), *The Wild North* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1960), and *My Mate Dick* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1962).

dies, death bestows an overwhelming knowledge of past lives (“Carlson’s Awakening” *The Wild North* 164–75). Mining thus becomes an analogy for descent into that part of the psyche that predetermines actions beyond the reach of consciousness. This interest in motivation conforms with Idriess’s project in many of his tropical mining stories, which is to examine the causes and costs of men’s drive for wealth. Many of his tales condemn theft and greed. Some reinforce the association between gold and death that pervades twentieth-century popular culture, including, as we have seen, Holthouse’s *River of Gold*.

Miners, Poets and Story-Tellers of the Late 1800s

Despite Idriess’s experience of latter-day pioneering in the tropics, he and Holthouse centrally represent the many writers who transmitted an idealised representation of the settlement era to later generations. My purpose now is to compare features of this reinventing, as outlined, with late nineteenth-century authors’ pictures of mining life. Ernest Favenc, Stefan von Kotze and Louis Becke wrote about tropical Queensland in stories or poems published in the Sydney *Bulletin*, the newspaper which centrally shaped the Australian literary consciousness and bush identity in the 1890s. In contrast with Holthouse’s dream of male liberty, the writing miners themselves stress the hardships, dangers and moral ambiguity of their enterprise.

Ernest Favenc

Born in Surrey into a merchant family in 1845, Ernest Favenc arrived in 1864 at a station on the upper Burdekin, where he trained as a stockman, drover and manager. His published poems and stories demonstrate a first-hand knowledge of the Ravenswood, Canoona and Cloncurry mining fields,³ and he claimed to have watched the rise of Charters Towers “from a few scattered tents.”⁴ Favenc’s ballad, “The Spirit of Gold,”⁵ nevertheless condemns men’s lust for gold as a destructive, incurable addiction, subject

³ For example, “A Lay of Ravenswood.” *The Queenslander* 16 December 1871, p. 7; “The Gold King.” *The Queenslander* 26 December, 1874, p. 8; “My Story.” *The Queenslander* 6 February, p. 7; 13 February, p. 8; 20 February, p. 7, 1875; “Jack Essingham; or, the Graves of a Household, A Tale of Northern Queensland,” Chapter XVIII. *The Queenslander* 11 December, 1875, p. 10; “A Drover’s Diary.” *The Queenslander* 20 May, 1876, p. 13; “The Professor’s Discovery. A Tale of Old Ravenswood.” *The Bulletin* 24 May, 1890, p. 20.

⁴ Favenc, in an untitled article on the Native Police, among his cuttings in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, Q 980, 1 F.

⁵ *Voices of the Desert*. London: Elliot Stock, 1905: 25-27. Selected verses run as follows:

Quoth the Spirit of Gold: “I will dig its grave
Far under the earth in some sunless cave,
And men will not dream, as they come and go,
Of the wondrous treasure deep down below...

I will seek out a place in the thirsty land
Where there’s nothing but salt and barren sand,
‘Neath a rainless sky, whence all men have fled,
And the desert knows not their hated tread.”

The Spirit listened to moaning slaves,
He watched men stumble in nameless graves;
But forward kept pressing the endless crowd,
To the wail of the “Dead March” sounding loud.

“Let murder and sin e’er attend its way;
May its blight pursue man to his dying day,
Sunder friendship and love and all innocence blast;
Let him gain it with toil—but to lose it at last.”

to chance, and the enemy of innocence, friendship, and love. The ballad confirms that mining men's doubts about the wisdom and morality of "gold fever" were present from the inception of the industry in the north.

Stefan von Kotze

Whatever his shortcomings as a writer, Favenc manifests the saving grace of a self-deprecating humour. By contrast, Stefan von Kotze, who was a generation younger, having been born in Klein-Oschersleben, Germany, in 1869, directs grim satire and a depressing sense of dislocation against all aspects of life in tropical Queensland. Von Kotze worked as a prospector, as a stockman on Wrotham Station, and as a journalist and editor in Charters Towers. Returning home, he republished in German, for the guidance of intending immigrants and travellers, a collection of articles that he had contributed to *The Bulletin* and other Australian papers. Entitled *Australische Skizzen*, this volume went through six German editions or reprints by 1935, before being translated back into English ten years later.⁶

Von Kotze's sketch of Cooktown after the rush contrasts strikingly with Holthouse's description:

Cooktown is quite a nice little township—immediately after the rainy season....In summer time, however, the township is transfigured into a boiling cauldron. In the deserted streets, lean goats try to exist on empty bottles and jam tins, and they retire for a siesta to the verandahs of public buildings...A stone memorial to the Captain Cook...is about as appropriate as a bell-topper in Heaven. (*Australian Sketches* 11)

As an educated upper-class European, von Kotze never became reconciled to Australian landscapes. He writes of the country between Cooktown and Maytown that its "basic note was age—soulless, unspeakable age—deprived of any hope" (13). Ignorant like most of his contemporaries of Aboriginal spiritualising of land formations from ancient times, he ironically complains that these lack soul, because, in contrast to Europe, where "legends weave around every lake, every mountain," they have no past (126). Von Kotze tells of men travelling to the Palmer field who died in agony after being trapped with broken bones under fallen trees—the first, buried under the assigned name of "Tantalus," could not reach the gun or knife that he needed to end his suffering (14-15); the second succeeded in killing himself only minutes before fire in the tree would have released him (16-17). Von Kotze's stories derived from his tin mining south-west of Ingham focus on old hermit fossickers: "Cut off from the world, without diversion, or even vice, they vegetate, dull and indifferent, until death closes their account" (80).

The unrelieved misery of von Kotze's mining writing can be imbibed as an antidote to the nationalist romance embraced by other *Bulletin* writers, who admired the grittiness of the pioneers' battle with the bush. Alternatively, his judgments can be attributed to homesickness or temperamental gloom, or to his determination as an outsider to be true to his observations and feelings.

Louis Becke

⁶ Von Kotze wrote poems and books in both English and German; he published *Fern im Sud: Australische Skizzen*, based on his writings in English for Australian papers, in Berlin in 1903. *Australische Skizzen* was republished in different editions or in reprints, in 1903, 1918, 1919, 1921, 1925, and 1935.

Louis Becke is another exemplary mining writer of the 1890s. A legendary adventurer, trader, bigamist,⁷ accused pirate, and shipmate of the notorious blackbirder “Bully” Hayes, Becke is remembered as the story-teller of the South Pacific. He was born in Sydney, and tried his luck in the 1870s in the Charters Towers, Palmer and Hodgkinson River gold rushes.⁸ In the 1880s he worked briefly in Townsville as a journalist, but discovered his vocation while writing for the *Bulletin* in the early 1890s. Like Idriess a prolific and commercial teller of tales, Becke went on to publish thirty-four books, including novels, collections of stories, a biography, and histories, some of the more respectable of which were researched and drafted by his collaborator, the English author W. J. Jeffrey. Becke set three stories, a novella, *Chinkie’s Flat* (1904), and a novel, *Tom Gerrard* (1904), on tropical Queensland mining fields.

The attitudinal instability of Becke’s mining fiction has long intrigued me. As standardised entertainment of the period, it unconsciously provides insights into ideology and current debates. In contrast with von Kotze, Becke positions his short stories, two of which are written in the first person, as insider texts, identified with Anglo-Australian diggers. “*Ombre Chevalier*” is a heightened account of Becke’s hunting and fishing for a party seeking alluvial gold on a tributary of the Burdekin. In this bush idyll, remotest Queensland figures as a paradise abounding in game, the opposite of von Kotze’s aged and impoverished purgatory:

In the rainy season all the water holes and lagoons literally teemed with black duck, wood duck, teal, spur-winged plover, herons and other birds, and a single shot would account for a dozen. (166)

The water was literally alive with fish, feeding on the bottom. There were two kinds of bream—one a rather slow-moving fish, with large, brown scales, a perch-like mouth, and a wide tail, and with the sides and belly a dull white; the other a more active game fellow, of a more graceful shape, with a small mouth and very hard, bony gill plates. These latter fought splendidly, and their mouths being so strong they would often break the hooks and get away... (176)

And on the following day, when C---’s [the station owner’s] guests arrived (and after we had congratulated ourselves upon having plenty for them to eat), they produced from their buggies eleven turkeys, seven wood-duck and a string of “squatter” pigeons! (178)

Indigenous people and present-day readers will regret the depletion, by casual slaughter of the kind relished in Becke’s story, of a landscape once so filled with life.

“*Ombre Chevalier*” takes its title from the Breton name for grayling, a species of salmon. The literal translation, “shadow of a chevalier,” is however poetically appropriate to the project of Becke’s Queensland and Pacific writing, which is to define Anglo- or Celtic-Australian masculinity for these newly settled regions. Clearly a precursor of Idriess’s mining reminiscences, “*Ombre Chevalier*” rejoices in an unhindered masculine indulgence in sport, which it substitutes for the labour of prospecting, and validates bush mateship through the narrator’s two Scottish companions.

Becke’s other Queensland mining short stories, “The Traitor” and “The Great Crushing at Mount Sugar Bag,” set respectively on the Gilbert River and on a fictional field inland from Townsville, reveal a technical knowledge of ore processing and assaying. In the former, solidarity between Australian prospectors and the police thwarts a would-be thief and

⁷ Becke had a Tuvalu (formerly Ellice Islands) wife and two Australian wives, one married in Port Macquarie and the other in London.

⁸ “*Ombre Chevalier*”: 165. *The Call of the South*. London: Milne, 1908: 165-82.

murderer, and in the latter four hard-up and disenchanting mining mates take a complicated revenge against a greedy Jewish storekeeper.⁹

Becke's two mining novels, which were written for London publication and belong to the genre of Empire fiction for boys, extend his stories' cheerful adolescent tone, a tone which we have noticed already in Idriess's work. The Englishman, Edward Grainger, hero of *Chinkie's Flat*, is a prospector who becomes a mining magnate, while Tom Gerrard owns a Cape York cattle station. Like most protagonists in earlier Australian fiction, both are romanticised members of the middle class, set apart as leaders from the diggers with whom Becke's narrators identify in his short stories: "[Grainger] was an Englishman, his mates all Australian-born, vigorous, sturdy bushmen, inured to privation and hardship, and possessing unbounded confidence in their leader, though he was by no means the oldest man of the party, and not a 'native'." (7) Edward and Tom fight evil-doers, and Tom wrestles a crocodile, in defence of young women whom each weds in the finales to their respective tales. Despite the dangers that the heroes face, the narrating voice forges confidently ahead, creating a sense of untroubled masculine command over circumstances, women and other races. Anyone who has dipped into the diaries or reminiscences of settlers like Joseph and William Hann or Robert Gray will recognise that this impression is false, since as leaders these men were bedevilled by family illness and tragedy, by droughts and floods, by threats to stock, and by financial and legal problems. However, as well as instilling confidence through the narrative tone, *Chinkie's Flat*, *Tom Gerrard*, and Becke's short mining tales support the white male hegemony by fending off moral claims and competition from other races, especially Chinese and Aborigines.

In both novels authentic descriptions of northern life provide relief from the unrelenting romance plots. *Chinkie's Flat* opens with an account of the rise and temporary collapse of the eponymous township. Situated on a creek running into the Burdekin (21), Chinkie's Flat was "of the usual Queensland mining type, a dozen or so of bark-roofed humpies, a public house with the title of "The Digger's Rest," a blacksmith's forge, and a quartz-crushing battery" (1). Becke's satire, which is an anomalous but equally welcome intrusion into this boys' book, compares the battery's "high-sounding title of 'The Ever Victorious'" (2) with the Anglo-Australian miners' incessant heavy labour, except on Sundays, when, "for relaxation" they organised "riding parties of twenty or thirty" and "chased Chinamen, of whom there were over three hundred, within a radius of twenty miles" (2). The passage that follows is an unstable amalgam of shifting values:

The rich alluvial of Chinkie's Flat had, as a matter of fact, been first discovered by a number of Chinese diggers, who were each getting from five to ten ounces of gold per day, when they were discovered by the aforesaid Peter Finnerty, who was out prospecting with a couple of mates. Their indignation that a lot of heathen "Chows" should be scooping up gold so easily, while they, Christians and legitimate miners, should be toiling over the barren ridges day after day without striking anything, was so great that for the moment, as they sat on their horses and viewed the swarming Chinese working their cradles on the bank of the creek, the power of speech deserted them. Hastily turning their tired horses' heads, they rode as hard as they could to the nearest mining camp, and on the following day thirty hairy-faced foreign devils came charging into the Chinese camp, uttering fearful threats, and shooting right and left (with blank cartridges). (3)

⁹ *Tom Gerrard* also expresses anti-Jewish prejudice, through the hawker/arsonist, Isaac Benjamin, and through Barney Green, alias Bernard Capel, one of the novel's three stock villains, who, recalling Shylock, threatens to "get his knife into" the heroine's prospector father. In "The Traitor," the narrator prospects with a Jewish mate, disguised by a non-Jewish name and "a strong Aberdeenshire accent." They are together only briefly, but part "with mutual regrets" (178-79).

This narrative struggles to contain its contradictions: recognition of the just claim of the Chinese who discovered the field; satire of the white miners' insistence on the rightness of their claim; dread of the "swarming" Chinese; admiration for their cleverness and industry; insecurity of identity in the brief switch to the Chinese opinion of "hairy faced foreign devils"; and finally, approval of the white miners' raids, which however halts on the brink of full revelation, in the naïve parenthesis about "blank cartridges."

Within half an hour of dispersing the Chinese, thirty white miners have pegged out a claim, and for six months Chinkie's Flat is filled with positive energy:

...then indeed were halcyon days for the Flat. From early morn till long past midnight, the little bar of the "Digger's Rest" was crowded with diggers, packhorsemen and teamsters; a police trooper arrived and fixed his tent on the ridge overlooking the creek, and then - the very zenith of prosperity - a bank official followed, and a stately building, composed of a dozen sheets of bark for a roof and flour sacks for the sides, was erected and opened for business on the same day, and much rejoicing and a large amount of liquid refreshment dispensed by the landlord of the "hotel" at a shilling a nobbler. (3-4)

In comparison with Holthouse's description of Cooktown, Becke's miners are models of restraint, another sign perhaps of his need to uphold white men's dignity in the newly settled country. Becke's irony, exposing Chinkie's Flat as a laughable imitation of civilised society, departs nevertheless from the uncritical approval of development that typifies popular accounts of northern mining.

The discomfort evident in *Chinkie's Flat* about relations between European and Chinese diggers is finally resolved by narrative developments that mix respect for hard-headed entrepreneurial *nous* with Victorian sentimental regard for heroism and charity. After six months the alluvial gold at Chinkie's Flat seems to be worked out, but Grainger steps in just in time to purchase the "Ever Victorious" and to form a partnership with six diggers left behind. The yields look promising, but to everyone's consternation thirty Chinese suddenly arrive. Aborigines have speared fifteen of their number on the track from Cloncurry, and six have died from thirst and exhaustion. Grainger, whose hero status prevents a further racial confrontation, charitably agrees that the new arrivals should rest at the Flat, and later negotiates to employ twenty as labourers. He quickly realises £16,000 profit from his share of the mine, but only his friend, the editor of a Townsville paper, supports his employment of Chinese labour. However, as Grainger remarks: "...they do work for me at twenty-five shillings a week that white men would not do at all - no matter what you offered them: emptying sludge pits, building dams, etc." (38). Capitalism thus provides a solution that salves consciences and maintains racial hierarchy.

In *Tom Gerrard*, Becke's attitude to Chinese miners has simplified and hardened. In describing the landing in Cooktown of diggers bound for the Palmer, he endorses the humiliating treatment given the Chinese, and comments:

But the fatuous Government of the day wanted to swell its depleted treasure-chest, and the Chinese poll-tax brought in money quickly. All over North Queensland the rich alluvial gold-fields were soon to be occupied by the yellow men, to the detriment of the white diggers...for the swarms of Chinese would descend upon a newly opened rush like locusts, and in a few weeks work out a field which would have made hundreds of white miners rich, though perhaps each Chinaman might not have obtained more than a few ounces of gold, every penny-weight of which he sent or took back to his native country. (195)

Apart from Grainger's tracker, significantly named Jacky, Aborigines figure in *Chinkie's Flat* as murderers who spear innocent miners from ambush. In both *Chinkie's Flat* and *Tom Gerrard* the young heroines speak for conscience from their positioning as inferiors. They object to dispersals—"would you shoot a black-fellow, Mr. Gerrard, for spearing a horse or bullock?" (84)—and to unmonitored violence by the Native Police. In *Chinkie's Flat* the villains are two former police troopers who abduct Sheila Carolan by night in a classic scene that aggravates fears of miscegenation and black men's potency. Surrounded by their followers, Sandy and Daylight are about to fight over her, when gunfire from Grainger and Jacky resoundingly drowns out quibbles of conscience:

Then Jacky's Winchester cracked, and Daylight spun round and fell dead, and Sandy's spear flew high in the air as a bullet took him fair in the chest. And then the savage instinct to slay came upon and overwhelmed Grainger, as well as his black boy, and shot after shot rang out and laid low half a dozen of the sitting and expectant savages ere they could recover from their surprise and flee. (101)

The shifting application in the last sentence of "savage/savages" from whites to blacks reaffirms conventional racial identities, which, however, are again called into question by the aftermath. Inspector Lamington of the Native Police, whose soft voice concealing the truth about dispersals earlier made Sheila shudder (85), displays Sandy's and Daylight's severed heads "wrapped up in an ensanguined saddle cloth - 'That's my £500 reward, Grainger'," he says (104).

Female Novelists of World War II and Later

Three accomplished but neglected female novelists, Sarah Campion, Elizabeth O'Conner and Thea Astley, drew inspiration from the colourful saga of the mining industry's establishment in tropical Queensland. In varied ways and to differing degrees, their work amounts to an informed re-imagining and critique of the region's early mining years.

Sarah Campion

Sarah Campion spent only "eight happy months" in North Queensland before the outbreak of World War II recalled her to her native England. She wrote the *Burdekin Trilogy*, consisting of *Mo Burdekin* (1941), *Bonanza* (1942), and *The Pommy Cow* (1944), while working at a canteen in the London underground during the Blitz. The daughter of a famous Cambridge medievalist, her father's immersion in scorching disputes about ecclesiastical history darkened Campion's childhood. She drew this experience in imagining the lives of the lovers, friends and families of obsessed tropical prospectors, thereby adding a new dimension to the region's mining literature.

The *Burdekin Trilogy*, which is set in the era of major mineral discoveries between 1878 and 1906, follows the picaresque adventures of Mo Burdekin, from his rescue as a baby from a Burdekin flood to his death at twenty-eight, drowned in mud as he seeks shelter under a wagon during another flood. Mo is ironically unaware that his death, like his life, has been predetermined by heredity, in that his family, including the father whom he resembles, likewise perished in a Burdekin flood.

The stunning Prologue to *Mo Burdekin* tells how Mo's family camps at the Old Glory mine while his drunken Irish father fossicks for gold. Swirling red mud from a burst dam swallows the father as he attempts after a shameful delay to bury the "bird-light" (4), and now fly-blown, body of his wife, who has succumbed to the hardships of mining in the bush (5). Eleven-year-old Janey seeks to lead the family's three younger children to safety, but the flood sweeps them all away. Only the wooden cradle containing baby Mo is saved from "the broad tossing breast of the Burdekin" (10).

Campion's narrator identifies with Mo, and elicits sympathy for him as a boy and youth, but slowly disillusiones the reader as he persists in sacrificing his own happiness and that of those closest to him to a destructive quest. This sequence reverses the unquestioning approval of heroic young white men in tales by Idriess and Becke. Aged three, Mo almost drowns while fording a creek to dig for gold at the vividly described mining settlement of Lucy's Gold (*Mo Burdekin* 41). Compulsively digging for tin at the mouth of Old Glory, he later fails to attend the wedding of his best friend, Lucy. The loss he feels most, however, is that of his baby son, Benny, who dies of fever in his father's care in the remote bush. In his guilt Mo takes briefly to drink and religion, but ultimately fixes on a metallic substitute in the form of a bonanza. Benny's transmutation into gold is the centre of the bitter irony that pervades the second Burdekin novel. Finally, in *The Pommy Cow*, with his first bonanza lost to claim-jumpers, Mo returns with Kate, an English suffragette who is the love of his life, to scratch for another in the Kimberleys. His discovery there of a second so-called golden calf (234) is again negated by human loss, in that his relationship with Kate, usually tense, becomes riven. Kate understands that Mo's motive for prospecting is an obsession, a love of the quest itself, which is more deeply rooted than a mere desire for money (231). This is the key to the Trilogy's broader critique of the masculine drives that Campion sees as creating and ruling the economic and social worlds. However, containing these worlds, and often intruding into them uninvited, is a wild, feminised nature, which enacts fate's poetically apt decrees.

The Burdekin Trilogy is a prose epic about the settlement of the Queensland tropics. In contrast with the bulk of the region's reminiscences and popular histories, however, it satirises the pioneering impulse and upholds the land and nature as inviolable. Like von Kotze Campion was a European visitor, but her wonder at the bush's fecundity and near-infinitude contrasts strongly with his abhorrence. From 1932 to 1937 she taught English in the Jewish community in Germany, where she experienced the rise of Nazism as a logical consequence of racial and religious prejudice. Accordingly, in *Mo Burdekin*, baby Mo's rescuer and foster father is a philosophical Jew, Reuben Abraham. Contravening such writers as Becke, Reuben, who like Becke's Jewish villain is a storekeeper, models a pure love of the Queensland outdoors detached from desire for worldly gain. His guiltless martyrdom allows Campion to satirise both scandal-mongering and legal processes in Leichhardt (Townsville), and an anti-Semitism that she sees as spreading through the nation (10).

The Burdekin Trilogy treats buildings, mines and machinery as alien symbols of men's ambitions. For example, at Mosman (Charters) Towers, Campion compares the tiny figures of miners with "the bush earth teem[ing] with ants...filled with the strange shapes of windlass and poppet head and battery" (145). She adapts the motif of the deserted mining settlement already established in the region's literature to further suggest the futility of the frontier's entrepreneurial imperatives. For example, the fate of abandonment to nature overtakes Lucy's Gold. When Mo and Lucy return years later, they are appalled to find the 'busy noisy settlement...stripped of life, as if a great wind had blown through and blown it bare' (*Mo Burdekin* 195).

Elizabeth O'Conner

Elizabeth O'Conner's engaging novel, *The Irishman*, winner of the 1960 Miles Franklin award and successfully filmed at Charters Towers in 1978, has an opposite approach - one of sentimental regret - to the demise of a mining town. Like most of the authors so far surveyed, O'Conner is a story-teller of distinction. Set in the Gulf, probably at Georgetown, between 1922 and 1929, when trucks and cars were replacing horse teams and wagons, and the gold reserves were failing, *The Irishman* yearns for a romanticised pioneering

past. Paddy Doolan, teamster, whose wagon transports ore between the diggings, the town's battery and the coast, and his son Michael are the central characters, and O'Conner's focus is on patrilineage and father-son relationships. Female and feminised figures are treated with empathy, but consistently judged as unsuited to frontier life, which rewards brave and energetic men.

Part One of *The Irishman* traces the unnamed town's decline over two years through the eyes of twelve-year-old Michael. The boyish perspective is familiar to us already from the works of Idriess and Becke, and is also found in the iconoclastic Burdekin Trilogy. In *The Irishman* boyishness is related to upholding, not male entrepreneurial invulnerability as in Becke, but the softer mythology of the pioneer. When Paddy leads the horse teams and laden ore wagons through the rising waters of the town's river, O'Conner endorses the heroism at the heart of the mythology. *The Irishman* explores Paddy's drunkenness and violence to a depth not contemplated, for example, in Holthouse's *River of Gold*, where such transgressions merely assist a colourful reconstruction of the era. O'Conner nevertheless allows Paddy's regrets and the excuse of a lost way of life to soften his flaws. She thus preserves the mythology, not only unscathed but strengthened by testing. Michael's youthful perspective as heir apparent to pioneering traditions encompasses the failing mining town's characters, and especially its horses, in a golden glow, as in the following passage, when he befriends one of the novel's father-figures:

Those early morning rides with Chad Logan were to remain with Michael for ever as a memory of great contentment. Looking back through the mists of childhood he would see those hot December mornings as clearly as though he were still twelve years old. He would smell the fresh grilling meat or the little pigeons that Logan shot near the river, and stewed in a small camp oven with rice and onions. (60)

The reference to hunting recalls Becke's idealisation of prospecting life in "*Ombre Chevalier*."

Unlike the Burdekin Trilogy, which alludes repeatedly to the futility of men's labour and ingenuity expended on mining, *The Irishman* clings to the dying town's productive years as a "great age." A sequence of events affecting the townsfolk personalises the decline as tragic. The closing of the battery coincides with the death of Granny Doolan, a vital matriarch whose black bonnet "glittered ferociously with jet trimmings that matched her small snapping eyes" (69). The symbolic death of Grandfather Marty Doolan further punctuates the downturn, while the trucking of the local Aborigines to faraway missions speeds the town's demise. Reflecting entrenched northern resistance to southern governmental interventions, *The Irishman* treats the removal as a calamity for blacks and whites alike. Finally, an accident hastens the end of company mining, when a "fall of earth" kills a young husband and father-to-be and a Dago - "Joe somebody" -, and permanently cripples young Sam Bassingthwaite - "Such a gentleman," as one onlooker opines, "though he did drink too much" (95). The collapse is a weak reflection of the contemporary Mount Mulligan Coalmine disaster (1921), in which more than seventy workers perished. The few casualties in *The Irishman* may be related to the novel's tacit approbation of mining as a major industry supporting regional development.

O'Conner accordingly extends the literary motif of abandoned mining works to elaborate the theme of loss. When the stampers at the battery, "the beating heart that kept the town alive" suddenly cease, silence "filled and smothered it like poison gas." Michael's mother remarks, "It seems like the end of the world" (104). When Michael views the battery, he finds pathos in its stillness, and a gothic threat that contrasts with the former joyous dance of materialising wealth (105).

Despite O'Conner's adherence to patriarchal and capitalist values, the focus of *The Irishman* on the gold town's civic and domestic life expands the concentration on exploration and industry growth found, for example, in *Chinkie's Flat*. O'Conner packs her town with colourful characters and tales, unfortunately usually in ways that reinforce hierarchies based on age and race. Her Dickensian portraits of Granny and Grandfather Doolan draw on caricatures of the elderly common in film and popular fiction. The enigmatic Chinese faces that silently watch the curious boys who sally into the joss house (57) recycle racial stereotypes. The town policeman Kevin Quilty avers: "It's hard to understand the blackfellow, I always say. Wild underneath, they all are, every dinged one of them." (22). Even so, Michael comes to see the Aboriginal outcast Split Nose Alec, whom O'Conner claims to be based on a real person, as a warrior and potential friend. Alec remains a mysterious Other, but he is no longer the monster taunted by the other boys. His injury - "From forehead to lips he had been split open by the blow of an axe, so that his nose lay in separate portions across his face." (21) - nevertheless heightens standard stereotyping of Aboriginal facial features into the grotesque.

Despite these limitations, *The Irishman's* portrait of domestic life sets aside the popular construction of early Queensland mining towns as places of masculine escape, and implicitly questions the mining romance that Idriess was concurrently promoting. Inside the Doolan's cramped house, Jenny and her two sons struggle in Paddy's absences with chores, poverty and isolation, while during his returns they fear his moroseness and fits of temper induced by rum. Paddy's drinking, fighting, gambling and final defeat and humiliation are viewed from an outside, family perspective, and family break-up is their leading consequence. In Part Two, as the horse-loving Michael works his way from stockman to station manager, mining is subsumed under the successful cattle-raising industry, and O'Conner reaffirms the deeper Australian mythology of bush pastoral.

Thea Astley

Thea Astley published fourteen novels or novellas and numerous short stories between 1958 and her death in 2004. Born in Brisbane and educated at All Hallows convent and the University of Queensland, she was a leading literary interpreter of Queensland in the second half of the twentieth century. Seven of her longer fictional works and a collection of short stories are set north of the tropic.¹⁰ Idealism instilled by her Catholic education and a passionate attachment to the region probably inspired Astley, in her North Queensland fiction, to expose a violent colonial past, and the rapacity of commercial interests that threaten the environment in the present. Deep compassion for those harmed, either by large-scale greed or by the blind selfishness of others in personal relationships, gives weight to Astley's satire. In the powerful opening chapters to her collection of linked tales, *It's Raining in Mango* (1987), she reshapes many of the literary features that we have so far traced as supporting the region's mining mythology.

Working perhaps with knowledge of *The Irishman*, Astley focuses on the fortunes of an Irish family, the Laffey's, on the tracks between Cooktown (which she fictionalises lightly as Charco), Maytown and Byerstown. The *paterfamilias* Cornelius Laffey is a journalist like Favenc, von Kotze, and Becke. Raised in Canada and comfortable in Sydney, he dresses ludicrously in white linen suits and a panama hat or pith helmet. By adopting the perspective of outsiders, in this case Cornelius's wife and children, Astley produces

¹⁰ Novels or novellas: *Girl with a Monkey* (1958), *A Kindness Cup* (1974), *It's Raining in Mango* (1987), *Vanishing Points* (1992, containing the novellas, *The Genteel Poverty Bus Company* and *Inventing the Weather*), *Coda* (1994), and *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow* (1996); story collection: *Hunting the Wild Pineapple* (1979).

devastating satire of both Charco and male pretentiousness. The newly arrived family's perspective on Charlotte Street contrasts radically with that of the card-playing observer in Holthouse's description quoted at the beginning:

Three thousand diggers were camping in Charlotte Street and along the temporary back roads from the river, and there was Jessica Olive picking her way delicately through slush past makeshift pubs, brothels, stores and rachitic shanties after the worst season of the year. The children whined and were bitten by flies but Cornelius was inclined to swagger under the jaunty skies, furtively easing the sweat-scarf about his throat, panama tilted rakishly back from his curls. The sky was no bluer than his eyes. (24)

Far from enduing her character with the romance of the pioneer in parallel with O'Conner's Paddy Doolan, Astley satirises Cornelius's Irish charm and narrates a series of betrayals. These include his initial self-interested persuasion of Jessica to bring their children north, and his resort to Charco's prostitutes, not for sex but for flattery. Convent-bred, innocent Jessica shows unexpected moral fibre in resisting Cornelius and in condemning the slaughter of Aborigines by prospectors and others. Moved by transitory guilt, Cornelius writes an exposé for *The Charco Herald* of "appalling acts of carnage directed against the indigenous people" (31). The paper rejects the article and sacks him, while *The Queenslander* and southern papers also refuse to print. Years later, in a final betrayal, Cornelius deserts his family without a word and takes the steamer for Brisbane. Astley thus refashions O'Conner's rendition of family break-up in the context of early tropical mining.

In addition, *It's Raining in Mango* radically transforms the boy's perspective that we have traced through its changes in Idriess's autobiographical tales, Becke's Empire fiction, Campion's *Mo Burdekin* and O'Conner's *The Irishman*. When Jessica's and Cornelius's young son, George, wanders off the track to Byerstown he happens upon "a bonefield where the half-rotted bodies of a dozen black men lay in a fly-swarmed putrescence" (29). These are the victims of a dispersal: "Above his head a hand stuck up from a crevice in the rocks, bits of drying skin flapping from the outthrust fingers" (29-30). Viewed through George's eyes, Byerstown, like Charco, is very different from the dirty, vigorous rough-and-tumble that Holthouse holds up for secret approval by male readers. It is even further removed from the misty gold of O'Conner's nostalgic Georgetown. Instead Astley tips the motif over into irony, so that Byerstown resembles a Brueghel painting of civic pandemonium, with hell as a background:

They stayed a week in Byerstown, trapped in the turmoil of new arrivals pouring in from the Palmer. It was the most liberal of educations. Trotting behind his father, who moved through mobs of drunks and brawlers with journalistic detachment, George witnessed the bloodiest of fistfights and a lynching. At night he was kept awake by the screams of beaten women. There seemed to be no police. And through it all he also kept seeing the half-rotted bodies of the blacks and that pleading decayed hand, whose fingers formed a white bone barrier behind which protective grille these other horrors were minimised. (30)

This passage establishes a motif of fingers that weaves like the voice of conscience or the cry of the oppressed through the lives of twentieth-century Laffey's in tropical Queensland.¹¹ While Jessica and Cornelius are arguing over George's exposure to the

¹¹ E.g., "Who had ever counted the burnt fingertips of women testing hot irons? Who? 'It would run into millions,' [Jessica] said to George. 'What would?' 'The fingers. Oh never mind!'" (72-73) After George and Mag Laffey have prevented police from removing the baby of Nelly, an Indigenous friend, "Nelly turned from the sink, her fingers dripping soap and water." (89).

killing field, he enters with his face blackened by stove soot. He thereby imparts to his parents his simple true recognition of the humanity that he shares with those slaughtered. The incident, which deploys the boyish perspective as a weapon in demolishing deception, is an uncompromising reworking of Michael's dawning respect for Split-Nose Alec in *The Irishman*.

Astley radicalises the boy-oriented conventions of this mining *corpus* even further, when she adopts the extreme outsider's perspective of Bidiggi, a twelve-year-old Aboriginal boy. Bidiggi's view of the white men's obsessions produces an ironic undercutting: "These men held shallow dishes that they filled with water and sand and as if they were making ritual in totem dance shook and swilled and emptied again" (39). Soon afterwards, he watches in terror as the white men's "shouting sticks" slaughter the warriors of his tribe, who have attacked out of hunger and desperation (40). When Bidiggi examines his brother's body for a spear wound, not understanding at first that he is dead or what killed him, the irony erupts into tragedy. The sole survivor of the white men's retaliation, Bidiggi gravitates to the Laffey family shack. As he gradually befriends George, the reader's emotions are tugged in opposite directions. Relief at the assuaging of Bidiggi's loneliness balances distress that the gradual infiltration of his customs and language will doom him to live as a fringe-dweller to the new town.

Conclusions

Some people still believe that it's bad luck for a woman to go down a mine. In respect of the tropical Queensland literary tradition considered here, women's exclusion from mines and mining advantaged female authors, because as outsiders who were also distanced by time from the industry's foundation, they understood some aspects more clearly than their male counterparts. Sarah Champion, Elizabeth O'Conner and Thea Astley first brought to readers' notice mining's destructive consequences for wives and families. Champion built on her outsider's perspective when she made a youth's intense drive for mineral discovery the basis of a general meditation on the inordinate power of men's obsessions in a patriarchal world. Astley used the same perspective to satirise the violent dispossession of Aboriginal people, and to paint an unforgettable picture of the suffering that resulted.

However, not all the male writers considered here were insiders to the industry. Stefan von Kotze tried his hand at mining, but fiercely maintained his status as an upper-class European. Probably as a result, his *Sketches* manifest a clarity or bleakness comparable in some respects with Astley's. Furthermore, the writings of male insider authors do not approve industry development, personal enrichment, or escape to uncensored pleasures without reservation. Given the grind, hardships and the dangers inherent in mining, they are in fact as nuanced as one would expect. Both Ernest Favenc as an early observer, and Ion Idriess as a twentieth-century populariser express moral qualms about greed as a motive for mining, and warn of the industry's sacrifices and risks. In fact economic necessity and social sanctions, including above all the rigorous codes accruing to

Connie's fingers, inflamed and infected with chilblains, provoke her adolescent revolt against the madness and cruelty of nuns at her Reeftown school (106-111).

Violinist Will's fingers, maliciously broken by his team members, lead to his refusal to play football, and his temporary expulsion from the Brothers' school (121-24): "Later that evening Will attempted to tell. He could only echo his father's story of the bones, the hands beseeching sky, the sprawl of colonially administered death by the side of a bush track. 'I can't help it,' the boy kept saying. 'I'd never really forgotten the story but I didn't think much about it either. Then when my fingers were snapped it all came back. Nightmares. The lot. I couldn't stop dreaming about it'" (124).

Before he commits suicide, Will Laffey "found his fingers stroking the fruit bowl" (227).

Thinking of his family, Reeve, the last of the Laffeyes, "begins a finger-tally of nutters" (233), before beginning a final trek northwards to Charco and in to the Palmer, where it "all started" (239).

masculinity, may have been more compelling motives for early prospectors in tropical Queensland than dreams of adventure or hopes of easy fortunes.

Recognition of this probability suggests a deeper insight, namely that much of the male-authored mining literature that we have examined aims primarily to reassure against vulnerabilities. Holthouse offers vicarious drinking and sex, and Idriess campfire companionship, certainly as an escape from domesticity, but mostly as solace for working men's powerlessness. Louis Becke's novels and stories seek to instil confidence in young male readers, perhaps living far from the centre of Empire, who faced extreme challenges, not only from non-British races, but also from their own consciences. However, the ultimate solution that such authors offer for male vulnerability is the exemplary image of the hero, an image which this first survey of mining literature in the Queensland tropics has traced through a range of transmutations.

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Industrial Treasure: North Queensland's Mining Heritage

Dr Janice Wegner

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Why does NQ have so much mining heritage?

Since 1860 North Queensland has been one of the most important mining provinces in Australia, and significant on a world scale (I'm defining North Queensland as everything north of Mackay and its hinterland). Pastoralism first spread a thin veneer of settlement over the area and established a few ports, such as Bowen, Burketown, Normanton, Cardwell and Townsville, and a couple of inland towns such as Hughenden and Dalrymple. Agriculture added a few more, like Ingham, Innisfail and Mackay. However the majority of towns were begun by mining and existing towns were heavily boosted, particularly the ports. New ports such as Cairns and Cooktown came into existence, and some other settlements like Atherton were begun to supply the mining fields with food and timber. Not only did the population increase, it was far more evenly spread than today, given that most of the mining fields were inland. After all, in the nineteenth century Charters Towers was Queensland's second biggest city. The following table shows how important the mining industry was to the North:

*Table: percentage of the North Queensland population engaged in mining (Source: C.P. Harris 1984, *Regional Economic Development in Queensland 1859 to 1981 with particular emphasis on North Queensland*, Centre for Research on Federal Financial Relations, Australian National University, Canberra)*

1864	1868	1871	1876	1881	1886	1891	1901	1911	1921	1933	1947	1954	1961
0.4	19.8	34.2	50.3	36.8	12.9	15.3	15.2	15.5	6.1	5.0	3.9	3.9	4.7
1966	1971	1976	1981										
4.5	4.9	6	6.4										

These figures are dominated by gold mining.

In fact it was this population which swung Queensland's decision to join a federated Australia. The south voted against, Central Queensland was fairly evenly split, and North Queensland voted for. Why did they do that? One reason was because the mining fraternity resented Queensland's high customs duties on mining equipment and supplies, and thought they would get a better deal from the Commonwealth. Another was that the North was supplying most of Queensland's exports thanks to mining, and felt that too little of the wealth produced in this area was coming back in the form of government expenditure.

Mining also provided services and infrastructure to the North. Before the gold rushes, roads were formed by their users and the only Government services were mail runs in the more closely settled pastoral areas, an occasional road party, and the Native Mounted Police sent to destroy Aboriginal resistance. As for commercial services, there were a few pubs sprinkled along the major tracks. Only the ports had the services and facilities one came to expect from British settlements in the nineteenth century. Mining however creates almost instant towns, and most offered at least a pub, a store and a butcher's shop. If the mining lasted for more than a few months, better roads would be built by the colonial or (after 1879) local governments, encouraging faster coach services; a police station might be next, followed by a court house. Banks would appear, stores would become specialised, and the growing population might support a hospital, churches and school. If they were lucky, some towns like Ravenswood, Charters Towers, Cloncurry, Forsayth, and Chillagoe would score a railway which in turn established more towns like Mareeba, Julia Creek, Mungana and Almaden. As the mining fields faded, many towns disappeared and services were lost, but not all. Had there been no mining, there would have been far fewer inland towns to become administrative centres like Charters Towers, Croydon, Georgetown, Coen and Cloncurry, and transport and communication networks would have

been sparser and less developed. There was already a telegraph line between Cardwell and the Gulf (near Karumba) built in the late 1860s, put there in the expectation that it would join with the undersea cable to Java and link Queensland with Asia and Europe. Of course the undersea cable went to Darwin, but from this line branched more telegraph lines to mining fields to keep the North in touch with the world.

So, North Queensland rode to prosperity on the mine truck (as Geoffrey Blainey suggests for Australia generally). A very wide range of minerals has been found and exploited here, beginning with copper at Peak Downs and Einasleigh (Richard Daintree's copper mine) in 1862 and 1864 respectively, and gold rushes at Clermont (1861-2), Cape River (1867), Gilberton and Ravenswood (1868), the Etheridge (1870), Charters Towers (1871), the Palmer (1873), Hodgkinson (1876), Coen and Croydon (1886) and Kidston (1907), and a host of smaller fields such as the Woolgar, Wenlock, Ebagoolah, Alice River, Horn Island, Eungella and Balcooma. Copper remained a big part of North Queensland's mining with major discoveries at Cloncurry in 1866 and Chillagoe in 1887. The Cloncurry field also contained Mt Isa, one of the world's great mines, found in 1923. It was discovered so late because it was silver-lead, and most of the miners were looking for copper.

Silver was mined extensively between the 1870s and early 1890s, encouraged by a silver boom in the 1880s. Districts included Silver Valley and Montalbion on the western Tablelands behind Cairns, Argentine and Ewan near Townsville, Totley, Sellheim, Mt Wyatt and Dreghorn near Charters Towers/Ravenswood, and Lawn Hills near Burketown. Lead is often found in association with silver and sometimes with copper, so this mineral was occasionally mined in the nineteenth century but really came into its own in the twentieth century, particularly at Chillagoe and Mt Isa.

Tin was being exploited on the Atherton Tablelands from 1878, with major centres developing at Herberton, Irvinebank and Mt Garnet, and the miners soon found more deposits near Cooktown (such as the Annan River and Bloomfield) and smaller fields such as Cannibal Creek south of the Palmer, Kangaroo Hills behind Paluma and Stanhills near Croydon. The tin miners came upon associated minerals such as bismuth, scheelite, molybdenite and wolfram which were exploited as their markets expanded, leading to other mining fields such as Koorboora, Wolfram Camp and Mt Carbine. Zinc was just a nuisance until the early twentieth century, and though it was occasionally mined for its own sake, it wasn't a major part of the region's mining industry until after World War II. Currently the biggest mines are Century on the old Lawn Hills field and Mt Garnet (Kagara).

Lime has been made from limestone at Chillagoe and other places, coral rock on some Great Barrier Reef islands, and shell middens in the Gulf from the 1860s until today. Despite many discoveries, until World War II coal was mined in only a few places, at Blair Athol (1874), Mt Mulligan (1907) and Collinsville and Scottsville (1912). Since the 1960s, of course, the Bowen Basin has become one of the world's largest coal producing areas. Gems have been found in many places, but apart from Agate Creek, mining has been on the fossicking scale. More modern minerals have included uranium, with the biggest find at Mary Kathleen being mined from 1958, though deposits near Mt Isa (1954), Maureen near Georgetown and Ben Lomond near Townsville (1971) were tested. Other additions to northern mining are bauxite at Weipa (1961) and Gove; nickel from Greenvale (1967); silica sand, with the world's largest mine at Cape Flattery; phosphate at Phosphate Hill and other places in the Mt Isa area; kaolin at Weipa and Skardon River; and perlite near Chillagoe. Despite the many iron deposits which have been identified since the beginning of settlement, iron ore has also been mined only occasionally, usually as flux for smelters. Cobalt, fluorspar and mica have also been occasionally mined.

What's left of 150 years of mining?

Anyone who has visited most of North Queensland's mining fields knows there are lots of standing stamp batteries in the bush. This might lead you to believe they are quite common. They aren't – because North Queensland has most of Australia's remaining stamp batteries. On nearly every mining field you'll find old boilers, steam engines (usually incomplete or in pieces), fragments of other equipment, and traces of towns, roads and causeways, market gardens, houses and camp sites. The goldfields were cosmopolitan places so some of these remains are not European. A lot of work has been done and is still being done on Chinese heritage, but more needs to be done on the Singhalese (Sri Lankan), "Malays" (usually Indonesian), "Manilla men" (Filipinos), and "Afghans" (mostly Pakistanis) whom we know were on the fields too. North Queensland's mining fields are extraordinarily rich in mining heritage and far more research needs to be done to find, analyse and explain it.

Why has mining heritage survived?

Economic decline and isolation

Mining heritage survived for the usual reason heritage survives: because the region fell on economic hard times. Gold mining declined after the First World War, despite a brief revival in the 1930s Depression, because for most of the period the price of gold was usually fixed. Wartime inflation ate away its value until currencies were freed from the gold standard and the price of gold could fluctuate. Both world wars also made mining supplies hard to get and disrupted metal markets. Base metal mining has always been chancy as world prices dip and rise so quickly, but except for tin, it has increasingly become a big company's game. Big company mining doesn't lead to the population levels of small mining, with some exceptions such as Mary Kathleen, because modern mining methods using big machinery and open cuts will strip out ores far quicker and with far fewer miners. Fly in-fly out is just the latest development in this trend. Small mining also became harder as the more accessible deposits were worked out. Even the North's remaining small tin miners gave up after tin prices crashed in 1984, and now there are few small miners left, mainly on alluvial gold. As mining declined, people and businesses left except for a small number servicing the cattle industry and transport links. The deepest trough was the 1940s and 1950s. Towns like Forsayth, Ravenswood and Irvinebank became little more than a pub, a store, and some Government services like a police station or a railway station. If they were lucky enough to be Shire centres, like Georgetown, Croydon, Charters Towers and Coen, they fared a little better. Some towns declined to the point where they became station homesteads, such as Mt Mulligan, Kidston and Palmerville. Other mining settlements were abandoned altogether and while North Queensland doesn't have a Bodie, the intact abandoned mining town in California, it does have some fascinating abandoned mining town sites. Without the population there was little incentive to keep up transport infrastructure so roads and even railways disappeared.

Tourism

Since the 1970s, better roads (especially the Beef Roads) and modern technology have made life in these communities a little easier, and tourism has boosted their economies. However those long periods of decline and the isolation of many former mining areas meant they became static, preserving many buildings and structures long enough for them to become attractive to tourists – so there was now an economic reason not to get rid of them. Towns like Charters Towers, Ravenswood, Herberton and Croydon are making their mining heritage accessible to tourists.

Lack of pressure from other industries

The cattle industry in North Queensland has also never been a wealthy industry so there wasn't the money around for new buildings. Pastoralists had no reason to 'clean up' old mining areas so they were likely to be left alone thanks to the isolation and bad roads, apart from some recycling by graziers and occasionally, farmers (e.g. battery stamp stems used as cattle grids, or tobacco barns made from bricks scavenged from former smelters). Some pastoralists have 'adopted' mining remains and keep watch over them. Scrap metal merchants raided the old equipment, but a lot remained.

Recycling

Another reason for the abundance of mining heritage is the relative poverty of the miners. Overseas capital was attracted to North Queensland in the 1880s and 1890s, but mining has its fashions and there were plenty of new and booming mining districts worldwide competing for the attention of investors from the 1890s onwards. Except for isolated examples like Mt Isa, there wasn't a lot of money coming in from outside the region, so miners tended to re-use existing equipment. Most mines had a short life so there was usually plenty to choose from, much of it abandoned. Recycling second hand equipment has therefore preserved a lot of older mining machinery, especially that equipment which came under the Mining Machinery Advances Act of 1906. The State government wanted closer settlement of inland Queensland which was best done by small miners and their families. Under this Act, it encouraged small miners by loaning them money to buy equipment, with the equipment providing the security for the loan. Of course mining is an uncertain game and a lot of that equipment was seized by the Department of Mines for non-payment of loans (or later, hire purchase agreements). This equipment was then circulated around the mining fields through new loans and agreements, or leased to miners. The result of all these factors is that older styles of machinery were kept in service longer than you'd expect. Mines like the General Grant were using nineteenth century technology in the 1930s, and the Tyrconnell and Emuford batteries were relying on such technology into the 1980s. Abandoned plant is assisted to survive by the dry inland climate, particularly cast iron. This is why it's never a good idea to put it on display on a well watered lawn.

Adaptation

Some mining structures have been adapted to other uses. The most obvious example is mining dams such as those at Cumberland and Durham near Georgetown, and Montalbion near Irvinebank, now used to water cattle and for recreation. The Mt Garnet mine's assay house was restored as a private house before being adapted as the office for the new mine.

Families preserving their heritage

Another reason was that former mining families who stayed on (usually in some other occupation) often had some ownership of the mining heritage and acted as caretakers, often in the hope that the value of the mines would rise again. Emuford Battery is one example. The Daltons in Kidston kept an eye on the Kidston Battery until the town was bought up by the Kidston mine.

The heritage movement

More recently, people are becoming fascinated by North Queensland's mining past and have acted to save its heritage, such as the National Trust of Queensland in Charters Towers and Mt Isa, Chris Weirman in Croydon, John Fitzgerald at Emuford, and the work of the Palmer River Preservation Society and Jack Skinner on the Palmer. Several mining sites have been put on the Queensland Heritage Register (began in 1990) which offers them legal protection. Regrettably the industry itself does little to help preserve its own

past apart from sparing some heritage structures from destruction in accordance with heritage consultants' reports. One outstanding exception is the work of Carpentaria Gold to repair the six mining smokestacks in Ravenswood as well as the School of Arts building, in conjunction with the Dalrymple Shire Council.

How significant is it?

North Queensland's mining heritage is world class. How many mining regions still have two batteries capable of operation like the Tyrconnell near Dimbulah and the Venus Mill in Charters Towers? (The Tyrconnell was a goldmine, found in 1876. It went through several stamp batteries – most of the present plant was installed in the 1930s and 1940s, but all of the technology is nineteenth century. It was last worked in the 1980s.) (The Venus Battery was built in 1872, updated in 1900, became a State battery in 1919, crushed ore from as far away as Cairns, and stopped commercial crushing in 1973).

How many have batteries that are virtually intact from their working days like the Wild Irish Girl on the Palmer and Emuford on the Irvinebank-Petford road? (The Wild Irish Girl crushed gold ore for small miners. It was erected 1894 and stopped crushing sometime in the 1970s. Its last owner was Sam Elliott, who died at the mill.)

(The Emuford battery was mainly for tin. The plant was brought in from a defunct mine nearby in 1911, and was occasionally added to but its owners never threw anything away! It was owned for most of its life by one family, the Greens; it stopped crushing when tin prices collapsed in 1985).

How many mine sites are as intact as the Great Northern at Herberton and the General Grant at Kingsborough, near Dimbulah? (The General Grant was a gold mine, found 1878. Its main period of working was 1893-1910, though it worked intermittently afterwards; it has very rare equipment especially its winder, an intact Babcock and Wilcox boiler, and a Schran air compressor.) (The Great Northern was the first tin discovery Herberton, and provided the start for the storekeeping firm of Jack and Newell. It was mined from 1879 to the early 1950s.)

There are also mine and mill sites with their main equipment intact even if some elements are gone, including the Iguana Consols at Croydon, a prospecting shaft put down 1915-18 to find the lost Iguana reef by Freddie Cuthbert; its equipment originally came from other Croydon and Charters Towers mines. The Richmond near Croydon is another (it was a gold mine, found 1886 and worked by small miners on and off for its very rich specimens; the current stamp battery was erected in 1913 from second hand equipment around Croydon. It crushed tin towards the end sometime in the 1920s). Others worthy of note are the Aspasia near Georgetown (worked 1916 intermittently to 1952 on gold/silver/lead ore), and the Alexandra Mill on the Palmer (the mine was found in 1878, and had very rich gold ore but didn't make much profit because of isolation; its equipment and battery were brought in during 1895, but the mine closed in 1898 and the battery frame was scavenged in 1940). Others include the Lukin on the Cape, the Tyrconnell Mine referred to above, and the Kidston Battery.

North Queensland also has two remaining headframes (poppet heads) of the old style favoured by Australian miners, as opposed to the A-frame introduced by European and American miners. One (made of steel) is at the Vulcan mine at Irvinebank, which was found by a party of Italians in 1888 but by various means became owned by base metals entrepreneur John Moffat and was the mainstay of his empire until the 1920s. A strike at this mine began the Australian Workers Association, which later became the Queensland

section of the AWU. The other headframe is at Dobbyn, near Cloncurry, and was moved there from Charters Towers.

The region has had a number of smelters, the most spectacular at Kuridala and Mt Cuthbert on the Cloncurry field. However slag heaps, smokestacks, foundations of stone, brick or concrete and terraces, and remains of smelters, flues and machinery can be found on many sites, such as Mt Molloy, Chillagoe, and Mt Garnet.

There are also some extraordinary mining precincts. The red sandstone cliffs of Mt Mulligan provide a spectacular backdrop to the former coal mine and its structures, and the cemetery which has most of the victims of one of Australia's worst coal mining accidents in 1921. The townscape also has many building remains, though the only standing building is the former hospital, now a station homestead catering to tourists. The Palmer goldfield around Maytown is famous for the heritage of its 17,000-odd Chinese miners, including dams and water races, pig ovens, forges, camp sites, lone graves and cemeteries. It is also a graveyard of early mining technology – steam engines and boilers, pumps, stamp batteries – and has a number of abandoned townsites.

Why don't more people know this? (Why is it undervalued?)

The first problem is that most people of the region are cut off from their mining tradition. Mining has a lower profile in the community now and given that most people are excluded from mining sites for safety reasons, it is often a mysterious activity that happens somewhere Out There, unless of course you're working in the industry. It is also still overcoming the bad image it gained during the 1960s to 1980s when it came under attack from the environmental movement, even though miners now are very environmentally conscious. There is less understanding of the important role it has played in forming the North Queensland of today.

The second reason is closely related: we tend to value heritage when we understand the history behind it. We don't even teach Australian history in the schools, let alone the history of our own region.

The third is an underestimation of the economic potential of mining heritage. Some towns have capitalised on their mining heritage for the tourist trade. However the North has yet to tap into the specialised markets of mining, industrial and engineering tourism, which are better understood in Britain and the U.S.

What threatens its future?

There are several threats to mining heritage.

1. The earliest response of those wanting to tap into the tourist trade, i.e. collect moveable heritage items and put them in a vacant lot in town, usually with inadequate interpretation. Herberton, Chillagoe, Croydon and Ravenswood have examples. Doing this does not 'rescue' items – it lessens the value of heritage mining sites and deprives the moved items of their history and therefore their heritage value. Croydon has since worked out that it's better to take tourists on tours of heritage places – they spend more time and therefore more money in the town, and you don't destroy the heritage value of the equipment by taking it out of context. The Council is also working to better protect and interpret the items that were brought into town, in line with museum practice.
2. Continued mining by unsympathetic or uninformed miners. It can be easy to destroy important parts of a heritage site simply because you don't realise what's

there. My favourite example is a boiler house and its chimney in Ravenswood, both carefully preserved by the mining company, with the low concrete flue which joins them bulldozed over. In recent years this has become less common with the requirement to assess environmental impacts of further mining on heritage places, but mining companies can't be forced to preserve heritage unless it's of such value that it is worth being nominated to the Queensland Heritage Register.

3. Simple decay. Fixing this can be costly, and while a restored building can be put to use, conserved industrial heritage is less obviously useful. The saddest case is the London North headframe at Ravenswood, until recently the oldest surviving timber headframe in Australia and an extraordinarily rare structure. Despite getting a grant to conserve it, the local Shire Council chose to let it collapse and planned to build a replica instead, citing safety concerns.
4. Souveniring and 'collecting'. The 4WD boom has ended the isolation of many sites and taking items away is helping to destroy heritage. The small carved headstones sometimes found on Chinese miners' graves, and any part of equipment with the machinery brand names on them, seem to be favourite targets. Desecration of graves, and the removal of information that can tell us more about our mining heritage sites, seems to be a senselessly destructive type of collecting.

Our mining heritage is worth looking after. It recalls an era that formed many of our towns and transport links, and an industry which helped Queensland get to its feet as a colony and a state. It is a source of history which has barely been touched and has much to tell us. Through tourism, it is an economic resource with its best days yet to come. Finally, it is fascinating in its own right, and worth seeing for itself.

Janice Wegner

Livestock and Landscape: A history of the settlement of Queensland by cattle

Dr Claire Brennan

**Lecture presented by Dr Brennan at CityLibraries - Thuringowa
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This lecture aspires to put cattle into history, and to reveal how significant they have been to the settlement of Europeans in Queensland. Doing so requires us to consider both physical and aesthetic aspects of these beasts, and doing so allows us to recognise how important they remain in the way we think about our place, in Queensland and in Australia. In this lecture, while I will be speaking about Australia more generally at times, I will focus on the history of Queensland. In part, this is a response to the requirements of this lecture series, but it is also a response to the very interesting history associated with this state, and with the tropical north of this state. Environmentally, this is a very interesting part of the continent, and the settlement of this place, and the response by new inhabitants to the environments they encountered, is fascinating.

Introduced species of animals were important from the start of attempts at European settlement on the Australian continent. Cattle arrived with the First Fleet, as did sheep and a range of other species familiar to British convict settlers. However these animals did not reach Australia from Britain, they were picked up at the Cape Colony en route. The First Fleet expedition made official purchases of one bull, one bull-calf, seven cows, one stallion, three mares and three colts, as well as rams, ewes, goats, boars and breeding sows during its time at the Cape. Officers of the expedition also purchased animals on their own account. While the basic description of these animals by type makes them sound familiar, these were animals purchased at the southern tip of Africa, and they were not British beasts. Ian Parsonson, a veterinary scientist, has estimated that the sheep probably belonged to fat-tailed breeds, and that the cattle were at least partially of Zebu blood.¹ As a result, the animals that arrived in Australia with the First Fleet would not have looked like animals of the same species originating in Britain. For a while animal imports to Australia, brought by naval ships, also had their origins in the Cape Colony or India.² The establishment of livestock species in Australia depended on such importations, and on purchase of animals from ships that had made particularly swift passages to Australia, and so had left-over stores, in the form of living beasts, to sell. As a result the earliest cattle to establish themselves on this continent were not familiar British beasts at all.

That buying of left-over animal stores from ships reaching Sydney soon after its settlement is a clue to the possibility of even earlier cattle contact with Australia. Such ship-based animals had earlier visited Australia - ships of exploration contained numerous animals as demonstrated by Captain Cook's Endeavour. Cook left European poultry, sheep and cattle (black cattle, in the phrase of the time) at Tahiti during his first voyage to the Pacific in an attempt to establish those species there. The cattle survived, but the poultry and sheep did not become established.³ During his second voyage Cook deposited pigs in New Zealand.⁴ Cook's account of the Endeavour voyage mentions the expedition's pigs during his unwilling stay in tropical Australia, but I have not yet established whether he released animals in this region.⁵ They certainly accompanied him

¹ Ian Parsonson, *The Australian Ark: A History of Domesticated Animals in Australia*. Melbourne: CSIRO publishing, 1998, p.2.

² *Ibid*, p.93.

³ James Morrison, *The journal of James Morrison, boatswain's mate of the Bounty: describing the mutiny & subsequent misfortunes of the mutineers: together with an account of the Island of Tahiti*. London: Golden Cockerel Press, 1935, p.113.

⁴ M. J. Ineson, 'A Comparison of the Parasites of Wild and Domestic Pigs in New Zealand' in *Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New Zealand* Volume 82, 1954-55, pp.580-581

⁵ Entry for 19 July 1770 in Cook's daily log of his journey. The original manuscript is held by the National Library of Australia, the transcript consulted is held on the National Library's website at <http://southseas.nla.gov.au/journals/cook/contents.html>

and pigs at least set hoof in the region that was to become Queensland accompanied by Cook.

Cattle accompanied European ships to the Pacific, and to Australia. Establishing a European society at Sydney without European animals would have been unthinkable, but it is perhaps more curious how early cattle also infiltrated Queensland. Animals had travelled the coast on ship, they also accompanied land-based exploring parties. In our region, the tropical north of what was to become Queensland, cattle accompanied explorers as a matter of necessity. The presence of animals on exploring expeditions is perhaps overlooked. I have looked, admittedly only briefly, for images of explorers posing beside their cattle, but I have not found any - although I did find images of some of the cattle that accompanied Major Thomas Mitchell. Despite this lack of imagery, journal accounts reveal that intrepid explorers were almost universally accompanied by cattle. And so the start of human land-based expeditions of exploration in the region can also be seen as the start of the conquest of Queensland by cattle.

Ludwig Leichhardt's successful expedition in Northern Australia set off as a party of sixteen head of cattle, seventeen horses, and only ten men. The indispensability of the different members of the party can perhaps be judged by Leichhardt's recorded concerns. In his introduction to his published journal he wrote that: "it may readily be imagined that my anxiety to secure our horses was very great, because the loss of them would have put an immediate stop to my undertaking."⁶ The usefulness of his horses was again highlighted on 18 October when two members of his party failed to find their way back to camp as dark was falling. Leichhardt placed more faith in the horses' navigational abilities than those of the men, noting that: "If they had simply given the bridle to their horses, they would have probably brought them back without delay".⁷ The significance of the non-humans to the expedition was also indicated by the time taken to search for bovine or equine members of the expedition who went missing. Over the course of the expedition a great deal of time was spent looking for cattle that had wandered back towards a previous campsite during the night, or horses that chose to stray. In contrast, on 3 November two human members of the party were deliberately turned away. Their departure was prompted by Leichhardt's failure to foresee just how vital cattle would be to his venture. The men were forced to leave the party and turn back to civilisation as Leichhardt had miscalculated the ease with which he would be able to feed his expedition while travelling.⁸ Thus the cattle that set off with the party became essential for its sustenance as well as for its motive power, and it is perhaps not surprising that Leichhardt devotes significant passages of his journal to descriptions of the difficulties faced by and caused by his cattle, as well as the way in which they dictated the expedition's early route.

Leichhardt's cattle requirements were not extraordinary; in fact he had attempted to travel light. By the time that Major Thomas Mitchell came to explore tropical Australia he was a seasoned campaigner and he knew the value of cattle. When his expedition to tropical Australia set out in 1845 it included twenty-nine men (including Mitchell), eighty bullocks, thirteen horses, and 250 sheep.⁹ As with Leichhardt, the requirements of the animals had a significant effect on the behaviour of the party in terms of time spent locating members of the expedition who had strayed, and in terms of the routes that could be followed, and

⁶ Ludwig Leichhardt, *Journal of an Overland Expedition in Australia, from Moreton Bay to Port Essington, A distance of upwards of 3000 miles, during the years 1844-1845*. London: T & W Boone, 1847. p.xx.

⁷ *Ibid*, p.15.

⁸ *Ibid*. p.26.

⁹ Mitchell, Thomas. *Journal of an expedition into the interior of tropical Australia, in search of a route from Sydney to the Gulf of Carpentaria*. London: Longmans, 1848, pp.6-7.

the periods of rest that were needed. The cattle recur not just in the written account of his journey, Mitchell is unusual in including the animals in some, although only a small proportion, of the images that accompany his accounts of exploration. Of particular interest is the image titled 'First Use of the Boats', which shows Mitchell's bullocks drinking from the expedition's boats. The situation is explained within the journal:

16th February.- Mr. Kinghorne set out with a man of our party to examine Duck Creek, a native boy having told him that water was to be found in it lower down. I sent back early this morning, our native, with the store-keeper, some of the men, and the shepherd, to look for the lost sheep in the reeds, and Yuranigh fortunately found them out, still not very far from the spot where they had been separated from the rest of the flock. Our greatest difficulty in these marshes was the watering of the cattle. We had still the Macquarie at hand - deep, muddy, and stagnant - not above thirty feet wide, the banks so very soft that men could scarcely approach the water without sinking to the knees. We could water the horses with buckets, but not the bullocks. The great labour of filling one of the half-boats, and giving the cattle water by that means, was inevitable, and this operation took up three hours of the morning;"¹⁰

This quotation demonstrates the way in which the men of the expedition were forced to serve the cattle, and the way in which the abilities of the cattle dictated the movements of the party. Mitchell's journal made regular reference to his animals: to the way that their needs dictated his travel, and to their impact on water sources, which they tended to exhaust.

The ill-fated Kennedy expedition through Northern Australia also set off with a large number of animals. The Kennedy expedition set off in May 1848 with thirteen men (including Kennedy), twenty-eight horses, one hundred sheep, and some dogs. Kennedy chose to equip his party with horses and sheep, rather than the dual-purpose bullock, and so this expedition falls outside the scope of this lecture. It might be worth noting that only three of the men of Kennedy's party survived the expedition, and that their experiences coping with the North Queensland rainforest, and of guiding sheep through that region, were deeply unpleasant.¹¹ I do not think cattle could have saved them.

In contrast to Kennedy, Frank and Alexander Jardine set off on their notorious expedition through Northern Australia with large numbers of cattle, and the brothers survived their travels. This expedition was centred on cattle as it was meant to supply the new European settlement at Somerset on Cape York with an on-going beef supply, a task in which the brothers succeeded. Considering that central reason for their expedition it is not surprising that their account of their journey regularly notes the ways in which the brothers and their men had to serve their cattle. The expedition set off with ten humans, forty-one horses, a mule, and about 250 head of cattle, composed of bullocks and pregnant cows.¹² Thus the actual number of cattle present during the course of the journey fluctuated as animals were killed for food, cows gave birth to calves, calves were killed for food when they couldn't keep up, cows were lost looking for lost or dead calves, animals died from eating poisonous plants, and animals drowned. The speed and course

¹⁰ Ibid, p.61.

¹¹ Sanderson, Rachel L. "Tangled visions: changing scientific understandings of the North Queensland rainforests, 1770-1990." James Cook University, 2005. pp47-55

¹² Jardine, Frank. *Narrative of the overland expedition of the Messrs. Jardine, from Rockhampton to Cape York, Northern Queensland compiled from the journals of the brothers, and edited by Frederick J. Byerley.* Brisbane: J. W. Buxton, 1867. p.7.

of the Jardine expedition were dictated by the needs and abilities of the animals, the very fact of their expedition was triggered by a European settlement's need for cattle.

The three expeditions for which complete records exist are clearly concerned with establishing cattle on a more permanent basis in Queensland. Leichhardt, Mitchell and the Jardines regularly record their assessment of the suitability of land for pastoral stations, and they are sometimes followed, sometimes preceded by cattle coming to stay, accompanied by pioneer pastoralists, or escaped from pioneer pastoralists and running wild. These three expeditions relied on their cattle for sustenance and for muscle power, that pattern was followed by European settlers in the North. Early settlement relied on animal power, and horse-power was supplied not only by horses. Bullock teams were slower than their horse equivalent, but more powerful and better able to cope with rough roads. They were also easier to keep, and less demanding in terms of the nutritional value of their food as their digestive systems are hardier. Their sheer muscle power was essential to European enterprise in the region. Cattle accompanied explorers, and settled down with pioneers.

Animals also served less practical ends. Cattle were significant to settler societies not just for their physical attributes but also for their aesthetics. The explorers in their accounts associated cattle with settlement, as when Leichhardt's published journal noted that a particular set of cattle tracks and dung were the westernmost that he had encountered, and must mark the edge of European civilisation in Australia.¹³ Similarly the Jardines' account places emphasis on stock as a sign of settlement: "Already have our hardy pioneers driven their stock out as far as the Flinders, Albert, Leichhardt, and Nicholson Rivers, the Flinders and Cloncurry having been stocked along their length for some time past."¹⁴ Three of the landscape images from Mitchell's journal include livestock, and they appear to act as symbols of either actual or potential European settlement. The last of these images, titled "St George's Bridge", marked the expedition's return to the edge of European civilisation in Australia, and it includes a clearly visible flock of sheep. Whether those sheep belonged with the expedition, or with the region, in the image they act as markers of settlement and civilisation.

Perhaps even more effectively than sheep, cattle were a mark of settlement, and familiar British species acted as a sign that the Australian continent could be transformed into a new home for British people. The conflict over this settlement was regularly played out on bovine bodies. Aboriginal people, in all regions of Australia at times chose to resist encroachment onto their land through the spearing of stock. Settlers at the time complained of profligate spearing that seemed to kill animals without intending to use them for food. And they complained bitterly and with some anguish.¹⁵ I suspect that the spearing of these animals was a deliberate rejection of both them and their human familiars, as well as a statement about land ownership. While European settlers might not have credited Aboriginal people with such a sophisticated symbolic language I think both Europeans and Aboriginal people recognised the significance of familiar species to European settlement both here in Queensland and elsewhere in Australia. Animals were used by Australian settlers as a means of claiming ownership of land and establishing

¹³ Leichhardt, p.11.

¹⁴ Jardine, p.x.

¹⁵ An example of spearing in Victoria: George Faithfull, "George Faithfull," in *Letters from Victorian Pioneers, being a series of papers on the early occupancy of the colony, the aborigines, etc. addressed by Victorian pioneers to His Excellency Charles Joseph La Trobe, Lieutenant Governor of the colony of Victoria. Edited with an introduction and notes by C. E. Sayers.* ed. C. E. Sayers, Melbourne: William Heinemann Ltd., 1969. p.219.

property rights when dealing with indigenous people, when dealing with each other, and when dealing with colonial government.¹⁶ Animals were, to some degree, fences staking claims—they were used to signal land ownership and to claim that land improvement required by colonial ideology and by law was being undertaken. The situation has been recognised in the settlement of North America, where there was a close identification between colonist and domesticated animal and the presence of even a scraggly cow wandering in the woods somehow meant that settlement had happened.¹⁷ And though the lack of real fences caused problems when trying to control the movement and behaviour of ovine and bovine colonists animals were easier to use than fences when quickly staking a claim to land.

That use of familiar animals to stake a claim to ownership and to establish a sense of order and homeliness is reflected in the art of the colonial period. The Tasmanian artist John Glover's famous 1835 work *My Harvest Home* closely connects European settlement, productivity, new forms of land use, and the muscle power and presence of cattle. Queensland was settled later, and without the close cropping that occurred in Tasmania from early on, but colonial art here also included livestock, and, as with Mitchell's images, artists working in Queensland could use animals to indicate the transformation of wilderness into civilisation. Examples can be found in the work of Conrad Martens, who toured Queensland and New South Wales during the 1850s. Martens toured in the hope of obtaining commissions from landowners pleased with his sketches, and it was a successful ploy. As a result the images he produced have the endorsement of successful pioneers eager to record the spread of civilisation within Australia. As an example, his 1852 work *Canning Downs* deliberately records progress on that station, including a progression of buildings that demonstrate solidity and deliberate improvement. A herd of cows is clearly visible and the presence of the animals is an important aspect of the transformation of the landscape and of the successful settlement of the region.¹⁸

But cattle weren't important only in terms of establishing a change in emotional ownership of land, and of establishing new bounds for civilisation, they also changed the land itself. The settlement of Queensland by cattle involved very real environmental changes, caused by the cattle themselves and by human beings seeking to accommodate cattle in their new surroundings.

The mere presence of cattle changed the land of Australia. Eric Rolls, a farmer environmental historian, has described the impact of European animals on Australia beautifully:

The soil had a mulch of thousands of years. The surface was so loose you could rake it through the fingers. No wheel had marked it, no leather heel, no cloven hoof - every mammal, humans included, had walked on padded feet. Digging sticks had prodded it, but no steel shovel had ever turned a full sod. Our big animals did not make trails. Hopping kangaroos usually move in scattered company, not in damaging single file like sheep and cattle. The plentiful wombats each maintained several burrows, so there were no well-used runs radiating from one centre as from

¹⁶ John C. Weaver. *The Great Land Rush and the Making of the Modern World 1650-1900*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003. pp.270-2.

¹⁷ Virginia DeJohn Anderson. *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. p.45.

¹⁸ Copies of some of Martens' works and biographical information is available from the Queensland Art Gallery website http://www.visualarts.qld.gov.au/content/martens_standard.asp?name=Martens_Works

a rabbit warren. Every grass-eating mammal had two sets of sharp teeth to make a clean bite. No other land had been treated so gently.¹⁹

Cattle trampled the land and changed it. Studies of the American West have indicated that there cattle and their hooves created the dust for which the region is now famous.²⁰ Quite what happened in Queensland still needs to be explored, but an obvious change brought about by cattle was the change they caused in river banks. These large animals, needing to drink regularly, flattened out the banks of streams and rivers. The explorers had regularly noted the steep banks of the streams and rivers they encountered, the hooves of cattle compacted these regions and changed the nature of rivers and streams, making them more prone to flood - an effect enhanced by the compaction of soil beneath their hooves. Trampled soil lost some of its structure and became less able to act as a sponge and to absorb downpours, meaning that rain runs off as floodwater when previously it had soaked into the soil and trickled into waterways.

As well as these broad impacts on the environment it is worth noting in passing that the introduction of cattle to Queensland also introduced a new source of waste. Australia at the time of European settlement was simply not adapted to dispose of large amounts of cow manure, and so the stench of early cattle settlement was significant. Native dung beetles have evolved to deal with the much smaller quantities of dung produced by native animals, and they were simply overwhelmed by the productivity of cattle. Dung beetles capable of dealing with cow manure were only released in 1967, and were widespread within two years. By 1978 fifty-six different species of dung beetle had been introduced to Australia to cope with the wide range of environments settled by cattle.²¹ The obvious marks of cattle on the landscape have decreased as a result of the work of these beetles.

Cattle and their potential shaped settlement in the North, and Townsville is a nice example of this process. Townsville was established as a port for export of the cattle products of its hinterland. In particular, the establishment of the town was prompted by the existence of Woodstock Station, and the need for a reliable port for export of its products. The station was established by John Melton Black and Townsville historian Dorothy Gibson-Wilde has noted Black's use of cattle to claim land, and his significance to founding Townsville.²² The Ross, and its port, were far more reliable than the temperamental Burdekin, and it was to found a port to service this station that Townsville was established.

Cattle have also affected the landscape of Queensland through human eagerness to provide them with water and help them with their settlement of central and western Queensland. The Great Artesian was first tapped in 1878 at Bourke, and widespread drilling followed. The discovery of water underground was used to allow the extension of the pastoral industry to inland areas.

Peak water extraction occurred around 1915, and most of the water that was brought to the surface went to waste.²³ Tapping this resource had broad environmental

¹⁹ Eric Rolls, "The nature of Australia," in *Ecology & Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies*, ed. Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997.

²⁰ Fred Pearce, "Histories: How cowboys choked the American West" *Newscientist*, 5 April 2008, issue 2650, pp.48-9.

²¹ M. Tyndale-Biscoe. 'Australia's introduced dung beetles: original releases and distributions'. *CSIRO Entomology Technical Report*. No. 62. 1996.

²² Dorothy Gibson-Wilde. *Gateway to a golden land: Townsville to 1884*, Townsville: History Dept., James Cook University, c1984, pp.24-7.

²³ Randall Cox, Alastair Barron (eds). *Great Artesian Basin: Resource Study Summary*, Brisbane: Great Artesian Basin Consultative Council, 1998. p.7.

consequences. Pressure in the natural springs, and at established bores, dropped as more and more water was extracted, and as a result legislation was passed in the states that shared the resource. However significant environmental change was already underway. Natural spring areas had been compromised by the reduced water flow available to them. Wasteful open bore drains allowed the spread of woody weeds into new areas, caused problems with soil salinity, and led to changes in soil structure and erosion. In the rangelands few areas are now more than 10km from an artificial source of water, and that allows cattle to graze widely, as was intended by those drilling the bores. It also allows kangaroos and feral animals to range through these areas, and has caused some species to become extinct as predator species are allowed into areas previously too arid for them.²⁴ Vegetation patterns have changed because of the new availability of water, and because of grazing patterns of livestock which pushed some preferred plant species to local extinction. In addition vegetation change to promote grazing was encouraged by both human beings and the behaviour of the cattle themselves. Insects and birds that had thrived in the old, arid inland have found themselves under pressure because of this large scale adaptation of the inland to suit cattle. As with the explorers, pastoralists are the servants of cattle and have successfully changed the landscape to suit them.

Cattle also have an effect on water resources in the region after their deaths. Townsville's boiling down works, established in 1866, was situated on the river. The first animals to enter the works were cattle, although cattle were later supplanted by sheep as pastoralists found that species less adapted to life in the north. The Ross River works closed in 1870, although another boiling down works operated at Alligator Creek 1879-1884.²⁵ The waste products of these plants would have been even more unpleasant than the products they set out to produce, and they would have been disposed of in the handy waterway. These works were later followed by meatworks, also on those waterways - the Alligator Creek meatworks opened in 1890, in Townsville a freezing works opened in 1892. The location on a waterway was necessary for two reasons - waterborne transport removed the saleable products of these works, and water removed the unsaleable products. As a result cattle significantly changed the water quality of these waterways, and there were complaints about the pervasive smell of the meatworks in the 1890s.²⁶ Waterborne waste, not exclusively from these sources, also attracted crocodiles to Townsville. Cattle, both alive and dead, re-shaped the Queensland environment as they settled it.

And they did settle in, and have continued to supply the meatworks with its raw materials. However, the animals that enter the works now are significantly different from those that entered it even fifty years ago. I promised to return to ideas about the aesthetics of cattle, and so I shall. Cattle are beautiful creatures, and colonial artworks demonstrate the way that they could be used by settlers - in art and in life - to establish a sense of well-being and belonging in a new place. In terms of the history of animal breeding, Australia was settled at a pivotal time as notions of innate livestock 'type' emerged and recognised breeds were established. Previously it had been thought that environment was an overwhelming influence on the characteristics of animals, thus the descendents of animals imported from one county to another in Britain would resemble the local animals rather than their own ancestors. Constant importation of stud animals was required, as their

²⁴ Ibid, pp.10-11.

²⁵ Dawn May. *Arctic regions in a torrid zone: the history of the Ross River Meatworks, Townsville, 1892-1992*. Townsville, Qld.: Department of History and Politics, James Cook University of North Queensland, c1990, pp.2-3, p.8.

²⁶ Ibid, p.31-2.

desirable characteristics would disappear in the new environment.²⁷ These ideas changed only in the late-eighteenth century, and that change is generally associated with the work of Robert Bakewell between 1764 and 1789 - Bakewell is most famously associated with his improved breeds of longhorn cattle and New Leicester sheep.²⁸

Bakewell's ideas of 'breed' and of the possibility of 'improvement' caught on quickly in Britain, and dovetailed with the idea of 'improvement' as a justification for colonialism. Images of animals from that period show both owners' pride in their stud cattle and sheep, and the value attached to beasts of a particularly fat and solid frame.²⁹

In any case, by the time of the British colonisation of Queensland cattle type was no longer thought to be determined by environment, and the 'look' of animals had become important. Good breeding had become something to aim for with cattle, and breeds had been set. Stud books, breed societies and agricultural fairs reinforced this process, and the fairs were important as they publicly recognised and gave awards to animals judged to be true to type and an exemplar of their breed.³⁰ Settlement of Queensland occurred after this process had become established, and settlers knew that all not all cattle were created equal. Obviously, while animals were being used as fence posts in colonial regions no control could be exercised over the breeding of their offspring, but agricultural shows and fences were introduced into Queensland, as were animals of definite British origin. Despite that early experience at Sydney, and the early introduction of African and Indian animals, livestock was imported directly from Britain to Australia as soon as settlers were able to do so, and the types of livestock promoted even in tropical regions were clearly tied to British breeds with animals born in Britain held in high esteem. The first agricultural shows in Australia were held in 1822 in Sydney and Hobart, and the Royal Agricultural Society of Queensland started holding shows in 1860, 149 years ago. Settlers in Queensland had access to this means of judging the value of cattle. And shows did give value to individual and to their associated herds. The monetary value of winning prizes and establishing pedigree meant that these shows were very useful to livestock breeders, who could then charge a premium for stud animals they chose to sell.³¹ These animals were seen as being able to improve pastoral station herds, and so to again add value to a holding. The significance of origin and animal conformation to British standards can be seen in the images of animals promoted in Queensland at the time.³² Agricultural shows can be used to demonstrate the continuing significance of cattle aesthetics in Queensland. Queenslanders will be aware that most of Queensland's cattle are no longer the blocky British animals of the nineteenth century. By 1996 over seventy percent of

²⁷ Nicholas Russell, *Like Engend'ring Like: Heredity and animal breeding in early modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. p.16, p.11-15.

²⁸ J. G. Hall and Juliet Clutton-Brock, *Two Hundred Years of British Livestock*. London: British Museum, 1989. p.12.

²⁹ The Museum of English Rural Life has an extensive collection of digitised nineteenth-century livestock paintings at http://www.reading.ac.uk/merl/online_exhibitions/livestok/cat_ls.html

³⁰ Harriet Ritvo has explored the relationship between human perceptions of beauty and breeding for non- or counter-productive characteristics in livestock in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain in Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian age*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1987. pp.45-81

³¹ This process has been explored in: Margaret E. Derry, *Bred for Perfection: Shorthorn Cattle, Collies, and Arabian Horses Since 1800*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

³² For example, advertisements for stud animals in the *Queenslander* newspapers of the late 1880s regularly pictured very solid animals and included text promoting their descent from known British herds or importation from Britain.

Queensland's cattle were purebred or part Brahman, and Queensland was home to approximately half of Australia's cattle.³³

The shift in Queensland's cattle breeds reveals the way that humans judge cattle for aesthetic as well as practical purposes. Queensland has established a number of agricultural Research Stations and centres for Primary Industries and of particular interest is the Belmont station which was established north of Rockhampton in 1952. This station was particularly significant in the development of Brahman cross breeds in Queensland and in promoting them as a better alternative to British breeds. Despite the earliest cattle in Australia arriving from the Cape and India, during the early twentieth century British breeds were certainly the standard cattle for pastoralists in all parts of Queensland, and Belmont had to work hard to gain acceptance for tropical cattle.³⁴ Such cattle were first imported to Queensland by the C.S.I.R.O. in 1933, but it took over forty years for them to be accepted by pastoralists. Earlier, private introductions had also occurred, and not caught on.

Non-British and non-European breeds have definite advantages in the North Queensland environment. Ian Gibson, a tropical cattle enthusiast, argued in 1963 that drought, tropical cattle ticks, and the hot, dry environment had taught northern Australian graziers a set of difficult lessons, "These lessons are the uneconomic practices and the difficulties of management to be found associated with the breeding of pure bred British stock under Northern Australian conditions."³⁵ He went on to argue that hybrid cattle were valuable as productive lean meat animals and resistant to many of the health problems that had plagued cattle in the tropics. Yet Gibson also recorded the hostility, expressed both in person and in the press, of the majority of breeders who were associated with British breeds.³⁶ Queensland pastoralists' unwillingness to accept the benefits of aesthetically unpleasing cattle can be seen through reminiscences about and records of agricultural shows. At the 1938 Rockhampton Show a pen of Brahman crossbreeds came tenth when judged 'on the hoof' but second in the 'Chiller Competition'. Shows often include competitions where animals are judged both alive and slaughtered, and the difference in placing for the Brahman cattle in the two sections of the competition show that their economic worth as carcasses was undermined by the aesthetics of the living animals. In that case the 'hoof' judging was reconsidered.³⁷ The Brahman breed enthusiast Jack Hanley has written about another incident that demonstrated the same underlying antipathy to Brahman cattle: "Hugh [Innes] showed Brahmans at the Brisbane Show of 1957 and he remembers sitting on a bale of hay in the Cattle Pavilion: several of his friends in the Hereford world walked past without speaking - an attitude that was to persist for several years."³⁸ Changing breed affiliation was a difficult process for pastoralists. At the 1953 Townsville Show Brahman cattle breeders were denied entry to the Showgrounds for their animals, except for access to the sale ring. In order to participate in the cattle sales associated with the Show, Brahman breeders had to conceal their animals from public gaze outside the sale ring - they were required to bring their animals

³³ Graham Meadows, *The New Zealand Guide to Cattle Breeds*. Auckland: Reed, 1996. p.31, p.95.

³⁴ *Belmont National Cattle Breeding Station Rockhampton: A Brief Description of the Property & a Report on Research in Progress*. 1960.p.1, p.7

³⁵ Ian Gibson, *Australian Tropical Beef Cattle*. Townsville: Northern Aspect, 1963. p.2.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p.17.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p.27.

³⁸ Jack Hanley, *Santa Gertrudis: big cattle—big country*. Brisbane: Boolarong Press with Santa Gertrudis Breeders' (Aust) Association, 1995. p.44.

in and remove them using covered trucks so that the animals were visible only while actually being sold.³⁹

But at the same time that events at Agricultural Shows demonstrate lingering antipathy to strange looking cattle the shows were also a factor in the acceptance of tropical breeds of cattle in Queensland. The adoption of the American Brahman breed in Australia can be tracked through their participation in Agricultural Shows. And it is worth noting that the tropical cattle in Australia at present owe their origins to the United States, not to Asia. The Brahman is a breed developed in the United States, not in Asia. A fixed Brahman cross-breed, the Santa Gertrudis, was first shown at the Brisbane Show in 1954, and competed there in 1955.⁴⁰ A breed historian noted the significance of such participation: "Following the display of Brahman stud stock at the 1961 [Brisbane] Exhibition, it was noticed that thirty new breeders applied for membership to the Australian Brahman Breeders' Association."⁴¹ Thus Shows, while reinforcing judgements of traditional cattle have also been used by breed enthusiasts to demonstrate the virtues of new types of cattle, and to move breeds from beyond the pale into regular competition and make them familiar to pastoralists.

Pastoralists tend to find it difficult to breed using numbers, rather than to judge animals on their appearance. That farmers prefer show ribbons to figures as a means of judging animals was found in 1990 in a New Zealand study of the use farmers made of agricultural education. That study found that farmers were generally frustrated when breeding by numbers, and were more comfortable using selection criteria they could see.⁴² The same sense of frustration at not being able to judge animals by eye can be found in a 1991 pamphlet for pastoralists in western Queensland. The pamphlet on management practise specifically cautions against culling bulls on conformation, insisting that bull calves should be culled only on growth and characteristics that might interfere with their ability to perform their duty.⁴³ The need to encourage pastoralists in this practise is explained by David Steele of Burlington Station who had adopted breeding by numbers. His assessment of the management system proposed by the pamphlet is that:

The only problem I have is what the bulls look like. We put them back into the herd at two years of age. They always look a bit rough because they're working young and it's not until they're about five- or six-year-old that they start looking like a reasonable sort of animal. That's the hardest part - looking at them all those years and wondering whether they're going to come good. But when I see the cows from those bulls and the store steers we're selling, I know we're breeding good quality stock.⁴⁴

Pastoralist resistance to tropical cattle in the region has been overcome, and Brahman cattle are now a familiar sight in tropical Australia. The process of their adoption has been interesting, and has illustrated the way in which Queenslanders continue to value other species for their looks and symbolism, as well as their ability to provide economic support. Perhaps the final settlement of Queensland by cattle that are more readily at home here is

³⁹ Ibid. p.46.

⁴⁰ Hanley, *Santa Gertrudis*. p.48.

⁴¹ Gibson, photo caption facing p.26.

⁴² Ken Moore. *Learning on the Farm: The Education Background and Needs of New Zealand Farmers*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Education Research, 1990. p.72.

⁴³ John Boorman. *Bonechewing country: cattle management for northern Australia*. Brisbane: Queensland Dept. of Primary Industries, 1991. pp.13-4

⁴⁴ Quoted in Ibid, p.15.

also a sign that human settlers in the Australian tropics are more at home with the environment, and less determined to transform it into a no-longer familiar Britain.

To conclude: cattle have been important to the history of Queensland, and I would suggest that they have been undervalued. It is interesting to consider the roles that other species play in human history, and here I have considered the role of a significant domesticated species in the spread of European settlement in the Australian tropics. Cattle have been significant as their requirements have directed human endeavours and have reshaped the region's environment. And they have been significant because of the role they have played in establishing a sense of belonging for people whose cultural roots were not found in the tropics, or in Australia, and who found that familiar animals could make an unfamiliar landscape more homely. Perhaps the changes in cattle types that occurred in the late twentieth century can be seen as a sign of Queensland settling down and growing into a society that recognises its interesting location and the requirements of its interesting environment.

Claire Brennan

Townsville's Neglected Founder: The Mysterious Mr Black

Dr Dorothy M. Gibson-Wilde

**Lecture presented by Dr Gibson-Wilde at CityLibraries - Thuringowa
11 May 2009**

**SIR ROBERT PHILP LECTURE SERIES
Number 10
11 May 2009**

As the last lecturer in this series, I would like to congratulate Dr Judith Jensen and Ms Trisha Fielding. At a time when the History Department of James Cook University has shrunk and the publishing programme of north Queensland history monographs, founded by the late Professor Brian Dalton, is no longer being funded, north Queensland history appears to have been somewhat sidelined.

This lecture series has helped to focus community interest again on the history of our region, historically one of the most interesting parts of Australia, indeed of the Asia–Pacific rim. I thank Judith and Trisha most sincerely for their roles in initiating and ensuring the success of the series, and I congratulate Townsville City Council for supporting their endeavours.

Now, let us turn to the man who started it all.

This photograph was taken in London in 1986 when, after eight years of searching, we finally discovered the last resting place of Townsville’s true founder.

Image: Photograph of Black’s cremation urn

It was the culmination of research that started, almost accidentally, in 1978 when I agreed to help the National Trust with research to enable the listing of the east Flinders Street Precinct.

Before that, my fields of interest in history were largely centred on overseas topics, so I held the misguided belief that Robert Towns had founded Townsville and that John Melton Black was just his local manager. And here they are:

Image: Portraits of Robert Towns and John Melton Black

My first big shock came when I discovered no one had produced a thoroughly researched and footnoted history of Townsville—and amateur histories that existed left a lot of questions unanswered.

Only two early histories proved to be fairly reliable and consistent. The best was written in 1887 by E.J. Banfield. It was clearly based on two sources—the reminiscences of Black’s colleagues, particularly Andrew Ball, and on early newspapers.

Image: Portrait of Andrew Ball

The other history was written by W.J. Doherty in the 1920s. Doherty was a fascinating character who edited the *Cummins and Campbell Monthly Magazine*, published regularly from about 1925 to the 1950s. He also wrote articles on north Queensland history in the magazine under the pseudonym ‘Viator’.

Neither Banfield nor Doherty referred to government records, or to the correspondence of Robert Towns.

Doherty’s history was based largely on data from the Banfield history, but drew on letters of John Melton Black to Robert Towns that were found in Sydney. In later articles, Doherty also used information supplied by Black’s sons who turned up, to everyone’s great surprise, in 1930.

Both Banfield and Doherty indicated clearly that Black was rather more than just an employee of Towns, and Doherty quite definitely hailed Black as the true founder of Townsville—he had this to say:

“Without the marvellous energy of J.M. Black, it is easy to imagine that Townsville might still possess the present pretensions of Cardwell or Burketown.”

Obvious from these accounts was the fact that Robert Towns spent only a short time in Townsville in 1866—and never returned.

Imagine my consternation. Where would one discover more?

In 1979 no early Townsville papers were known to exist, but the earliest papers in Bowen survived. Papers were not then available on microfilm and still had to be perused in hard copy, so the search actually started in Bowen.

In the *Port Denison Times*, the name of Towns did not appear prominently in the earliest accounts of “the new harbour at Cleveland Bay”. It was Black who was reported; he received bad publicity for founding a port to rival Bowen.

I wondered who had actually owned the pastoral properties surrounding the site of the new port. Locating that information took me to Queensland Archives, and the discovery that all of the properties were claimed solely in the name of John Melton Black—even Woodstock in 1863.

Image: Woodstock Station

Incidentally, in the archives a number of other documents came to light, among them the report of a survey of Cleveland Bay by Captain Heath before the government agreed to allow the new port to open officially. That rather knocked on the head claims that Townsville was not as good a site for a port as Bowen or Cardwell. Another report from Black and Towns had attached to it two plans of the proposed port site which indicated how carefully Black planned the development.

Before approaching backers and the government, he had already surveyed the area, and established the availability of reasonable access to the site from the hinterland.

Robert Towns was not involved in any of this careful assessment which must have predated the end of April 1864.

Next, as several early settlers at Bowen had arrived from Rockhampton, I decided to explore the papers there. This led to a startling discovery—among the folios of early Rockhampton papers were four volumes of the *Cleveland Bay Express*, from its founding in 1866 to 1870. For about seventy years it was believed that these papers no longer existed, so it was rather like discovering treasure trove.

Throughout 1866 and 1867 the Townsville papers referred consistently to the firm Black & Co. As it turned out, the only partners of that firm were John Melton Black and Robert Towns. Clearly, Black had played a leading role.

After analysing all of the data, it emerged that John Melton Black had come north in 1862 on a chartered vessel, the *Napoleon Bonaparte*, with a party of Melbourne friends. He then took up property north of the Burdekin, and set out quite deliberately to discover a more convenient port. He was so sure that a better port existed in the Cleveland Bay region, that he never invested in Bowen land — a fact that could be confirmed by lists of early land sales.

It became plain that Black had planned an almost breathtaking development with meticulous attention to detail.

Before late 1863, he relied on finance from another backer, the Melbourne plumber Longshaw. Black must have sent off a herd of cattle from an agent in Sydney before coming north by boat, because he built up with notable speed a herd which he could use to claim that all of the runs he established were stocked. Even though the *Napoleon Bonaparte* was heavily laden with chooks, horses, supplies and equipment, it could not have carried a herd of cattle.

When Black arrived in Bowen in 1862 he had copies of maps published after Dalrymple's expedition in 1859 to explore the Wickham–Burdekin region. That expedition was financed by a number of Sydney investors including Robert Towns. Some people, therefore, believed that Black must have been given the maps by Towns.

However, according to others, including C.S. Rowe who accompanied Black, the explorer McKinlay had planned to join the party, but was distracted by the search for Burke and Wills. It seems much more likely that Black received the Dalrymple maps from McKinlay.

How then did Towns become involved? The answers lie in the Towns letters held in the Mitchell Library in Sydney, and in the Brooks papers, copies of which are held in the National Library in Canberra.

This is a silhouette of Robert Brooks.

Image: Silhouette of Robert Brooks

He was Towns's mentor in London. I would recommend to anyone interested, the biography of Brooks written by the late Frank Broese entitled *Mr Brooks and the Australian Trade*—it is an excellent account.

The Towns letters proved problematical. Even in 1980, the only method of obtaining access to some of them was to provide a list of the names of his correspondents in whom one might be interested, and then a librarian would peruse the letter books to copy by hand the relevant material. It took some time, but it was worth the trouble. It showed very clearly that Towns had not known Black before April or early May 1864.

Black met with Towns in Sydney, and unveiled the plan of his development. Towns was so impressed with the preliminary surveys, and the extent of his pastoral holdings—"a small principality", he called it—that he could not resist.

He purchased a half share in Black's enterprise, apparently taking over all of the properties that Black claimed—with the proviso that any further properties Black claimed should be in Towns's name. The company Black & Co. came into being, with Black as the managing partner.

It is rather comical to find Towns, hailed by some as a great businessman, having second thoughts only after he had stitched up the deal.

He wrote to Mr Warren in Melbourne, a letter that proves Towns knew very little of Black prior to this—I quote:

"Private and confidential, Sydney, 18 May 1864 — I am anxious to know the history and character of Mr. J.M. Black, a Gent who is well known about Melbourne. He erected the Theatre or other extensive buildings in your city — he lost largely by this undertaking and went north into Queensland and took up large tracts of country — I am very anxious to know Honestly his means...and History...having purchased half

his property which is very extensive and he is to manage it — I want to know my partner...”

A copy of Warren’s reply does not appear to exist, but if he revealed to Towns what we now know of Black’s earlier career, it may not have reassured him.

After extensive searches in records in Victoria, it is clear that Black first came to prominence in that state as plain John Black—not John Melton Black.

He is said to have arrived in Victoria in 1852, but even that is questionable.

There were a number of John Blacks listed as arriving at that time, one of whom had connections to early gold diggings, but by 1852 our John Black was running a large carrying business from stables at Collingwood. The stables were so well known that advertisements in papers at the time for other businesses often used “Black’s Stables” to identify their locations.

The earliest references to those stables in March 1852 indicate that Black had an extensive transport network already established. It seems impossible that he could have arrived in 1852 and created his transport empire in such a short time. I believe he had arrived at least twelve months earlier.

By 1853 he was building Tattersall’s Horse Bazaar. The Melbourne *Argus* described it as

“a set of buildings of all sorts and kinds of horse accommodation, sale, etc., upon a gigantic scale...situated in Lonsdale St, a little above Swanston St... (it ran) through, Arcade fashion, to Little Bourke St...a great general horse emporium”.

The next year he embarked on building the Royal Hotel and the new Theatre Royal. The hotel was completed in about three months in 1854. The theatre was not completed until July 1855. Black had apparently sold his horse bazaar to finance the hotel and the theatre.

The theatre alone cost at least £60,000, possibly a great deal more. It was a magnificent structure even for Marvellous Melbourne at that time, designed to seat an audience of 3,000 at a time when theatres seating 1,500 were considered large.

Image: Photograph of Theatre Royal and Lola Montez

This photograph of the interior of the theatre gives an indication of its size and opulence.

On 10 July 1855 the *Argus* featured a laudatory article on the new theatre. Four days later the paper was on the back foot. They had received numerous letters making allegations against Black. The letter writers were, according to the *Argus*, “very angry that we should express our appreciation for that gentleman’s enterprising conduct...”

Black stood accused of underpaying his workers, and one sub-contractor named Robertson was mounting a case against him for £105 owing for roofing on the Theatre Royal.

Black should have stuck with carrying. With no experience as a theatrical entrepreneur, he was out of his depth. The Theatre Royal staged a few successful operas and attracted some big names such as Lola Montez, whose photographs you can see here. She was definitely not entirely a popular choice. Black could not compete with established entrepreneurs such as George Coppin. Desperate to stave off bankruptcy, he even ended

up in court after an attempt to hijack Coppin's leading lady. So he was forced into bankruptcy.

By then he had become John Melton Black. The 'Melton' probably came from the small town which Black's teams used as a staging post to the Ballarat goldfields. Melton today is virtually an outlying suburb of Melbourne.

Image: Map showing town of Melton

He may have remained in Victoria for a time, but in the late 1850s he disappears leaving his creditors behind him, though he did not abandon all of his staff. He took with him W.A. Ross and C.S. Rowe, both of whom he had employed at the Theatre Royal.

He also took his wealthy backer Longshaw, who eventually died and was buried on the bank of the Haughton River.

If Mr Warren reported even part of this to Towns, particularly the accounts of Lola Montez, it would not have been reassuring.

As anyone who has read *Gateway to a Golden Land* will know, the partnership of Towns and Black was not a happy one. Towns whinged about costs of the development. At the same time the bricklayer he sent from Sydney was left behind in Rockhampton dead drunk—this did not help Black in construction of the meatworks and other buildings.

Black coped with the day-to-day problems of creating the port while the wouserish Towns condemned him after receiving reports of heavy drinking in the settlement. This probably enraged Towns even more because he had sent up to Townsville his son Robert, who enjoyed a pint or two. Black was supposed to reform young Bob—a task in which he failed.

In many ways old Robert Towns is a particularly unpleasant character. Apart from his meanness, he encouraged others in the settlement to send reports to him, behind Black's back, and believed their reports rather than giving Black the benefit of the doubt. Black may have spun him a few yarns, but there is now no proof of this. Nevertheless, it has to be said that Towns made Black's life hell.

He gave Black little credit for the progress made or for devising the whole grand plan for the place. He seemed to think the founding of Townsville was all due to his money and influence. Though these had played a role, Townsville would certainly not have succeeded as it did, without the intelligence and energy of Black, who had laid all of the foundations for the project.

Not only was Black elected the first Mayor of Townsville, he also assisted with the formation of a School of Arts, and, when the first newspaper ran into trouble, apparently took over running that.

He was a bundle of energy. He built a comfortable residence on Melton Hill, known as Bachelor's Hall.

Image: Photograph of Black's house and Black & Co. building

He oversaw the establishment of a wharf and mercantile premises for Black & Co. He also oversaw the building of the first hotel, the Criterion; the planting of sugar, coffee and cotton plantations; and the opening of a boiling down works.

Image: Photograph of plantation workers

This photograph is probably of some of the first South Sea Islanders who arrived in 1866. Though very indistinct, the buildings of the boiling down works are in the background.

To see the township badly damaged in the cyclone of 1867 must have been a dreadful blow to Black, particularly as the partnership he had formed with Towns was about to expire.

In 1867 he left for Sydney. There the partnership was dissolved, and Towns was forced to pay Black out. The sum is not known, but the complaints Towns wrote to Brooks suggest that it was substantial.

Black never returned to Townsville, though newspapers at the time reported that a number of prominent northerners petitioned him to return to stand for the seat of Kennedy in the Queensland parliament. Black declined, and according to his sons, as later reported by 'Viator', his reasons were that he was tired of the rough colonial life, and his health began to suffer.

He probably embarked on an extensive tour of Europe before returning to settle in London.

When news of his departure reached Townsville, it came as a sad blow. That he was held in high regard by the citizens of Cleveland Bay is confirmed by their farewell gift to him of a gold cup and an illuminated testimonial. The testimonial read:

"Presented to J.M. Black Esq., J.P., first Mayor of Townsville, Cleveland Bay, Queensland, by the inhabitants of that town and district, as a token of their esteem and a slight recognition of his valuable services in opening up and developing the resources of North Queensland."

This is the gold cup. It was made by Cook and Robin of Pitt Street, Sydney, and was of solid Cape River gold. It stood 35 cm high and weighed a kilogram. After adorning the Black family fireplace in England for many years, it disappeared, and has never been located. I suppose I should add that I have asked not a few questions regarding its whereabouts.

Image: Photograph of presentation cup

E.J. Banfield in 1887 reported that Black had returned to England where he died in 1884.

There, it seemed, the story ended.

Then, I was utterly astounded to find in the 1930s issues of *Cummins and Campbells Monthly Magazine*, articles by 'Viator' reporting that two of Black's sons had turned up in Townsville. They stated that Black died in 1919. He had married Marion Drummond O'Dowda, whom he met in north Queensland, in St George's Church, Hanover Square, London—a rather posh Church of England wedding venue at the time. They had five sons and a daughter, though two of the sons had died.

According to 'Viator', the sons stated that Black was born in Edinburgh, and was cremated. His ashes were in Kensal Green Crematorium.

His son Douglas described him as "a tall grey man who always seemed to be absorbed in his business. On no account would he be attracted into other ventures, no matter how tempting".

Perhaps experience in Australia had taught him a few lessons.

According to the sons, he seldom mentioned Townsville.

This information was fascinating. It would be nice to see his last resting place and perhaps discover more of his history in England. So in 1980 when [my husband] Bruce was on sabbatical leave in Britain, it was a great opportunity to explore some of the records there. None of those records were available then as they are now—on the Web—in fact the Web as we know it was not even invented then.

The name 'John Melton Black' did not appear in birth records in Scotland or in England. It seemed the report from Black's sons that he was born in Edinburgh was wrong. The search for a marriage record was more successful.

Image: Photograph of marriage certificate

In London records, this marriage certificate was located, for John Melton Black and Mariam Drummond O'Dowda. Dated 15 April 1869, it gave the occupations of Black's father James as 'Physician', and Marian's father Henry as 'Builder'.

It was a surprise, to say the least, to find that the location of the wedding was St Patrick's Chapel "according to the rites and ceremony of the Roman Catholic Church". So much for the very respectable and fashionable St George's Hanover Square reported by the sons! I was beginning to wonder if the sons actually did know much about their parents.

However, the marriage certificate provided the clue to the identity of Black's bride. She was one of the first three barmaids to arrive in Townsville. Their names are recorded in a number of sources. There might have been another Marion O'Dowda in Townsville, but this seemed unlikely as I had found a death notice in the *Cleveland Bay Express* for Alicia Mainwaring Drummond, relict of the late Henry O'Dowda, Esq of Dublin, Ireland, and only daughter of the late Revd G. E. Drummond. She lived at 42 Rathmines St, Dublin. This was Marian O'Dowda's mother.

Image: Photograph of Mrs Black

Here we see Marian with one of the children.

Possibly the children were never aware of her past as a barmaid. As the very respectable Mrs Black, she would not have been too keen for them to discover her Townsville past.

It was not altogether surprising to find that the information from Black's sons that his remains were in the Kensal Green Crematorium was also incorrect. In fact, there was no Kensal Green Crematorium.

There was a Kensal Green Catholic Cemetery. Marian and their eldest son Oscar were buried there. But there was no sign of the elusive John Melton Black.

It appeared that the sons had even forgotten the site of their father's last resting place. Research had reached this interesting point when it was time to return to Australia.

Back in England, six years later in 1986, the search resumed. Only after a study of the history of London crematoria was it possible to pin down that Black's remains should be in the Golders Green Crematorium—at that time the only crematorium in London.

Image: Photograph of Golders Green Crematorium

This photograph taken in summer looks delightful. We, however, were there in the depths of winter. It was only after quite a long trek through piles of snow that we reached the main building—and found this urn in a room crammed with urns of various shapes and sizes. As you can see, it was identified only with the initials J.M.B., and his date of death.

Image: Photograph of urn

It was sad indeed that the remains of this man who had founded a great and flourishing city should remain virtually unidentified and unrecognised in a cold environment so far removed from the warmth of Townsville.

Black died on 8 September 1919, aged eighty-eight, at his home 'San Raphael', Hampstead, London.

Image: Photograph of 'San Raphael'

As you can see, it was not the home of a poor man. He must have left a fortune of several hundred thousands of pounds, perhaps millions. This is difficult to estimate, as he left a life interest to his wife, who died in 1921, with the residue divided equally between his four surviving children.

One can estimate roughly the extent of the fortune from the probate records of Gladys, the de facto wife of his eldest son, Horace. She died in 1960. Horace had left £20,000 to his legal wife Evelyn, and the rest to Gladys with whom he had lived for many years. He died in 1956. Gladys died four years later, leaving a fortune of £164,000, most of which appears to have been inherited from Horace. When you consider that Horace inherited only a quarter share of J.M. Black's fortune, and several years had elapsed since 1921 when Marian died, one begins to appreciate just how successful Black became.

Incidentally he is in good company in Golders Green Crematorium—among those whose ashes were placed there are H.G. Wells, Kenneth Horne, Ivor Novello, John Inman (of 'Are You Being Served' fame), Enid Blyton, and numerous others whose names are well known.

The search did not end there. Just how had Black become so wealthy?

His sons made reference to an involvement with the Bell Punching and Printing Company. Given the other misleading information they had provided, I was not entirely convinced that anything might be found.

But, a visit to the Companies Registration Office in London revealed that the company had been founded in 1878. It had purchased the British rights to an American patent for a machine for punching tickets for buses and trams.

As the London Underground was expanding, and there was great call from many businesses for tickets that could be punched when boarding various means of transport, or for attending large entertainments, the Bell Punch Company was guaranteed to make a

fortune. The London company increased its profits by also manufacturing the tickets to be punched, largely due to the acuteness of the man who became the General Manager and a major shareholder in 1884—John Melton Black.

Maybe, when he took over the company in 1884, he wished to end all ties to his past in Australia, and that was the reason that friends back in Townsville were allowed to believe that he had died.

Image: Photographs of 'clippy' and of Black's machine

As the General Manager, Black greatly increased the value of the business with his invention of a new design of mechanical ticket punch that greatly improved the ticketing process. Here we have a photograph of Black's punching machine, and one of a London bus conductor using the machine. It was, of course, Black's clipping or punching machine that gave the bus conductors the name of 'Clippies'.

The Bell Punch Company was reorganised about 1891 with a capital of £100,000, a very large sum at that time, and company wealth increased as the machines came into use in other parts of the world.

Black remained the General Manager until 1909 when he handed over the reins to his eldest surviving son, Horace Drummond Black, who had served as the firm's secretary after the untimely death of his older brother in 1902. In succeeding years, Horace oversaw the expansion of the company and the erection of a new factory at Uxbridge, to the west of London.

Image: Photograph of Bell Punch Co. Works, Uxbridge

The buildings of the Black expansion appear on the left of this photograph [Label D]

The company underwent a number of name changes, but survived for many years, though the family role in management appears to have ended with the death of Horace in 1956. However, the Bell Punch Company continued until 1986, under different management. An electronic derivative of the Bell punch system is still in use today.

At that time the English Census and other records were not available, as they are today, on the Web, and after wasting some time on fruitless searches, I returned to Australia still without locating Black's origins. It is only in recent times and thanks to the computer programme Ancestry.com, that I have been able to discover more.

The search in Scottish records yielded no results. It was certain that his sons had once again led me astray by saying he was born in Edinburgh.

I decided to try searching the 1881 Census. To my horror there were thousands of John Blacks. It was only by launching a search using Marian's name that I struck the jackpot.

In 1881 Black gave his place of birth as Lancashire. This gave a lead back to the Census returns of 1841 which showed Dr James Black and his wife Jane, both born in Scotland. John Black was born at Bolton in Lancashire, and educated at a boarding school at Bolton le Moors. His parents were married in Scotland and had migrated to Bolton about 1820. John had three brothers, William, Thomas and James, but as yet they have not been traced. As you can imagine, I did a little dance around the office!

John Melton Black and Marian Drummond Black had four children—Oscar Drummond, Ada Drummond, Valentine Drummond and Victor Drummond. Black described himself as

an Annuitant—which may mean that a story circulated in Townsville in 1867 that he had inherited money had an element of truth, or it could also mean that he was still living off the large sum he had received from Towns.

Continuing to succeed on Census returns was intriguing. By the 1891 Census, Black had reinvented himself. He had become a Civil Engineer. Two more sons, Douglas Drummond and Stanley Drummond appear, but Ada, Valentine and Victor disappeared.

By 1901 Black is describing himself as the 'Manager of a Printing Works'. The children are Oscar D., Horace D., Douglas D., and Stanley D.

A Death Notice for Oscar Drummond Black appeared in 1902, but no records of death for Valentine and Victor appeared. In another area, however, the name Horace Victor Drummond Black born in 1879 appeared, which indicated Victor had become Horace. No records were located regarding Valentine, and it must be assumed that he probably died some time before 1891, or at some location overseas—or maybe he too changed his name?

Ada also disappeared, but the Probate records for J. M. Black showed he had a daughter Ida who married Alexander Stuart Baker. Sure enough, the marriage records showed Ida St Claire D. Black marrying Mr Baker at Woolwich in 1893. So John Melton Black's daughter had also changed her name before marriage.

By 1911 John Melton Black called himself John Melton Drummond Black. This was perhaps a sign of his perception of having reached the acme of middle class respectability, or perhaps an attempt to impress others that he came from a wealthier background than was in fact the case.

On present evidence, Black has no living descendants. His daughter, Ida had a son, Alan Baker who lived at Hove, but to date no records of any issue of his marriage have been located.

None of Black's sons had children, though all married. Douglas became a rancher in Canada before World War I and served with the Canadian forces in France. He married Clarice Podosky, daughter of an old Ravenswood identity whom he met in Sydney. They were married in Majorca and lived in Durban. Douglas died in 1959 in Durban.

Image: Photographs of Douglas Black and Clarice Podosky

These are the only photographs of Black's adult descendants located so far.

Stanley appears to have travelled widely, particularly in the East. He too married and lived in England where he died about 1961.

So the great search to discover John Melton Black and to locate descendants continues, though intermittently. It has not ended. There is still more to be found, given a little luck and a lot of patience.

Black was a truly remarkable man. His theatre in Melbourne was well ahead of its time. His patent ticket punch was a brilliant invention. The Bell Punch Company was an outstanding success.

However, it is his scheme for a future great port in Queensland that really amazes. He was so confident that the best port must lie north of the Burdekin between Cape Bowling

Green and Halifax Bay, that he was willing to risk his own life swimming the Burdekin in flood to ensure title to all of the land—it takes the breath away.

Image: Photograph of McKinlay and crocodiles

This illustration from the book *Tracks of McKinlay* shows the trouble Black's mate had when crossing the Burdekin about the time that Black made the crossing— it puts recent newspaper reports of one poor starving crocodile in Cleveland Bay in the shade, doesn't it?

Black's choice of Towns to approach for financial backing was brilliant. He summed Towns up as both vain and greedy—but realised that he wielded considerable power with the Queensland parliament. What he did not realise was that Towns was a penny-pinching old wowser and slave driver, with virtually no sense of humour and little sympathy for others.

I do not think Black himself had much of a sense of humour, though his compatriots at Cleveland Bay seem to have respected and liked him. Most certainly he had a volatile temper, having pulled out a handful of J.A.J. MacLeod's beard in a dispute. He ended up in Court in Bowen for that.

He seems to have remained aloof from others—a man who played his cards very close to his chest. Douglas described his father as “a reticent man who kept his own counsel.” His desire to succeed and create a fortune was almost obsessive. He certainly ended up a wealthy man, and in the end was arguably a more successful businessman than his former partner, Robert Towns.

Though it bears the name Townsville, our city stands today as a splendid monument to the planning and clear foresight of John Melton Black.

The presentation of his portrait to the city by Black's children in the 1930s did a little to re-establish him as the real founder of the city, but Towns continues to receive far too much credit for the success of the city.

Personally, after perusing so many documents, I find Black a more congenial and interesting character than Robert Towns, and regret that he has not received the attention due to him in the city that owes him so much.

But I have one niggling question that can never be answered.

Did Black entice Towns to invest in his grand scheme with the deliberate intention of selling out to Towns, thus making a small fortune when the partnership expired?

I would not put it past him, and cannot help but wonder.

Dorothy M. Gibson-Wilde

About the contributors in this lecture series

Professor Geoffrey Bolton

Geoffrey Bolton is an emeritus professor and former Chancellor of Murdoch University in Western Australia. He has been publishing Australian history since 1958. His works include *A Thousand Miles Away: a History of North Queensland until 1920*.

Dr Noel Loos

Noel Loos taught the history of black - white relations in Australia at James Cook University. His latest book *White Christ Black Cross: The Emergence of a Black Church*, was published in 2007 by Aboriginal Studies Press. He has also conducted research into frontier conflict, the place of Aborigines in colonial society, and the evolution of government policies for Aboriginal and Islander people. In the 1970s, he pioneered the development of teacher education programs in Queensland for Aboriginal and Islander people. His previous book was *Edward Koiki Mabo: His Life and Struggle for Land Rights*.

Dr Judith McKay

Judith McKay was formerly senior curator at the Queensland Museum, Brisbane, where she was custodian of a large collection of paintings by the noted Australian flower painter Ellis Rowan. Judith's publications include books on Ellis Rowan and, with her husband Donald Watson, on early Queensland architects. In 2001 Judith was awarded a Queensland-Smithsonian Fellowship to pursue her research on world expositions, which resulted in the book *Showing off: Queensland at world expositions 1862 to 1988*. Her latest book, published in 2006, is a history of surveying in Queensland, written with well-known surveyor Bill Kitson.

Dr Rodney Sullivan

Rodney Sullivan became a teacher before lecturing in history and politics for many years at James Cook University. His academic publications include Australian labour history and a biography of Dean C. Worcester, an American colonial official in the Philippines. Since his retirement from JCU he has co-authored *A Walker's Guide to the Gold Coast* (2002) and *Words to Walk By: Exploring Literary Brisbane* (2005). He also contributes to *The Biographical Dictionary of the Australian Senate*. Among his subjects for the first three volumes are the notable North Queensland senators Thomas Crawford (1865-1948) and Ian Wood (1901-1992). His commitments for volume four include the entry on Townsville's Margaret Reynolds.

Dr Russell McGregor

Russell McGregor is associate professor in history in the School of Arts and Social Sciences, James Cook University, Townsville, where he teaches primarily in the fields of Australian history, world history and the history of nationalism. He has published extensively on the history of settler Australian ideas about Aborigines, including the award-winning book *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939* (1997). His more recent publications focus on post-World-War-Two Aboriginal assimilation policies, leading into his current research project on the place of Aborigines in settler imaginings of Australian nationhood.

Dr Cheryl Taylor

Cheryl Taylor holds an adjunct appointment in the Department of Humanities at James Cook University in Townsville, where she has lectured happily for many years in English and Australian literature. Her PhD thesis was on Middle English and medieval Latin contemplative literature. She is currently general editor of the long-running journal *LiNQ* (*Literature in North Queensland*), and edits the subset "Writers of Tropical Queensland," in AustLit.

Dr Janice Wegner

Janice Wegner is a Senior Lecturer in history and heritage at the Cairns Campus of James Cook University. A North Queenslander herself, she has published books and articles on the history of North Queensland, especially its mining history and heritage. She is a past member of the Queensland Heritage Council and chairs the Far Northern branch of the National Trust of Queensland.

Dr Claire Brennan

Claire Brennan teaches history at James Cook University in Townsville. She is an environmental historian with research interests in the field of animal history. Her PhD, completed at the University of Melbourne in 2005, examined the history of sport hunting in New Zealand and Victoria in the nineteenth century. She is now extending her interests in introduced species from sporting to economic species. She has published on the history of the rabbit in New Zealand, of sport hunting in Melbourne, and on the environmental history of New Zealand's national parks.

Dr Nigel Chang

Nigel Chang is an Academic Adviser and lecturer at James Cook University in the School of Arts and Social Sciences. His research interests include the Archaeology of Southeast Asia, the Archaeology of Personal Ornaments (Jewellery), Cemetery Archaeology, Prehistoric Landscapes and Historic North Queensland.

Note: Dr Chang's lecture 'Archaeology and the Historic Past in Townsville' was delivered on 6th April 2009 to an enthusiastic audience. No formal lecture script has been provided so it could not be included in this book. Please contact Dr Chang personally if you have any queries about the lecture.

Dr Dorothy M. Gibson-Wilde

Dorothy Gibson-Wilde was born in Townsville, and spent her early years in Proserpine. Her university study began at the University College of Townsville, then a country campus of University of Queensland. Her honours degree and Doctorate of Philosophy were completed after the College became James Cook University. She has been fortunate in being able to expand her knowledge in many overseas centres, and her interests in history are wide-ranging; she has a particular fascination with Ancient Rome in Britain. In the last thirty years, her research has focused on many aspects of north Queensland's development.