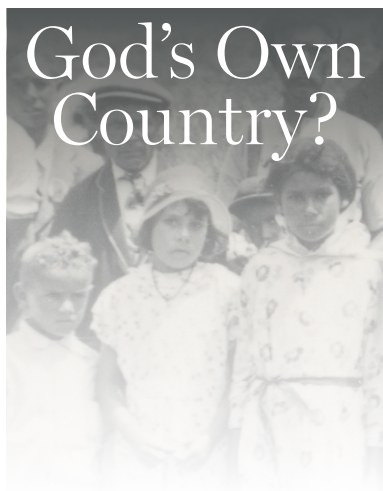


God's Own Country?

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH AND TASMANIAN ABORIGINES



JAMES BOYCE



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But despite all this help, which I gladly acknowledge, the responsibility for the research and its interpretation remains, in the end, solely mine.

James Boyce

June 2001

Foreword

AFTER ONLY six months in Tasmania, I found myself in a meeting with Aboriginal Elders. The meeting was held at the time of the State Government's attempt to return land to Aboriginal communities, an attempt which had failed to gain support in the Legislative Council of the State Parliament. It was also part of my personal journey, having visited Flinders and Cape Barren Islands and been welcomed to Tasmania by the Aboriginal community.

As we spent time together, the Aboriginal Elders told their stories of family, customs, belief, land, and of relationships with white people — stories of kindness and callousness. Their strong sense of their people, their love for one another and this land and their generous and gracious spirit towards the white settler truly amazed me. I was humbled and privileged to be among them.

After some hours of sharing stories I was overwhelmed. I wondered what I was to do. How could I ever remember all these stories? I asked the Elders what was expected of me having heard all their stories? What could I do to further our journey of reconciliation? The reply was, 'Tell your story.'

'My story?' I asked, puzzled.

'Yes, your walk over the Tasman Bridge, your welcome to this place at your ordination, your meeting and speaking with Aboriginal people.'

I am forever grateful to these Aboriginal Elders for their wisdom. I can tell my story. It is one told with my own nuances and reflecting on my own path in our people's journey together. My story now becomes part of the story of the Anglican Church and its encounter with Aboriginal people in Tasmania. These stories are a vital step in our journey of reconciliation. I am profoundly grateful for the

dedicated scholarship of James Boyce that brought this history into an accessible form.

My prayer is that this story will enable us to reflect on our own encounters with Aboriginal people and that it will lead to reconciliation between our peoples. Jesus said, 'We are to love God and to love our neighbour.' There is no more important neighbour for us to love and to be loved by than the original inhabitants of this beautiful land. May it be so.

John Harrower
Bishop of Tasmania

June 2001

Author's Preface

Such a lot of people, like the police, the councillors, the wardens all stand up and ask for our history but if they stopped to think they have one too. Perhaps they don't want that put into books either.¹

ABORIGINES have told their story many times: to explorers, missionaries, historians, anthropologists, social workers and committees of inquiry.

As the Anglican Church explores its relationship with Tasmanian Aboriginal people, it owes them to begin at a different place, to this time tell our story before we ask again to hear theirs. Before more time, experience, knowledge and sharing of personal pain are asked of Aborigines, the Church needs to do its own work.

There is a white historical record to begin this: extensive printed sources are available. These tell something of the Church's own story, although not all. The printed record, particularly but not only in the 19th Century, is biased towards those with power in white society: in this case the Church leaders. In addition, because whites became officially blind to Aboriginality on the Tasmanian mainland after 1876, these sources tell us little about contact beyond the Bass Strait Islands until recent decades. The resilience and survival of other Aboriginal people in Tasmania is of course acknowledged and celebrated, despite their resultant neglect, in this work.

However, despite all these limitations, the printed record remains an essential starting point; it does have something to say.

So, before Aboriginal people are asked again to be the vulnerable ones, it is owed to them for the Church to look at

these sources and consider honestly some of the pain they contain. Then perhaps some real listening can begin.

This, therefore, is a white history, drawing on predominantly white documents. It is deliberately incomplete. It is not meant to be the whole story, but it is a place to begin.

Where I have crossed the sometimes blurred line and written again a story that belongs to others, I am sorry. I have tried to remember that, as Miller writes:

Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes for the place we are approaching is holy and we may find ourselves treading on another's dream. More serious still, we may forget that God was there before our arrival.²

James Boyce

Hobart

June 2001

Chapter 1

The Early Years

FOR THE FIRST two decades after the European invasion of Van Diemen's Land in 1803 there is little evidence of Church of England contact or concern with the Tasmanian Aboriginal people. This was partly due to the small size of the Church and the priority of the work among convicts. More significantly it is indicative of the limited extent of European land takeover during this period and the personality and priorities of the first and, until 1818, only Chaplain, Robert Knopwood.

Tasmania remained predominantly Aboriginal owned and controlled until the early 1820s, so the numbers of dispossessed people, the most likely recruits for missions, were few. As Reynolds and others have noted, 'A striking feature of the Tasmanian experience was that the period of maximum conflict came a generation after first contact.'¹

While there certainly was some significant conflict, most dramatically at the Risdon massacre of 1804, British survival in these early years was dependant on negotiation not war determining their necessary access to land and resources. Relationships between Aboriginal people and the white hunters, stock-keepers and bushrangers living in the bush were common, many Aboriginal children spent time with white settlers, and there was a remarkable mutual adaptation of technologies and life styles.²

The better-known story of abductions, kidnappings and violence mainly belongs to the later War. The punishment for such activities at this time, given the reality of Aboriginal power and control over most of the country, was clear.

The official Church however played little part in this fascinating and comparatively hopeful story. The Chaplain was a part of the civil structures, a senior Government official, and largely confined himself to the relative safety of the secured areas, although he did join the other officers in profiting from the extensive sale of kangaroo obtained by his dogs and convict hunters from beyond the frontier.

The Rev. Robert Knopwood was already 43 years old when he arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1804. He retired as Chaplain in 1823, although he maintained an active ministry on the Eastern Shore at Clarence Plains until his death in 1838.

The character and morality of Knopwood has been widely debated by historians. The interest is exaggerated by the fact that his diary is one of the few sources of information about daily life in early Van Diemen's Land. This source reveals him to be somewhat of a disappointment for those seeking a founding church hero, but he also appears to have lacked some of the defects common to many of his more enthusiastic contemporaries. Thus while Knopwood lacked the admirable concerns about the impact of the European invasion on the native population found among clerics elsewhere, missing too were the depressing moral judgements which easily accompanied such assessments. Knopwood simply felt no need to justify his neglect in the manner of the more evangelical Samuel Marsden in Sydney, who took an active lead in pioneering missions to New Zealand, 'the Aborigines are the most degraded of the human race ... the time is not yet arrived for them to receive the great blessings of civilisation and the knowledge of Christianity'.³ Knopwood was never, as the Rev. William Henry became in Sydney, 'heartily sick of the place' and overcome by, 'the almost impossibility of being useful among the poor natives, who are truly the most wretched and deplorable beings my eyes have yet beheld'.⁴ His great virtue, in these early years especially,

was in a fairly tolerant and accepting outlook, which was greatly appreciated and enjoyed life here: land, culture and people.

It is an important point that Knopwood's lack of interest in the ethics or implications of the invasion cannot be explained away as a reflection of the values of the time. Rather, Knopwood was a representative of a Church beginning to have a great interest in the Christian responsibility to indigenous people. The London Missionary Society, an interdenominational organisation founded in 1795, was already active in the South Seas. The Church of England's own missionary society, the Church Missionary Society, established in 1799 by Wilberforce and others, was active in New Zealand from 1809. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel founded in the late 17th Century but now expanding fast, began work in New South Wales as early as 1793. These organisations also set out to have political influence and change British Government policy to provide better protection for the rights of native peoples. Indeed these societies were to have an important part in shaping later British policy towards Aboriginal people in Van Diemen's Land.

However for the moment the Napoleonic Wars meant both Church and State in London seemed to have largely forgotten the far-flung penal settlement, and the local Chaplain had different interests and priorities. At any rate up until 1818, as already noted, the question did not seem a pressing one. Unlike in Sydney where there was a comparatively rapid takeover of tribal lands, the confined Tasmanian settlements and defensive military position necessarily taken, did not overly dispossess any Aboriginal tribe. There were not, therefore, the same potential mission fields as NSW where the former owners, seeking to survive an aggressive and expanding white invasion, were already in need of protection and sustenance.

Knopwood's lack of concern in the ethics of the invasion, its implications for the Aboriginal owners, and the possibilities of outreach, should not however be equated with a lack of

awareness of Aboriginal Tasmania. He had a strong respect for the reality of Aboriginal ownership and control of the land beyond the two small British settlements at Hobart Town and Port Dalrymple. Even his first sermons show a faith that could value and appreciate the land and its people. In 1803, on arrival at the soon to be evacuated Port Philip, he asked that:

*God would bless and prosper all our undertakings in this infant colony and increase the fruits of the earth, by which through his blessings, our lives and those around us, the natives of the land, may be amply supplied... Thou has created all things and for thy Glory they are and were created.*⁵

Knopwood's first sermon at Sullivan's Cove went to the heart of the matter for the transplanted Church, asking: 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?'

'The untutored savage loves his country,' noted Knopwood, 'though it contains little more than the wretched habitation, the trackless wilderness and the uncultivated waste ... But as the progress of civilisation advances ... A real love for our country, must be founded on the extensive basis of regard for mankind, which is nowhere taught, but by the precepts of the Christian religion.'⁶

At any rate, no person in 1804 could not but be immediately aware of the Aboriginal presence and control of the land. On 29 February 1804, Knopwood takes his first Tasmanian walk and 'see(s) many of the native huts but none of them'. A week later he ventures out again, 'During our walk we see a great many native huts and the fires they made; no doubt but they see us'. The next day he sees his first Aboriginal at a distance and the following day he nervously reports them being 'all around'.⁷

Knopwood's first direct contact with a Tasmanian Aborigine is a tragic preview of much subsequent history. The first words of a Church of England clergyman to an indigenous Tasmanian are to an infant survivor of the Risdon massacre in May 1804. On 3 May he had received the following letter from Mountgarret at Risdon:

As you express a wish to be acquainted with some of the natives, if you will dine with me tomorrow you will oblige me by christening a fine native boy who I have. Unfortunately poor boy, his father and mother were both killed. He is about two years old.

Mountgarret also invited the Church for the first time to silently cooperate with the theft and mutilation of mortal remains. 'I have likewise the body of a man that was killed. If Mr. Bowden wishes to see him desected [*sic*] I will be happy to see him with you tomorrow.'⁸

A week later, Knopwood takes up the offer to meet the child, sadly celebrating the symbolism by naming the lad after himself, the new town and the date, recording, 'I xtianed [*sic*] a young native boy whose name was Robert Hobart May.'⁹

Reality soon set in, however. Collins could not afford war and, angry about the NSW Corps' undisciplined aggression, soon took steps to evacuate the eastern shore (and thus the territory of the Oyster Bay Tribe, the Derwent being a tribal boundary) and bring the officers and people there under his and the Marines' direct control. The infant Aboriginal prisoner was also quickly returned.

It wasn't until 4 April 1806 that Knopwood had his next close contact and first real meeting.

*At Sam a native girl about 17 was in my garden, the first that I ever saw near me. She ran away some small distance and then stopd [*sic*]. I went to her, she wanted some fire which I got for her, and some fish and bread, but returning to get some more fire she ran off.*¹⁰

It was to be some time before such a peaceful interaction again occurred. Land access had to be negotiated and trading and human relationships established.

The period between 1806 and 1808 provided an enormous challenge to the success of the British invasion. The possibility of a second evacuation seemed very real. During these two critical years, referred to as the 'great famine' due to the virtual disappearance of European food stuffs and difficulties in finding indigenous replacements, there were a number of spearings of men and dogs. The key to eventual

survival and prosperity was successfully negotiating access to the main Aboriginal developed, maintained and defended hunting grounds.

Knopwood's diary documents this transition. The first death by spearing is recorded by him on February 1807. On 18 February, he writes, 'No grass and the country on fire by the natives who are very troublesome to the men out a kangarooing.' On 24 February he noted that, 'the distress of the colony is great.' Knopwood's own dog, on which, due to the inaccuracy of guns, successful hunting depended, was soon speared. It got worse. On 19 May 1807 'my man Richardson came home ... the native has nearly killd [*sic*] him and dogs ... it is very dangerous to be out alone for fear of them. They are so hardened they don't mind being shot at.' Meanwhile the Aboriginal fires, lit to maintain the open hunting grounds, are also faithfully but not unfearfully recorded, as smoke regularly surrounds the tiny secured beachhead.¹¹

Yet, by 1808, convict hunters are spending months at a time in the bush, successfully providing the Government store with over 100 kangaroo a week in the south alone, with little conflict with the Aboriginal owners.¹² Certainly, beyond the frontier care was still needed for those without the necessary trade and human relationships. Knopwood does not pay his first visit to the north until 1814 and even then notes that Stoney Valley, just out of Bagdad, is a 'beautiful valley but should you meet with the natives you must inevitable [*sic*] lose your life: the hills of each pass so high that they would kill you just with stones.' He also records the mass slaughter of trespassing sheep in November 1815.¹³

However, remarkably peaceful relations prevailed generally and some Aboriginal visitors even returned to Hobart Town. In July 1814, Knopwood records a visit by four Aborigines who had been to South Arm, where one of the tribal women lived with a Richard Campbell. On 15 November, continued ownership over Knopwood's own granted land was asserted when seven Aborigines stayed on it two days. 'I walkd [*sic*] down the garden and found that the natives had made a

fire at the bottom of my land and were getting oysters and mussels.' The same group visited again in May 1816.¹⁴

Knopwood even started doing some trading of his own to secure a personal favourite, crayfish. On 24 March 1818, he visits Crayfish Point with young Aboriginal women in his boat. 'There the native girls dived down for the fish and caught a great many.' He ate well that night.¹⁵

Visits soon became common. On 15 November 1818, he records 'the whole tribe of natives came for bread etc. — one woman, five girls and two boys. The four girls remaining with us as usual.' On 26 November 1818, he notes that 'All the native girls, ten, and two boys came as usual for their bread and each of them had a new dwg [*sic*] of women's clothes and the boys, from H.M. Store.'¹⁶

However, as the British land takeover moved well beyond the initial beachheads after 1818, these visits seem to have stopped. Knopwood's next diary reference is to record a christening of three Aboriginal children at Government House in February 1819 and then again in April.¹⁷ Such baptisms were not a new occurrence. By 31 December 1819, of the 685 children whom Knopwood had christened, 26 were Aborigines.¹⁸

There are many frustrating mysteries concerning the extensive relationships between whites and Aboriginal children during this period as indicated by these christenings. Unfortunately, Knopwood enlightens us little. The twin proclamations by Governor Davey in 1814 and then by Sorell in 1819 forbidding white settlers to keep Aboriginal children in their homes are clear enough, but the background, motivation and impact of these measures are much less so. This widespread practice cannot equate with the virtually abducted slave labour common on other parts of the Australian frontier later in the 19th Century. White military power was not here sufficient for this. Certainly, the value of children to the settlers is clear. Their knowledge of the land and its resources would have been invaluable. However, what kept the children — up to fifty at a time — in the settled

districts is not readily apparent. Indeed, many do seem to have come and gone. Perhaps the impact of European disease was already leaving many orphans; perhaps the tribes recognised the profitable advantages of children spending time with the British. Maybe the children were part of the extensive trading and other networks connecting town and bush, and the Governor's proclamations motivated more by stamping out the economic and social base of the bushranging economy, than by child welfare concerns. It is not clear. There were, especially as time went on, kidnappings and abductions. But, in these early years, Aboriginal control means other less violent explanations for this extensive human contact must feature.

The Church, at least officially, was meant to be involved. In 1814, Davey ordered that the children be returned to Knopwood, but this proclamation seems to have had no impact. Sorell's authority was greater and the frontier now further away, so perhaps some of Knopwood's later contact with children was part of a general supervisory responsibility for those now more permanently separated from their tribes. There is simply not enough information to know.

It is, however, clear that most of Knopwood's contacts with Aborigines involved children and young people. Of particular interest to the contemporary Aboriginal community, for example, is that on Knopwood's visit to Port Dalrymple in March 1814 he christened two Aboriginal girls, Hannah and Dolly Dalrymple. Dolly's mother was later 'given' a land grant by Governor Arthur on the banks of the Mersey near Latrobe.¹⁹ Dolly had seven children and the family survives to the present day.

Knopwood visited the north again the next year, but by 1818 visits became unnecessary when the colony's second chaplain, John Youl, arrived. Youl was an evangelical former missionary to the Pacific islands. However, this background does not seem to have disposed him to be mission-minded in his attitude to the Tasmanian Aborigines.

At any rate, in both major towns at least, a strange quiet seems to have descended on white-black relations in the early 1820s. Knopwood's diary becomes silent on Aboriginal people. Sorell, in a lengthy 1824 handover report to the new Governor, George Arthur, does not even mention Aborigines. Other colonists are relaxed and complacent in their recorded comments.

The British, including the Church of England, seem therefore to have been completely unprepared for the total war that would engulf the Colony from the mid-1820s as the Tasmanian Aboriginal people launched a ferocious resistance to the British move to unilaterally assert private ownership and control of the prime hunting grounds of the island.

Chapter 2

The Tasmanian War

THE SIMULTANEOUS change in British political and ecclesiastical command in Van Diemen's Land during 1823-24 coincidentally preceded the outbreak of violent conflict with Tasmanian Aborigines. Governor George Arthur and the new Chaplain, William Bedford, were soon confronted by the realities of war.

But this was not before, as if in a final embassy to the increasingly intrusive whites, a last opportunity for peaceful dialogue between the British and the owners of the land was provided. In 1824, a group of more than 60 Aborigines took everyone by surprise and visited Hobart Town. For Arthur, the chance must have seemed heaven sent.

Arthur had a Christian conversion in Bermuda in 1812 and his governorship there subsequently was characterised by a concern for the indigenous people. There is no doubt that for Arthur colonisation brought with it ethical and legal obligations. Like the evangelicals and missionary societies in London, he understood and struggled with the ethical and legal realities of conquest. The Aboriginal visit to Hobart Town so early in his term was for him, therefore, propitious. It was described by the new settler and active Anglican, William Parramore:

On the 10th of November we were visited by a tribe of 66 Natives ... I met on the Sunday after the 10th while walking from Church with Mrs. Bedford, 3 of them with great long coats, but not a

particle of covering before ... The Lt. Gov. on their arrival had them immediately provided with food and old clothes – and the second night they were conducted to the road men's hut 4 miles from town ... The third day they were rather sullen and refused to sing the Kangaroo song, and moved off early the next morning.¹

Within a few days, Arthur had organised a public meeting to found an 'institution for the civilisation and instruction of the Aborigines of the Island.' Parramore also described this meeting on 15 November 1824,

It was proposed to institute a school for the education of the natives' children and to grant 2000 acres of land to be cultivated by the adults if they can be brought to any sense of the benefits of a settled life.²

Bedford, who had arrived in 1823, was enlisted in the cause along with Youl and the Methodist Minister Mansfield.³ However, after rules and regulations were drawn up, nothing further was done. The Aborigines from the Oyster Bay tribe came and went over the next two years but another attempt to found a native institution by Arthur in 1825 also failed.⁴ The reasons for this were mixed. Parramore describes the active opposition from some settlers,⁵ the clergy were not sufficiently interested⁶ and as Reynolds notes, overall 'the Governor's enthusiasm was not widely shared'.⁷

Bedford's reforms were already having a major impact on the social and cultural life of the previously easy-going settlement. Unlike with Arthur, however, a zeal for the Aboriginal issue was never apparent. The Church under Bedford did not follow through, much to Arthur's growing frustration. Subsequent, increasingly urgent entreaties by Arthur to Bedford for a special mission to the Tasmanian Aboriginal people came to nothing.

Meanwhile on the frontier, violence was increasing. At first, this could be blamed on a few 'troublemakers', especially allegations that a Sydney Aborigine known as Musquito was stirring up the basically 'peace loving' locals. In an attempt to provide the necessary deterrence, Musquito and one of

his colleagues were tried and hanged. Knopwood's sense of duty and perhaps curiosity drew him to attend the trial on 12 October 1826 and, along with Bedford, the execution the next day.⁸ The trial was widely criticised because the defendants were unable to testify due to their lack of knowledge of Christian teaching. These were, however, to be almost the last hangings. Aboriginal prisoners thereafter were treated, and sometimes mistreated, more as prisoners of war, and prosecutions for murder were no longer pressed.

Nor had the deaths worked as a deterrent. The hangings seemed only to strengthen the resolve of most Aborigines in the invaded areas to put aside tribal differences and fight to defend their homelands.

The British response included attempts to enlist Aborigines living with them into the fighting. These included some of those who had been raised from childhood under the British. The bush knowledge of the so-called 'tame' or 'civilised' Aborigines, usually baptised Christians, was desperately needed. Black Bill William Ponsonby was one baptised Tasmanian Aborigine exploited by John Batman in the conflict. Ponsonby had even been married according to the rites of the Church to another professed Aboriginal Christian, Catherine Kennedy.

Far more commonly, however, such converts became formidable foes, returning to the bush to fight alongside their people, bringing knowledge of European language, customs and technology. In particular, Aboriginal women who had lived in long term relationships with white men now led the fight against the invaders.⁹

The result was that, except in areas still beyond the frontier like the Bass Strait Islands, the relationships between black and white broke down. The space for mutual adaptation and change, including in matters of spirituality and culture, which was evident on both sides before 1820, was lost.¹⁰

By the summer of 1827-28, the colony was in a state of war with martial law soon to be declared. A considerably higher proportion of the available economic and human resources,

as well as political and social energies, was put into this fight than into any war since. At the time, it was widely described by the British as a fight for their survival.

The Tasmanian War had never been written out of the history books. Even at the height of the great silence about the survival of the Aboriginal people, Tasmanian school children, almost uniquely in Australia, were taught the reality of frontier violence. This was partly because of the very public and documented characterisation accorded to the struggle by the official state leadership. Probably more important, however, was that it was considered a safe, even though tragic, story. For unlike in other parts of Australia, the issue was considered over and the historical reality therefore deemed not to have contemporary implications.

While some of the horror has been captured in the dominant story, the War's reality, as Henry Reynolds has documented in *Fate of a free people: a radical re-examination of the Tasmanian Wars*, has not. Reynolds documents that this struggle was not primarily about white outrages against a defenceless 'primitive' Aboriginal population. It was an heroic and successful guerrilla campaign against numerically superior invading forces that highlighted the ineffectiveness of the British military and European technology in an era and in terrain that imposed great constraints on both. This was, in most respects, a fairly equal struggle. Casualties it seems were fairly even until the British secured the eventual advantage by the overwhelming weight of numbers.

The loss of life in the war for Tasmania was in proportion to the population probably greater than World War 1, and certainly much in excess of World War 2 or any subsequent conflict. About 170 Europeans died. The figures for Aboriginal deaths are much harder to establish. Reynolds' estimate is that between 150 and 250 died from direct conflict during the Black War years and 100–150 in the earlier period.¹¹ Moreover, it was characterised by many at the time as a patriotic war of defence, with British views about the righteousness of their cause vigorously debated. Peace was only secured in the end, Reynolds convincingly

argues, through a negotiated settlement or treaty, the broad details of which have been remembered and promoted by Aboriginal Tasmanians since in 'one of Australia's oldest and most enduring political movements'.¹²

Yet despite the heroic struggle and settlement reached, with its very contemporary legal and ethical implications, much historiography has been reduced to detailing atrocities committed by whites. As Reynolds concludes, 'The Tasmanians have not been well served by historians and other writers who have pitied them but who at the same time have patronised and belittled them.'¹³

If the reality of the War has been obscured, so have its causes. From the beginning, there was a concerted effort to put the blame on individual outrages committed by poor whites in the desperate circumstances of the frontier. Undoubtedly, the underlying rationale for the violence was the security and control of the large tracts of Aboriginal pasture land that had been given to the white settlers by colonial authorities in the 1820s. Shifting the blame to the convicts and ex-convict stockmen and shepherds, kangaroo hunters and sealers effectively deflected attention from this fact.

Whatever the individual outrages and horrors, the War's underlying causes were clear: the invasion and appropriation of land.

In the five years to 1823, 66,000 acres were granted, more than the total in all the years before. In that year alone, however, with grants now being made in proportion to the capital already possessed, land grants totalling 441,871 acres were made. By 1831 a further 1,457,461 acres had a British title (although, at least in the opinion of Chief Justice Pedder, probably an invalid one) and virtually all the most productive land on the island had been appropriated by a wealthy European elite of less than 500 men, and their more than one million sheep.¹⁴

As the War intensified and public desperation in the face of successful Aboriginal resistance increased, Arthur continued

to search for a settlement, through the intermediary of a church. However, the Church of England, despite its growth in the 1820s, kept well away. In 1828, Arthur even approached the Church Missionary Society (CMS) directly for assistance. But, citing lack of resources, the CMS declined to become involved.

Given the fairly secure and established position of leading Anglicans and Anglican clergy, it is perhaps not surprising that it was a Methodist builder who eventually took up Arthur's challenge to set up a Christian mission on Bruny Island in 1828 and then led the peace embassy to open negotiations with the Aborigines from 1829. George Augustus Robinson had arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1824. He was a committed Christian and had defined the motivation for the work in faith terms, believing that this 'unfortunate race' were 'brothers in Christ'.¹⁵ As some of the Bruny Island people set out with Robinson on their heroic and dangerous mission to discuss peace terms with the tribes, official Church of England involvement was confined to the safer and more familiar territory of committees.

Arthur established the Aboriginal Affairs Committee in November 1829 to conduct a special inquiry into the cause of the hostility and 'to consider the measures expedient to be adopted with a view of checking the devastation of property and the destruction of human lives occasioned by the state of warfare which has so extensively prevailed'.¹⁶ Its first and temporary Chair was the visiting bishop of the new diocese, based in Sydney. Bishop William Broughton's previous actions, including his public support for missions, had given Arthur hope that he would provide a moderating influence to the increasingly extreme measures being demanded locally.¹⁷ In his first charge, in December 1829, Broughton had acknowledged Europeans as being in 'occupation of their soil' and that obligations arose from being 'partakers of their worldly things'.¹⁸ In Van Diemen's Land, however, he too was caught up by war fever. When Arthur asked for a special prayer for the conciliation mission, Broughton's response was 'My God, subdue their

rancour'.¹⁹ The two local Anglican chaplains, Bedford and Norman, were both also Committee members.

The Committee began its investigations on 20 February 1830 and made its first report on 19 March, having heard a multitude of desperate and violent descriptions of, and possible solutions to, the current emergency. The report concluded that the outrages by some whites, initially at Risdon and latterly by mainly convict and ex-convict stockmen, bushrangers and sealers caused the inherent 'wanton and savage spirit' of the Aborigines to seek indiscriminate revenge.²⁰ A question of invasion and land theft, and a subsequent war of defence, was thus reframed as a question of character, with both poor whites and Aborigines at fault. The Committee's first enquiry therefore legitimised the land grab of the new establishment of the colony and provided the basis for future historiography.

The influence of Broughton and probably Bedford was more positively evident in the report's recommendations for action. The Committee advocated 'taking every opportunity to lead them into the path of civilisation ... an obligation exists to exercise mercy and justice towards the unprotected savage'.²¹

The settlers saw the proposed measures as inadequate, and the public clamour for a full-scale military operation using all available resources grew too powerful to resist. The Committee then justified and rationalised the new approach. Aborigines in settled districts had now become 'too much enjoined in the most rancorous animosity to be spared the most vigorous measures against them'.²² Arthur bowed to the inevitable. An all out commitment, with all available resources harnessed to force a final settlement, was now made.

The Black Line involved every able bodied male, bond or free, thrashing through the bush in a wide arc across the island to drive all Aborigines from the settled districts into a new reserve and confinement at the Tasman Peninsula. Half of the colony's total annual budget was expended in this one operation, which in a government-run penal colony was a

very high proportion of GDP.²³ Only two Aborigines were in fact captured and two shot, but the settled areas were effectively cleared and the British were able to move back into most previously evacuated areas.²⁴

British victory was also sought by prayer. On the Sunday before the Black Line commenced, 5 October 1830, all churches in the colony held services at which prayers were offered for the success of the 'Black drive' due to commence on the following Tuesday.²⁵ Bedford was asked to publicly pray before they set out. One journalist blamed that prayer for the Line's 'failure': 'the very arrogance, presumption and impiety of this special prayer ensured its defeat'.²⁶

While the Line seemed at the time to have failed to fulfil its objectives, it did create the right climate for negotiations. On the British side, the colony simply lacked the resources to repeat the exercise. The limitations of even the biggest military operation were now apparent to all. In London, alarm bells were ringing loudly. Budget and ethical concerns combined to force an increasing concern about the direction of colonial policy. The growing power of the missionary societies and evangelical influences was a crucial factor here.²⁷ The 1830-31 CMS Annual Report, for example, noted:

The cooperation of various causes has promoted the agriculture, wealth and population of the British possessions in New Holland, with a rapidity of which perhaps, history furnishes no other example. But the extraordinary advance of colonization has been effected at the expense of the original inhabitants and proprietors of the soil: their lands have been occupied ... to an extent scarcely credible.

Furthermore, the report called for an acknowledgment 'which these circumstances have established on the justice and compassion of the people of Great Britain ... (and) the urgent necessity of some reparation being made for the injuries which we have inflicted.' It pointed out that government's revenue was 'derived from the culture of lands, of which the ancient proprietors have been derived

forcibly and without compensation' and that expenditure is now 'due to them, in the strictest sense, as a debt to justice'.²⁸

It was not only the British who were anxious to reach an agreement. Unknown to the whites, the combination of constant harassment, movement, loss of land, disease, and then the overwhelming psychological impact of seeing the enormous white numbers thrown against them in the Black Line, seems to have made Aboriginal people across the island aware of the impossibility of victory through war.

As British settlement terms were discussed and the Aboriginal Committee and Executive Council, Chief Justice Pedder provided for the first time something of an alternative Anglican voice in the official decision making bodies. Pedder, a devout and committed Anglican, supported Arthur's view that a good part of Van Diemen's Land proper needed to be set aside as Aboriginal land. Both Pedder and Arthur saw a land and access deal as one part of a comprehensive treaty with Aboriginal Tasmania.²⁹

Arthur had had the whole of the rich north east of the island gazetted as an Aboriginal reserve in 1828. This policy option continued to be pushed by Pedder, even as the Governor himself abandoned it in the face of hostile public opinion and an angry landowning establishment.³⁰

Pedder was a rare example of a senior Anglican prepared to make judgments against the interests of the dominant landowning class. Pedder even went as far as to question the legality of all land titles issued in the colony. He was also particularly concerned about the legality and ethics of the proclamation of martial law in the settled districts in November 1828 and the licence it gave for settlers to kill fellow British subjects.³¹ However, martial law was to remain in place until January 1832.

Most other senior Anglicans were part of the predominantly Anglican land owning establishment, who were the main beneficiaries of the appropriation of Aboriginal land and thus in a sense the real victors in war. The serious and long-

term implications of this for the Church will be explored in the next chapter.

Such men, along with Robinson and broader public pressure, eventually converted Arthur and the increasingly ineffectual Aboriginal Committee to the option of an island reserve. Robinson's view was that removal from the mainland was necessary to achieve the change from a nomadic lifestyle he believed was required. Most other decision makers just wanted Aborigines safely out of the way with no prospect of independent return.

Pedder, however, remained convinced that this island option was not just, and would see Aborigines 'pine away'. He continued to press for a treaty with defined territorial boundaries on the Tasmanian mainland.³² Arthur himself later regretted no treaty had been signed. As he recalled in 1835, 'On the first occupation of Van Diemen's Land it was a great oversight that a treaty was not at that time made with the natives.' Arthur was active along with other evangelicals in lobbying the British Government to change policy in this area. The 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, which preceded British settlement in New Zealand, was a result of this pressure.³³

As the Aboriginal Committee debated island reserve options for Tasmanian Aborigines, another, more unlikely dissident Anglican voice emerged in the meetings of the Committee, that of Bedford. Bedford shared with his friend Robinson a commitment to the moral aspect of the mission which necessarily involved ongoing contact and interaction with the whites. In the correspondence between them, Robinson argued that the colonists had no right to the land and a minimum duty and obligation to impart Christianity and civilisation.³⁴ It was Bedford's concern that the Bass Strait Islands were too far away to do this which led him alone to support Maria Island as the new reserve. However, other Committee members believed Maria was too accessible and eventually favoured the Flinders Island option.³⁵

The deal negotiated was not only about land. As Reynolds has argued, both Robinson's journals and British and Aboriginal

actions provide the basic outline of the treaty or agreement reached. Robinson noted that the Aborigines 'relied with implicit faith on the fulfilment of the promises I made to them on the part of the Government.' According to him, these included that they would have their wants and needs supplied and that 'their customs were to be respected and not broken into by any rash or misguided interference.' He also admitted 'it was guaranteed by me on behalf of the government that ... as far as practicable they were in the summer months under proper protection to occasionally visit their native districts'.³⁶

Reynolds suggests Robinson's desperation for success had led him, while in the bush, to have actually gone even further and well beyond what was possible for him to deliver. There is some evidence that he promised Aborigines that it would be a short term exile, a temporary respite and reprieve. Robinson possibly delayed going to Flinders Island until 1835 because of this, while the Aborigines were desperate for him to come, believing it would signal their return home.

However, for the British conquerors, especially those like the Anglican Church who through their membership of the decision-making bodies and government bodies were, ethically at least, parties to the original agreement, there is no comfort in either historical interpretation. As Reynolds notes, either Aborigines still have a claim over mainland Tasmania or 'Flinders Island and the smaller islands in the group associated with it were set aside as a reserve, as a new homeland, by way of compensation. That was the view of contemporaries.' Reynolds is convinced that the contemporary record shows: 'There was a clear understanding among prominent settlers that Flinders Island was to compensate the Tasmanians for the loss of their ancient homelands'.³⁷ As just one example of this, the Launceston Examiner argued in 1847 that Flinders Island was 'the commutation which has been assigned to the natives for their patrimony'.³⁸ What cannot be questioned is that it was a Act of British Parliament in May 1836

which legally reserved Flinders Island for the Aborigines of Tasmania with no others permitted to reside there without permission.³⁹

The evidence for a treaty is not confined to Robinson's journals. It was shown by the actions of both parties. It is implicit in the extraordinary behaviour of the Aborigines in following Robinson into the heart of enemy territory, often explained as some sort of mystical pied piper routine. Even more telling is the official welcome given to these feared enemies by the British Governor. The subsequent behaviour of Aborigines and Europeans at Wybalenna clearly shows a shared sense of rights under agreement.

Even though Robinson often regretted that the promises 'made them on which they surrendered their liberties, were so faithlessly kept', the Aborigines' freedom to express cultural beliefs, to come and go on the island at will, have their needs met by European labour without working themselves and so on, make Wybalenna a place of very painful exile but certainly no prison.⁴⁰ 'The aborigines [*sic*] clearly believed that the settlement, the stores and indeed the whole island, belonged to them' and the British officials largely accepted their right to do so.⁴¹ There is also the remarkable and well documented evidence of an enduring Aboriginal oral tradition remarked on by European visitors to the Bass Strait Islands from the 1840s to the present, which consistently claimed the Government owed them assistance and land in return for their ancestors agreeing to leave the main island of Tasmania.⁴²

For the Church of England, the end of the War also opened a new chapter. At Wybalenna and then Oyster Cove, as well as the Orphan Schools, the institutional Church structures finally came into daily contact with the indigenous people of this island. Almost from the beginning, however, the memory of the War has prompted a strong sense of church failure and debate about the Church's role in the conflict. Many contemporaries wondered why the Church had so little contact with Aborigines. The Hobart Town Gazette of 4 February 1826 asked why there was no clergy mainly devoted

to them.⁴³ In 1829, Henry Widowson wrote: 'I have never heard, not do I believe, that any teacher of the Gospel ever went half a dozen miles from Hobart town to inquire into their condition.'⁴⁴ Present day historians have been even harsher on Van Diemonien efforts than their mainland counterparts. John Harris in *One blood: two hundred years of Aboriginal encounters with Christianity* argues:

*The church was failing badly. The word "failure" has been repeatedly used of the early missions on the Australian mainland, but at least this judgement applied to an effort that was made. There was a much worse failure — the failure of the church to exert its influence upon depraved white society. Not only did the clergy remain silent, but the congregation did not encourage such action of the clergy either. The thunder from the pulpit came from a later generation of clergy after the violence was all over. The church's failure was not the result of its efforts, nor lack of success — we are not required to succeed. The failure was in not even trying.*⁴⁵

John Guenther's spirited defence of the Van Diemonien Church acknowledges the limited action, but points out the reality of limited resources and the priority necessarily given to ministry to 'the white population: they looked first to effecting a much needed spiritual and moral transformation in that society'.⁴⁶ However, this argument does not address Harris's main point about public advocacy of Aboriginal rights and issues, common in the Sydney church at the time, which unlike missions would not have required any diversion of resources.

Church silence, it seems, reflected the unfortunately predictable realities of war. Conflict in NSW was characterised and publicly depicted as frontier violence, not war. In Van Diemen's land, the whole future of the Colony was seen to be at stake and it is a rare prophet indeed who speaks up for justice in circumstances such as these.

There was, however, a much more profound failure of the Church of England than pointed to by John Harris. This relates to the Church's embrace and unquestioned identification with the new 'men of property' who arrived

in the 1820s and led to the invasion and conquest of Aboriginal Tasmania. The active identification and support with the landed classes meant the primary failure of the Church was not neglect, silence or 'not even trying', but active legitimisation of a land theft very questionable by the Christian ethical standards of the time.

The key to understanding this failure lies in the Church's own relationship and vested interests with one continuing question and defining issue: land.

Chapter 3

Partners in Plunder

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND in Tasmania was a partner in the dispossession of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people through its support and legitimisation of the conquest of their land. This was based primarily on the Church's close identification with the state and land owning classes. To a significantly lesser extent, it was also based on the land grants and linked financial assistance it directly received.

The Church of England in Van Diemen's Land underwent a major change from 1818, much more fundamental than the end of the priestly monopoly previously enjoyed by Robert Knopwood. From this time, a new type of immigrant arrived, a group who were to have a major impact on both Aborigines and the Church. After 1818, Van Diemen's Land for the first time became an attractive destination for men of capital. This was in part due to recession in England and the end of the Napoleonic Wars, which restricted career options there, especially for the younger sons of the gentry. Partly it was because big profits could be made from grazing sheep on the Aboriginal maintained open grassland hunting grounds of the colony. The capital expenditure required for a healthy return was low. The land was given freely to the rich, and little or no clearing was needed due to effective Aboriginal pasture management. Combined with free state labour provided through the convict system and the proven and expanding markets for wool in their home country,

Van Diemen's Land from 1818 to the mid 1830s became a very desirable investment destination indeed.

First a policy change was required. Following an Inquiry conducted by Commissioner Bigge, most of the small land grants to ex-convicts and poor whites by the early 1820s were replaced with large land grants, which were made in proportion to capital already owned. Although this capital was meant to be applied to the 'improvement' and cultivation of the land itself, this was impossible to enforce and the best returns were often to be had by simply exploiting what was already there and selling parcels of land speculatively when the price was right. So the land grab of the new wealthy immigrants began, slowly at first and then after 1823, as awareness increased that the resource was ultimately limited, in a frenzy.

Men like George Hobler spent a lot of their time in securing ever-larger parcels of land. For example on 24 November 1826, he 'discovered a fine track of country and secured it for the present thro. Mr. Sharland the Deputy Surveyor.' On 6 June 1827, he was granted 2000 acres. On 17 May 1831, after meeting the Surveyor General and the Colonial Secretary to 'obviate any impediment in that quarter', he obtained a meeting with the Land Commissioners and 'handed in my claims, having no doubt of the favourable recommendations of my application to the Governor.' The only impediment to quick profit was the defence provided by the rightful owners. Hobler, like most others, had no hesitation in arming their conscripted convict labour force to do their fighting for them. 'I have armed four men,' Hobler reported in December 1827, 'who I hope will get sight of their night fires and slaughter them as they be round it.' But this attack, like so many others by the British failed, and by October 1830 Hobler was angry, 'these horrid savages have committed many cruel murders of late and if not severely chastised will destroy the exposed

Opposite: Land under European occupation about 1830.

Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office



settlement and materially check the progress of the colony.' However, by August 1831, the front had quietened, profits were good and Hobler 'thanks God for directing me to this spot' five years previously.¹

Land was granted through this type of process with only nominal quit rents until 1831, and thereafter sold.² Between 1823 and 1831, when the land gifts were finally stopped, just under two million acres had been granted and European settlement extended through the midlands from Launceston to Hobart, well up the Derwent Valley and significant areas of the east and north west coasts.³ Yet only a few years before, British ownership hardly extended more than 50 kilometres from Hobart or Launceston in any direction.

In this brave new world of land ownership and capital accumulation, the vast majority of whites, the convicts, ex-convicts and poor free settlers were excluded. Fifty to one hundred of the wealthiest settlers possessed upwards of 18,000 acres each and four to five hundred almost all the rest.⁴ By the mid-1830s, these men had secured almost all the prime Aboriginal maintained and developed hunting grounds of the island. The frontier then shifted to Port Philip, along with the good economic times as government revenue declined, speculative capital went offshore and the population slow-down began.

Of great significance for the Church of England is that this new landowning class was predominantly Anglican and that many sought to be squires of the new land. This required respectability, a sense of permanence and legitimacy. The heritage and model they were drawing on for their sought ideal was England, where the Church was part of the foundation of the landed classes' social prestige, political power and economic wealth. In return, financial and other support to the Church was provided. At this point in English history, and for some time after, the interests of the landed classes and Established Church were assumed to be bound together. It was to be another generation at least before the Church of England seriously confronted the changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution.

Many of the new immigrants thus sought a similar relationship with the Church here. Similarly for the Church, the new immigrants seemed to offer much. The goal was clear — security through endowments on this English model. Relationships with the large landowners, the main source of wealth in the colony, were seen as fundamental to building up the Church and rooting it firmly as, if not quite the established, at least the official and dominant church in the colony.

For example, Cassandra Pybus writes of her ancestor Richard Pybus, who received a large grant of land on Bruny Island when it was still in Aboriginal ownership. Several acres were excised from his Bruny Grant as a gift to the Church of England. Pybus was an Anglican lay preacher and a 'pious man', who seems to have had a genuine commitment to the Church and its faith. Yet as Cassandra Pybus notes: 'Nothing constrained him from selling most of this free gift of land when property values skyrocketed during the 1840s.'⁵

Barrett's 1942 history of the Church in Tasmania lists a number of other endowments with pride. Captain Dumaresq of Illawarra near Carrick built a church on his estate in 1844 and endowed it with 200 acres of land. Hagley parish came into being in 1856 when Sir Richard Dry, active Anglican, Tasmania's first native born Premier and possessor of a 30,000 acre estate, endowed it with three farms bringing a total income of £400. Sir Richard then held patronage, again on the English model, and filled the vacancy with his brother. Dry also endowed a number of other churches in his fairly extensive district. Legge in the Cullenswood district and Bethune at Ouse are other example of land endowments for the Church.⁶

Many other estates, perhaps more reluctant to hand over resources, built private Anglican chapels instead. As Karl Von Stieglitz noted 'on estates from one end of the island to the other — from Richmond to Circular Head, from Cullenswood to Cressy, fine little chapels were built.'⁷

It is always very dangerous for any historian to generalise regarding individual motives and, no doubt in this case as always, they varied. The genuine Christian faith and commitment of many of these settlers is not under question, nor the fact that much of their relationship with the Church was genuine and generous. However, this truth does not contradict the fact that at a critical historical juncture, the ties between these men of property and the Church helped consolidate and legitimise the ethical and social status of both the land grants and the landowners. Respectability for the new establishment was not automatic and could not be assumed while ethical concerns about the true ownership of this land continued to be major contemporary issues.

Indeed, the debate in the 19th Century was as rigorous and in some ways more progressive than now. Thomas Gregson, a local barrister and future politician, speaking up for the 'honour of civilisation', pointed out at a public meeting on 22 September 1830 that Aborigines are 'legally masters of the soil' and they ought not be forced out of their lands marked by the Crown.⁸ Robinson was at a loss 'to conceive by what tenure we hold the country for it does not appear to be that we either hold it by right of conquest or by right of purchase'.⁹ A correspondent to the Launceston Advertiser in 1832 wrote of the Aborigines and the land:

*they are not rebellious subjects, but an injured nation, defending in their own way, their rightful possessions which have been taken from them by force ... The same God made both (black and white), the same God protects both and the same God will judge both.*¹⁰

David Burn summarised the concerns:

*however much the grantee might endeavour to reconcile his acquisition as a gift of the British Crown, still it was legalized plunder, which the flattering unctious, that he was converting an inadequately appropriated wilderness into a resort for civilised man, could not entirely smooth away.*¹¹

The theological situation was also unclear. The most common justification for the land takeover was that Europeans made better use of it, their right came from God's injunction to 'go

forth and multiply, subdue the earth and replenish it.' The only problem was 'the embarrassing fact' that little land was actually brought under the plough and 'the extensive open-range grazing ... neither met the expectations of European philosophy nor did it differ all that much from the way Aborigines used the land'.¹² If 'considerations of this sort were held to justify a compulsory transfer of land', as Robinson and others pointed out, 'then soon there would be an end to the rights of all property'.¹³

As the Rev. T. Atkins concluded from the safety of the home country, theological justifications could '... by no means justify the avaricious and unjust, the inhumane and murderous conduct of many of the original settlers and colonists of Tasmania, who, by occupying the land which formed the hunting grounds of the natives, deprived them of the means of sustenance ... A day of retribution will come,' he warned, 'when the righteous judge of the whole earth will make an inquisition for blood.'¹⁴

Doubts about the ethics and legality of the land grab were widespread among Christians in Britain. Socially concerned evangelical Anglicans dominated the House of Commons Select Committee on Native Peoples. Their Reports of 1836 and 1837 found that, 'it might be presumed that the native inhabitants of any land have an incontrovertible right to their own soil; a plain and sacred right, however, which seems not to have been understood.' It noted that in Australia especially, Aboriginal claims, 'whether as sovereigns or proprietors of the soil, have been utterly disregarded. The land has been taken from them without the assertion of any other title than that of superior force.' The Report generously concluded that the neglect of the territorial right of Aborigines 'must have been an oversight'.¹⁵ Other activists in Britain were less understanding. The British and Foreign Aborigines Protection Society, for example, 'view the treatment of Australia's Aborigines as virtually identical to the slavery of indigenous Africans'.¹⁶

In this context of rigorous debate about the ethics of the land takeover and the righteousness of the Tasmanian War,

it is not unfair to the genuine Christian commitment and motives of many of the wealthy settlers to acknowledge that their close relationship to the Church helped legitimise their questionable claims to be the respectable, permanent and God given squires of the new land. The Church of England in Tasmania's close partnership and identification with the landowning class clearly served mutual interests.

Such was the overall success of the establishment in reframing and legitimising Aboriginal dispossession that by 1875 Hugo Munro-Hull was only expressing the dominant view when he wrote: 'We must come to the conclusion that the beneficent Creator never intended Tasmania to be the permanent home of the savage; but to be filled with a free, and honest and a gentle people.'¹⁷

The Church's part in the dispossession of Aboriginal Tasmanians was not only related to its support and legitimisation of the new landowners. Church and State also worked

St Andrew's Anglican Church at Evandale by Duncan Cooper, 1851. W. L. Crowther Library, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office



closely together through direct land grants and considerable state subsidies. In the early years, the Church was a part of the official State structures and thus, in one sense, holds a share of responsibility for all Government actions, including the British invasion and land appropriation. By Arthur's time, while the Church of England was still treated as the established church, there was already change under way, as the Governor actively sponsored and financially supported other denominations. From 1836, the policy was to treat the main churches equally regarding endowments, although in practice the Church of England's status and power with the establishment still gave it a favoured position.

As part of this Church-State relationship, land grants were made to the Church, initially direct to the clergy. John Youl, the northern chaplain, was a particularly keen pastoralist. When he died in 1827, he left 4000 acres of mostly granted land.¹⁸ Knopwood's last days were spent in bitter disputes over the price received from the Government for the sale of his valuable 30 acres at Cottage Green, now part of Salamanca Place and Battery Point. Glebes, areas of land set aside to provide income for the Church, were also carved out. Peterson was instructed to make out a 200 acre glebe in the north and later Macquarie increased this to 400 acres. The glebe in the south was on the eastern shore in the Rokeby district, which was also listed by Bigge as being 400 acres in 1819.

Subsequent policy practice regarding land grants to the churches was somewhat inconsistent but by the time Van Diemen's Land separated from NSW in 1825, the intention was clear enough. Part of the arrangements for the development of the new colony was that one seventh of Crown lands, in size and value, was to be reserved for the permanent support of churches and schools, the lands to be selected by the commissioner of survey and valuation.¹⁹ However, in practice, a Churches and Schools Corporation to administer the system on the NSW model was never established here.²⁰ Archdeacon Scott, who had been secretary to Bigge and was now a shareholder in the Australian

Agricultural Company and a wool merchant, visited the colony to investigate and make recommendation regarding this issue. He documented the need for more schools and clergy, which as Arthur noted looked promising enough given that 'the price of land and therefore church revenue must rise'.²¹

Before the Church asset was realised, however, the policy changed in 1831. The Secretary of State for War and Colonies found that the existing guidelines inconvenienced settlers and did not even pay for expenses, so Church costs were henceforth to come from general revenue.²² Arthur was instructed to 'conduct the sale and lease of 150,000 acres of Church and School land and provide all clergy with a decent house and glebe of 40 acres'. The last land rush on the best remaining native pasture land after 1831 was, ironically enough, then on this former church land. Lloyd Robson sees this sale of church land as:

*a striking manifestation of the union of religion and capitalism, because, of course, except where the areas were bordered by granted land, the church and schools' lands could be sold only to a few very wealthy colonists.*²³

As a part of the new policy, clergy were also not to be granted land. Church glebes continued to be granted until the 1860s when the State Aid Redistribution Bill prohibited government endowments of any more land for religious purposes and replaced such support with a lump sum annual grant.

Von Stieglitz, writing in the 1950s, notes that, 'Our church had already been given 1,716 acres of land by that time, and was in a very sound position.'²⁴ Surveyor General J. E. Calder's *Return of lands granted to the churches*, compiled in 1868, in fact totals 1,701 acres.²⁵ Sixty-two parcels of land had been granted, ranging in size from less than an acre at Mangana to the 400 acres at Clarence and Longford. Apart from 219 acres at Launceston and 75 at Campbell Town, most were between three and 40 acres with an average size of 27.4 acres.

While the amount of land given to the Church after 1831 is small, it must be remembered, as James Fenton noted in 1884, that much of the smaller grants consisted of 'valuable allotments in towns'.²⁶ For example, the 33 acres granted at New Town to support the new Bishop, known then as the Bishop's Glebe, already had a very significant value. This would have been a very useful supplement to the income from the estate purchased near Cressy, renamed Bishopsbourne, with money raised mainly by Governor Franklin's efforts and the £800 promised by the Legislative Council.²⁷

Nor was state aid to the Anglican Church confined to land grants. Until the 1850s, the majority of the clergy, indeed all of the early clergy, were on the Government payroll. All the Church buildings up to 1832 were built at Government expense and the spate of church building in the 1830s and 1840s was also underwritten by the State, with the Government usually covering at least half and often more of the cost. Policy did still vary among governors, but Franklin, for example, provided £300 for the erection of the minister's house, £700 for a place of worship and paid the minister's stipend if the congregation was more than 80 in the country and 200 in the main towns.²⁸ Franklin's generosity was underpinned by a relatively healthy budget built on land sales, generously appreciating since the end of the War.

Only when the good land was gone in the early 1840s, with land sales ceasing altogether after 1845 and a budget crisis thus looming large, did state aid to the Anglican Church significantly reduce. By then, however, private endowments by the respectable landowning establishment had significantly taken up the slack. At the same time, the ethical questions about the land grants and British invasion were, within Van Diemen's Land at least, increasingly being defined as 'history'.

Chapter 4

Institutional Meeting Points: The Orphan Schools, Wybalenna and Oyster Cove

IT WAS THROUGH the medium of the institutions of the Orphan Schools, Wybalenna and subsequently the Oyster Cove Aboriginal Establishment, that the Church of England came for the first time into close everyday contact with Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

The first of such experiences were at the Orphan Schools. In 1828, Arthur in partnership with the Church of England established two Orphan Schools, which accommodated and educated hundreds of boys and girls all year round. Bedford and other clergy dominated the committee. In 1832-3 a parish partnership was formalised, with both Orphan Schools moving to newly built premises in New Town, one on either side of the equally new Parish Church. The church was purpose built to meet the needs of the School, convicts and the free settlers. The children occupied one gallery, convicts the other, leaving the main body of the church for the settlers. Carefully designed barriers and separate entrances kept the convicts out of sight of the children.¹

Despite the name, the resident children were not usually orphans. Rather, most were the children of convicts, with at least one parent and occasionally both, alive. Even free settlers could place their children there, although a fee was

usually then required. Aboriginal children were also placed in the Orphan Schools.

It was a traumatic and difficult experience. Boys slept in hammocks, 80 to a dormitory. At 14, all children were apprenticed out and worked for no money until they were 18, completely at the mercy of their masters. Even by the standards of the time, the Schools were viewed with concern. In the early years, the Committee was consistently unhappy with the regime. There were five masters in the first eleven years as they were regularly dismissed in an attempt to improve the basic care. When they were finally closed in the 1860s, after a damning Royal Commission, the schools were likened to a prison rather than a benevolent institution.

The Aboriginal children at the Orphan Schools were taken to Wybalenna in the middle of 1835. That year alone, there had been three deaths of Aboriginal children at the schools, leaving eight to make the journey.² It seems likely the return of their children was part of the treaty or understanding negotiated between Arthur and the Aboriginal people through Robinson. During their conflict with Superintendent Jeanneret at Wybalenna, he did return some children to the Schools as a strategy to gain greater compliance from the community. As later white officials realised around Australia, the power to remove children gave an enormous authority over the whole community. However, such powers were not yet his. Whether it was honouring the agreement, concern over sensitivities in London or hopefully also some Christian conscience, the children were returned. It was not until Wybalenna was closed in 1847 that Aboriginal children were again consigned to the Orphan Schools.

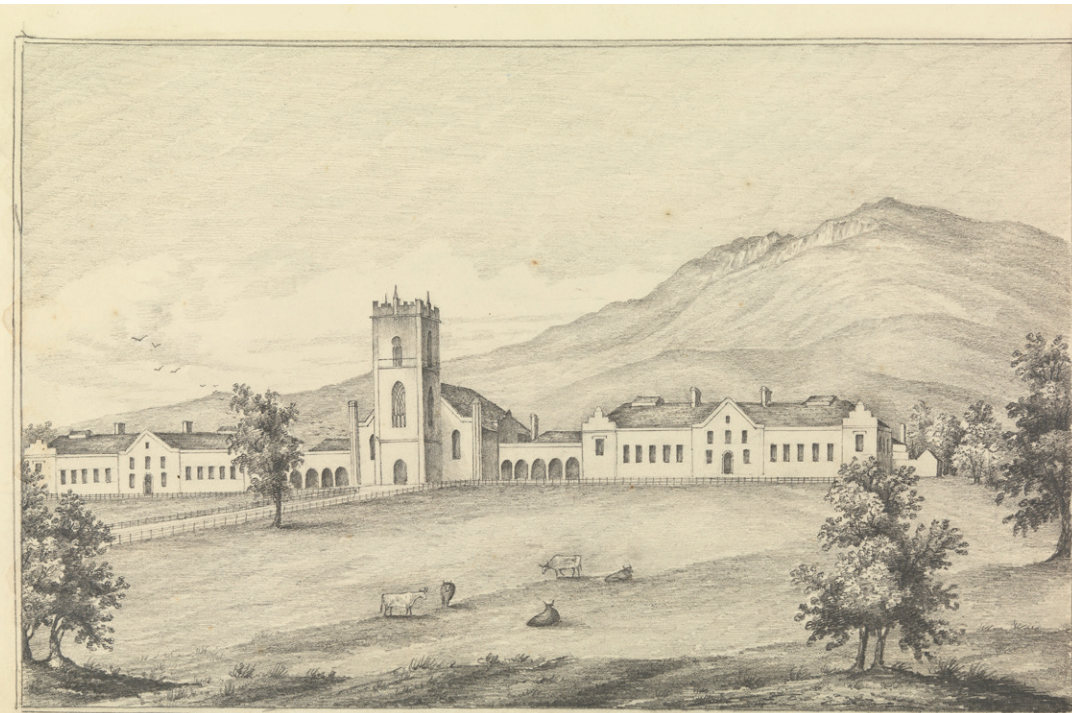
The Orphan Schools had a major impact on the Aboriginal community. Along with the obvious distress and suffering caused by these Dickensian institutions so far removed from Aboriginal community life, the Schools did unintentionally empower individuals to adjust, manipulate and resist the less rigorous institutional life at Wybalenna. The Schools provided a knowledge and experience of British culture, including Christianity, and a level of education and literacy

above the average in white society. In the political struggle for justice and honouring of the spirit and letter of the agreements with the British Government, these were powerful weapons.

Wybalenna was even more a place of contradiction and paradox. It is conventionally portrayed as, at best, a prison, at worst a Christian concentration camp.³ Given some of the realities there, especially the pain of permanent exile and the very high death rates at certain periods, this is perhaps appropriate. Not is it surprising that the ideology of oppression is identified as Christianity, given the well known and to 21st Century's eyes outrageous, disrespectful and patronising forms of Christian instruction undertaken there. The form of teaching, at least under Robinson, was

The Orphan Schools, from a sketchbook of Tasmanian scenes by Emily Bowring.

Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office



catechetical, drilling students in basic Christian doctrine by endless repetitions of the same question and answer: 'Where is God? Who made you? Where do good people go when they die? Where do bad people go?' and so on. Pupils were examined regularly and their answers were recorded.⁴ Even though such teaching methods were common at the time, this does not reduce the shame and horror now felt by the employment of such a crude approach in the context of such painful, privileged and unique Christian pastoral responsibilities.

Reynolds, however, has seen this conventional story of Wybalenna as incomplete and ultimately patronising, because it gives far too much acknowledgment to white officials and ignores the vitality and power evident in Aboriginal resistance and cultural adaptation.

It is clear that while Wybalenna was a place of painful exile, for the Aborigines at least, this was no prison. Indeed, the contrast with the lives of the many white prisoners, there to work to sustain the community, could not have been greater. Nor can it compare with the absolute white power and compulsory Christian direction, including direct prohibitions on traditional cultural practices and spiritual beliefs, characteristic of mainland missions later in the century.

At Wybalenna, the Aborigines and white officials shared an understanding of the rights and freedom of the Aborigines on the island, as expressed in the peace settlement. If these rights were disregarded, Aborigines took effective political action through direct appeals to the Governor and British Government. These rights included having their material needs met, ownership of the land, freedom of movement and, significantly for the emergence of an indigenous Christian faith, their right to cultural freedom. One expression of these rights was their refusal to do European-style work. Aborigines consequently divided up Flinders Island for hunting and spent considerable time in the bush. Ritual life continued and adapted and the Aborigines successfully resisted attempts to control their relationships and culture.

As Reynolds concludes, 'critics of the settlement at Wybalenna have seen it as a place where the Aborigines were stripped of their culture, where they had religion "rammed down their throats", where they were not allowed to carry out traditional ceremonies and were compelled to wear clothes.' But such reports 'attribute far too much to Robinson and far too little to the Tasmanians ... The relationship between the Tasmanian and the culture of the colonists as it emerged at Wybalenna is a complex one.'⁵

This does not mean that the vision of Robinson and others was not for the Aborigines to become a stable, settled, agricultural, Christian, 'civilised' people. Nor does it mean that they did not do everything within their power and capacity to impose this lifestyle and cultural values on them. Trying to enforce European cultural and moral norms on Aborigines, making them work, and querying how to better change them into a settled agricultural, Christian people became, along with managing cost, the themes of three official inquiries in the 1840s, as well as many since. However, unlike most 19th Century missions on the mainland, the realisation of this vision was struggled for in the context of real Aboriginal power built on the understandings of the treaty.

At Wybalenna Aboriginal culture and spiritual life continued to develop. Much of European culture and practices had already been adapted and appropriated before the move to Flinders Island. As Julia Clarke documents, 'creatively the Tasmanian universe was certainly an expanding one. Song, dance and storytelling in Tasmania seem to have been dynamic and adaptable traditions.'⁶ This process of cultural adaptation and change continued at Flinders Island. Thus the new 'devil dance', which so offended Robinson and other whites because of the nudity and sexual imagery involved, is seen by Clarke as an act of 'humorous defiance' deliberately calculated to offend and unsettle.⁷ Moreover, it was clearly beyond Robinson's authority to stamp it out.

Where did this ongoing development, the cultural change, continuity, resistance and accommodation involved in the

complex meeting of the two cultures leave Christianity?⁸ For most historians, Christianity is never more than the ideological language of British cultural oppression imposed on and resisted by the Aboriginal people. This was clearly true at one level. The white authorities' explicit aim was for Aborigines to adopt a British cultural expression of Christianity, which had little relevance to their life experience or culture. However, again it is patronising and misleading to attribute too much power and influence to these white superintendents and catechists. There is strong evidence that Christianity was also in fact appropriated and made relevant and real to Aboriginal culture and customs by a very effective indigenous Christian leadership. Moreover, in these indigenous hands, like those of many other oppressed people, from North American slaves to South American workers,

Residence of the Aborigines, Flinders Island, coloured lithograph by John Skinner Prout.

Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office



Christian instruction moved from a crude instrument of social control to become a path of liberation and empowerment way beyond the intention, comprehension and certainly the approval of the Church and its teachers.

Even Reynolds, however, is uncomfortable to carry his main thesis to its logical conclusion in this area. He acknowledges that 'the Aboriginal response to Christianity was complex'. He recognises that men like Walter Arthur and Thomas Bruny were 'committed Christians'. He recounts the extensive evidence of local prayer meetings, accounts of speeches made and so on. He even acknowledges the 'intriguing point' that those most influenced by Christianity 'were the strongest advocates of Aboriginal rights', and that, 'in the hands of Walter and Mary Arthur, Christianity became a means of shaping and affirming a new Aboriginal identity'.⁹

However, in apparent contradiction of this evidence, he still concludes that 'Christianity had made little impact despite constant church services and prayer meetings', basing this on 'the assessment of numerous observers'. He cites the evidence of Robinson's son to the visiting Board of Inquiry in 1839 that he did not believe the Aborigines had 'any correct knowledge of religion' and the common observation of how strongly they held on to their own beliefs.¹⁰

On this point alone it seems that Reynolds joins those who must deny the complexity of the meeting of white and black cultures and give acknowledgment only to the white participants. Why is this merging and adaptation, the complex interrelationship of cultural practices advocated elsewhere in his thesis, denied only in matters of spirituality?

The white judgment that this, the Aboriginal form of Christian practice and belief, was not 'correct religion', is more likely evidence that it was in fact something different and new, something adapted and made relevant and real to their culture and identity. It certainly does not mean that 'Christianity made little impact' or that independent Aboriginal action in this area was any less authentic than the political action to which it was in fact so closely related.

Assessing 'true' belief is an almost impossible task for any historian. Putting labels on the faith of others is even more problematic. Was this a tribal spirituality influenced by Christianity or a Christianity building on tribal beliefs? No doubt it was both. However, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, there is no reason why the many examples of independent Aboriginal Christian practice at Wybalenna should not simply be accepted as expressions of a vibrant indigenous faith. Moreover if the people themselves described this activity as Christian, their language and interpretation would seem to be the appropriate guide for the historian to follow.

Christianity did not replace traditional culture, any more than European foods, language or music replaced tribal foods, words and song. As has been common in many parts of the world, Christianity was apparently expressed in the context of existing beliefs and practices as part of a complex and evolving spirituality and culture.

Moreover, Aboriginal Christian leader embraced political action for justice as an integral part of their faith. The most famous example of this, setting out a pattern of Aboriginal political action based on the same understanding of their rights which has continued through to the present, is the petition of February 1846 signed by eight Aborigines living at Wybalenna to Queen Victoria.

The humble petition of the free Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land now living upon Flinders Island ... That we are your free children that were not taken prisoners but freely gave up our country to Colonel Arthur then the Governor after defending ourselves.

Your petitioners humbly state to Your Majesty that Mr. Robinson made for us and with Colonel Arthur an agreement which we have not lost from our minds since and we have made our part of it good.

Your petitioners humbly tell your Majesty that when we left our own place we were plenty of people, we are now but a little one.

Your petitioners state they are a long time at Flinders Island and had plenty of superintendents and were always a quiet and free people and not put into gaol.

Your Majesty's petitioners pray that you will not allow Dr. Jeanneret to come again among us ...

He put many of us into jail for talking to him because we would not be his slaves. He kept from us our rations when he pleased and sometimes gave us bad rations of tea and tobacco ... We never were taught to read or write or sing to God by the doctor. He taught us little upon the Sundays and his prisoner servant also taught us and his prisoner servant also took us plenty of times to jail by his order.

The Lord Bishop seen us in this bad way and we told His Lordship plenty how Dr Jeanneret used us.

We humbly pray your Majesty the Queen will hear our prayer and not let Dr Jeanneret any more come to Flinders Island.¹¹

Reynolds believes 'this declaration represents the most important Aboriginal historical interpretation available for the colonial period anywhere in Australia.'¹² If Reynolds is right, it puts the relationship between the Anglican Church and the Aboriginal people at centre stage, for the people claimed a Christian faith, criticised their white officials on the basis of neglecting it and appealed to the authority of the Church to legitimise their claims.

Regardless, the Church of England was deeply implicated in this political drama, as the speed and seriousness with which these matters were considered by the British Government corresponded directly to the acute interest taken in indigenous issues by the missionary societies and their House of Commons representatives. As Reynolds notes, 'From the perspective of the Colonial Office, Walter Arthur was a more important figure than the white officials who ran Wybalenna because of the acute embarrassment his protest would have produced if taken up by the powerful missionary societies.'¹³

Further, the resultant Inquiry revealed the assistance provided by the Anglican catechist Robert Clarke, who was also in some conflict with Dr Jeanneret. The recurring historical mistake, challenged by Reynolds, has been to assume that the Aborigines themselves were essentially apolitical and that effective action was ultimately a white initiated affair. In this interpretation, the Aborigines become

pawns in the white world of *realpolitik* as Clarke manipulates their grievances for his own ends.¹⁴

Except for the period from 1839 to 1845, Robert Clarke lived with the Tasmanian Aboriginals as catechist from 1834 until his death while living at Oyster Cove in 1850. There have been varied judgments on Clarke, both in praise and condemnation but, as with Knopwood, they seem unfairly strong. Some of the contemporary criticisms made of him actually may speak in his favour of providing, by the standards of the time, a fairly flexible and culturally adaptable Gospel message with a comparatively relaxed attitude to some of the associated British Christian cultural practices. Robinson complained that ‘when his eyes are open ... he is an inveterate smoker and is very uncleanly in his person.’ Governor Denison found him ‘incapable of exercising any proper control over the natives’.¹⁵ Jeanneret accused him of cruel treatment of the children in his care but, given the Aboriginal view of this particular commandant, even this accusation could disguise a virtue.

One boss complained to Hobart of Clarke’s commitment to teach the Gospel first. This referred to the rigorous contemporary debate throughout British Christendom between those who believed preaching and understanding the Gospel must come before civilisation and cultural change could occur and those who believed the Gospel could never be heard until primitive habits had been abandoned. Clarke had an ally in Arthur and indeed among the most prominent evangelical thinking at the time. The Colonial Secretary’s reply upheld the view of the catechist: ‘In truth, the inculcation of the first principles of the religion ... of the Bible, is the most effectual mode of introducing civilisation.’ And there was to be no interference with him.¹⁶

One Tasmanian Aboriginal woman, Bessy Clarke, told Bonwick some years after Clarke’s death that he was ‘a very good man. All the blackfellows love him.’¹⁷ Plomley, on the other hand, sees him as the worst of a bad bunch who ‘stands out as an incubus whose behaviour was seriously detrimental to the welfare of all’.¹⁸

In the end, probably the greatest strength and virtue of Clarke, from a Church point of view at least, was commitment. He and his wife, who worked actively with Aboriginal women, are the only white officials in European Tasmanian history who were prepared to live out their lives alongside Tasmanian Aboriginal people. The others all left to easier lives, including Robinson. It is probable that Clarke’s other options were limited and that the demands of his job were less and the conditions better than any alternative, but his staying power, from an Anglican perspective, is important to acknowledge.

It is clear, however, that Clarke was not the Christian leader of the Aboriginal community or one of its more dynamic, intelligent or capable members. As the thorough inquiry into the 1846 petition established, Clarke acted on direction. The leaders in this struggle to see justice done were a new generation of Aboriginal Tasmanian Christians with a strong collective identity and cultural pride.

Clarke in this instance deserves praise, too rare in subsequent church history, for simply documenting Aboriginal concerns exactly as they were put to him. As he told the Inquiry, he ‘had from their mouths the nature of their grievances which I embodied as nearly as possible in their style and mode of expression’.¹⁹ Showing a commitment to process of which any social justice advocate could be proud, he even first prepared a draft and read it back to them before the final version was written. Clarke was not, it seems, prepared to challenge injustice against the Aborigines independently. He would not help with the petition without the order of the Superintendent, which he required in writing. Indeed, when Jeanneret temporarily returned, Walter Arthur wrote to the Governor ‘there is not any white men here who dare to say anything in our behalf’.²⁰

This was a successful Aboriginal initiated, inspired and owned political action. Its leaders, especially Walter Arthur and Thomas Bruny, were Christians, which also meant in this context Anglicans.

Arthur and Bruny had both spent time at the Boys Orphan School between 1832 and 1835, there learning to read and write 'with a proficiency equal to that of the majority of the colonists'.²¹ Bruny wrote in the paper Arthur and he founded and produced on Flinders Island that he had learnt at the school to 'read the Bible and I understood it and I was taught to cypher and I was taught to learn the geography and the grammar and the catechism all of them I did learn'.²²

Arthur and Bruny taught reading and writing to other community members, led the congregation in singing and prayers, delivered sermons and wrote articles for the newspaper. They used the paper to exhort the community to Christian behaviour. Arthur would return from hunting expeditions on his own free will to observe the Sabbath.²³

His was an incarnation creation-centred theology: 'now my friends you know that there is but one God only: the God who made the sun, and moon, and stars, and everything that you can see around you ... And may we learn more and more of God and of his son Jesus Christ.'²⁴ This faith did not represent a denial of Aboriginal culture, an acceptance of white authority or an aping of British mores. On the contrary, the Christianity of Arthur and Bruny was a distinctive Tasmanian Aboriginal expression of the faith, which they saw as a means of liberation and empowerment for their people.

On reaching manhood, Walter Arthur had quickly made his independence clear. After a few days in the bush in his mid-teens, probably being initiated, Arthur returned and disappointed Clarke and Robinson by moving out of Clarke's house against their wishes. Robinson's hopes of this literate and intelligent pupil becoming a catechist were further dashed when he married Maryanne tribally and his ultimate lack of commitment to European cultural and moral mores was made abundantly clear.

However, the strongest evidence that this was a manifestation of something new, a genuine Tasmanian Aboriginal Christian expression, was how this faith embraced justice and political action in a way unimaginable to their white Christian

teachers. Jeanneret believed Arthur and his friends aimed to 'disturb their more peaceable countrymen and ... excite them to riot and set (to) naught the authorities'.²⁵

The primary Christian failing at Wybalenna and, from late 1847, at Oyster Cove is not the primitive and crude forms of instruction or the patronising British Christian interpretations but that no one in the white church seems to have recognised the importance and dynamism of these indigenous Christian leaders. On the contrary, they were at best patronised or ignored, at worst seen as a threat. After the move back to the mainland, white Christian visitors, like Robinson before them, continued to be struck by Arthur, who was soon running his own dairy farm, but remained closed to the dynamic potential of what he represented. Bonwick noticed his neat house, the air of domesticity and that 'the Bible occupied a conspicuous position'.²⁶ However, the commitment to justice integral to Arthur's Aboriginal Christianity was consistently resisted. As a visiting magistrate observed in 1858, Arthur was 'subversive of the necessary good order and discipline to be observed, but calculated by his influence to create a mutinous disposition among the less educated of the Aboriginals'.²⁷

Even today it is more comfortable to stay with pity and regret than deal with this new story. Truganini in her last years, not Arthur or Fanny Cochrane Smith, was to be the preferred Church symbol for Aboriginal Tasmania. As Reynolds argues:

*Arthur represented something all together different and ultimately more challenging. He was able to successfully synthesise Aboriginal identity with Christianity and European education. His career pointed the way to the possibilities of the future rather than the past; the politics of rights rather than those of guilt. He appealed to the principles of British and colonial society — he wanted justice not pity.*²⁸

In 1847, Wybalenna was evacuated and the Aborigines moved to Oyster Cove, south of Hobart. The move initially brought hope. Between 1847 and 1850 there were no deaths, and the indigenous leadership negotiated the transition with

apparent success. White Church and political interest was also at this time high.

The first Bishop of Tasmania, Francis Nixon, had an interest in Aboriginal people. He visited Wybalenna with Governor Franklin in 1843, the year after he arrived in the Colony. It seems the leaders of the community discussed rights and grievances with them both. The appeal to the Lord Bishop's authority for verification of their claims is quite explicit in the 1846 petition. At Oyster Cove, Nixon maintained his interest, making several visits, keeping informed of developments and organising clergy to visit and provide pastoral care.

Governor Denison and his wife, active and committed Anglicans, even served Christmas dinner to the Aborigines at their New Norfolk residence as a welcome home in Christmas 1847. Soon after, they gave up their vice regal box at the theatre to them.²⁹

Not so happily, all ten Aboriginal children were returned to the Orphan School. This must have been a cruel shock after the relative freedom and independence of community life at Wybalenna. Lady Denison found the children at the school to be 'all so unnaturally quiet and orderly ... dull and apathetic ... with no amusements at all'. The Denisons provided games and initiated quarterly visits with special prizes. In 1849, the prize was won by an Aboriginal girl, and Lady Denison describes the child's joy at the recognition and special attention. Unfortunately, the Denisons' interest in the school, along with the Aborigines, soon waned and the visits ceased.³⁰

The overall situation at Oyster Cove also deteriorated rapidly from 1850 as expenditure was continually cut. Physical conditions eroded, disease and death hit the settlement and political and Church interest lapsed. There were six deaths in 1850 alone, severely sapping morale.³¹

Consecration of the first Bishop of Tasmania, and the Bishops of Barbados, Gibraltar, Antigua and Guiana, 1842.

Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office



Westminster Abbey

*Consecration of the First Bishop of Tasmania D^r Nixon
and of the Bishops of Barbados, Gibraltar, Antigua
and Guiana on 24th August 1842.*

When Robinson made a brief visit in 1851 prior to returning to a comfortable retirement in Bath, England, he was told by the Aborigines that they wanted to exercise their right to return to Flinders Island. However, as white society moved first to accept then even to embrace the 'tragic extinction' paradigm, Aboriginal political influence drastically declined, and this option was never seriously considered.

With self-government in 1855, official neglect became nearly total and cost cutting became almost the sole priority, with the budget being halved in the first year alone.³² James Calder visited in 1855 and was shocked 'that nothing is done ... that we have allowed them to sink still lower'.³³ Calder was an evangelical lay preacher and schoolteacher from Victoria and felt the Christian abandonment deeply, 'No means are adapted to provide any religious instruction or emulation ... the remnant should at least be prepared for death and eternity'.³⁴ According to Calder, clergy had given up visits, 'after constantly being greeted by the sight of aborigines [*sic*] running away to hiding places in the thrush'.³⁵

No doubt this was related to the fact that after Clarke's death in 1850, as a further cost saving, the Government had axed the position of Clarke's replacement catechist, then held by Mr Trappe. Pastoral care was for a time then taken over by the Rev. Mr Freeman, who was little interested in the Gospel-first philosophy, having a much sterner Victorian moral message to convey about culture and behaviour.

Maryanne Arthur told another visitor, James Bonwick, in 1859 that, 'We had souls at Flinders, but we have none here ... we are thrown upon the scum of society ... nobody cares for us'.³⁶ 'They think we have got no souls now,' she tragically concluded.³⁷ The death by drowning of her husband in an accident off Sandy Bay beach further weakened the community. Arthur had continued to lobby on behalf of his people to the end, but the new self-governing colony of Tasmania had no memory or

commitment to Aboriginal rights, treaties or agreements. The white claim to the land was now seen as absolute.

The buildings fell even further into disrepair from the early 1850s. An establishment that even in 1847 had been assessed as too unhealthy for convicts due to chronic dampness was now a desperate slum. In the context of Government neglect, the possibility of the new Diocese of Tasmania putting some of its own funds and resources to maintain at least a Church presence does not seem to have been seriously considered. Church interest now also focused on the last sightings of a nearly 'extinct' race. Nixon even took photos of the Oyster Cove Aborigines in 1858 and sent them to the International Exhibition in London in 1862, with the depiction 'remnants of a dying race'.³⁸

By 1862, all the children at the Orphan School were dead.³⁹ William Lanney, the last of the men of the Oyster Cove Establishment, was still lodging official complaints about conditions as late as 1864, but to no avail.⁴⁰

Given the relationships and commitments already entered into, the abandonment by the Church of England at this desperate period of high need is one of the most painful and least understandable aspects of past neglect. In some ways this is increased rather than mitigated by the values of the time. There is no excuse, or even decent reason, for the actions taken in terms of the Church's own faith or teachings. Ultimately, the Church disregarded even the British Christian cultural customs, upon which so much emphasis had always been laid.

John Cove in *What the bones say: Tasmanian Aborigines, science and domination* has documented the Anglican Church's cooperation with grave stealing.

Most Tasmanians are aware that Lanney's body was secretly and illegally chopped up and shared out by members of the Royal Society after his death in May 1868, one Society member famously having a tobacco pouch made out of his skin. Church cooperation in this criminal behaviour is less well known. Lanney's funeral was conducted at St David's by

the Rev. Mr Cox. Contemporaries pointed out in the columns of the daily paper that the good Reverend must have been aware of the mutilation. The Church record worsened with the death of Trugannini who, after the trauma of witnessing Lanney's dismemberment, had provided specific instructions to an Anglican clergyman about the disposal of her body. Given this, Cove finds the 'silence of the Anglican Church' when her wishes are ignored, her body stolen and later sent to Melbourne for the International Exhibition prior to public display in Hobart from 1904 'sickening'.⁴¹

Most people in 1876 did also. British Christian cultural practices and beliefs were still held far more strongly in the general population than the paradigm of the greater scientific good propounded by the Royal Society. Why, therefore, did the Church of England cooperate in this betrayal, not only of Aboriginal Tasmanians but also of its own fundamental beliefs? Sadly, Cove's conclusion on this matter is difficult to dispute: "The membership data of the Royal Society is informative. The Lord Bishop of Tasmania was a life member, and the Archdeacon a vice president."⁴²

The Church's subservience to, cooperation and identification with powerful local establishment figures to secure Aboriginal human remains and cultural property provides a shameful and sorry close to a generation of institution-based relationships which had, for all its tragedy and suffering, promised something much more.

A new generation of Aboriginal Christian activists had shown the Church how the fundamental question first asked by Knopwood — How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? — might have been answered in truth and spirit. But the Church of England leadership and clergy could not even honour their bones.

The failure seems profound and total. And in terms of the official story, it was.

Fortunately, however, Aboriginal resistance and survival, or indeed an indigenous Christian faith, was not dependent on officially sponsored establishments, officially sanctioned

culture and belief, or the sponsorship and support of Church leadership.

One of the indigenous Christians from Oyster Cove, Fanny Cochrane Smith, had married and left the settlement in 1855, eventually being given a land grant at Nicholls Rivulet. She seems to have found a more welcome home in the Methodist Church, donating the land for its building and becoming the founding matriarch of a proud and resilient Aboriginal community. It was thus not to be the honour of the Church of England to receive the only bit of land actually freely given up to any church in Tasmania by one of its rightful owners.

Beyond the frontier of political and ecclesiastical command, an even more hopeful story was unfolding. As the evacuation of Flinders Island was being planned in April 1847, a notice which points to the survival and resilience both of Aboriginal Tasmania and some form of more positive relationship with the Church, appeared in the Cornwall Chronicle:

*(Married) at George Town, on Saturday the 27th instant, by Rev Mr. Fereday, John Mira (a native of the island of Otaheiti) to Betsy Miti (an Aboriginal native of this island). Also James William (a European) to Victoria Ferrard (also a native of this island). The parties left on Thursday morning late in an open boat for George Town — a distance of 80 miles, in order that the marriage ceremonies might be performed by a duly qualified clergyman.*⁴³

It is a more hopeful story of Aboriginal survival and cultural resilience and adaptation, including an ongoing relationship with the Anglican Church pointed to by this marriage notice, which will now be explored.

Chapter 5

Mission to the Islands

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND was the first part of the established institutional structures of the newly self-governing colony of Tasmania to give official recognition to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community living in the Bass Strait Islands. From 1852, as the Church turned its back on 'failure' at Oyster Cove, an ongoing series of widely publicised missionary voyages to the 'half castes of Bass Strait' explored the hope of a dynamic new relationship with these independent and resourceful survivors of Aboriginal Tasmania.

There had been Tasmanian Aboriginal women living with the sealers of Bass Strait since the first decade of the century. By 1830, there were 74 Tasmanian Aboriginal women living with Europeans, and in 1837 there were still 40 living on the islands outside the official settlement on Flinders Island. The fear of removal and the military contingent initially kept a distance between the two Aboriginal communities. However, by the 1840s there was much coming and going and the Islander community was a part of the independence and vitality of the social and cultural life at Wybalenna. Indeed, Governor Denison gave this contact as one of the primary purposes of evacuation, as it meant that the settlement was becoming too hard to control.

The Islander community had already served a useful purpose in the white justification of the violent conquest of Aboriginal

land. The sealers were stereotypically depicted and the worst scum of white society, lacking morals or civilisation and the women as their helpless sexual and economic slaves, without choice or hope. The resentments this caused were seen as a primary cause of Aboriginal hostility.

However, the evacuation of Wybalenna, the concentration of 'official' Aborigines at Oyster Cove, where the 'end' was in sight, and the growing distance from the Black War, allowed a more balanced and appreciative white assessment. For the Church of England clergy who observed and described them in the 1850s and 1860s, the Islanders were a settled, peaceful and moral people with a distinctive way of life clearly based on the adaptation of Tasmanian Aboriginal economic, social and cultural practices.

The proud new young Diocese of Tasmania, imbued with the missionary fervour of the Victorian Church, had been delighted to 'discover' this isolated mission field to a non-white people beyond the frontier. From 1852, there followed fifty years of missionary activity, usually driven and sometimes directly undertaken by the Bishop. Until the 1890s, the mission was confined to the occasional summer visit, and this arrangement seems to have worked best for all parties. The Aboriginal people received a vehicle to have their needs, aspirations and identity recognised and promoted within white society. The Church had a romantic and attractive frontier mission to a hospitable and appreciative people and a chance to atone for past neglect by fulfilling a moral imperative of history, a special obligation and responsibility.

This does not mean both sides shared a common understanding of what the missions were about. Both parties had different values and agendas, but there was enough common ground and mutual benefit for a dynamic, productive and mutually appreciated partnership to continue until the 1890s, when a permanent residential mission soon revealed to both groups the extent of their underlying differences.

It was certainly clear from the beginning that this was no mission to a heathen people. The existence and vibrancy of the existing Christian life was acknowledged and appreciated, as were the indigenous Christian leaders. The visiting clergy provided a Church form and structure as well as conducting large numbers of weddings and baptisms.

The opportunity for the Church to become involved was an initiative of the Aborigines themselves. The community had applied to Governor Denison for a missionary catechist to be appointed to educate their children, proposing that due to their Aboriginality expenses be paid from the Land Fund, as was the case for Oyster Cove. The Government was only prepared to recognise one Aboriginal community, however, the dying one at Oyster Cove, and denied the request, which was passed on to Bishop Nixon.¹

Nixon took up the challenge and got the issue on the agenda of a public meeting called to form the Missionary Society in Tasmania in 1852. It subsequently resolved that the Islanders of Bass Strait should have a claim on any projected missionary enterprise that might be planned by the Society.² Accompanying this was a short article in the Tasmanian Church Chronicle. To encourage support, the contrast with the Oyster Cove people was made clear, 'The young men are prepossessing in their manners and address, and of athletic frame; the girls are modest in their demeanour and can make themselves useful in domestic affairs.'³

Bishop Nixon then visited the islands in 1854 accompanying the Surveyors General and published an account of the voyage as *The Cruise of the Beacon*. It certainly seemed appropriate that in the final months before self-government in Tasmania an embassy should have set out to the survivors of Aboriginal Tasmania to formalise their land holdings and discuss questions of faith and ethics.

Nixon was soon aware of the extent of the changes in the Straits since his 1843 visit, both the loss of the old and the excitement of the new. At Wybalenna, 'desolation stared in the face wherever the eye was turned.' Already only the

chapel remained intact, turned into a barn. ‘The vast territory of 480,000 acres is let to Captain Smith for 10 years. His family and servants making up the total white population of Flinders.’ They seemed uninterested in worship, ‘There was no possibility of holding divine service here ... (the) inhabitants being engaged upon their several occupations.’⁴

What a contrast with his reception at his next port of call, Gun Carriage Island. There, the Bishop found ‘that the most hospitable preparations had been made to welcome us on our arrival.’ As in subsequent missionary voyages, many travelled far, ‘all had strained their utmost to reach the island, in the earnest hope of hearing the word of God.’ He praises the indigenous Christian and community leader, Lucy Beedon: ‘Big minded and earnest in her Christian profession ... From the pure love of those around her, she daily gathered together the children of the sealers, and does her best to implant to them the rudiments of both secular and religious knowledge.’

Bishop Francis Nixon

Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office



Beedon was one of the second generation of Aboriginal leaders, born in 1829 to Emerenna and a Jewish ex-convict from London, who until her death in 1886 remained an effective and impressive Aboriginal leader and teacher. There were also many baptisms and some marriages for Nixon to celebrate, including that of Edward Mansell and his long time Aboriginal partner, Judy Thomas.⁵

Nixon’s views of the Islanders’ faith and lives, while inevitably seen through his own aspirations, values and culture, were broadly consistent with those of other clerical observers during the next 20 years. He describes divine service at Gun Carriage Island:

...every inhabitant and every visitor on the island was present ... And a more quiet, orderly and attentive gathering I never witnessed. It was with a solemn sense of the privilege conferred upon me that there, in that little storm-girt hut, the winds and the seas raring around us, I ... commenced the humble offerings of prayer and praise to that creation’s Lord. There was a deep earnestness ... that I should be glad to witness in more advanced and polished gatherings of Christian worshippers. There was a heartiness in their response, a fervour in their repetition of the creeds, which gave good evidence that their hearts were in their holy work.’⁶

Nixon was similarly impressed by the culture and morality of the community. He noted that there was an ‘air of quiet domestic union. The men appeared sober, active and intelligent; the women were unmistakably modest and retiring.’ ‘These simple half-castes,’ Nixon concluded, ‘had taken the prayer book as their guide.’⁷

Before returning home, Nixon visited the few other permanent white residents then on the Islands. Robinson’s son, after eight years residence on Cape Barren, had ‘become as rough and wild as the uncultivated scenes around him.’ His father-in-law, Dr Allen, was so ‘indifferent to religion’ that the shocked Bishop reports he and his wife declined baptism for their eight children! Whether they became more or less so after such public shaming does not seem to have been the Bishop’s concern but, at this historical juncture at least, the Church’s righteous judgment found in favour of black over white.

There was no immediate fruit from Nixon's labours. However, by the early 1860s Beedon's business responsibilities meant she no longer had the time to teach the children. She invited the Reverends Thomas Reibey and George Fereday to the islands to discuss the need for a school teacher, promising that the Islanders would raise part of the required salary.⁸

Reibey, the Archdeacon of Launceston, became a spirited and effective campaigner with Church and State on Islander matters, while Fereday focused on pastoral care and individual advocacy. It was a formidable partnership in those relatively straightforward days. George Fereday was the minister at George Town from 1846-1871. He acted as an unofficial agent for the Islanders in many transactions and seems to have had extensive relationships with them even from the time of the first marriage in 1847.⁹ However it was the politically astute, wealthy Archdeacon of Launceston, prepared to go public in his campaign for Aboriginal rights, who made the greatest impact on Government and Church policy and practice.

Reibey, ordained in 1844, was the first Tasmanian-born Anglican priest and a large landowner with extensive holdings in the north of the State. His personal wealth meant he was never on the Diocesan or State payroll and this gave him an added capacity for independence and freedom. He was Archdeacon from 1858 to 1870 when, embroiled in internal church battles, publicity around an alleged seduction attempt led him to resign. His switch to politics in 1874 was a productive one, becoming State Premier in 1876-7 and Colonial Secretary from 1876-9 before holding other Government offices until his retirement in 1903.¹⁰

Reibey's first island mission was in 1862. As a disturbing portent, he gave a ride to two merchants from Victoria 'who were thinking of taking up pastoral leases on one or more of the islands'. Although they decided not to pursue this, 'they were the advance guard of others who did'.¹¹ Reibey found the Islanders gathered at Chappell Island for the annual mutton-bird harvest. He had extensive consultations with them about the education options, held services attended by up to 65

people at a time, conducted ten baptisms and generally seems to have enjoyed himself.¹²

The subsequent focus of Reibey's work, apart from the normal services, baptisms, weddings and funerals, was twofold: first, putting the work on a sustainable basis through raising funds and awareness (especially to enable the purchase of a decent boat) and, second, pursuing state and church support for a school teacher to be based on the islands.

The first requirement, for an adequate vessel, became an imperative for Reibey after nearly dying in a fierce Bass Strait gale on his second journey in 1863. As he told Hobart's Archdeacon Davies, 'It will not be wise to undertake another visit in so small a craft. I never experienced so much anxiety or encountered so much danger in my life. I cannot tell you how entirely I gave up all hope of ever returning.'¹³

Reibey's support for education was based on the Islanders' own agenda. As he reported to the Legislative Council, 'I felt it my duty to get the parents together as much as possible, and learn from them their wishes and opinions on the question.' To Church News readers he was even more explicit regarding the inspiration and guide for his actions. His recommendations followed those of Lucy Beedon and many of the parents.¹⁴

Reibey had some success. The sum of £250 was allocated by the Government for teaching the children, provided that this was matched by a similar sum collected by private subscription.

Archdeacon Thomas Reibey.
Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office



With Reibey temporarily in London, however, it was left to Hobart's Archdeacon Davies to report to say that only £80 was thus collected. He asked that the 'sum of £250 may be placed on the estimates for 1864 without the restrictions of 1863'.¹⁵ However, it was not until the end of the decade that the Aboriginal struggle for government education funds was to succeed.

Individual advocacy was also part of the work of Reibey and Fereday. Reibey successfully had a colonial pension reinstated for 'Margery Munroe, a native of Westernport'. He was less successful for 'Marian Scott, a native of this Colony, nearly 80 years of age. This poor woman is entirely destitute,' he reported to Davies, '... (and) had once received a pension of 1s per diem ... but lost it. Since my return I have made her case known to the present Colonial Treasurer, and applied for the payment of her pension ... (who) has treated my application with perfect contempt.'¹⁶

At Reibey's request, Davies took up both Scott's case and that of the Oyster Cove Aborigines. Their family and community on the islands had told Reibey they wanted them back and Davey wrote to the authorities:

*when the present Session of Parliament has closed, it may, perhaps be desirable for the Governor in Council to consider if it would not be advisable to send the six Aborigines still remaining at Oyster Cove to their relatives at these Islands. I am informed that they are anxious to go and their friends willing to receive them.*¹⁷

This was a cause promoted by the Islander community through the 1860s and 70s. However, it seems that, for the Government, being able to announce the official extinction of Tasmanian Aborigines at Oyster Cove served a better purpose than returning them to an expanding community in the islands. Such a return could only perpetuate legal and ethical dilemmas increasingly defined as 'history'.

Even the neglect of Wybalenna by its white tenant did not escape Reibey's concern. He told the Government:

I desire to call your attention to the neglected and disgraceful condition of the grave-yard at Flinders. The fence is entirely

destroyed and sheep and cattle bed upon the graves. It was painful and humiliating to witness the fearful neglect and desecration ...

Like Nixon, Reibey had a high opinion of the Aboriginal people. 'I found the Islanders, an intelligent and interesting people — simple and primitive in their habits, free from the vices of a more civilised life, and very anxious about the instruction of their children.'¹⁸ This view was confirmed with more contact, returning after his second trip with his 'good opinion of these people on the whole strengthened'.¹⁹ He stuck to this assessment despite the reaction it seems to have caused in the Church community. 'Notwithstanding anything which has been said to the contrary,' he told the Church News, 'I can only repeat my former words' acknowledging only, 'that there are it is true, two or three of inferior character among them, but is it to be wondered at?'

Reibey was driven in this work by a very strong sense of duty and responsibility. 'It will be a lasting blot upon the history of our Church,' he told Davies, 'if we fail to secure for them that which is only just and right.'²⁰ Reibey used the ethical claims Aboriginal people had over white Tasmanians in his appeal for support and funds. In the Church News of 20 November 1862, the following letter from him appeared:

Brethren — It has become my duty to appeal to you on behalf of a Missionary work of our Church, than which it would be difficult to imagine any having stronger claims on your sympathies and sense of Christian duty; I allude to the spiritual and educational care of the descendants of the Aborigines of this Colony, now living on the Islands in Bass's Straits. The Parliament of this Colony has voted the sum of 250 pounds towards this object, conditionally on a like sum being raised up by private charity, and it is for the purpose of raising this sum I now address you, so that these poor people, who, as I can testify are anxiously looking to us for help, may not be left in the almost entire neglect they have hitherto been. They number some 200 souls living in the different islands of the Furneaux Group ... I hope to be able to repeat my visits; but should I succeed, the intervals at which such visits would be made must necessarily be long; and it is clear that with

so many children growing up, the presence of resident School Master and Catechist will pay but the lowest measure of our duties towards them ...

In the working of the laws of God's providence we have dispossessed these poor people of this fair land. In that we may hope, there was no sin; but surely sin would lie heavy at our doors, if we blessed with civilisation and Christianity, neglected, when the opportunity was offered us, to fulfil to them the simplest duties laid upon us by the requirements of Christian charity. To you, then, I confidently appeal for aid in this good work.

However, appeals to duty and responsibility seemed to have had little effect on Tasmanian Anglicans in this instance. The editor of the Church News used fear to strengthen the argument in January 1863, although the emphasis on responsibility resulting from invasion and dispossession remained:

Archdeacon Reibey's appeal ... has not at present received the response it deserves. Yet it would be difficult to imagine a case that has a stronger claim upon the present inhabitants of Tasmania. How deeply this was felt by our Bishop and by Archdeacon Reibey, in their several visits, we have seen; and a more recent visitor, the Rev. W. Richardson, adds his testimony to the same effect. "It is my simple duty to express my full acquiescence in the character of these Islanders ... Their simplicity and native modesty are calculated to awaken the liveliest interest, and their conduct and conversation under the serious disadvantages they are placed are truly admirable. But what is to become of their fine, but sadly neglected children? Are they to be allowed to grow up and form an archipelago of pirates in the highway of colonial commerce?"...

If they are not looked after ... by us who now occupy the hunting grounds and sheltered haunts of their forefathers, and have thus thrust them out into this barren region, we and our children must be held responsible to a civilised world for the inevitable result.

Archdeacon Davies added his support, telling the Colonial Secretary he agreed with Reibey 'that there is no case which has a stronger claim upon the inhabitants of this land; and that sin will lie heavily at our doors if we ... neglect to fulfil to them the simplest duties laid upon us by the requirements of Christian charity.'²¹

Reibey used his time in England in 1863-64 to raise funds and to ensure that, along with the recently retired Bishop Nixon, the new Bishop, Charles Bromby, would maintain the commitment to the Strait's Mission. As Bromby later recalled, 'On the day of his own consecration, Archdeacon Reibey had informed him in a railway train of these half-castes, and of his endeavors [*sic*] to raise a fund in England to purchase a mission yacht.'²²

Bromby's was a promising start. He was consecrated in St Paul's in 1864 alongside an ex-slave, the new Bishop of Niger, Dr Samuel Crowther, the 'first African to be consecrated Bishop by English hands'. 'The creation of a Negro episcopate marks a new era in missionary undertakings,' the Morning Post reported, looking forward to a 'full native church.'²³

It was fitting then that Bromby's English appeal for funds for his new diocese focused on two priorities: the mission to the islands and completing the cathedral. He explained to potential benefactors that the 'inhabitants of the numerous islets which lie at various distances between Australia and Tasmania are the offspring of Aboriginal women and runaway prisoners.' Nixon lent his support to the appeal, reminding the British of the reality of dispossession and the responsibilities this brought:

On retiring from my old sphere of labour in Tasmania, I am desirous to commend one special object to the sympathies of Churchmen at home. It cannot, I think, be denied, that we owe a large amount of consideration for the temporal and spiritual welfare of the Aboriginal inhabitants of that fair land, which we have wrested from them. The Government of the Colony does all within its power to comfort the declining years of the miserable remnant of the former Lords of the soil, now reduced to six. But there are off-shoots of the old stock scattered throughout the Islands of Bass's Straits, who have a strong claim upon our Christian Care.'²⁴

Bromby, Reibey and Nixon's appeal to the 'thoughtful and liberal Churchmen of England'²⁵ had more success than to their Tasmanian brethren. Seven hundred pounds was raised, although how much of that money was eventually spent on the island work is not so clear.

However, while Bromby visited the Strait in 1876, his commitment seems to have declined with time, perhaps exaggerated by his later conflict with Reibey. The Board of Mission also legitimately pointed out that it was only in 'a certain sense, a mission to the heathen', not comparable with the needs of the Chinese tin-miners in the Northeast, as the 'Aborigines professed Christianity'.²⁶

Aboriginal and Church advocacy did bear fruit the year Reibey left the Church. Henry Collis was appointed as teacher in 1871 for the 'half-caste' children on the Furneaux Group, with a school opening on Badger Island in September 1871 and a subsidiary school on Cape Barren in November 1871. Collis and his wife ran the schools until ill-health forced their retirement in 1882, when the school was closed, not reopening again until 1890. It is probably no coincidence that Government funding was maintained for this work during the 1870s, the period of Reibey's greatest political influence.

The next significant individual in the Church of England's outreach work to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community is Canon Marcus Brownrigg. Brownrigg published accounts of almost all his fourteen voyages, undertaken from 1872 to 1885, in an endeavour to raise funds and support for the mission. The 1870s and 1880s were a more complicated period for such work in the Bass Strait than Nixon and Reibey had known. The reason was straightforward enough and hardly unfamiliar to either the owners of the land or the Church. The final frontier of Aboriginal Tasmania was now being conquered and whites were taking over even these remote islands for grazing and mutton-birding.²⁷

The change had been swift. In 1850, the 'only intruders upon the straitsmen domain would have been Smith's foothold at Pea Jacket Point and Dr Allen's lease — shared with straitsmen at Clarke Island.'²⁸ Moreover, the annual leases signed with the Government from the late 1840s seemed to have given some right of control to the Aboriginal people. Perhaps such security had never been the Government's intent. As the Surveyor General wrote to Denison after his first trip in 1848, 'by their acceptance of Tickets of

Occupation on the payment of nominal rent, the rights of the Crown has been fully established to the lands which up to the period of my visit they considered their own.' Regardless, once challenged, 'the Government's tickets of occupation ... proved to be worth little.'²⁹ With the Waste Lands Acts of 1861 and 1870, European access to such 'empty' 'crown' land was facilitated and encouraged.

The 1866 lease of part of Chappell Island galvanised a long and sustained Aboriginal campaign to defend their lands and livelihood. From 1867 the Islanders complained that if the remaining mutton-bird rookeries were sold or leased they would starve. They wrote to Fereday in November 1867, who told the Government, 'the people want to get Chappell Island reserved as it is the best and only remaining rookery not sold or leased'.³⁰ From 1870, there are frequent letters and petitions from the Islanders to the Government seeking protection of the rookeries and land rights for themselves.³¹ Fereday was so concerned he went public, telling the readers of the Church News that the Islanders had told him they were 'threatened with a great calamity' as the islands were all sold or leased. Fereday strongly recommended that at least Chappell Island be reserved for them.

Bromby was also concerned about the exploitation involved in absentee owners leasing the islands. He wrote:

A lessee takes possession of a rookery i.e. one of the few islands occupied by the mutton bird. He charges foot money, and takes their profits from mutton bird catching, and even anticipates profits of a coming season by supplying the half-castes with brandy. If the system is not altered, so as to admit the proper inhabitants of the soil taking out a licence for the season from the Government, in the place of residual lessees, I fear the half-castes will be gradually elbowed out, become dependant upon the Government as paupers, if not criminals.³²

The Surveyor General, however, dismissed Aboriginal protests. Like activists before and after them, they turned to the British Government for verification of their historic rights. They petitioned Governor DuCane for exclusive rights to Chappell Island, as it was the focal point of their life and

community. The Governor met with them on Goose Island in August 1871 and was sympathetic. While not prepared to give legal title, the Tasmanian Government did then gazette Chappell and Big Dog Islands as rookeries under the Game Preservation Act and leases were offered to the Islanders on the western end of Cape Barren Island.

The Government, however, did little more to stem the white invasion. On the contrary, during the 1870s, the Maynards were expelled from Little Dog Island and the Everetts from Woody Island. Clarke Island was leased by a European from 1872, and Preservation soon after. Aborigines usually had their lease applications rejected and any prior existing lease arrangements ignored. Even Chappell Island remained under threat as parts of it were soon being sold freehold to whites.³³

Flinders Island, meanwhile, remained as one single lease. For £100 a year, the prominent Launceston businessman Robert Gardiner controlled it all. It was not until the 1880s that this was broken up, although Gardiner retained substantial interests.³⁴ Gardiner was grimly nicknamed 'Resurrection Bob' by the Aboriginal community for his practice of stealing Aboriginal remains and selling them for scientific specimens. Henry Collis and Lucy Beedon complained officially about this, but no action was taken.³⁵

By the late 1870s whites had therefore largely alienated the last lands of Aboriginal Tasmania. In 1883, Europeans leased or owned 28 islands and only one was held by an Aborigine.³⁶ Most of these were in the name of two absentee landlords: Gardiner and another Launceston based businessman, James Walden.

At the same time, the white backlash against any special measures to protect Aborigines' livelihoods or land was already well under way, accompanied by racist attacks on their character. As a correspondent to the Examiner wrote in 1883, 'we and our children have more right to own land on these islands than the half-castes ... it is a great mistake for the Government to assist them.' They combine the 'lowness of the black, and the cunningness of the whites'.³⁷

The Aborigines replied with their historical arguments: 'We are under no obligation to the Government. Whatever land they have reserved for us is a token of their honesty, in as much as it has been granted in lieu of that grand Island which they have taken from our ancestors.'³⁸

The familiar impacts of invasion and dispossession were also being felt in the islands, with Aboriginal social, economic and cultural life under increasing pressure. It was in this very challenging and rapidly changing context that Marcus Brownrigg undertook his work.

Brownrigg, who was from Irish Protestant gentry, arrived in New South Wales in 1856 as a 21-year-old. Soon after, he became one of the first students of Moore Theological College, then as now an evangelical training ground. Bromby appointed him to Ross in 1867. The next year, he moved to the prestigious post of St Johns in Launceston, then the best paid in the colony. After his first voyage, in 1872, he published *The Cruise of the Freak*, illustrated with his own lithographs. His subsequent voyages were published in the Launceston Examiner and the last six made into pamphlet form as well as republished in the Church News. He therefore had a wide audience and was an influential commentator on Bass Strait affairs before failing health required a move to Queensland.³⁹ Murray-Smith describes Brownrigg as 'theologically a narrow evangelist, but ... in human terms an attractive, versatile and compassionate man.' He was an astronomer, architect, boat builder, musician, Temperance advocate, British Israelite, student and practitioner of homeopathy and President of the Launceston Mechanics Institute. Many of these various interests and skills were utilised in his work among the Aboriginal community. This breadth of interests meant that over the 13 voyages, as Murray-Smith argues, 'we see him becoming more and more involved in the Islanders as *people* rather than as souls, and perhaps sometimes struggling against this.'⁴⁰ His theology was confronted and challenged by questions of justice, resource ownership and land.

On Brownrigg's first voyage, Lucy Beedon again provided the welcome and made the introductions. She was still pushing

her mainland sisters' cause, asking that Brownrigg support her invitation for Trugannini to come to the islands and live her last days 'among the descendants of her own race'.⁴¹ Brownrigg was as impressed as the earlier clerical observers with the Islanders' character and faith, their 'serious and reverent behaviour afforded me much real pleasure' as did the knowledge of the young.

*Their replies to questions relative to the stories of the Fall, Cain and Abel, and the Flood, and to several particulars in the history of our Blessed Lord were, when the feelings of natural reserve had passed away, very satisfactory.*⁴²

Most of the population continued to attend services. Congregations of fifty plus were standard and there is ample evidence of people travelling considerable distances to get to them. Baptism seems to have been almost universal. Brownrigg's own commitment could never be questioned. Navigating himself through these dangerous waters, at first in a boat he built himself, he visited all the many inhabited islands and was prepared to walk long distances to visit every home. The Islanders' views of Brownrigg are not recorded, although in 1895 a child born on Cape Barren was named Marcus Blake Brown. (He would become a member of the large contingent of Islanders who volunteered to fight for the British Empire in the Great War, and one of the five who never returned.)⁴³ Brownrigg even had some success in obtaining donations, recording in 1875:

*Through the kind and zealous exertions of many friends to the mission, both at home and in the colonies, and by the liberal aid of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, the Kate, a cutter of about 15 tons ... has been purchased for the Mission.*⁴⁴

By the late 1870s, there is some change evident in the now familiar pattern of services and baptisms. As the social impacts of dispossession made their inevitable mark, Brownrigg's emphasis shifted to temperance campaigns. For example, on the sixth voyage in 1877, he obtained on Cape Barren alone 25 pledges to permanently give up alcohol. Special services with a temperance lecture, scripture reading and prayer were held, and 'parcels of illustrated papers' such

as *Band of Hope Review* and *British Workman* were delivered to the heads of families. 'There is, perhaps, no more serious obstacle to the spread of Christianity than intemperance,' he wrote in 1877.⁴⁵

It is interesting that from this time the temperance issue seems to act as a catalyst for Brownrigg, who recognised that a broader approach was required. Thus Brownrigg increasingly becomes a partner in community gatherings with very open agendas. For example, the program on 28 January 1878 on Badger Island started with 60 persons at tea 'picnic fashion'. The 'cup which cheers but not inebriates' was 'brewed to perfection' accompanied by ship biscuits and cake. Then, while the young people played rounders, the serious adult talk began. 'Among the questions referred to' and high in Brownrigg's priorities 'was that of police protection' and how to stop the 'illegal traffic in intoxicating liquors'. Later, the schoolroom was filled for the temperance lecture and 27 more signed the pledge. They then moved back around the fire in the evening and the music began.⁴⁶

It was inevitable that, as the process and agenda of the mission meetings broadened, Brownrigg could not avoid hearing the community's other concerns. Public relations, however, usually demanded silence on these, as the financial support of the mission came from those concerned with 'religion' and individual morality, not land and justice. Thus, on 13 February 1879, we find him at Cape Barren where he recounts that the community meeting followed the evening service, 'but as the matters considered thereat relate solely to the Interests of the Islanders the nature of the business need not here be detailed'.⁴⁷

But if the difficult questions were glossed over in Brownrigg's public reports, his private correspondence with the Government gets closer to the heart of the matter: land. On 14 February 1881, as a result of a long Aboriginal campaign of letters and petitions, and following Brownrigg's suggestion, the Tasmanian Government gazetted a Reserve, or more accurately withheld from lease, some 6,000 acres at the western end of Cape Barren Island.

From the beginning, Church and Aborigines had different ideas about the purpose and rationale for the new Reserve. For Bromby, at least, it was a means of overcoming what he publicly called the ‘moral weakness’ caused by ‘Aboriginal ancestry’ and expressed in ‘vulnerability to drunkenness and sloth’. A Reserve would be a place to protect them from harmful influences and ‘relinquish the pursuit of mutton birds, properly attend to the soil and receive tuition in the sober virtues of respectable white society’.⁴⁸ The Aborigines, by contrast, wanted a reserve not to change their way of life but to protect it.

This fundamental tension was not fully apparent until the 1890s when the Church physically moved onto the Cape Barren Island Reserve and actively sought to live out its own vision. Meanwhile, the Reserve, while small and perhaps token, did bring the scattered Aboriginal people together and thus provided a necessary communal base for their economic, social and cultural survival.

However, the Aborigines more than Brownrigg soon recognised the limitations of the Reserve. On his 1884 visit he was disappointed by the lack of development and heard by way of explanation what would become a familiar refrain in the coming decades: ‘that they have no security in respect of the land.’ Brownrigg’s response that he had been ‘fully assured by the Minister of Lands and Works’ that the land ‘had been reserved for the exclusive benefit of the half-castes’ was — in the absence of title, lease or legislation — not reassuring.⁴⁹

Neither the Tasmanian Government nor the Church of England ever came to terms with the purpose or rationale of the Cape Barren Island Reserve. It was a pragmatic and relatively painless response by Government to the Aboriginal campaign, the legitimacy of their cause and pressing material need. However, the obvious implication, that it was a *de facto* recognition of the survival and legitimate aspirations of a Tasmanian Aboriginal people, was never fully acknowledged. For the Church, the Reserve came with a mainland missionary mindset: that Aborigines needed to be changed, managed, controlled, protected and converted into

a Christian, civilised and agrarian people with their nomadic and savage instincts bred out. Yet the Church also shared the apparently contradictory view that there were no Tasmanian Aborigines; that these were just other Tasmanian people not deserving but also not requiring ‘special treatment’.

Official Aboriginal ‘extinction’ also meant that there could not be the special legislation removing Aboriginal citizenship rights, often including the legal guardianship of their children, which was standard elsewhere. White authority on the Tasmanian Reserve was therefore always limited compared with the near total power held by mission managers on the mainland. Meanwhile, the Tasmanian Aborigines themselves, as will be seen, consistently rejected paternalistic treatment and maintained a distinctive and strong sense of their historically-based rights. They sought support, not direction; resources not charity; and land security not improvement-linked tenancies.

Taken together, this made Cape Barren Island a quite different and more equal arena of struggle for the survival of Aboriginal identity, land and culture than was apparent in most Australian mainland missions. Brownrigg’s close personal relationships and short summer visits meant these inherent tensions were not yet fully apparent by the time ill-health forced his retirement from this work in 1885. However, the complexities and contradictions of the situation were soon to become very evident, with the arrival of an energetic and determined new Bishop of Tasmania, Henry Hutchinson Montgomery.

Chapter 6

Montgomery and the Cape Barren Island 'Problem'

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND'S involvement with Tasmanian Aboriginal people reached its climax under the energetic, missionary minded and politically powerful Bishop of Tasmania, Henry Montgomery. 'For years there has burned in me a growing desire to aid the mission cause with all my bent,' Montgomery confessed in his enthronement sermon in 1889.¹ The new Bishop's commitment to the Strait's Mission, as for Nixon and Reibey, was also motivated by historical obligation. 'Here are a fine sturdy independent race of men rapidly increasing in numbers,' he wrote, 'the descendants of Aboriginal inhabitants of Tasmania, to whom surely there is a great debt still owing.'²

On his arrival in Tasmania, Montgomery was presented with an open opportunity to kick-start the mission. This was the ongoing desire of the Aboriginal community to fill the still vacant teaching post. He soon persuaded the Minister of Education to accept a unique proposal in Tasmanian state education: a church-state partnership. A jointly funded missionary school teacher post was created, the incumbent intended to exemplify Christian standards of behaviour, instruct children and their parents in horticulture and agriculture and also fulfil the functions of Postmaster and Government representative.³

Edward Stephens was appointed to the position and arrived on Cape Barren Island with his family in August 1890. As the Church News reported, 'Having been without a schoolteacher for some time, the Islanders hailed Stephens' arrival with enthusiasm.'⁴ Stephens came to a community of 110 people, living off mutton-birds, piloting stores, sealing, whaling, fishing, itinerant labouring and snaring. Most families were still absent from February to May on Chappell Island for the mutton-bird season and there were also social, cultural and economic gatherings associated with the collection of shells in July and mutton-bird eggs in November.⁵

The vision of Montgomery and Stephens for Aboriginal Tasmanians was clear enough. They sought to change them to a settled agricultural 'civilised' Christian people. Ryan argues that in pursuit of this vision, Stephens, during eight years on the island, 'operated an oppressive system of law and order in conformity with the reserve system then developing on other parts of Australia.'⁶ However, as with Wybalenna, there are important differences with contemporary mainland missions, expressed not so much by the objectives but in the power of the Church to achieve them. The lack of special legislative powers, the awareness of rights, the tradition of political advocacy and the relative economic independence of the community meant that it actively, and reasonably successfully, resisted this latest attempt at social control and behaviour modification.

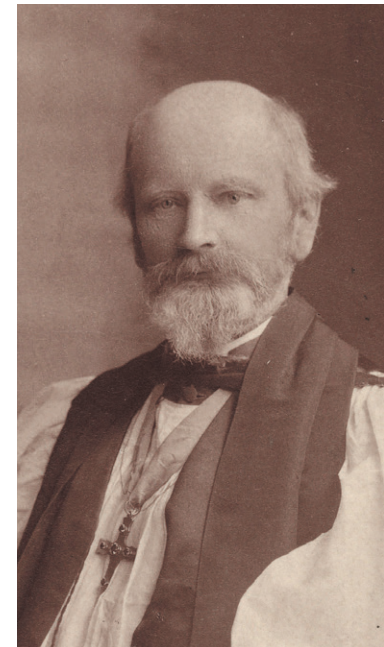
This conflict was not immediately apparent. Montgomery was as enthusiastic and positive as any of his predecessors after his first visit to the islands, in February 1891, the first of ten annual trips. In 1892, he wrote, 'There is peace and goodwill here, more real unity than we can find almost anywhere on the (Tasmanian) mainland.' Montgomery was also impressed by the size of his congregations. 'The population is perfectly regular at all religious service,' he told the Director of Education in February 1892.⁷ That year, he confirmed 31 people, mostly adults, reporting that, 'the whole population attended every service'.⁸ Montgomery also planned a church building with the Islanders. They agreed to build it if he

supplied the materials. By November 1892, it was complete and he dedicated it in January 1893. Montgomery took pride that this was clearly Anglican turf. The Islanders' unity in worship was 'so decided that I cannot help viewing with satisfaction that an attempt by the Wesleyans to begin ministrations on the Island was seen by them to be out of the question.'⁹

Such shared religious practice, however, hid already emerging discord. Partly this was just a reflection of the personal problems of Stephens. He had a long history of alcohol abuse and, by the time of Montgomery's 1892 visit, his diary reveals that he was having problems again.¹⁰ As a result Stephens' behaviour was at times violent and erratic and, in August 1894, the Islanders made their first official complaint about his behaviour. In 1895, the community petitioned the Director of Education to remove him.¹¹ Stephens was brought back to Hobart and reprimanded for drinking but sent back against the best interests of the Aborigines, the Church and his own mental health.

Montgomery backed his man, however, seeing resistance to change as inevitable and the way forward, dogged perseverance. The Education Department in this, as in most matters, largely followed his advice. The result was increasingly open conflict, culminating in Stephens shooting at the Aborigines, their open defiance of his assumed authority and his eventual mental breakdown in 1897. He was then replaced by his son Charles, who continued in the position until 1905.

The ill-health and instability of Edward Stephens, however, was not the main cause of conflict between the Church and the Aboriginal community. The missionary-teacher position



Bishop Henry Montgomery
Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office

itself and the policy agenda promoted by the Bishop reflected an approach and vision for Aboriginal Tasmanians which was pursued in full realisation that it was against the wishes and aspirations of the people themselves. From his first visit, Montgomery clearly heard the Aboriginal agenda. He records that they requested from him support for more favourable mutton-bird regulations and land ownership. Moreover, Montgomery promised to present their grievances to the Premier.¹² However, as Ryan documents:

Rather than pressing their claim for communal ownership of land, he recommended to the Premier that each Island family be allocated a block of land near the school under the watchful eye of the schoolmaster and that if they did not farm their land, then the lease should be withdrawn. Instead of pressing for the communal lease of mutton-bird rookeries, he recommended the introduction of a family licence system where the Islanders would compete rather than cooperate during the mutton-bird season. For Montgomery was determined that the spirit of private ownership and individual achievement should replace the Aboriginal communalism which he considered had been responsible for their moral decline.¹³

While the Government did not adopt Montgomery's proposals for land reform on the Reserve, they become very influential and formed the basis of Government legislation and policy for much of the 20th Century. Montgomery had more immediate success with his proposals for the mutton-bird industry. The Government soon agreed to the new regulations, including licences and a closed season. Later, Montgomery had eggling largely banned and in 1894 he successfully sought a closed season for the seals. He was even successful in having a constable appointed in June 1892, partly to supervise the new regulations.¹⁴ However, Montgomery's lack of consultation or regard for the Aborigines' wishes meant some of these apparently positive restrictions were resisted because they were culturally inappropriate and had a detrimental impact on communal life. The community, too, was concerned about the preservation of the mutton-birds and seals but had different solutions that emphasised Aboriginal communal control over the major rookeries.

The Aboriginal people increasingly became aware that Montgomery's goals were very different from their own. By the late 1890s, Montgomery's pursuit of his own agenda, which he was never open about, led to an almost complete loss of trust between the Aborigines and the Anglican Church. Montgomery interpreted this opposition to him as a manifestation of character weakness in the Aborigines, which for their own good needed to be resisted and overcome.

In September 1897, the Aborigines formed their own body, the Islander Association, to independently represent and provide advocacy for their interests. The Association initiated a petition to their traditional source of redress, the Governor, concerning mutton-birding and land tenure, and attempted to establish a newspaper and health benefits organisation. Both Montgomery and Charles Stephens saw this exercise in self-determination as a threat and resisted it. The Church warned they would lose their land if there were not change. The community responded by boycotting the visits of white officials. For example, only four Islanders attended a combined meeting of Montgomery with the Minister for Justice in 1899.¹⁵

In 1899, John Maynard protested on behalf of the community to the Education Department about the discrimination inherent in the concept of the missionary schoolteacher. He pointed out that the school being closed one week in four for missionary work unfairly impacted on their children's education.¹⁶

Montgomery opposed such calls for equality, writing that it was 'not in the nature of half-castes to be content with any arrangement'.¹⁷ By now, Montgomery considered it a good sign 'when half-castes complain of Schoolmaster or Policeman or Bishop. It arises from some fruitful action on their (the officials) part which is resented from their ill balanced standard point and want of principle'.¹⁸

In the face of opposition, Montgomery advocated still stronger measures. By the turn of the century, he was supporting further restrictions on the mutton-bird industry,

parcelling out the Reserve only to the industrious who improved and farmed the land.¹⁹ He argued that resistance must be confronted with firmer authority and discipline until the desired change was effected. He recommended successfully to the Commissioner of Police in August 1899 that a committee of inquiry was required and a police magistrate should visit.

*I believe that the terrors of the proceedings in the eyes of these natives would be such that the evils now existing would be checked ... Nothing would do more than the stern hand of the law at this time.*²⁰

Montgomery saw this as a necessary part of his paternal concern. He further told the Commissioner:

*There will be a terrible time when the first half-caste is shut up in a cell: anything might be expected ... from shooting in the dark to systematic lying and false swearing against everyone in authority. But you will see that I saw these things *privately*. I am their father and it puts me in a delicate position. I see they have petitioned for votes. *Nothing* could be more disastrous and futile. A bottle of grog would buy any votes.*²¹

A 'father's concern' could still fortunately motivate more positive action. Police intervention was required to defend as well as control. Montgomery sought the enforcement of licences at Chappell and the exclusion of cattle that were illegally damaging the rookery. He also sought restrictions against new birders coming in from the Tasmanian mainland, writing, 'This year, for the first time, W. Davey, a white man has three parties on the islands ... next year there will be half a dozen doing the same.'²² As Montgomery told the Commissioner, 'to prevent a public outcry', the 'half-castes must not be left to starve.'²³

The Commissioner agreed to Montgomery's request for a greater police presence, commiserating with him that 'They repay your kindness by the hate of savages who do not retain the primitive virtues of the wholly uncivilised man.'²⁴

Paradoxically, Montgomery's reassessment of the character of the 'half-castes' fully opened his eyes to their Aboriginality. He told the Premier in September 1900, 'these people are

not English in character — the more you know of them the less English and the more native they are ...' They need to be 'firmly governed as an inferior race.'²⁵ And again to the Police Commissioner in 1899, 'These people are not English people. I regret to say that their native culture comes out when they are discovered in crime, and their ... vengeance is almost certain.'²⁶

From 1899 to 1902, many Aborigines responded to this interference by a boycott of the school. Montgomery's relationships with them had by now almost completely broken down. In his 1899 visit he ignored the 'half-castes' 'since they ignored me'. Stephens explained that his unpopularity was due to the fact that 'you are as usual blamed for laws etc in connection with the Straits Islands'. Montgomery instead focused his pastoral concern on white settlers, principally those on Flinders Island.²⁷

As a reading of Montgomery's extensive correspondence with the Government can now testify, the Aboriginal community's assessment of his negative influence was accurate. Contemporary readers of the Church News could be excused on the other hand for not knowing there was a problem at all. Montgomery's up-beat mission stories were maintained. As Hart has noted, 'Montgomery clearly understood the effect of bad publicity'.²⁸

One of the most damaging aspects of this loss of trust was that the mediating role the Church had played for the past 30 years had broken down. For Aborigines the only path now left open seemed resistance. For white officials, Cape Barren Island Reserve became defined as a 'problem' to be fixed. Montgomery noted with concern that they had developed a special hatred 'for himself, the schoolmaster and the constable and had expressed a wish not to become 'like white people'. Charles Stephens told Montgomery, '[t]hey will give the Government more trouble than the Boers are giving Great Britain'.²⁹

Aboriginal resistance, which in their context depended on boycotting white instruments of social control, now resulted

in a marked decline in church attendance. The services register of the Cape Barren Island Church documents the impact of the breakdown in trust during the last five years of the 1890s, which had become permanent by early in the new century. From it being the norm for most adults and virtually all children to attend weekly, by the time of the Bishop's visit in 1898, the number of communicants was down to 10 to 15. It got worse. In his 1899 visit, only four or five 'stayed loyal.' In the regular services during 1899, there were usually only a couple of adults in the congregation, sometimes none, and a 'goodly number of children'.³⁰

Only four people attended the service for the Bishop's farewell visit to the Reserve on 11 August 1901. It seems that the Tasmanian Aboriginals were understandably not sorry to see him go.³¹

In a hostile and land-hungry white society, however, Montgomery's departure left a gap. In his last Synod address, he asked that the Church of England remember the 'half-castes', but without his leadership the interest almost immediately declined. The gap left by the Bishop soon became evident when Chappell Island was leased for grazing in 1902. The old missionary campaigners still had some outrage, but no longer any direct influence. Montgomery wrote from London to Charles Stephens in September 1902 that the placing of hundreds of sheep on Chappell 'amazes' him and he is 'bitterly disappointed with the Government'. Reibey supported Stephens' campaign to protect the crucial rookery, writing, 'The giving of Mr. Fitzgerald a lease of Chappell is a violation of the promise made by the Government in 1862 and of the notice — see Gazette 15 December 1891 — reserving Chappell Island.' Reibey also listed a number of other broken promises.³²

However, Stephens and the now retired Reibey lacked Montgomery's popular influence or political power. Bishop Mercer, Montgomery's replacement, despite being a Christian socialist, labour supporter and a friend of most progressive social causes, showed little interest. Tasmanian Aboriginal issues had become defined as an exclusively missionary and social welfare question, not a justice one.

The Government itself simply did not care. In 1902, a debate in the Parliament on the future of the Islanders lapsed for want of a quorum, and the white invasion of Aboriginal lands extended one island further.³³

Montgomery had caused serious wounds to the relationship between the Church of England and the Tasmanian Aboriginal people resulting in a breakdown of trust. However, his energy and commitment to the issue would never again be evident in a senior Tasmanian Anglican. If the 20th Century had possessed any Church leaders who could have matched this virtue, Bishop Montgomery's long-term negative impact need not have been anywhere as great.

Group on Chappell Island, 1902.

Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office



Chapter 7

Church Withdrawal 1901-1939

THE 20TH CENTURY was characterised by a growing distance in the Church of England's relationship with Tasmanian Aborigines. The close relationship with the State and the primary identification with those seeking to fix what became known as the Cape Barren Island 'problem' continued, but the Church moved from centre stage to a background support role. Montgomery had, however, set a broad agenda for the State Government and the new voice for the white community from 1908, the Flinders Island Council. His vision to control and manage the Islanders to achieve behavioural change remained the dominant policy focus until the 1940s.

On the Reserve itself, the Church of England presence was gradually reduced. This downgrading of the mission was due to a combination of loss of interest from both Aborigines and Church, a rapid increase in European population on Flinders Island and shifts in ideology and state policy.

Church attendance was never fully rebuilt after the loss of trust in the late 19th Century. This also resulted in a lack of ongoing maintenance for the church building so that by Christmas 1902 Stephens records that it was 'only safe to have services during very fine weather'. From January, a permanent move to the schoolroom was needed. In November 1905, Stephens moved on. The crowded congregations present in his last services indicate

that he had perhaps gone some way towards rebuilding relationships.¹

Stephens was replaced by G. W. Knight. While Knight continued to hold services, it seems the 'missionary school teacher' was now more teacher than missionary. Paradoxically, perhaps this reduction in mission focus assisted the work of the Church. Attendance at worship was low but stable, and the community in 1907 'unanimously decided the (church) building would have to be rebuilt'. Music was still enjoyed with choir practice on Friday nights, and Sunday school was still popular. Knight also had more than 100 people at his farewell service on 8 January 1911. During this time and after, bishops came and went but continued to visit, 1910 and again in 1915. Stephens, on a return visit in 1916, was impressed by the 'good attendance' and 'very reverent behaviour'.²

However, this modest rebuilding of Church of England worship life ceased in 1920, when for the first time in 40 years there were no regular Sunday services held on Cape Barren Island. Services through the 1920s and 30s were irregular. There were seven, for example, in 1921 but none in 1924.³ Cape Barren became in this time an outpost of the predominantly white church at Flinders, and visits there no doubt depended on the commitment and capacity of the Minister there.

The reduced role for the Church is evident in the changing responsibilities for the schoolmaster. From 1928, the teacher was also a special constable. The missionary/teacher had become the policeman/teacher. The teacher thus remained an agent of social control, holding a unique place in the state education system, but the underlying ideology and dominant institutional reference point had shifted from Church to State.

The declining Church interest also reflected changes in population mix and loci of power, economic and political. In the early decades of this century, the centre of the Furneaux group shifted from Cape Barren to Flinders

Island. While development and population growth remained slow at Flinders Island until the significant state aid of the 1950s,⁴ when the new municipality of Flinders Island was incorporated in 1908, the 250 Europeans concentrated on the main island were already in the majority.⁵ When the Aborigines refused to pay rates and taxes on the grounds that they had not been consulted about its establishment and were not represented on it, a long tradition of non-cooperation and open conflict between the white Council and black community began.⁶ The Church of England in the Furneaux group followed this shift in population and power. From the 1920s, it was primarily centred and concerned with the numerically, economically and politically dominant European population.

Changes in ideology were also impacting on the reduced role played by the Anglican Church in Cape Barren Island life. New Labor governments, and even more conservative ones, had less faith in the social priorities and instruments of the Church and more confidence in the right and capacity of the State to develop and implement social policy. The decline in the Church's public role and place inevitably impacted on Cape Barren work. The missionary schoolteachers were simply no longer an appropriate or preferred policy option.

The State takeover of policy and procedure in relation to the Cape Barren Island community was heralded by the 1908 Inquiry by Police Commissioner J.E.C. Lord, and subsequent 1911 legislation. This Inquiry was pushed by the new Council, determined to see action taken on what they considered to be a major barrier to the development and prosperity of the new municipality. Ryan argues that, 'The Police Commissioner's report became the basis of all succeeding reports until 1978.'⁷ It is therefore very significant that Lord draws heavily from Montgomery's ideas and in fact quotes him anonymously. It was perhaps a recognition that in the new political climate the inspiration and policy ideas of a former Church of England Bishop would not necessarily help the cause, which explains why Lord kept his source quiet. Montgomery's policies to undermine communalism on Cape Barren and

promote agricultural endeavour and individual incentive were now to be implemented, but in the name of the State, not the Church.

Aboriginal views were unchanged. They told Lord they needed ownership over the Reserve and rights to the mutton-bird industry, which was increasingly being taken over by whites. But Lord, following Montgomery, recommended that short-term individual leases, with proven land improvements and agricultural endeavour the prerequisite for a longer-term lease, replace the communal reserve. Lord did depart from Montgomery on one matter. While he also recommended someone be appointed to 'strictly govern' the Islanders, this was now to be a secular position, a manager or overseer rather than a missionary.⁸

Draft legislation was prepared in June 1910 but, on the eve of its introduction, Aboriginal political action won some concessions. A letter to the Mercury on 21 November from H.G. Everett signed on behalf of 70 Islanders stated serious objections to the Act's land provisions and above all to the 'manager' concept. The letter pointed out they could supervise themselves and recommended instead a community 'committee of management' make regulations for the Island. The Bill was subsequently held over for a year and some changes were made, although not in favour of self-determination. When the Cape Barren Island Reserve Act was debated in Parliament in 1912, the Premier argued that the Islanders were an 'indolent' people by virtue of their Aboriginal ancestry. He acknowledged their 'moral right' to the Reserve but stated that a legal right required them to satisfy the conditions of the Act. He dismissed one Opposition MP's call for the Islanders to be granted immediate land ownership. Mainly for financial reasons the overseer was never appointed. Strengthening the powers and State role of the schoolmaster and constable then based on the Island was considered sufficient.⁹

Little changed after the First World War. Unlike on Flinders Island, there was no Government money used to assist settlers and promote development, despite the equally high

per capita contribution of the Cape Barren community to the War effort, which included 21 volunteers and six dead.¹⁰ The Aborigines continued to petition for outright ownership of the Reserve. The November 1922 Petitioners, including 'returned soldiers', noted that the 'Whitemark Council' supported a 'strict overseer over us' and wished to make their Reserve a 'government depot'. They made it clear they would 'not submit to an overseer for they are British subjects and want to be so treated', requiring 'deeds to their land, not leases'. They are 'tired and disheartened from not been listened to and not having the security of ownership'.¹¹ A Parliamentary Inquiry in the early 1920s, dismissed by the Council as a 'sop' to the Islanders, failed to progress matters.¹²

The Council continued to press for stronger action and even withheld essential health services for non-payment of taxes. The 1923-4 Report from the Secretary of Lands also noted that the Director of Public Health had referred the unsanitary conditions at the Reserve to the Council 'but that body

Children on Cape Barren Island about 1940.

Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office



refused to take action'.¹³ The Minister of Lands supported the Council's continued push for an overseer but was more aware of the constraints, especially the cost.¹⁴

Another solution to the 'half-caste' 'problem' now common on the Australian mainland was also proposed by the Minister at this time: the compulsory removal of children. However, Tasmania was the only State by 1911 not to have protectionist legislation in place whereby the legal responsibility for the welfare of indigenous people was assigned to a Chief Protector or Protection Board. In some States and in the Northern Territory, the Chief Protector was the legal guardian of all Aboriginal children, displacing the rights of parents. The Protectors, usually police officers, who had responsibility to enforce the legislation at the local level, had nearly total control over Aboriginal people, including control over their right to marry, take a job or travel. As the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission Report, *Bringing them home*, notes, 'Tasmania was the exception to the protectionist trend.' The Tasmanian Aboriginal community was saved from such intervention by the insistence of successive Tasmanian Governments 'that Tasmania did not have an Aboriginal population, just some "half-caste" people'.¹⁵ The lack of special laws meant that the legal advice to the Minister was that the Government did not have the power to compulsorily remove children from the Reserve. Children of indigenous families living on and near Cape Barren Island were thus left relatively undisturbed until 1935, when the introduction of the Infant Welfare Act increased the State's capacity to act.¹⁶

It was the risk of violence spilling over from yet another land dispute which sparked yet another Inquiry and temporarily brought the Anglican Church back onto centre stage. There was increasing conflict between the European lease-holders and the Aborigines on Cape Barren Island caused by allegedly unauthorised stock grazing on the Reserve and the retaliatory thefts of animals.

A.W. Burbury of the Fauna Board volunteered to investigate the rising tension. His subsequent 1929 paper, 'Report on the conditions of the half castes at Cape Barren Island Reserve',

summarises the main issues and views of the time. He notes that 'white residents of the Islands say that very few of them can claim descent from Tasmanian Aborigines'. He dismisses this on the basis that the evidence to the contrary 'is on record'. There were 250 people then on the Reserve, with only three of them having met the conditions of the 1912 Act and therefore having leases. For Burbury 'how they live is a mystery' as there seemed few employment opportunities outside mutton-birding. The church 'built by the half-castes at the time of Bishop Montgomery exists'. Burbury notes that the 'school teacher (is) conducting services and burials'. To what extent this tradition had been maintained on an ongoing basis, or was resurrected by the contemporary teacher, Norman Hawkins, is not clear. Some financial contribution from the Church also remained, it being 'understood that the Church already contributes towards the maintenance of religious instruction, and the carrying out of burials at the reservation'. Burbury also documents the ongoing Aboriginal political tradition. 'They hate the whites, regarding themselves as having been supplanted and exploited by white men. They say that the whites took away their land and are now taking their kangaroos and mutton birds.' He believes it 'worthwhile to consider allowing these people the right to occupy the whole island' and is concerned by the 1912 legislation:

The Act too has given them the belief that they have a claim on the State and that it was passed in recognition of their claim that their country had been taken from them by the whites. To an extent this view of theirs is justified, for if the Act was not the result of a recognition that these people were entitled to something, why was it passed?

Burbury proposes Church management of the Reserve as a possible solution to the 'problem'. 'The Church of England Missionary Society might be approached with a view to the establishment of a missionary station at the Reservation as is done at others of their missions.'¹⁷

The Government was by now attracted by the possibility of handing over responsibility of the whole problem. In 1930, it

asked the Australian Board of Mission (ABM) to undertake an investigation to ascertain the suitability of them assuming management. The investigating team, led by Rev. J.S. Needham, the ABM chair, was horrified at the independence and political tradition of the Islanders. Needham recorded with disbelief that ‘one man mentioned quite seriously — and he to all appearances had no Tasmanian native blood in him — that if a case was brought in a Federal Court the Tasmanian Government would have to pay rent for the island of Tasmania.’¹⁸ The official ABM Report to the Government considered the Islanders should either be treated as legal and moral children, as Aborigines were on mainland Australia, or have the full responsibilities that come with citizenship and be dispersed:

It seems rather inconsistent to give full citizenship to those who expect, and are getting, exceptional treatment ... It is, we assume, too late now to accept the advice of the Commissioner of Police – given in 1908 – and treat the whole “half-caste” population as minors. But adults receiving the full benefits of citizenship should be expected to accept the full responsibility as well, but we doubt whether many of the adults are yet capable of such responsibility ...

It has been our experience that half-castes have certain defects of character which will not correct themselves. The half-caste speaks as a white man ... yet thinks like a black man. The old nomadic instincts remain ...

These defects of character will not be remedied without firm but kindly discipline and constant instruction. There must be development from the ways of a nomad to a life based upon white civilisation ... There is need, we believe of a sympathetic protector with power to control, discipline and to administer punishment ... Those proving incapable and intractable should lose their leases and be sent away from the Reservation.

This was an expression of dominant Church and State policy, reflecting standard Social Darwinist racist assumptions about indigenous people and reservations, which was little changed from Montgomery’s time. However, there was also a new ‘progressive’ emphasis. Reserves by the post-war period were not for those with European blood.

We cannot too strongly recommend the dispersal of the half-castes and their absorption in to the general community: for we feel that dispersal and absorption are the only permanent solution to the situation.

The ABM was also concerned about the lack of white authority:

On our Aboriginal Missions the Superintendent has much more power than is at present in the hands of the school teacher on Cape Barren Island. No native can remain on the Reserve without the permission of the Superintendent, and all must obey his ruling ...

Given all these factors, the ABM decided not to get involved:

We were forced to the conclusion that there would be no scope for the Church to undertake for the Government the responsibility of the management of Cape Barren Island reservation, and this for several reasons:

- 1. We cannot recommend continued segregation.*
- 2. If segregation was continued the inhabitants – after such a long spell of irresponsible independence – would not be amenable to proper discipline.*
- 3. The parents would probably be disinclined to allow us to bring up the school children in dormitories away from their influence.*
- 4. The people are inclined to be ‘bush lawyers’ and would probably take advantage of having two authorities that they might play one against the other.*
- 5. Under present conditions such Christian influence and teaching as the Church could provide are not likely in themselves to be effective in solving the problem.*

The Report closed by recommending that a ‘Protector’ be appointed and the children sent away to boarding school as, despite the parents’ ‘great affection for their children ... [they] are not inculcating in them habits of industry’.¹⁹

Commissioner Lord, fortunately, argued against the proposed change in policy, asserting the Islanders’ Aboriginality and legitimate claims on white society. He also argued that white Tasmanians preferred segregation.²⁰

Although the people in question are not half-castes, they are definitely coloured, and are descendants of Tasmanian Aborigines. I believe that any effort to absorb them into the white community would meet with determined opposition by the "half-castes" themselves, and that they would receive strong support from the white community on sentimental grounds, as well as because of their character and colour stain.²¹

Norman Hawkins, who seems to have been very much in the Anglican missionary schoolteacher tradition, was a firm supporter of the proposed reform agenda. He officially seeks for the Government 'full powers of administration, including (being) able to force work', with 'banishment to be the penalty'.²² Hawkins also repeats the concern that the people 'are obsessed with the idea that they have legitimate right to the land of their ancestors' and that the claim that 'the people of Tasmania ought to be paying them rent for Tasmania' had been suggested to him 'several times'.²³

But, for the moment, Lord won the day and Church and State left the Aboriginal community in relative peace. Indeed, the Depression years proved to be a relative golden age. The availability of special Commonwealth grants to undertake unemployment relief works renewed the Island infrastructure and by 1936 provided about 100 Aborigines with work. Combined with good mutton-bird seasons, the social, economic and cultural life of Cape Barren seems to have prospered and the population increased to 300 by the late 1930s. A new church was even constructed during 1939 and dedicated in 1940.²⁴

The general decline in the Church of England's interest also left the space open for more energetic Christian endeavours. Carl Jensen, a Launceston-based evangelist, visited annually for seven consecutive years in the 1930s, although by 1940 the schoolmaster refused him permission to return again, arguing 'too many views put before the people lead only to confusion'.²⁵ However, Ada Hudson from the Bethel Penial Mission proved to be a longer-term presence.

Miss Hudson moved from Hobart to Cape Barren to establish a mission in 1934. Her aim was to teach residents useful

household skills such as 'domestic science, sewing, cooking, hygiene and similar accomplishments'.²⁶ She was backed by ecumenical support groups in Launceston and Hobart, who provided financial assistance, collected goods and received a regular newsletter and updates on progress. Hudson also made many appeals through the Mercury and Examiner for financial assistance to the Mission.

The Islanders resented and resisted this return to a missionary approach. On 19 September 1936, a letter was published in the Examiner which provides a concise summary of contemporary Aboriginal objections to the missionary/charity perspective and their self-identity as an independent Christian people:

Many letters have appeared in the papers during the last two years, mostly over the signature of Miss Hudson, asking for charity for the residents of the half-caste reserve, Cape Barren Island. We would like to know who authorised her to ask for charity on our behalf? We do not want charity but work. Many persons reading those letters would naturally think that we were an uncivilised heathen community.

We have had a church for more years than most of us care to remember. A service, Church of England, is held every Sunday, and the attendances of the percentage of population is the highest in Tasmania, so we do not want missionaries. We have regular visits from the doctor at Flinders Island, and a stock of medicine is kept by the schoolmaster. A trained nurse was rushed over by plane lately when influenza broke out, and it was very quickly under control, so we don't want amateurs doctoring us. We have a fine school, with first class teachers in charge. All subjects are taught, including needlework and gardening. Children need a lot of recreation as well as schooling, and if Miss Hudson thinks they are coming to her for a second dose of needlework and gardening, she must be unduly optimistic.

... We are, we hope, as good Christians as any average community and decidedly object to persons coming here to save us. Since the Minister for Lands and Works has been providing work for the people we have been able to get decent food etc and the conditions are far better than they were years ago. We repeat, sir, all we want is work, and the opportunity to earn money and keep our self respects.²⁷

Ida West has a personal memory of the impact of such 'help':

The late Miss Ada Hudson put a story in the Mercury newspaper about oranges for half-castes. My son was going to Albuera Street Primary School at the time and he came home and told me that Miss Hudson said he was going to get oranges. When I saw the big letters saying, "Oranges for half-castes" I told him that he couldn't take them. I went out and bought some oranges myself. I knew that Miss Hudson meant well, but I still had my pride.²⁸

However, Miss Hudson's redeeming virtue was commitment, perseverance and an openness to change. In the very much harsher political climate the Aboriginal community was to face in the 1950s, these strengths meant she ultimately proved a quite useful ally.

Chapter 8

Assimilation and its Aftermath: 1939 to the Present

THE BIGGEST and most concerted attack on the culture and community life of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people since the 1830s began soon after the Second World War. It was led by the Tasmanian Government and white non-government institutions. This painful chapter of recent history cannot be adequately told here, even from the perspective of white Tasmania. The printed record conveys only the change in policies and practices, not their human impact. These stories anyway belong to others and a very different process from this is needed to hear them. Nevertheless, the documented 'facts' remain an important starting point and can be easily enough set out.

In 1937, at the Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities on Aboriginal Welfare, a national policy of assimilation was adopted. Active policies to pursue this goal were to be put in place to accelerate what was seen as the 'natural' and 'inevitable' process of Aboriginal people and culture becoming absorbed by the 'dominant and superior' European race. People of 'mixed descent' with European blood were especially targeted. They were now to be denied their Aboriginality and treated like 'groups of poor whites ... The policy must be one of welfare to assimilate them into the general community'.¹ As an

active partner in state welfare structures, such a policy shift was to have grave but largely unrecognised implications for the Church.

Tasmania was the only State not represented at this conference, but such thinking nevertheless directly influenced the 1944 State Government Inquiry into the future of the Cape Barren Island Reserve. Reflecting new census and statistical guidelines, the Islanders were no longer to be considered even part-Aboriginal. It was seen as time to take strong action, close the Reserve and assimilate the people, with the aid of the welfare system, into the broader Tasmanian community. The subsequent Cape Barren Island Reserve Act of 1945 extended the reserve for only five years. As the ABM had advocated in its 1930 Report, the residents must in this time either farm their land or lose all entitlements to it. All Reserve land not granted would revert to the Crown.²

The Aborigines were angry and defiant, leading to a Parliamentary Select Committee investigation in 1947. The Islanders told the MPs yet again they would not leave, as the Government had bestowed the Reserve to their ancestors as compensation for the loss of the island of Tasmania. For the

Members of the Cape Barren Island community about 1940.

Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office



first time, however, the argument that some legal and ethical entitlements were owed to Aboriginal Tasmanians arising from past events was completely rejected by the Government. The committee recommended instead that the Islanders 'be gradually absorbed into the rest of the Tasmanian population' and their recognition as a 'special people' with rights conferred by their Aboriginal ancestry should end and all claims be dismissed.³

The Reserve was therefore legally terminated in 1951, with only one resident eligible for a lease. The Islanders refused either to follow the Government's conditions to stay on, or to leave. By a policy of non-cooperation and resistance to State authorities, the community survived. In 1958, there were still 120 people on the island, although the gradual migration of some families back to the Tasmanian mainland, mainly Launceston, was understandably accelerated.

Given this Aboriginal resistance, the late 1950s saw the Government consider more active intervention. Premier Cosgrove believed 'that the only solution to the problem is their systematic removal and absorption into the Tasmanian community'.⁴ The main agency responsible for assimilation, the Social Services Department, subsequently instigated another Inquiry in 1959 'to investigate the whole half-caste problem'. The report documents again the ongoing Aboriginal political claims: they 'openly state that the Government took their land away, and therefore must now look after them'. It was generally negative about the character of the Islanders but, in a critical decision, recommended against more extreme measures: 'to attempt to speed up what seems to be the inevitable assimilation of the island people into the Tasmanian Population would ... be an unwarranted interference in their rights as citizens'.⁵

This does not mean, however, that nothing was done. As a result of this report, the policy focused on identifying and actively assisting families volunteering to leave the island. More regular visits from child welfare officers were also made to monitor children. There is documented evidence also that for many families accessing benefit entitlements on the

island was difficult at this time. Relief was sometimes only available off the island. Even Miss Hudson's modest request for assistance to tackle malnutrition by resuming the previous practice of providing lunches for the children was refused by the Director of Education on the grounds that free meals 'would only tend to keep these people on the island ... and there are many reasons why it would seem desirable for them to disperse'.⁶

At the same time, in contrast to the Depression years, there continued to be little infrastructure investment, economic development or employment assistance available on the island itself. Unlike Flinders Island, where considerable sums of Government money were being used to promote development at the time, Cape Barren was being allowed to run down. In 1960, a 16,000-hectare cattle run was established, which included some land from the old Reserve.

This combination of lack of opportunity, regular surveillance and sense of ongoing harassment, meant the Islanders' 'right' to stay on as 'citizens' often meant little, and many were in fact left with little option but to move on. In particular, the power to remove their children made life frightening and difficult and led many families to leave for a quieter and less scrutinised life elsewhere.

The most painful aspect of the assimilation policy was the removal of Aboriginal children. Across the nation, child welfare legislation and practice from the 1940s was being reshaped according to the assimilationist welfare model. As *Bringing them home* notes,

*Aboriginal children were not removed because their "white blood" made them "white children" ... They were removed because their Aboriginality was a "problem". They were removed because if they stayed with "their group", they would acquire their "habits", their culture and traditions.*⁷

In Tasmania, Aboriginal children were removed from their parents and community from the 1930s under the Infant Welfare Act of 1935 and the Child Welfare Act 1960. From 1928 until 1980, the Cape Barren Island head teacher was

also a special constable, legally authorised to act as a police officer and having the power to implement administrative or judicial procedures for the removal of children in cases of neglect.⁸ The post-war policy of assimilation influenced and promoted more active State intervention and led to a large increase in the number of children removed from Cape Barren Island and other Aboriginal families in the 1950s and 1960s. While children in Tasmania were always removed under the Act, Aboriginal people found the neglect provisions broad and the safeguards few. Cases could be disputed in court, but in practice the geographical and cultural remoteness of legal processes meant this never happened with any Cape Barren Island family until special legal assistance was established in the early 1970s.⁹

As the Tasmanian research undertaken by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission for the *Bringing them home* report has established:

*These children were sent to non-Indigenous institutions and later non-Indigenous foster families on the grounds they were neglected. Alternatively, Indigenous families were threatened with the removal of their children if they did not consent to the removal of their children.*¹⁰

The painful stories of some of the children and families affected by the active assimilation policies are not for white Tasmanians to tell, but a few quotes of Tasmanian experiences are presented in the HREOC Report.

*I often used to ask my foster mother who she was, this old lady who would come to the gate, and the answer I always got was, "She is some silly old black woman."*¹¹

*Even though at home, you might be a bit poor, you mightn't have much on the table, but you know you had your parents that loved you. Then you're thrown into a place. It's like going to another planet.*¹²

Young people were also encouraged to leave the island when their schooling was complete. Others of course had no choice if they wished to undertake any secondary schooling. Miss Hudson was in touch with some of these people while living in Hobart from 1955 to 1959 and told the following story:

I have seen one girl brought over here and put in a Home in her early years, and when I came over here four years ago she was in gaol for vagrancy, in a shocking state of ill health. She went down and down until she died under horrible circumstances at 28 years of age.¹³

What was the Anglican Church's connection with this painful and challenging story? The Church's role was twofold. First, the Church of England ran two of the four approved children's homes, Clarendon in the Hobart area and Roland at Sheffield. The extensive study of the incomplete records by the Tasmanian Government for the HREOC Report notes that in the 1930s most children were placed in approved children's homes. After this time, 'usually children were fostered although some indigenous children were sent to children's homes'.¹⁴ However, a short period in homes, usually while foster placements were arranged, was more common. The Tasmanian Government study concluded:

Tasmanian Aboriginal children were accommodated in children's homes in the North and the South of the State, with families in Launceston and with foster families. The majority of Aboriginal children from Cape Barren Island appear to have been placed in the north.

The vast majority of the Aboriginal children were placed in the homes by the Department of Social Welfare and funded by them.¹⁵ Boys of six or seven went to Roland and, given the research finding that most Aboriginal children were placed in the north, this agency probably had more indigenous children living there than Clarendon, although unfortunately no study or review has yet been made of Roland records.

The numbers of Aboriginal children removed up until the late 1960s cannot now be accurately established. In a Report to the Australian Aboriginal Affairs Council in 1969, the Tasmanian Government reported that 'the Social Welfare Department bears the total cost of maintaining some twenty island children who are wards of the State'.¹⁶ Given the community's documented resistance to voluntary wardship provisions, and the low numbers then publicly identifying as Aboriginal people, this is a very high figure and shows the

extent and deep-seated influence of removal policies. Only 671 Tasmanians identified as Aboriginals in the 1971 census, yet in 1975 there were 25 Aboriginal wards, of whom five were living in approved non-government children's homes. By 1976, as the Aboriginal community re-established itself, 2942 people were identifying as Aboriginal.

While there were still ten Aboriginal children in approved homes in 1995 out of a total of 35 Aboriginal wards, Aboriginal Child Placement Principles have guided placements since 1984. As the current Director of Clarendon, Marion Rainsford, notes, 'Children of Aboriginal descent currently living at Clarendon, are known to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre and have been placed here with their agreement'.¹⁷ However, it is also true that the lack of sufficient and sometimes more appropriate alternative placement options in Tasmania remains of concern to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre.

The placement of indigenous children in Anglican children's homes was not, however, the most important link with assimilationist welfare policies in Tasmania. Indeed, given that these were Department placements, made according to Government policy and of less importance than state-administered foster care, such a focus can disguise the more profound Church participation and shared responsibility involved.

The Tasmanian social welfare system has always been a partnership between Government and non-Government agencies, most of which have been church-based. The Anglican Church, then as now, has been an integral part of the overall state welfare structures, including direct provision of a range of services, participation in policy development and support for the professional and ideological values and practices which underpin it. Given this, the separation of church and state responsibility in this area is somewhat artificial, and responsibility for the work of the social services, including its policies and practices must, to a significant extent, be shared.

This is true even beyond the church-based welfare agencies. How much, for example, was the whole downgrading of the Church expenditure and presence on Cape Barren Island influenced by the thinking that it was not a sound long-term investment anyway? Why is it that an Aboriginal family would be provided with material aid from a church group on the mainland on referral from the District Welfare Officer, while on the island they would have had nothing even though they might have been just as desperate? Assimilation was as much a set of values and assumptions taken for granted by most white institutions when relating to Tasmanian Aborigines as a Government welfare policy. In this context, there is little evidence of the Church of England developing or even considering an independent perspective based on its theology, faith or direct contact with Aboriginal people.

Obviously, this is not true for all individual Anglicans. Some, for example, were involved in the Church in Life Organisation, which had a Cape Barren Island Committee chaired by Dr John Morris. This group was distinct in having an Aboriginal liaison person and developing its sponsorship program to support children from the island to attend school on the Tasmanian mainland in consultation with the community. Placements were private and voluntary, children returned regularly to the islands and families were assisted with housing and expenses if they wished to be near their children during schooling years.¹⁸ The Ladies Guild of St Barnabas Church of England, Lady Barron, provided a bursary at least once to a student to study at Flinders Island Area School and subsequently at a private school in Hobart.¹⁹ Some individual Anglicans, on Flinders Island especially, provided other direct and practical assistance. The Bishop of Tasmania also seems to have been privately concerned to the extent of requesting a report from C.I.A. Booth, Council Clerk of Flinders Municipality and former schoolteacher on the Cape Barren Island.

Booth's November 1958 report has been widely quoted, particularly the passage justifying the new policy.

They have had some 60 years or more of genuine and sincere help from school masters, government officials, clergymen, and missionaries, and the result of their labours are practically nil. Not all these helpers could have been wrong in their approach.²⁰

Perhaps neither Booth, the Council, the Church nor the Government could face the painful possibility that perhaps, after all, they were. Whatever the reason, the Church leadership remained silent.

As in the 1820s and 1830s, there cannot be an easy refuge for the Church in resorting to a defence based on the values of the time. There were white Tasmanians who again saw the injustice of the situation, both on Cape Barren Island and beyond. Moreover, especially from the 1960s, there was considerable awareness and action in Christian circles about assimilation policies and the role and responsibility of the Church in relation to them.

Sister Perkins, the nurse on the island, was one example of a very practical Aboriginal ally. The sister was a great source of frustration for the District Welfare Officers seeking voluntary admissions to wardship in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In a 1961 report to the Director of Social Services, the DWO complained that,

There does not appear to be any likelihood in the immediate future of further Section 35 (voluntary) admissions being effective as a method of assimilation of the children ... the people have been informed to resist any suggestion of admission by Sister Perkins ... Sister Perkins attitude to me was openly antagonistic. She refused to discuss the problems of the islanders — in fact refused to see that there is any problem. Her reference to this Department as 'child snatchers' typifies her attitude. She was very rude indeed!²¹

Sister Perkins did in fact believe there were problems, but in her view they were due to the 'appalling poverty'.²²

Even Miss Hudson was politicised and angered by the situation. In her newsletters, read mostly by churchgoers, she did not mince words: 'There are certain people who think the people should be brought to Tasmania and absorbed into the population, I say no! Let them live where they wish.'²³

Politicians were not spared Miss Hudson's fire. She told the Minister for Lands and Works:

They should not be forced away, let them come and go like other people on Flinders do, and adjacent islands, and "white" people living on Cape Barren Island ... the people have not had security since they were put there.

She also pushed hard for the obvious and positive alternative, Government support for a number of development possibilities on Cape Barren, consistent with the large amounts then being spent subsidising development on Flinders Island. Nor was she reluctant to point out the ultimate contradiction in Government policy: 'If they are "free citizens" of Tasmania, no longer a special group, then at least 'let them be treated like any other.'²⁴ Miss Hudson turned to the Governor in a final desperate plea in 1959: 'Now Sir, is there any way you can help these people in your position and prevent the entire wiping of them out.'²⁵

Twenty-five years of commitment to the Cape Barren community had evidently changed Miss Hudson. Her new agenda of land security, job training and support for the economic and social development of the community was much closer to Aboriginal goals than her attacks on dancing and promotion of needlework of the 1930s.

In the end, pragmatic changes were forced on Government policy by two factors. The first was the inherent internal contradiction between the official line that Tasmania had no Aboriginal people or even 'half-castes' any more and proposals for special treatment based on race. The second was the ongoing Aboriginal resistance which saw so many of them simply stay put and so many others maintain their island connections, cultural practices and Aboriginal identity even from afar. As the Director of Social Welfare explained in a memo to the Chief Secretary:

The CBI people should not be the subject of special treatment on the grounds that they are of different racial extraction ... Any assistance offered to these families when and if living in Tasmania proper, must be equally available to other problem families.²⁶

By the mid 1960s, these factors, in addition to studies on the health of Cape Barren children and broader maternal deprivation research, was also causing changes in policy and practice relating to Aboriginal children. For example, in 1965, the Chief Secretary had proposed in that 'church people be approached to develop a program in the south of the state (for islander children) such as Reverend Ezzy has developed for children in the north of the state'. The Minister apparently provided holiday and long-term placements for Aboriginal children from the Northern Territory in Northern Tasmania. However, the Director of Social Welfare rejected it on the grounds that,

with schemes such as hostelling or fostering school children or apprentices from the Island, the long-term answer must conform to the generally accepted principle of social welfare, of trying to keep families together rather than breaking them up.²⁷

A proposal from The Church in Life Movement, this time acting without consultation with the Aboriginal community, was also rejected on similar grounds. A deputation in late 1966 to the Minister of Education sought the closure of the Cape Barren Island School and its replacement by correspondence for young children and a special bursary system for older children, with accommodation in 'hostels' or 'approved children's homes'. This proposal was 'examined very closely' and sympathetically by the Education Department²⁸ and had it been accepted would obviously have had a major impact on the sustainability of the Cape Barren Island community. However, it was actively and successfully resisted by the Islanders in a public campaign, with the eventual support of the Chief Secretary, who asserted that the school should remain open and the Islanders 'should not in any way feel coerced [to leave], nor should there be any suggestion of enforced separation from their children through the pressure of educational needs'.²⁹

Again, an Anglican line in these rigorous and critical contemporary debates is hard to identify. However, the Church at this time did resurrect one ongoing issue of historical injustice — that of appropriated Aboriginal

remains. The Rev. H.B. Atkinson, the son of the Anglican clergyman to whom Trugannini had entrusted her last wishes and an Anglican priest himself, explained that his father had been troubled all his life by Trugannini's desperate plea to him in the middle of the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, 'O Father, Father, bury me here, it's the deepest place, promise me.' His father had apparently made the necessary arrangements to have her wishes carried out, but having been transferred to Stanley had been unaware they had been ignored by his colleagues until 'he saw her remains at the Tasmanian Exhibit of the Melbourne Exhibition in 1888'. Atkinson, with some support from the Bishop, put pressure on the Museum between 1947 and 1951 to have Trugannini's wishes finally respected. The Bishop, however, eventually accepted the museum's argument about the continued primacy of the scientific interest but did successfully request an 'honourable interment' for her remains, which had previously been on public display. The compromise reached was to build an additional room devoted to Tasmanian Aboriginal culture at the museum to commemorate the sesquicentenary year of European settlement as a 'suitable memorial to the Tasmanian Aboriginal race'. The skeleton was to be placed in a special shrine that would be open to the public but only available for viewing by scientists. This room was eventually completed in 1970, although fortunately without the shrine.³⁰

Direct action by the Aboriginal community from 1970 demanded that the bones be returned. Along with a decline in the acceptability of the scientific argument, this proved more successful in overcoming the museum's resistance to change. Trugannini was finally cremated in 1976 at Cornelian Bay and her ashes scattered over the Channel. It was still, however, a white-organised affair. The Church was active again in the early 1980s on this issue, this time supporting the Aboriginal people's struggle to control the disposal of the remaining State-controlled collections of Aboriginal human remains in Tasmania.

By the late 1960s, both the Tasmanian Government and the Church were becoming increasingly peripheral to

developments in the struggle for the rights of the living. After the 1967 referendum, when Commonwealth Government funds became available to address Aboriginal needs, the lure of new money did lead the State Government to indirectly acknowledge there were, after all, indigenous Tasmanians. 'If there was to be a national allocation of funds to improve the living standards of Aborigines,' the Chief Secretary publicly explained, 'Tasmania would press its claim for inclusion, although the Bass Strait Islanders were by no means regarded as Aborigines in the true sense of the word.'³¹ The real reason for State Government participation was to try to get the funds to lure people off Cape Barren once and for all through resettlement packages, ensuring, as the official memo explained, that 'the Cape Barren Island problem which has been with us for well over a 100 years would virtually disappear within a decade'. In addition, 'some parents with children in the care of the State could have their children returned if their housing was adequate.'³² At the same time, in 1968, the Flinders Island Council was pushing for all of Cape Barren to be opened up for development. A Parliamentary Committee supported this.³³

However, the new political forces emerging were to leave Council, Government and Church far behind. Charles Perkins, from the Commonwealth Office of Aboriginal Affairs, visited in late 1968 and was not happy about the use of Commonwealth monies to resettle Cape Barren Island people. Even the schoolteacher spoke out against it. When in April 1970 the Tasmanian Government advertised for a resettlement officer, there was open confrontation with both the Aboriginal community and the Commonwealth Office.³⁴ By 1971, the position had become a community development officer.

Some Christian activism on Aboriginal issues is also evident at this time in the work of the Aboriginal Advancement League (AAL). There had been a Tasmanian branch of the League in Devonport since the 1950s, but it was only from 1967, when Methodist minister Jim Colville joined, that the Tasmanian branch caught up with the justice and

rights agenda increasingly dominating the AAL nationally. When the branch brought Aboriginal activists and Federal President of the AAL Bob Maza to Tasmania in 1970, there was a strong community backlash against his proclamation of rights and Aboriginal power. Colville was even brought before his church hierarchy for censure.³⁵ A decade later, the very active Aboriginal Treaty Support Group had as its Chair the Rev. W. Spencer.³⁶

However, on the whole, the new activists both black and white had no connection with any church. In Tasmania, early white support came from some key academics and others in the Aboriginal Rights Action Group and most importantly the student movement. The Australian Union of Students' (AUS) initial involvement was to provide scholarships to assist Aboriginal students. However, the impossibility of people generally taking these up, led this group to attack the larger social, economic and political barriers to participation, and it became the AUS action group on Aboriginal issues. AUS visited Cape Barren Island in 1969 and then, in 1971, organised the first formal conference of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community in Launceston, attended by over 200 people. The most significant motion of this historic conference was 'we do not wish the Tasmanian Government to attempt to dilute and breed out our people and our cultural heritage'.³⁷ Tasmanian Aboriginal people then established the Aboriginal Information Service in 1972, becoming the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) in 1973. That year, the TAC established the Flinders Island Aboriginal Association.

The Commonwealth Labor Government elected in December 1972 promoted self-determination, land rights, and justice for Aboriginal people in education, health, legal and other areas; backing this up with big increases in expenditure. The Tasmanian Government and most other institutions and structures, including the churches, struggled to keep up. Activists were blamed for artificially creating Tasmanian issues. As a generally sympathetic Tasmanian Minister for Health, Dr Allen Foster, complained to his Federal

counterpart in relation to new measures the Commonwealth was pushing through on Cape Barren:

*Philosophically I have never seen these people as being different in any way to other Tasmanians. I believe the people themselves until recently have held the same view. This, of course, would not be shared by the activists presently working in the field.*³⁸

However, as even the white historical record makes very clear, this was only the latest expression of a very old struggle. As Reynolds puts it,

*The contemporary movement is merely the latest manifestation of a political tradition stretching back to the Black War and the settlement at Wybalenna. It is therefore one of the oldest and most enduring political movements in Australian history.*³⁹

The 20th Century closed with signs of hope for the long-term success of this struggle. The Mabo judgement of the High Court in June 1993 established within common law principles a form of native title largely unrecognised before and abandoned *terra nullius*. While the legal implications for Tasmania remained unclear until the High Court's interpretation of how its principle findings impacted on dispossessed people had been tested, the ethical implications were more immediately apparent.

The Liberal Government soon made an historic U-turn on land rights policy in 1994, with the public support of the Anglican Church, resulting in some land, including a part of Oyster Cove, being returned to the Aboriginal community. The HREOC Inquiry brought to national attention the painful reality of a 'stolen generation'. At the same time, the level of community involvement and public support for reconciliation increased dramatically. The march of 25,000 Tasmanians across the Tasman Bridge to support the reconciliation cause in 2000 became a powerful symbol of popular and political support for Aboriginal land and justice issues, despite the close defeat of the State Government's Land Bill by the Legislative Council the following year.

For the Anglican Diocese of Tasmania, the appointment of a new Bishop in the first year of the new millennium

also seemed to offer the promise of a new relationship with the Tasmanian Aboriginal people. John Harrower's enthronement ceremony was planned with the Aboriginal community, especially the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and incorporated Aboriginal cultural symbols. Very soon after, the Bishop made a strong public statement of support for land rights, stimulating debate on the age-old stumbling block in Church-Aboriginal relations, land. Combined with a new openness to Aboriginal spirituality within the community generally, even the possibility that Walter Arthur and his friends had first pointed to in the 1840s now seemed to beckon: an indigenous Christianity helping to renew and change the Church itself.

As the bicentenary of the British invasion draws near, the unanswered question for the Anglican Church in Tasmania is thus whether it will be open to something never before tried in its long and troubled relations with the indigenous custodians of this land, giving up the unsuccessful and damaging attempts to change Aboriginal people and becoming instead open to being changed by them.

Conclusion

How Shall We Sing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land?

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And to know the place for the first time*
— T.S. Eliot¹

THERE IS ALWAYS some reassurance in the notion of progress, which is probably why history was for a long time told in this way. Things might have been bad, indeed may still be; but so long as they are gradually getting better no radical or disrupting change is called for.

As it reviews its historical relationship with Tasmania's indigenous people, therefore, one of the more disturbing realities for the Anglican Church in Tasmania to confront is that in many periods the situation only got worse. It takes considerable courage to face, for example, that the darkest hour was perhaps not the Black War, safely buried in another generation, but the support for assimilation in the 1950s.

The story is a mixed one and provides a warning for the present and future that there is no guarantee of progress. In many ways the debate was more informed and progressive in the 1830s than it was to be again until the 1980s. There was a recognition then by many Christians of the reality of the invasion, the nature of the War, the justice of the Aboriginal

cause and the questionable legal and ethical British claim to the land. As Reynolds notes, 'The sophistication and cogency of assessments made long ago sometimes amazed me, as did their contemporary relevance.'²

In this context it is a disappointment that, unlike in London or even in Sydney, the Church of England in Van Diemen's Land was largely silent in relation to these critical questions relating to dispossession and land takeover. Until the 1830s, there was indeed little interest by the Church in Tasmanian Aboriginal people. This was despite considerable black and white interaction beyond the frontier, the concern expressed by others and strenuous Government efforts in the 1820s to engage the reluctant local Church in the increasingly pressing task at hand.

It was only after the British conquest of the island was complete and the Aboriginal people moved into institutional contexts that the Church finally began its work. At the Orphan Schools, Wybalenna and Oyster Cove there was extensive and ongoing contact with Aboriginal people.

This contact cannot simply be reduced to the Church inappropriately imposing a foreign creed on a dependent and defenceless people. Despite the often patronising and arrogant approaches utilised, there is considerable evidence that the resistance, resilience and continuing development of Aboriginal culture and identity in these contexts extended even to the development of an indigenous expression of Christianity. This faith was not only one of personal experience and conversion, it incorporated community questions of justice and land.

The white Church leadership, however, could not keep up. Ultimately, their determining reference point and primary identity remained with the dominant power and British cultural expressions of the faith.

There seemed to be a time in the 1860s in the Bass Strait islands when a different story may have unfolded. Men like Reibey and Brownrigg seemed to work fairly collaboratively with the Aboriginal people and the indigenous Christian

leadership on a shared agenda which included recognition of historical claims, cultural identity, economic independence and even to a limited extent land security.

That there was any settlement at all negotiated around the white land grab in the Furneaux Group in the 1870s and 1880s, and that the Cape Barren Island Reserve was established in 1881, was undoubtedly assisted by this partnership. However, it is important even here to be wary of a historiography which gives too much credit to the whites and fails to recognise the ongoing and effective Aboriginal political action which such clerical advocacy supported.

Certainly, these churchmen saw the relationship with the Tasmanian Aboriginal people in very positive terms and were optimistic about the future. However, Church support became much more limited and ambiguous once advocacy necessitated confronting white interests as the white takeover of land and resources accelerated in the 1880s.

It is tempting to blame Bishop Montgomery for much of the negative change that occurred in the Church's relationship with Tasmanian Aborigines in the 1890s. Montgomery used his considerable political influence to vigorously pursue his own agenda for the Aboriginal people, quite aware it was contrary to their own expressed wishes and aspirations. His proposals sought to undermine the communalism of Aboriginal life and replace hard won community rights to land and resources with a system of individual ownership for those prepared to change to an agricultural and 'civilised' way of life.

By the end of Montgomery's bishopric, Cape Barren Island had become officially defined as the 'problem' it was to remain through many government inquiries until the 1960s. Montgomery's version of 'muscular Christianity' seeking to breed out nomadic and uncivilised behaviour through rigorous behaviour modification had done significant and probably lasting damage to Church-Aboriginal relations.

However, no individual, even one with the energy and influence of this Bishop, was the primary cause of change.

It is no coincidence that the Aboriginal people became a renewed 'problem' at the same time as this last frontier of Aboriginal Tasmania was invaded. Church relations with Aborigines broke down as they were systematically excluded from the islands that had provided a refuge since their dispossession from mainland Tasmania began.

In the 20th Century, the leading role of the Church was gone, but the close identification and partnership with the dominant power continued, culminating in Church participation in the active welfare intervention underpinning the assimilation policies of the 1950s and 1960s. It has been this primary identification with those in power in white society which has been the consistent barrier to the Anglican Church in Tasmania developing a sustainable and just relationship with the indigenous people, whose needs and political struggles often directly confronted these dominant interests. Initially, it was the Church's identification and reliance on that small group of wealthy immigrants of the 1820s, who received within a decade almost all the best Aboriginal-developed hunting grounds of the island as free grants, which prevented the local Church ever seriously confronting the ethics of land takeover. Later, even when power became more diffuse, the pattern continued. In the Furneaux Group, the focus of work shifted from Cape Barren to Flinders Island early last century, as soon as the white community was firmly established there. In the 1950s and 60s, the primary identification was with the State welfare authorities, pursuing assimilation. There are sadly very few examples of independently initiated Christian action inspired by the Church's own teachings and faith.

Given that the Church ultimately did not support the Aborigines' consistent campaign for fair access to land and resources, it followed that it was also never able to come to grips with self-determination. Difficulties, resistance and conflict experienced in the struggle for justice were reinterpreted as arising from questions of character, individual morality and racial traits. The aim for most of the

Church's history has been to change Aboriginal Tasmanians into a 'civilised', settled agricultural people. Ultimately, the Church has been consistently unwilling to hand over power: power over resources, power over decision-making and goal-setting, even power over the meaning and interpretation of the Gospel and expressions of what it means to be Church.

There have been, however, signs of hope. Again, the work in the Furneaux Islands from the 1850s to the 1880s, where the Church of England led white Tasmania to face the reality of the survival, continuing cultural identity and legitimate claims of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people, stands out. At a quieter level, the faithful Christian service of many on Cape Barren Island during the 20th Century seems to have rebuilt relationships to a limited extent and maintained a continuing Anglican identity on the island.

Less directly, it is positive and hopeful that the Bible and Christian teaching, while undoubtedly used to enforce white power, have not been a principal or particularly effective tool of control. The Church has been at its most oppressive not with Bible in hand, no matter how patronising and judgmental some missionaries and clergy could be with it, but when theology was carelessly abandoned for cruder new paradigms drawing on secular science for their dubious and often racist claims. Thus, it was Bishop Montgomery's 'progressive' adoption of Social Darwinism, not his biblical understanding, which underpinned and justified his deeply damaging attempts to forcibly change Tasmanian Aboriginal people. Similarly, it was social welfare philosophy, not theology, that primarily led the Church astray in more recent decades.

At any rate, Christianity proved not so easy to control. In the hands of a new generation of indigenous leaders, the tool of the conquering class became, as it did for African Americans, South American workers and South African blacks, a powerful force of liberation. The British cultural interpretation of the faith, given such emphasis by the missionary teachers, was put in its appropriate context by Aboriginal leaders who sought an indigenous Christian

expression which emphasised continuity with past cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices.

The fact that Aboriginal cultural resistance and adaptation extended even to Christianity is extremely important. While Church attendance never fully recovered from the loss of trust during the time of Montgomery, it remained higher than in the broader white community. Christian cultural customs remained important, and the people continued to self-identify as a Christian people well into the 20th Century. Christianity was integral to a vibrant and evolving spirituality and culture, even if this could not find much expression in the largely unchanging and resistant official Church structures.

The biggest sign of hope, however, is that for all the limitations there has at least been a very significant historical relationship between Tasmanian Aborigines and the Anglican Church. For all its pain and sorrow there is at least raw material to work with. In particular, the Church's active work in the Bass Strait islands from 1852 to 1905 and its quieter ministry there in subsequent decades have meant that most Tasmanian Aboriginal people, at least until the 1950s, identified as Anglicans. Along with the Church's historical responsibility to Aboriginal people arising from dispossession, which progressive Anglicans in the Diocese have always recognised, there also comes now the responsibility arising from the promises, commitments and relationships formed much later.

Of course, ultimately, the biggest message of hope, as well as the rawest wounds, have not been revealed here. These are the people's own stories. Black and white interaction has always been at its richest in Tasmania at the level of ordinary folk, away from the gaze of the disapproving establishment. It is telling that in Ida West's autobiography she recounts how in growing up in Flinders Island in the 1930s, black and white children played and even lived together. She describes how friendly Europeans usually were on an individual basis or when meeting in each other's homes. However, when the two groups came together, whether in church or at a dance, everything changed.

The printed white historical record, on which this paper depends, can only set the scene, provide a framework and beginning for this real work of reconciliation and history making — the hearing of each other's stories. The deeper experience waiting to be told is about the relationships and experiences of ordinary Anglicans and Aboriginal people. These will need to be respectfully and carefully heard if the Church's relationship with the Tasmanian Aboriginal people is not to stay, as at present, one of primarily historical interest.

Perhaps such listening will enable that fundamental question posed by Robert Knopwood in his first sermon in 1804 — 'How shall we sing the Lord's Song in a strange land?' — to be heard again. The process involved in asking this question may in the end prove more important than any answers that can currently be proposed.

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