

‘Always Crackne in Heaven’

By

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This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by any other person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis.

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Grant Finlay

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## **Abstract**

The interaction of Aboriginal people with expressions of Christian faith during the colonial history of Australia has been examined in various contexts but not to any great extent in Australia's southernmost setting of Tasmania. This thesis traces the interactions of Tasmanian Aboriginal people with Christianity from the beginnings of the colony of Van Diemen's Land to the early years of the twentieth century.

While surviving documentary sources are limited they show a vibrant pre-contact Aboriginal religious life. Its elements were multi-layered, complex and open to interacting with the different religious lives of other clans and subsequently with the colonists. Pre-existing religious beliefs and practices were the paradigm through which Aboriginal people interpreted the Christian faith.

In the first generations of colonial contact there was not a mission among Aboriginal people by any church missionary society. Most religious oriented conversations occurred in the less formal settings of conversations between individuals or within families. Some conversations were with the Government appointed conciliator, catechist or clergy who were part of Government programs such as the Hobart Orphan School, the Settlement at Wybalenna, and Oyster Cove Station. These formal settings provide archival sources that indicate a variety of interactions and Aboriginal responses to Christian faith.

The polyvalent rather than uniform responses demonstrate the 'agency' of Aboriginal people. Most chose to reject the Christian faith. Some, however, incorporated various elements including baptism, participation in church services, family Bible reading, Bible translation, writing addresses and the preaching of Christian sermons.

A substantial focus of this thesis examines the oral and literary responses to exposure to the Christian faith at a pivotal location during a crucial period of colonial history, namely the Wybalenna Settlement on Flinders Island from 1832 – 1847. Previously unpublished sources analysed include Bible translations, catechetical examinations, literacy tests, Christian addresses and newspaper articles. The interplay of oral and written responses is examined as well as ways Aboriginal people incorporated Christian faith as they adapted and mediated personal and clan roles and relationships in the dynamic context of Wybalenna.

The formal settings of the Wybalenna Settlement and Orphan School contrast the largely independent practices of particular families on the Furneaux Islands throughout most of the nineteenth century and the Nicholls Rivulet Methodist Church in the early twentieth century. These more informal settings demonstrate ways in which Aboriginal people's adoption of Christian faith was constrained by denominational structures and a general lack of interest in them by most church members. Nevertheless, Aboriginal Christian people formed long and lasting relationships with a few colonial Christians who supported their development of uniquely Tasmanian Aboriginal Christian lives.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I like the acknowledgement blurbs that people put at the beginning of their theses and books. They remind us all of the many influences, supporters and contributors to what is on, and not on, the pages we're about to read. While not being a team effort, for the author must take final responsibility for what appears on the pages, nevertheless just as it takes a village to raise a child, so it usually takes the efforts of more than one person to produce a thesis.

I begin by acknowledging the many generations of Aboriginal people of this group of islands we now call Tasmania. I appreciate them as custodians of many stories and rituals of a metaphysical nature. I am curious about those stories and rituals and how they have survived and been interpreted during the experiences of colonisation.

The community of people of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress Tasmania continue to be the home of my sense of belonging here. While they have benefitted from a number of the stories I have found in this research, they have also given me time to undertake this thesis. My UAICC colleagues across Australia who live contemporary experiences of Aboriginal Christian faith have assisted the development of ideas and interpretations of archival material.

My supervisor, Mitchell Rolls, has given me constructive feedback over quite a few years. He appreciated the worthiness of the project several years ahead of me. I have appreciated his insights and encouragement, and how our sometimes differing perspectives helped clarify my own. Other postgraduate students at Riawunna and the interdisciplinary network, Colonialism and its Aftermaths (CAIA), have been encouraging and at times inspiring, usually without them knowing it.

Much of this thesis relies on archival material and I thank the staff at the Mitchell Library in Sydney for the week that gave me many new things to write about. The staff at the Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office and the Rare Books Collection at the Morris Miller Library, University of Tasmania, have also been very helpful.

Two people who gave personal professional assistance were Merrill Clayton who translated portions of a book for me, and Jennie Herrera who proof read the final draft. Simon Barnard produced the maps.

My deepest gratitude, by a long way, belongs with Debbie Finlay who endured many a one-sided ‘conversation’ over seven years as I got excited about an archival find or just filled the air with thoughts that could have, and probably should have, simply remained unsaid. It would be difficult to find a single appropriate way to say thank you, but I am sure more than a few ideas will come to light in the coming years. And to Laura – *‘none for you Gretchen Weiners’*, Kate – *‘sorry for missing the mutual graduation’*, ‘and Liam – *‘lone survivor’*.

## **Acronyms**

BCP – Book of Common Prayer

CMS – Church Missionary Society

KJV – King James Version of the Bible, also known as the Authorised Version

UAICC – Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress

UCA – Uniting Church in Australia



## **Preface**

### **Naming protocols**

During the first generations of contact, many Aborigines had multiple Aboriginal names. In the colonial archives there are often more than one way of spelling them. I adopt the protocol of using the spelling and capitalisations used when quoting directly from sources. A number of Aborigines named in this thesis were also known by both Aboriginal and English names. These multiple and simultaneous identities are an important consideration in how these people interpreted and incorporated Christian faith. The protocol used will be to list both Aboriginal and English names when first mentioned. Subsequent references will have the Aboriginal name where it is known and the English name where the Aboriginal name is not known.

In this thesis a number of Aborigines and clans are mentioned. The following 'clan tree' outlines the clans, people and intra-clan relationships specified. Within each clan the names are listed in the order in which they appear in the thesis. There were of course other people and clans beyond those listed here. The clan names used are as they appear in George Robinson's papers and other reports. There is some conjecture about several clan identifications particularly those of a spouse as both spouses in a marriage were unlikely to be from the same clan. There is also some conflation of clans in the archives such as 'Ben Lomond' and 'North-east', as well as 'Big River' which included people from various clans related to the central areas of Van Diemen's Land. Individual names are used in the form most often used in the source documents. The spelling of some of these names is different among the Aboriginal community today.

*'Ben Lomond' clan*

- Rolepa / George married to Luggenemenener / Tuery
  - Walter Arthur, eldest son
  - Rolepana, another son, living with John Batman at the 'Kingston' property near Ben Lomond
- Trowlebunner / Achilles, brother of Luggenemenener, married to Toogernuppertootenner / Maria II
- Meterluererparrityer / Christopher
- Tarenootairrer / Sarah married to Nicermenic / Eugene, from North-west clan
  - Mary Ann Arthur, daughter of Tarenootairrer, married to Walter Arthur, son of Rolepa and Luggenemenener. Mary Ann married Adam Booker after the death of Walter Arthur
  - Fanny Cochrane Smith, daughter of Tarenootairrer, married William Smith
  - Adam, son of Tarenootairrer

*North-east*

- Mannalargenna
  - Wapperty, daughter of Mannalargenna
  - Kartityer / Hector, son of Mannalargenna

*Oyster Bay*

- Tongerlongerter / William

*Nuenone clan (Bruny Island)*

- Trugernanner / Lalla Rookh
- Woorraddy / Alpha
  - Droierloine / Peter Bruny, son of Woorraddy
  - Maiki / Davy Bruny, son of Woorraddy

*South West*

- Dray / Sophia

*Big River*

- Purngerpar / Alfred
- Druemerterpunner / Alexander married to Drunameliyer / Caroline
- Dowwringgi / Leonidas
- Pieyenkomeyenner / Wild Mary married to Warwe / Albert, from North clan
- Dromedeener / Daphne
- Maccamee / Washington
- Makeaduru / Constantine

*North-west*

- Pevay / Tunnerminerwait / Napoleon married to Fanny (not Fanny Cochrane Smith)

### *West coast*

- Noemy
- Drinene / Neptune
- Tedehburer / Clara
- Terminope / Augustus
- Pengernoburric / Bessy Clark

### *Unknown clan identity*

- Lerpullermener / Henry
- Pernermeroick / Milton

## **Naming format**

Throughout this thesis I will use several names for ‘Tasmania’ rather than a single ‘monologicistic’ title. These are:

- *Trouwunna* when referring to the land in which pre-contact Aborigines lived, noting that present day Aboriginal people use additional words such as *lutruwitta*;
- Van Diemen’s Land during the years from 1803 – 1856 when it was known as such by colonial authorities; and
- Tasmania from 1856 onwards.

## **Spelling**

In quotations the spelling of the source is retained. I have chosen not to use the signifier, sic, to indicate this, taking it as self-evident.

## Maps



## Tasmania

With some sites of early contact

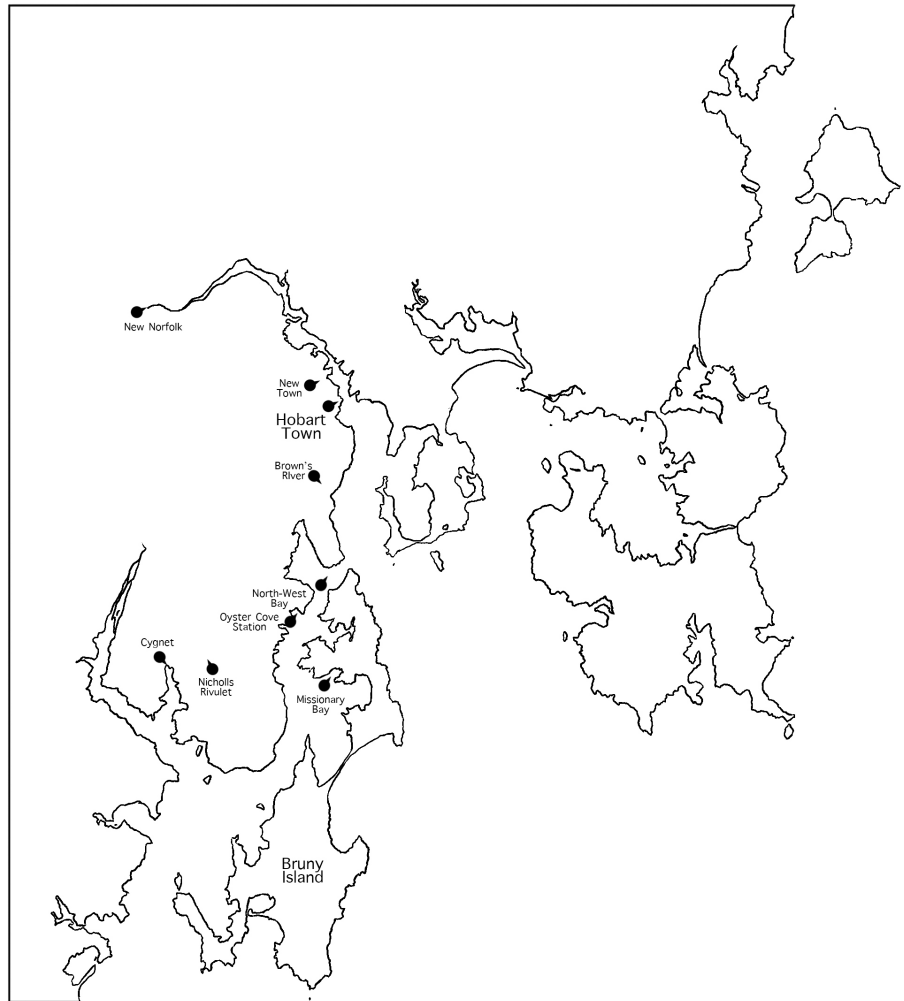




# North-East Tasmania

With the Furneaux Islands





## South-East Tasmania

With Bruny Island



## **Introduction**

‘Should we have a church service on Australia Day?’ ‘Is it okay to have Holy Communion on a midden site?’ ‘How do you do a ‘culturally appropriate’ funeral inside a church?’

Since January 1995 I have been a Minister with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) in Tasmania. The UAICC is a national network of Aboriginal churches and community service activities that are part of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA). Several Tasmanian Aboriginal people participated in formation of the UAICC at Galiwinku, Elcho Island, in north-east Arnhem Land (NT) in July 1983.

The national Assembly subsequently endorsed the UAICC as an entity of UCA in July 1985. A UAICC group began in Tasmania in 1986 involving Aboriginal Elder Aunty Ida West and several people from the Uniting Church, including Mr Neville Marsh. By January 1987 the group had expanded to include five or six Aboriginal people and a similar number of others. The first pastor, Len Watson, arrived from Queensland and formed a congregation in the northern suburbs of Hobart later in 1987. Aboriginal Elders have always been central in the work among the Aboriginal community, particularly Aunty Ida West, Aunty Girlie Purdon, Lennah Newson, and Eva Richardson. Rev Saula Lalagavesi followed Pastor Watson from 1990 – 1993. I began in the placement with UAICC Tasmania – Leprena in January 1995, two weeks after my ordination.

Regular discussions occur during Sunday services and Regional Committee meetings about Aboriginal cultural practices, the legacies of colonial history, and their interactions with people’s personal Christian faith, interpretations of the Bible, church traditions, and our contemporary collective



gatherings. When the 26<sup>th</sup> January landed on a Sunday in 1997 it prompted a question we hadn't explicitly discussed before. One question in the conversation was along the lines of, 'I wonder how our ancestors dealt with this kind of issue?' This thesis is part of a response.

This Elder's 'wondering' touches upon issues discussed in this thesis: the colonising experience and ways it affected Aboriginal people at the time, particularly regarding their religious life; the complicity of churches in that experience and how this affects ways Aboriginal people experienced 'church' and being 'Christian' or not being 'Christian'; the variety of Aboriginal experiences and the stories Aboriginal people told. This is particularly relevant in that the Aboriginal people discussed in this thesis are the ancestors of today's Tasmanian Aboriginal community.

This identified issues for further discussions: how these various 'histories', 'traditions', and 'narratives' shape people's Aboriginal Christian identities, and a collective narrative in the community; and what 'new' narratives and practices might we 'speak' among today's community?

As a non-Aboriginal person the questions are also potent for me. What is my role as Minister in this congregation, on this issue, on 26<sup>th</sup> January? What is my contribution to the discussion, particularly given my role and power as 'Minister'? By having a church service, am I continuing a history of church clergy enforcing a white colonising ideology upon Aboriginal people?

On 26<sup>th</sup> January 1997 we had a church service. Some participated, and some did not. Those who were there engaged in prayers, talked about 'invasion' day legacies, sang songs, and read the Bible. There was not a single, or unified,

Aboriginal, or non-Aboriginal response to the questions. These diverse interactions and responses are also crucial to this thesis.

## **Tasmanian Aboriginal History**

Much has been written over the years about Tasmania and Aboriginal people. The histories written in earlier years, including Ling Roth (1899) *The Aborigines of Tasmania*,<sup>1</sup> John West (1852) *The History of Tasmania*,<sup>2</sup> and James Bonwick (1884) *The Lost Tasmanian Race*,<sup>3</sup> wrote little about Aboriginal people's religious life, and even less about their religious responses to colonisation. Bonwick described Aboriginal religious life as

if wanting little for the body they craved less for the soul, with no gods and no form of worship, their vague fears due only to the wild dread voices of storm and darkness.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1960s and 1980s the seminal works of N.J.B. Plomley in editing some of the voluminous writings of George Augustus Robinson in *Friendly Mission*<sup>5</sup> and *Weep in Silence*,<sup>6</sup> brought a great deal more material about Aboriginal pre-contact religious life and contact conversations to a wider audience. These books continue to be valuable and problematic resources, and they will be discussed in detail.

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<sup>1</sup> Roth, H. L., 1899, *The Aborigines of Tasmania*. Halifax; King & Sons; facsimile of second edition, 1968, Hobart, Fullers Bookshop.

<sup>2</sup> West, J., 1852, *The History of Tasmania*. Launceston; Henry Dowling.

<sup>3</sup> Bonwick, J., 1884, *The Lost Tasmanian Race*. London; Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Plomley, 1966.

<sup>6</sup> Plomley, 1987.

Lloyd Robson, *A History of Tasmania*,<sup>7</sup> and Vivienne Rae-Ellis in *Black Robinson*,<sup>8</sup> and *Trucanini: Queen or Traitor?*<sup>9</sup> briefly discussed religious aspects of the lives of Aboriginal people in more recent decades. In *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*,<sup>10</sup> and its reprint, *Aborigines in Tasmania since 1803*,<sup>11</sup> Lyndall Ryan provided the first organised and more detailed description of pre-contact Aboriginal religious life, but little of that life beyond first contact. Henry Reynolds (1995) *Fate of a Free People*,<sup>12</sup> James Boyce (2008) *Van Diemen's Land*,<sup>13</sup> and various writers of shorter journal articles and papers have brought more attention to Aborigines as active negotiators during the earlier years of the colony. At times Aboriginal people co-operated with colonists, and at other times protested against dispossession and the denial of rights. Again, the religious aspect to these Aboriginal responses has not been examined very thoroughly. Ida West's (1987) *Pride Against Prejudice*<sup>14</sup> stands out as the only earlier publication by a Tasmanian Aboriginal person but this also mentions little about her religious life.

In the past decade more locally focussed histories have emerged. These include Ian MacFarlane's, *Beyond Awakening*,<sup>15</sup> Patsy Cameron's, *Grease and Ochre*,<sup>16</sup> Graeme Calder's, *Levee, Line and Martial Law*.<sup>17</sup> A small number of autobiographies by Aboriginal authors have also appeared, including Molly

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<sup>7</sup> Robson, L., 1983, *A History of Tasmania*, Vol I. Melbourne; Oxford University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Rae-Ellis, V., 1988, *Black Robinson*. Carlton; Melbourne University Press.

<sup>9</sup> Rae-Ellis, V., 1976, *Trucanini. Queen or Traitor?* Hobart; O. B. M.

<sup>10</sup> Ryan, L., 2001, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*. Sydney; Allen & Unwin.

<sup>11</sup> Ryan, L., 2012, *Tasmanian Aborigines A History Since 1803*. Sydney; Allen & Unwin.

<sup>12</sup> Reynolds, H., 1995, *Fate of a Free People*. Ringwood; Penguin.

<sup>13</sup> Boyce, J., 2008, *Van Diemen's Land*. Melbourne; Black Inc.

<sup>14</sup> West, I., 1987, *Pride Against Prejudice*. Canberra; Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

<sup>15</sup> MacFarlane, I., 2008, *Beyond Awakening*. Launceston; Fullers Bookshop.

<sup>16</sup> Cameron, P., 2011, *Grease and Ochre*. Launceston; Fullers Bookshop.

<sup>17</sup> Calder, G., 2010, *Levee, Line and Martial Law: a history of dispossession of the Mairremmener people of Van Diemen's Land 1803-1832*. Launceston; Fuller Bookshop.

Mallett's, *My Past, Their Future*,<sup>18</sup> Ronnie Summers', *Ronnie, Tasmanian Songman*.<sup>19</sup> In many of these works the pre-contact religious life of Aboriginal people provides content for an early chapter before the inexorable tide of colonial history moves the discussion to war, dispossession, 'disappearance' and 're-emergence'. Discussion of Aboriginal people's religious life is incidental. Pre-contact beliefs and ceremonies, when they are discussed, usually contain assumptions from later contexts or from elsewhere in Australia. Tasmanian Aboriginal religious life, like other aspects of the culture and people, is presented as more rudimentary, almost like a 'proto-religion.'

This thesis is about Tasmanian Aboriginal religious life. It focuses on the experiences of those Aboriginal people who engaged with the Christian faith in the early years of the colony, especially those of the Wybalenna Settlement, the Islander community of eastern Bass Strait, and the post-Wybalenna life at Oyster Cove. The majority of Aboriginal people in colonial Van Diemen's Land did not identify with the Christian faith and those who did were from a variety of clan backgrounds, roles and cultural practices. Women and men, people of different ages, experiences and identities connected with the Christian faith through various colonial people and, importantly in this thesis, other Aboriginal people.

## **Church history**

Since this thesis considers Aboriginal Christian faith, particularly in the nineteenth century, a brief summary of churches in Van Diemen's Land provides helpful background. There were, and continue to be, various denominations of the Christian church in Tasmania. The Anglican Church (previously known as the

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<sup>18</sup> Mallett, M., 2001, *My Past – Their Future*. Hobart; Blubber Head Press.

<sup>19</sup> Summers, R., 2009, *Ronnie, Tasmanian Songman*. Broome; Magabala Books.

Church of England) was the predominant church in the nineteenth century, the period of most interest to this thesis. It was closely entwined in government positions and processes for much of that century.

From the middle of the eighteenth century in England, prior to establishing the colony in Van Diemen's Land, many Christians in England experienced what is broadly known as the Evangelical Revival. The revival inspired the 'methodist' movement within the Church of England. It also involved Christians from other denominations who had earlier 'dissented' from attempts to keep all Christians within the Church of England.

These included the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and other 'non-conformists'. The evangelical awakening also inspired missionary endeavours. These were undertaken by zealous individuals, as well as interdenominational or 'para-church' mission societies that were not restricted to a single denomination, though denominational societies also formed.

The 'methodist' movement grew as a para-church phenomenon within and beyond the Church of England for fifty years and only formally separated from the Church of England in the 1790s just a decade before the establishment of the colony of Van Diemen's Land. The Methodist Church, as a distinct denomination, was not much older than the colony and, like the colony, was shaped by its Anglican connections.

The Independent, or Congregational Church, like the Methodists, began as a movement of the Evangelical Revival. The Presbyterian Church formed as a particularly Scottish expression of the Protestant Reformation, akin to the Church of England in England. The Evangelical Revival also affected the Presbyterian Church.

The Catholic Church had been the predominant form of church in Europe from the time of the Roman Empire, until the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. In the colony of Van Diemen's Land, it was influenced by Catholics from Ireland, many of whom arrived as convicts but also as migrants.

None of these churches, or any of the Christian mission societies associated with them, established ventures particularly focused on Aboriginal people in Van Diemen's Land. However, in the language of the broader evangelical revival and missionary endeavour, it was common for individuals, such as Robinson, to describe their activity among Aboriginal people as a 'mission' and themselves as 'missionaries'.

It was also common for the Church of England to describe work beyond Parish boundaries as 'mission', such as the 'D'Entrecasteaux Mission' south of Hobart that provided services to Anglican colonists.<sup>20</sup> So the word 'mission' when used in Van Diemen's Land in the nineteenth century is not necessarily about cross-cultural contexts involving Aboriginal people. In this thesis I regard Robinson as a missionary-minded individual Christian who was part of the broader evangelical missionary endeavour but he was not someone sent by a mission society to evangelise Aboriginal people. I will say more about Robinson's particular biography below.

### **Not a history of mission, but Aboriginal responses**

Histories of Christian missions among Aboriginal people have become more prevalent in recent years. Some examine them as instruments of colonising

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<sup>20</sup> *Church News*, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1864, p. 307.

powers (for example, Peggy Brock, *Outback Ghettos*<sup>21</sup>), the personal experiences of individual Aboriginal people (Christine Choo, *Mission Girls*<sup>22</sup>; Doris Pilkington, *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence*<sup>23</sup>), or missionaries themselves (John Harris, *One Blood*,<sup>24</sup> Niel Gunson, *Reminiscences and Papers of Threlkeld*<sup>25</sup>), or relationships between Aboriginal people and missionaries (Bain Attwood, *Life Together, Life Apart*<sup>26</sup>), or from within a particular church (James Boyce, *God's Own Country*<sup>27</sup>).

This thesis is not a history of a mission, because there was not one in Tasmania. Rather it focuses on Aboriginal people's responses to the Christian faith as shared with them by particular individual colonists and the context in which those interactions occurred. Some of those colonists had explicit roles in the government such as Conciliator, Superintendent or Catechist at government sponsored programs. Others colonists related through their role in their church denomination. And, of course, there were many others who were neither in government employ nor in Christian denominational service.

In the broader context of colonial church history the first five chapters of this thesis discuss events that were occurring when Christian mission was in its earliest beginnings in colonial Australia. There were few, if any, previous practices from which to draw upon. Only one attempt to translate portions of the Bible into an Aboriginal language had occurred prior to the conversations at Wybalenna in 1833. This was by Lancelot Threlkeld in the Awabakal language

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<sup>21</sup> Brock, P., 1993, *Outback ghettos: Aborigines, Institutionalisation, and Survival*. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press.

<sup>22</sup> Choo, C., 2001, *Mission Girls: Aboriginal Women on Catholic Missions in the Kimberley, Western Australia, 1900-1950*. Crawley; University of Western Australia Press.

<sup>23</sup> Pilkington, D., 2002, *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence*. St. Lucia; University of Queensland Press.

<sup>24</sup> Harris, J., 1990, *One Blood*. Sutherland; Albatross.

<sup>25</sup> Gunson, N., 1974, *Australian reminiscences and papers of L. E. Threlkeld : missionary to the Aborigines, 1824-1859*. Canberra; Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

<sup>26</sup> Attwood, B., 1994, *A Life Together, A Life Apart*. Carlton; Melbourne University Press.

<sup>27</sup> Boyce, J., 2001, *God's Own Country?* Hobart; ISW.

from 1827 – 1834.<sup>28</sup> The only Christian mission supported by a denomination to have begun at the time of the activities on Flinders Island was at Wellington, New South Wales, begun by the Church of England's Church Missionary Society (CMS) in the same year as the Government Settlement began at the Lagoons on Flinders Island, Tasmania. Therefore the context of much that is discussed in this thesis was more fluid and dynamic than occurred in later mission institutions with their more regimented structures, programs, theology, and architecture. This Tasmanian context therefore offers a unique perspective on Aboriginal responses to Christian faith in the early colonial era.

The thesis is also limited to those Aboriginal responses for which written sources survive. The limitation is problematic. Pre-contact Aboriginal languages were oral. There were skilled orators, and series of songs and dances, but no written literature. All surviving written sources were created in the context of colonising experiences and, with few exceptions which will be discussed, all are from colonial authors.

What we read therefore is usually a colonist's representation. It is as Greg Denning describes it, a 'texted past',<sup>29</sup> or in the words of Bain Attwood, a 'making', or construction, of Aboriginal people and their worlds.<sup>30</sup> Where Aboriginal people's own writing is considered, it too is contextual within colonial relationships. As Penny Van Toorn argues, 'writing never arrives naked'<sup>31</sup> but is clothed by relationships, and the interactions of diverse and unequal participants. Van Toorn's seminal work in this area influenced my research but as the thesis progressed there were areas of discord. Anna Johnston considers the other side of

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<sup>28</sup> Harris, J., 1990, pp. 25 – 27.

<sup>29</sup> In Attwood, B., 1989, 'Reading Sources in Aboriginal History: Mission Station Visitors Books', *La Trobe Journal*, 43, pp. 21 – 28.

<sup>30</sup> Attwood, B., 1989, *The Making of the Aborigines*. Sydney; Allen & Unwin.

<sup>31</sup> Van Toorn, P., 2006, *Writing Never Arrives Naked*. Canberra; Aboriginal Studies Press.



this writing relationship, and suggests that colonists were also ‘making’ themselves through their writing.<sup>32</sup>

## **Documentary sources**

These issues are particularly relevant in this thesis where much of the source material is from the papers of George Robinson. Robinson was employed by Governor Arthur initially as a storekeeper on Bruny Island, south of Hobart, in March 1829. Robinson was an evangelically minded Christian man and after a few months Governor Arthur changed Robinson’s appointment to that of ‘conciliator’. In this new role he represented Governor Arthur in seeking to persuade Aboriginal people to cease hostilities with colonists and to vacate their lands. Robinson travelled around *Trouwunna* with a group of Aboriginal people seeking to persuade others to join the government establishment being set up in the Furneaux Islands off the north-east coast. On 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October 1831 an agreement was reached between Governor Arthur and a number of clan leaders in this regard.<sup>33</sup>

In his dealings with Aboriginal people Robinson was always an employee of the Governor. He was never appointed by any church based denominational or other Christian mission society.

Robinson’s papers comprise seventy-two volumes and ‘constitute one of the most important sources for Aboriginal history and ethnography during the period of pastoral settlement in south-eastern Australia’.<sup>34</sup> Some of these journals

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<sup>32</sup> Johnston, A., 2004, ‘The Little Empire of Wybalenna: Becoming Colonial in Australia’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 81, pp. 17 – 31.

<sup>33</sup> Plomley, N.J.B., 1966, *Friendly Mission*. Kingsgrove; Halstead Press, p. 483.

<sup>34</sup> Gunson, N., 2002, ‘Reality, History, and Hands-on Ethnography: the Journals of George Augustus Robinson at Port Philip 1839 – 1852’, *Aboriginal History*, 26, pp. 225 - 237. <http://press.anu.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/ch0937.pdf> accessed 14.5.2014.

and papers have been edited by N. J. B. Plomley and appear as *Friendly Mission*,<sup>35</sup> and *Weep in Silence*.<sup>36</sup> Many more are still to be transcribed and published, particularly in regard to the Wybalenna Settlement. As Johnston and Rolls highlight<sup>37</sup> these papers, and there are thousands of pages, are read in polyvalent ways.<sup>38</sup> They appear to offer ‘first-hand’ descriptions, almost documentary-style recordings, of Aboriginal life, including religious meanings and expressions, and simultaneously they appear to hide the very people whose religious life they describe.

While in such inchoate evidence certain patterns do become evident and provide much relevant data as to the how and why of the lives observed, some patterns might be ostensible in that they are exceptional rather than usual, and much of pertinence is also overlooked and not recorded.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, the papers of Robinson can be useful. Such usefulness could perhaps be better illuminated by imagining our knowledge of Tasmanian Aboriginal life without anything from Robinson. It would be a very different historiographic landscape. For

contemporary colonial texts, notwithstanding their manifest distortions, ignorance and silences, nevertheless are still vital to anthropological histories because of their relative ‘coevality’ with indigenous pasts. Such texts catch something of the tenor, agendas

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<sup>35</sup> Plomley, N.J.B., 1966, *Friendly Mission*. Kingsgrove; Halstead Press.

<sup>36</sup> Plomley, N. J. B., 1987, *Weep In Silence*. Hobart; Blubber Head Press.

<sup>37</sup> Johnston, A., & Rolls, M., 2008, ‘Reading Robinson in the Twenty-First Century: An Introduction’, in Johnston, A., & Rolls, M., (eds.), *Reading Robinson*. Hobart; Quintus.

<sup>38</sup> I am using ‘polyvalence’ to refer to the potential multiplicity of meanings and interpretations of a text or event as used in literary theory and particularly biblical studies. See for example, Crossan, J., 1980, *Cliffs of Fall, Paradox and Polyvalence in the Parables of Jesus*. New York; Seabury Press. Gorman, M. J., 2009, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*, Peabody; Hendrickson Publishers.

<sup>39</sup> Johnston, A., & Rolls, M., 2008, p. 15.

and doings of other times, of earlier phases of often lengthy,  
fundamentally transformative local engagements with Christianity,  
colonialism, modernity, decolonization and globalization.<sup>40</sup>

Beyond the frustration of what is ‘overlooked and not recorded’ is what has not yet been published. While Brian Plomley provided a great service to many people by editing and publishing *Friendly Mission* and *Weep in Silence*, Robinson’s papers from Van Diemen’s Land are much more extensive. These are held in the Mitchell Library in Sydney. Probably the most exciting week of research for this thesis was the one spent scanning hundreds of papers that are only summarised in a footnote or referred to obliquely by Plomley. These as yet unpublished papers provide rich material of writings by Aboriginal people at Wybalenna, particularly Walther Arthur and Thomas Bruny. They also include catechetical examinations, more than is printed in R. S. Miller’s, *Thomas Dove and the Tasmanian Aborigines*,<sup>41</sup> as well as notes of first language addresses, and many other topics of interest.

Other sources for this thesis are documentary records of government, including particular correspondence between the Colonial Secretary’s Office and the various superintendents and catechists responsible for Aboriginal people, and also churches archives in the form of baptism, marriage and funeral records and other of their publications. The development of ‘Trove’ by the National Library of Australia has been another invaluable resource in examining public notices and newspaper articles contemporary with the people being discussed.

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<sup>40</sup> Douglas, B., 2001, ‘Encounters with the Enemy? Academic Readings of Missionary Readings on Melanesians’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 43 (1) pp. 37-64.

<sup>41</sup> Miller, R. S., 1985, *Thomas Dove and the Tasmanian Aborigines*. Melbourne; Spectrum.

## **Aboriginal responses to Christian faith – considered and varied**

The dialogue of religious narratives in Van Diemen's Land occurred within the historical experience of the dispossession and subjugation of Aboriginal people by the colonising power of British political and economic expansion. Church denominations, particularly Anglican, were complicit in the suppression of Aboriginal voices and aspirations. Robinson as 'conciliator' contributed to Governor Arthur's policies. Rev Thomas Reibey, Anglican Archdeacon in Launceston, and James Dandridge, Superintendent of the Oyster Cove Aboriginal Station, held Aboriginal people's pensions. Reibey reported to parliament on the Furneaux Islanders. Anglican Bishop Montgomery oversaw the teacher/catechist on Cape Barren Island and contributed to preparations for the Cape Barren Island Reserve Act.

In many histories the brief references to Aboriginal responses to Christian faith usually assume the place of non-Aboriginal writer and reader to be of primary importance. The elevation of Robinson's reports above those written by others is one example. Another is the suggestion that Robert Clark, the catechist at Wybalenna, and not any of the Aboriginal people, was responsible for writing the petition to Queen Victoria in February 1846 which sought to prevent the return of Dr. Jeanneret as Commandant at Wybalenna.<sup>42</sup>

Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples' religious life has often been restricted to the interpretation of a single non-Aboriginal voice, that of Robinson. However, more was occurring than Robinson or others wrote about, or even that Robinson and others noticed. This thesis, while examining Robinson's journal writings and other

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<sup>42</sup> TAHO CSO 11/26/378, Plomley, 1987, pp. 148 – 49.

documents, seeks to identify what might have been happening on the other side of the dialogue, in the behaviour and words of Aboriginal people.

I hope to demonstrate from a variety of contexts that Aboriginal responses to Christian faith were variant, considered, deliberate, and polyvalent and that this grew out of a dynamism within Aboriginal people's own religious traditions and the sometimes tentative contexts in which dialogue with the Christian faith occurred. Aboriginal responses included baptisms (adult and child), conversations with Robinson, performing 'Sunday corroboree' in the bush on Flinders Island, mutual catechism and hymn singing at Wybalenna, family Bible reading on Bass Strait islands, arranging a catechist for children in a family, donating land for a church, preaching in a local congregation, and many others.

### **Complex dialogical identities**

Many previous histories/interpretations have homogenised Aboriginal people as though they had one experience or spoke with one voice. Aboriginal people were never homogenous. The existence of several clans with cultural and linguistic variations expresses an underlying diversity. Christian people were also not homogenous. The various church denominations and people's own beliefs ensured that 'Aboriginal' – 'Christian' conversations were never 'monologicistic' comprising one homogenous community conversing with another.

The construction of 'Aboriginal' and 'Christian' as a binary, fixed, oppositional discourse of either/or and not authentically both-and is similarly an unreality. This is part of the limitation of post-colonial terms such as 'hybridity', which can suggest two entwined 'homogenous' entities. This thesis uses the

metaphor, and, I would suggest, the historical experiences of those described in the texts, of ‘dialogue’.<sup>43</sup> It can express the underlying religious narratives and has flexibility in how each voice infiltrates the beliefs of the Other. Paul Ricoeur’s writing, *One Self as an Other*,<sup>44</sup> is instructive here, particularly in seeing complex identity as narrative identity developing and becoming more complex over time.

Likewise Barry Sandywell’s articulation:

By approaching interpretation in the wider cultural and historical contexts of semiopraxis we avoid every form of empiricist and formal semantics; by emphasizing the integration of meaning, experience, and situated praxis in human activities we return questions of meaning to the human context of life-in-the-world; by recalling the dialogical nature of selfhood we are reminded that every structure of meaning arises as the negotiated outcome of transactional processes.<sup>45</sup>

The distinction between Aboriginal-Christian identities and the engagement with the Christian faith by non-Christian Aboriginal people is an important one. It is sometimes quite difficult to ascertain a particular person’s Christian faith when using only documentary sources, particularly when those sources are limited, problematic and more than a century old. There is a subtle but important distinction between engaging with the Christian faith by a non-Christian Aboriginal person and engaging in the Christian faith by an Aboriginal Christian person. However, for most, if not all, of the people discussed in this thesis this distinction is very problematic, if not impossible to make. How many sources, of

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<sup>43</sup> See also, Bakhtin, M., 1981, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Holquist, M., (ed.), translated by Emerson, C., and Holquist, M., Austin; University of Texas Press.

<sup>44</sup> Ricoeur, P., 1992, *Oneself as Another*. Chicago; Chicago University Press.

<sup>45</sup> Sandywell, B., 2013, *Reflexivity and the Crisis of Western Reason*, Vol. 1. Hoboken; Taylor & Francis, p. 400.

what type, and over what time frame would be sufficient to prove or disprove a person's identity as Christian? Even emphatic statements at one point can be contested by alternate statements at others. Both processes of engaging 'with' and 'in' were adaptive. Although both processes are related, people move from one to the other and back again at different times in their lives. Disentangling these is impossible based on the documentary sources available.

Several Aboriginal people demonstrated further adaptations to Christian faith through their lives. Walter Arthur's experiences as a young child at the Orphan School evolved in the early days of his writings at Wybalenna, followed by more sophisticated addresses and petitions to the Governor and later again at Oyster Cove. Fanny Cochrane Smith's initial participation in the Church of England services went through significant transformation when she joined the Methodist Church in later life. These continuing engagements with the Christian faith, albeit in different forms, indicate a multifaceted and evolving experience rather than a single 'conversion' or initial identification with one particular Christian expression.

The emergence and grounding of complex Aboriginal Christian selfhood in the context of Trouwunna – Tasmania is further expressed in the comparison between the first and last Aboriginal people described in this thesis. The first Aboriginal person baptised, a young boy given the name 'Robert Hobart May' had a Christian identity foisted upon him. The last person described in this thesis is William Smith, the eldest child of Fanny and William Smith. He was born into an Aboriginal-colonial family surrounded by continuing first language songs and Christian hymns. He became a Christian preacher in a local church congregation.

Therefore not only do the contexts need more nuanced descriptions but particular Aboriginal people's unique 'voices' also invite more considered listening. Complex multi-layered narratives from multiple voices have been missing from much academic and public discourse. This complexity can be seen in documentary narratives, and through this thesis I hope to show Aboriginal people's responses as multi-layered, both in their pre-contact religious life and in their responses to Christian faith. That Aboriginal people did not simply put superficial Christian clothes on top of Aboriginal bodies smeared with grease and ochre. They were more culturally complex and were living in a range of heterogeneous contexts in which they were evolving 'transcultural identities'.<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, although some colonial Christians, such as Robinson, sought to eradicate Aboriginal cultural practices and emphasised an English-only Christian faith, others such as Robert Clark, attempted to affirm and encourage Aboriginal people's own language in their interpretation of Christian faith. But the most influential people on how Aboriginal people incorporated Christian faith and lived these complex personal narratives were other Aboriginal people, not the catechist, and even less so the superintendent, no matter how puffed with self-importance.

Aboriginal Christian faith, therefore, is not restricted to documents of the church or various missionary societies or individuals at the time, but in how particular Tasmanian Aboriginal people engaged with the faith presented initially orally, and subsequently textually and orally in multiple forms and through multiple people. And for many, Christian faith was integral to the transitional roles they played from generation to generation.

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<sup>46</sup> Peyer, B., 1997, *The Tutor'd Mind: Indian Missionary Writers in Antebellum America*. Amherst; University of Massachusetts Press, p. 17.





## **Chapter outlines**

Various colonial writers regarded Tasmanian Aboriginal people as religiously sterile, or where it was recognised, it was dismissed as rudimentary, a ‘proto-religion’ inferior to more sophisticated Aboriginal religious expressions in other parts of Australia. However, Aboriginal people were not a hollow voice when colonists arrived. In Chapter One—‘Fertile not fallow spiritual lives’—I consider the sources in more detail. The regional variety of Aboriginal religious narratives and the existence, names and characteristics of Creator Beings is noted and I examine one creation story in detail, told by Woorraddy / Alpha, particularly the religious connections between people and kangaroo. The gendered nature of the narratives is discussed briefly.

In the second half of the chapter I discuss the complexity of the Aboriginal religious worlds that shaped their engagement with the Christian faith. By incorporating English words into that religious world Aborigines demonstrated an openness to Christian faith and a capacity to interpret elements of it in ways that differed significantly from the Christians with whom they conversed. Their interpretation of ‘England’ is one such example. Aboriginal responses were not simply resistance or adherence but rather engagement in multiple ways and contexts, and varied and evolving interpretations over several decades within particular lives and across several generations among the communities.

In Chapter Two—‘Motti (one) Nyrae (good) Parlerdi (God)’—I begin with the first colonial Christian contact with an Aboriginal person in the baptism of the orphaned child, Robert Hobart May, and consider its meaning from his clan’s perspective as well as Knopwood’s, the Christian Chaplain. Following this

I discuss further examples of Aboriginal people's adaptive processes incorporating elements of colonial life into their religious world and how these impinged upon their social, cultural and religious lives. Further contexts are described in the early records of the baptisms of Aboriginal people, particularly focussing on the example of one child, Robert Macauley, and his interactions with an older Aboriginal man, Woorraddy. The contrasting religious lives of these two illustrate some of the range of responses Aboriginal people had to Christian faith, as do the contrasting funerals of Robert and Eumarrah.

Following these interpersonal examples, attention turns to the colonial government's institutional actions that exposed Aboriginal people to another form of Christian faith in the services and formal classes of the Hobart Orphan School. The latter part of the chapter discusses a number of examples of dialogue between Aboriginal and Christian religious narratives, including Robinson's rudimentary translation of Christian faith into Nuenone words. Other examples are of unknown Aboriginal people in the north-east integrating kangaroo marrow and ochre with the Book of Common Prayer, and others attending church in Hobart.

Chapters Three, Four and Five discuss this wide variety of Aboriginal experiences, interpretations, knowledge and relationships that were brought together at the Aboriginal Settlement at Wybalenna on the west coast of Flinders Island from 1832 – 1847. Although a lot of Robinson's papers have been edited and published by Plomley in *Weep in Silence*, many more papers of material relevant to this thesis have not. Because of the complexity of the context and the amount of as yet unpublished material available, I devote three chapters to this context. These chapters rely on a very close reading and detailed analysis of complex archival material. There is a particular focus on genealogical and inter-

clan relationships. I am conscious of the minutiae presented in these chapters. But they are there to bring to light the heterogeneity of the context, the people and their responses to the Christian faith.

In Chapter Three —‘Black man’s church’— I discuss the initial years of Wybalenna and the removal of children to the Hobart Orphan School. Following the appointment of the first catechist, Thomas Wilkinson, a brief attempt was made to translate into written form a portion of the Bible into one of the Aboriginal languages. I examine this attempt in some detail to identify the Aboriginal people who were participating and what it might have meant for them, Wilkinson, and their wider audiences. The second half of the chapter discusses the practice of Christian church services, including their content, participants, and their location outdoors, in an Aboriginal hut, and later a brick chapel. As well as various Aboriginal participants some discussion will occur about the differences between the colonists, particularly Catechists and Superintendents.

Chapter Four—‘Cracks in the catechism’— focuses on varieties of Aboriginal writing and speaking. I examine the schools that were instituted, and particularly the catechetical classes as they demonstrate ways that Robinson and Clark were adapting contemporary teaching methods for the context at Wybalenna. Importantly for this thesis they show the involvement of Aboriginal people, particularly children, as teachers. This was one example of the social, cultural and political adaptations occurring in intra and inter-clan relationships. The catechism examinations provide some insight into what Aboriginal people were ‘learning’, particularly variations to the rote answers.

The examples of writing by Walter Arthur and Thomas Bruny further illustrate the multiple contexts at Wybalenna, and that what on the surface appears

to be a tool of colonial assimilation may be an opportunity for strengthening Aboriginal religious narratives. The casual introduction of evening classes of ‘mutual instruction’ brought into the classroom, and Robinson’s records, Aboriginal conversations about Christian faith in first language, *pidgin*, and English. The latter part of the chapter discusses *The Flinders Island Chronicle*, the newspaper written by Walter Arthur and Thomas Bruny under the supervision of Robinson and the interweaving of Robinson’s, Arthur’s and Bruny’s roles and hopes. These sometimes coalesced but also differed significantly.

Chapter Five—‘Always Crackne in Heaven’—is entirely about ‘sermons’ and exhortations written and spoken by Aboriginal people at Wybalenna. I locate them in the context of evangelical Christian sermons of that era, as this was the background to both Robinson and Clark. I then examine the speakers, all men and mostly clan leaders, and the role of these addresses in intra and inter-clan relationships as well as between Aboriginal and colonial listeners. I consider what one address in *pidgin* might mean in English. The addresses were translated to Clark, the Catechist, by a woman from the speaker’s clan. Clark then wrote them in his reports to Robinson. As such the final notes are multilayered in their interpretation from speaker to translator to Catechist to Commandant. The gendered context is briefly discussed.

The second half of the chapter compares the written address of Walter Arthur and Thomas Bruny and the various older men for whom a written report survives. In this I consider theological differences in some of the topics addressed by the two younger men, and between them and the older men, and the adapting relationships in which they were all engaged. The variety of styles and theological perspectives demonstrates sophisticated agentic responses by the participants.

The chapter and thesis title is from an address by Druemerterpunner / Alexander:

I say my friends Mr Clark ask you plenty out of Gods book and no other white man ask you anything out of the Bible – we hear him a long way – You like Jesus Christ do you not my brothers – Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners – we die we go to heaven good people always crackney in heaven Mr Clark tell me + you Jesus Christ die was crucified – He die a little one not a long one then he jump up and went to Heaven by + by he bring you and me to Heaven if you are good people.<sup>47</sup>

Chapter Six—‘Neglecting the simplest duties’— moves focus to the Furneaux Islands in eastern Bass Strait. Relationships with sealers at the start of the nineteenth century adapted to incorporate clergy from the Church of England who then became agents government in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth. For most of this time Aboriginal interactions with the Christian faith occurred beyond the reach of a denomination and they demonstrated a willingness to act in contrast to the church to seek resolution of issues such as education when their desires differed from the denominational representatives.

Internal denominational conflicts and apathy to financially support the church’s work among the islander community meant by and large they attended to their own religious needs, including celebrating their own funerals. Later in the century the relationship with church representatives broke down and while it is not the only example it shows that Aboriginal Christian experience has been affected by denominational constraints and wider political agendas.

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<sup>47</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 50 – 51.

Chapter Seven—‘They think we got no souls now’— begins with the survivors at Wybalenna moving to Oyster Cove, south of Hobart. The events of this chapter were occurring simultaneously with those on the Furneaux Islands. The first part examines the reinstitutionalisation of Aboriginal children at the Hobart Orphan School. Attention then turns to the Oyster Cove Station and Aboriginal people’s experience with Clark, the nearby public house, and the general neglect by the government. An examination of the contrasting contexts of ‘bush’ and ‘station’ again demonstrate the need for a nuanced interpretation than simplistic notions of resistance or acquiescence. A change in government policy regarding the Visiting Chaplain was clearly rejected by Aboriginal people. However, several also attempted, with varying degrees of success, to live more independent lives and engage in alternate Christian practices. These were usually frustrated by colonial authorities. Only one Aboriginal person, Fanny Cochrane, was successful in leaving the Oyster Cove station.

The second half of the chapter discusses the experience of Fanny Cochrane and William Smith. Fanny left her earlier connection with the Church of England and along with William not only joined the Methodist Church but donated land for a church building at Nicholls Rivulet. The chapter concludes with the challenges faced by the congregation and with William and Fanny’s son, William, a lay preacher in the church.

By the end, I hope to have given enough examples to support a narrative of Aboriginal people having varied and complex religious identities prior to their exposure to Christian faith in the context of colonisation, and that through successive generations various people were not only curious about the faith but deepened their understanding and did so in multiple ways which both expanded

their religious identities and inspired many of their wider activities. These expressions were essentially of their own making, but evolved through complex multi-layered dialogue that was at times constrained by the limitations of colonial and denominational life.



## **Chapter One: ‘Fertile not Fallow Spiritual Lives’**

Aboriginal people of Trouwunna were, and are, a people formed by a religious worldview. In order to understand the ways in which Aboriginal people engaged with the Christian religion brought by the colonists, one needs to appreciate that they already lived in a world imbued with religious significance both in meaning and ritualised interaction. This shaped their engagement with, and interpretation of, the Christian stories and rituals to which they were exposed and which some incorporated into their own lives.

In this first chapter I attempt to identify a number of features of what is known of the pre-existing religious life of the Aboriginal people of Trouwunna. This is both to demonstrate the existence and complexity of people’s religious life and the lens through which they engaged Christian faith in the first generation of the colony of Van Diemen’s Land. I do so cognizant that all that is known of such practices and beliefs was gleaned through colonial contact. I intentionally avoid importing Aboriginal religious beliefs and practices from other parts of Australia as a superior or legitimising comparison.

During the nineteenth century when the British established their colony in Van Diemen’s Land, it was widely believed by colonists that the Aboriginal people lived without a religious or sacred relationship with each other or creation. Later occasional individuals such as Robinson described, though in somewhat disparaging ways, some of their religious beliefs. Nonetheless the more dominant view was that the Aboriginal peoples’ spirit was a vacuous place, a void, and an uncultivated ‘land’ of the spirit. James Bonwick wrote in the 1880s that

the laws of the universe would at times plough up the fallow ground  
of their sterile souls; but there was no sower to drop a seed of spiritual  
truth into the gaping furrow.<sup>1</sup>

The sower image used by Bonwick alludes to the 'Parable of the Sower' in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 13, in the Christian Bible's New Testament. The different soils represent different capacities and responses to the seed of the word of God being planted by the sower, who in the parable is identified as Jesus. While acknowledging the existence of a soul within an Aboriginal person was a somewhat progressive thought compared to those who regarded the Aboriginal people as less than human, there is, however, a double-edged fateful inevitability. In this 'fallow ground' there is both no internal existence of spiritual truth or potentiality for spiritual fruitfulness, nor an external agent necessary to impregnate their souls.

For many years among historians,<sup>2</sup> archaeologists<sup>3</sup> and anthropologists, there has been a prevailing belief that earlier so-called pre-colonial Trouwunna Aboriginal society was somehow derived from what occurred in other parts of Australia, but in diminished or atrophied form. Several writers remark on the lack of evidence of the Aboriginal people's cultic life and yet make categorical statements about its paucity and inferior quality.<sup>4</sup> For example, their dances were often described superficially as 'bounding and prancing' while they 'yelled and

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<sup>1</sup> Bonwick, J., 1884, *The Lost Tasmanian Race*. London; Sampson Low, Marston Searle and Rivington, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Clark, J., 1988, 'Devils and Horses: Religious and Creative Life in Tasmanian Aboriginal Society', in Roe, M., (ed.), *The Flow of Cultures*. Canberra; Australian Academy of the Humanities, pp. 50 – 72.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, R., 1977, 'The Tasmanian Paradox', in Wright, R. V. S., *Stone Tools as Cultural Markers: Change, Evolution and Complexity*. Canberra; Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, pp. 189 – 204.

<sup>4</sup> Clark, 1988, p. 50.

shrieked' around a fire<sup>5</sup> with little consideration being given to the existence of a cosmology, let alone its possible complexity.

Others<sup>6</sup> have responded by discussing the complex religious systems elsewhere in Australia and invoked that complexity as present in Trouwunna, but these views still presume the defining quality exists elsewhere, away from Trouwunna. While comparative studies of Yolgnu, Wurundjeri, or Pitjantjatjara or other clans within and beyond Australia may reveal commonalities, it is important to also consider them in their own contexts, languages, histories, and cultural and colonial adaptations.

Rhys Jones, in '*The Tasmanian Paradox*,'<sup>7</sup> took for granted the inferiority in Aboriginal people's religious life in the parallel he made between technological and religious complexity. The technology of Aboriginal clans in other parts of Australia was regarded as more complex and therefore superior to those in Trouwunna. The 'richness of life', those 'large scale religious events such as are described for mainland society, were not', according to Jones, 'part of Tasmanian cultural behaviour'.<sup>8</sup>

These double-charged criticisms, that Trouwunna Aboriginal people possessed both a simpler technology and a rudimentary religion when compared with Aboriginal people in other parts of Australia, have not been based on close engagement with the people or examination of their practices. As the variety of Christian and many other religious beliefs and expressions that abound throughout the world demonstrate, simplicity of form does not necessarily indicate simplicity of religious belief.

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<sup>5</sup> Clark, 1988, p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> Kidd, M. J., 2006, *The Sacred Wound of Australia*. Nimbin; Ohlah Publishing; Miller, L., 2006, 'Isness, the Terrain of Aboriginal Being', School of Philosophy Thesis; University of Tasmania.

<sup>7</sup> Jones, 1977, pp. 189 - 204.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 201. Jones later retracted this statement.

One response to these assumptions is expressed by archaeologist and writer David Horton when he warned against glib assumptions as to the inferiority of Aboriginal people or making a 'value judgment as to the relative importance of various cultural and economic traits'.<sup>9</sup> He proposed that the very simplicity of the Aboriginal peoples' technological tool kit might in fact have achieved the same results as the supposedly more elaborate technologies used elsewhere. The time gained through simpler and easier-to-make tools and weapons may then have been used for matters of 'the ego, the mind and the soul'.<sup>10</sup>

While we may take issue with the culturally conditioned cosmology implicit in a focus on 'ego, mind and soul', nevertheless Horton argues that 'it is quite clear that some evidence for communal religious activity is indeed present in Robinson's journals'.<sup>11</sup> Robinson's journals contain most of the available descriptions of Aboriginal religious life that he noted as he travelled with a range of Tasmanian Aboriginal people in the late 1820s and early 1830s. A more regional focus to Aboriginal people's beliefs and practices is evident in the recent contributions from Cameron<sup>12</sup> regarding the north-east, and MacFarlane<sup>13</sup> regarding the north-west.

Ryan, in her important work *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* briefly notes some of the misguided expectations when she wrote '... their religious beliefs were recorded by people who expected the Tasmanians to conform to notions of nationalistic animalism.'<sup>14</sup> In her overview of the religious beliefs and practices of the Aboriginal people across the island she wrote:

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<sup>9</sup> Horton, D., 1979, 'Tasmanian Adaptation', *Mankind*, 12, pp. 28-34.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> Cameron, P., 2011, *Grease and Ochre*. Launceston; Fullers Bookshop.

<sup>13</sup> MacFarlane, I., 2008, *Beyond Awakening*. Launceston; Fullers Bookshop.

<sup>14</sup> Ryan, L., 2001, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*. Sydney; Allen & Unwin, p. 11.

Thus the men were associated with the sun spirit and the women with the moon. Their religion was thought to be based upon “star gods” and good and bad spirits that could be compared to classical European mythology. Their spiritual practices were apparently based upon the idea of a good spirit (Moiheener or Parledee), who governed the day, and the bad spirit (Wrageowrapper), who governed the night. These and other spirits were associated with the creation, fire, river, trees, and the dead. As an uncircumcised people they can be compared with the “older” uncircumcised tribes of mainland Australia.<sup>15</sup>

Despite comparing Aboriginal people with those of ‘mainland Australia’, Ryan avoids the hierarchical rankings that other writers portray. This summary by Ryan suggests a common religious worldview and consistent cultic practice among all of the Aboriginal clans on this island, without considering possible variations among them. However, regional variations in religious beliefs and practices did exist. Moiheener and Parledee (good spirit) did not necessarily have identical meanings in their different religious or linguistic locales. McFarlane describes cultural traits specific to clans in the north-west that included ‘cicatrice body patterns, dances, language, songs, sacred trees, myths, astronomy, [and] different “deities” ’<sup>16</sup> and he helpfully notes:

the idea of a Tasmanian Aborigine is, of course, a European construct, blind to the rich cultural diversity to be found in the patchwork of mini-states that made up pre-contact society.<sup>17</sup>

Possible regional variations will be clarified in the forthcoming pages.

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<sup>15</sup> Ryan, 2001, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> MacFarlane, 2008, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

In his book *Fate of a Free People*,<sup>18</sup> Reynolds brought more focus than hitherto recognised on Aboriginal people as thinking subjects, political activists and negotiators with the colonial authorities of Van Diemen's Land. His work alerted people to the 'agency' of Aboriginal people yet Reynolds did not consider the Aboriginal people's religious perspectives as a factor in their behaviour, particularly as part of their negotiations and 'agreement' with the colonial authorities. But in this thesis, Aboriginal people's engagement with the Christian faith will be seen to have been that of active subjects exercising their own agency. Their religious world was contributing to their political behaviour and to their interpretations of Christian faith.

This question of the role of the Aboriginal peoples' religious life in their interactions with the colonisers has been raised by Greg Lehman in his Honours thesis, *'Narrative and Identity'*<sup>19</sup> and by James Boyce in *'God's Own Country?'*<sup>20</sup> Lehman sought to contribute what he called an intentional partisan Palawa perspective to the conversation in response to

the few, if any, explicit accounts of the *nature* and *meaning* of relationships between Aboriginal people and their land (emphasis in original).

He argues that 'little has been written about the way Tasmanian Aboriginal people see the world'.<sup>21</sup>

Boyce, writing of the history of the Anglican Church's relationships with Aboriginal people, raises the question of religious beliefs as a motivating factor in

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<sup>18</sup> Reynolds, H., 1995, *Fate of a Free People*. Ringwood; Penguin.

<sup>19</sup> Lehman, G., 1998, 'Narrative and Identity', Unpublished Honours Thesis, Hobart; University of Tasmania.

<sup>20</sup> Boyce, J., 2001, *God's Own Country?* Hobart; ISW.

<sup>21</sup> Lehman, 1998, pp. 16, 18.

the behaviour of a number of Aboriginal people in their interactions with colonists. An example from the 1830s of one Christian Aboriginal leader is Walter Arthur, who was involved in preaching and writing Christian exhortations at the Wybalenna settlement on Flinders Island and who had a key role in framing a petition to the colonial authorities. While Arthur was the leading petitioner, Boyce does not explore the detail of Arthur's Christian faith, or that of the other petitioners, since the focus of his book was on the role of the Anglican Church. The writings of Aboriginal people at Wybalenna will be examined in Chapters Four and Five.

### **Pre-existing Aboriginal religion**

Until the late 1990s little had been written about Aboriginal religious life in Tasmania. It is a sobering starting point for this research to acknowledge that there is a total absence of 'primary source' material in terms of oral or written material produced by Aboriginal people themselves about their cosmology and religious practices prior to, and during, the early years of colonisation. All extant records about Trouwunna Aboriginal cosmologies emerged in the context of colonial interactions and impositions and are, to some extent, an engagement with, or expression of, those contexts and intercultural or interreligious exchanges.

The available information comprises a relatively small number of journal writings, letters and reports mostly by churchmen, or those employed to 'liaise' or 'conciliate' with the Aboriginal people. And what little is known is largely unexamined. While there are word lists, including a corpus of over a hundred sentences and phrases and a handful of songs, the Aboriginal worldview, in which those words had particular meanings, has only recently begun to be examined. It

seems paradoxical that the existence of languages, perhaps eight or nine in total, are acknowledged, yet little is known of the worldview within which those languages evolved and were practiced.

As noted earlier, Robinson's writings are crucial to any consideration of this. Robinson began his employment with Governor Arthur on 21 March 1829. His identification as Christian is crucial to his interactions with Aboriginal people. Therefore before discussing his work with Aboriginal people it is necessary to examine his experience in church.

Robinson has often been described as a 'Methodist'. This is important not just for its biographical detail but more importantly because of how it might have influenced the theological and denominational aspects of his interactions with Aboriginal people. In 1976 Franklin described Robinson as a 'bricklayer-turned-missionary'.<sup>22</sup> Rae-Ellis in 1988 argued that Robinson became a Methodist when travelling from England to Van Diemen's Land with a Samuel Mansfield,

a potter from Liverpool travelling out to join his Wesleyan missionary brother Ralph. For hours they discussed religion, read non-conformist literature and sang hymns together.<sup>23</sup>

Harris, following Rae-Ellis, merged the two descriptions to describe Robinson as 'a Methodist, often described as a "bricklayer-turned-missionary"'.<sup>24</sup> However, this may not have been the case.

As noted in the introduction, 'methodism' (with the intentional use of a lower case 'm') began as part of the broader Evangelical Revival in the eighteenth

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<sup>22</sup> Franklin, M.A., 1976, *Black and White Australians*. South Yarra; Heinemann, p. 30.

<sup>23</sup> ML Robinson Papers, Nov 1823 – Jan 1824, cited in Rae-Ellis, V., 1988, *Black Robinson*. Carlton; Melbourne University Press, p. 10, f/n 6, p. 269.

<sup>24</sup> Harris, J., 1990, *One Blood*. Sutherland; Albatross, p. 95; and Harris, J., 'Robinson, George Augustus', 1994, (ed.), B. Dickey, *The Australian Dictionary of Evangelical Biography*. Sydney; Evangelical History Association, p. 324.



century, with the conversion of Church of England clergyman Rev John Wesley. It was a movement within the Church of England and among ‘non-conformist’ churches. Methodist people continued to be part of the Church of England for almost fifty years<sup>25</sup> before the particular denomination of the Methodist Church was formally established in 1794. There were, therefore, no sharp differentiations between being ‘methodist’ and part of the broader evangelical movement inspired by the revival. At least not until the mid-1790s.

Furthermore, Christians of the evangelical revival were members of a range of denominations. Some immersed in mission societies, others continued membership of their existing denomination, and others were involved in new denominations. The question here is, did Robinson join one of the divisions the Methodist Church?<sup>26</sup>

Robinson was a confirmed member of the Church of England.<sup>27</sup> He married Maria Amelia Evans in the Church of England at Christchurch, Newgate on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1814.<sup>28</sup> By 1823, there were five children: George Augustus, Charles Thomas, Maria Amelia, Henry Thomas, and William Thomas.<sup>29</sup> All were baptised in the Church of England at St Bride’s Church, London.<sup>30</sup> Robinson set out for

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<sup>25</sup> See, ‘Reasons Against a Separation from the Church of England by John Wesley A. M., printed in 1758 with Hymns for the Preachers among the Methodists (so called) by Charles Wesley A. M. <http://anglicanhistory.org/wesley/reasons1760.html> cited 14/5/2014.

<sup>26</sup> The primary divisions of ‘methodism’ were Primitive Methodist and Wesleyan Methodist, with the latter being the main form of the Methodist Church in Van Diemen’s Land.

<sup>27</sup> ML Robinson Papers, 10 August 1848, A7041, Vol. 20, cited in Rae-Ellis, 1988, p. 7, f/n 24, p. 269.

<sup>28</sup> Christchurch Newgate Register, Marriages 1814, MS10115/6A, Guildhall Library, cited in Darcy, J., 2010, ‘Child of the metropolis: George Augustus Robinson in London’, *History Australia*, 7 (3), pp. 55.1 to 55.18. DOI:10.2104/ha100055, p. 55.6.

<sup>29</sup> Rae-Ellis, 1988, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Plomley, N.J.B., 1973, *An Immigrant of 1824, Hobart*. Tasmanian Historical Research Association, p. 4. The last baptism, Elizabeth, on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1795, the same year as the formal separation of the Methodist Church from the Church of England through the Plan of Pacification. It had begun in 1784 when founder and Anglican clergyman, Rev John Wesley, gave legal status to the Methodist Conference, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/history/separation-from-the-church-of-england>, accessed 16/5/2014.

Van Diemen's Land on 7 September 1823 aboard the *Triton*.<sup>31</sup> On board church services were conducted each Sunday in accordance with the form of the Church of England by the Captain. Religious books were distributed by the 'Edinburgh Seamen's Friend Society'.<sup>32</sup>

Robinson arrived in Hobart Town in January 1824.<sup>33</sup> Maria and children, George, Charles, Maria, William and Henry arrived on the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1826, and their first vandermonian child, Eliza, was born a year later<sup>34</sup>. Alfred Walter was born 29<sup>th</sup> November 1828 and baptised in the Church of England, Hobart Town, on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1828.<sup>35</sup> Cecilia was born on the 30<sup>th</sup> December 1835 and she and elder sister, Eliza, were baptised in Church of England, Parish of St David's Hobart Town on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1836.<sup>36</sup> It is clear that Robinson's denominational affiliation was with the Church of England. There was a Wesleyan Methodist Church in Hobart at the time<sup>37</sup> but no record of Robinson being involved there at all. It may have been advantageous for his work prospects with the Governor to publicly affiliate with the Church of England but there would need to be stronger evidence of Methodist involvement in order to demonstrate a meaningful shift away from Robinson's Anglican roots and family baptism practices.

Robinson's involvement in mission societies in London is not as emphatic as the marriage and baptism records, but important to consider. Darcy explores the relationships that are most likely to have shaped Robinson's missionary and humanitarian endeavours. The presiding vicar at George and Maria's marriage

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<sup>31</sup> ML Robinson Papers, 3 Sept 1823, A7022, Vol 1, part 1, cited in Rae-Ellis, 1988, p. 9, f/n 1, p. 269. See also, Plomley, N. J. B., 1966, *Friendly Mission*. Kingsgrove; Halstead Press, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Plomley, 1973, p. 18.

<sup>33</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 33.

<sup>34</sup> Rae-Ellis suggests Eliza was born nine months after Maria arrived (Rae-Ellis, 1988, p. 16), but Eliza's baptism register records her birth date as 27<sup>th</sup> April 1827. This may somewhat dampen Rae-Ellis's narrative of Robinson's voracious sexual energy.

<sup>35</sup> By Archdeacon Bedford, the last baptism for the year, TAHO RGD 32.

<sup>36</sup> Again, by Archdeacon Bedford, baptisms 123 & 124, TAHO RGD 32.

<sup>37</sup> The Methodist Church began in Hobart in 1820 with Rev Carvosso, TAHO NG 499.

was Rev Crowther, a founding member of the Church of England's Church Missionary Society (CMS).<sup>38</sup> A close friend was Thomas Northover, CMS clerk and accountant from 1819 who also liaised with evangelical abolitionist MP's Brougham and Buxton.<sup>39</sup> Darcy examines links between the Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel of Honduras, George Arthur, later Governor of Van Diemen's Land, and the CMS both locally in Honduras and in London,<sup>40</sup> and suggests Robinson knew these networks and used them when he arrived in Van Diemen's Land, especially in choosing CMS missionary, Rev James Norman, to endorse his application for the post at Bruny Island.<sup>41</sup>

In Hobart Robinson did not begin his evangelical humanitarian work immediately but by the beginning of 1828 he helped form the Seamen's Friend Society and Bethel Union and was elected Secretary.<sup>42</sup> His loyalty seems strongest to the Bethel Union as shown in his hoisting the Bethel flag during Sunday services while on his travels around Van Diemen's Land.<sup>43</sup>

Later that year he was providing pastoral care alongside Anglican Archdeacon Bedford to some of those being hanged<sup>44</sup> and was secretary of the Mechanics Institute<sup>45</sup> though this was not an exclusively church organisation. He was a member of the Auxiliary Branch Bible Society of Van Diemen's Land<sup>46</sup> where, in 1828, Rev Knopwood was Chairperson, Archdeacon Bedford secretary

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<sup>38</sup> Darcy, 2010, p. 55.6.

<sup>39</sup> Darcy, 2010, p. 55.8. In 1835, still an MP, Buxton instigated and managed the House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines (1835) and in 1837 co-founded the British and Foreign Aborigines Protection Society, Blouet, 2004. Cited in Darcy, 2010, p. 55.9.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 55.11.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Other members included Presbyterian Minister, Macarthur and Methodist Minister, Carvosso, *Colonial Times*, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1828, p. 1. The *Sydney Bethel Union* continues today <http://www.sydneymbethelunion.com.au/milestones.htm#top>, accessed 14/7/2014.

<sup>43</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 97, 117, 182, 187, 191, 335, 339, 352, 390.

<sup>44</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1828, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1828, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Established on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1819 at the Church of England, Hobart. *Hobart Town Gazette*, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1819, p. 1, and 8<sup>th</sup> May 1819, p. 1 & 2.

(both Anglican), Macarthur (Presbyterian), Carvosso (Methodist), and five others, including Robinson were members.<sup>47</sup>

Rae-Ellis suggests Robinson was a member of the British and Foreign Bible Society<sup>48</sup> but Hobart newspapers do not seem to report Robinson as a member. Likewise he is not listed as a member of the Wesleyan Missionary Society. Robinson also held several memberships simultaneously, as secretary of Bethel Union and Mechanics Institute.<sup>49</sup> This was not unusual for evangelically minded churchmen.<sup>50</sup>

As Darcy argues, the evidence suggests that Robinson both in his earlier years in London, and then in Hobart, was not a non-conformist or Methodist as some have argued. He remained true to the Church of England, even though he worked closely with Methodists and Presbyterians in the multi-denominational Bethel Seaman's Union<sup>51</sup> and Auxiliary Bible Society in Hobart. As she states emphatically, 'There is no evidence in the records of the Hobart Methodists that Robinson was involved in their organization.'<sup>52</sup> In January 1830 when he first wrote of sending Aboriginal people to a church service, the Church of England is described as 'church' and the methodist gathering the following evening is

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<sup>47</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1828, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> Rae-Ellis, 1988, p. 16 - 17, f/n 22, p. 269. The Society was founded in England in 1804 by Robinson's friend, Thornton: Darcy, 2010, p. 55.9.

<sup>49</sup> On one occasion they had meetings on the same night, one hour apart in different venues. *Hobart Town Courier*, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1829, p. 1.

<sup>50</sup> Rev Miller from the Independent Chapel, who conducted the marriage of Fanny Cochrane and William Smith, was a member of the Wesleyan Missionary Society, (*The Mercury*, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1854, p. 2). Van Diemen's Land Auxiliary to the London Missionary Society, (*Colonial Times*, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1854, p. 2), Mechanics Institute, (*The Courier*, 20<sup>th</sup> January 1854, p. 2), Evangelical Union, (*Colonial Times*, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1854, p. 3), Van Diemen's Land Auxiliary Bible Society, (*The Courier*, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1854, p. 2), The Tasmanian Temperance and Total Abstinence Association, (*The Courier*, 17<sup>th</sup> March 1854, p. 2), and Hobart Town City Mission, (*Colonial Times*, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1854, p. 3).

<sup>51</sup> Darcy, 2010, endnote 3, p. 55.12.

<sup>52</sup> Darcy, 2010, endnote 3, p. 55.12.

described as ‘the Wesleyan meeting’.<sup>53</sup> In consideration of what evidence is available it would be more accurate to describe him as an evangelically minded member of the Church of England. This is also important when interpreting Robinson’s later descriptions of performing ‘divine service’ in the bush and at Wybalenna. The use of the Church of England’s, *Book of Common Prayer*, in these services forms the background to his practice of ‘English-only’ church services at Wybalenna.<sup>54</sup> It also explains his excitement on the occasion of finding pages of the prayer book smeared with ochre which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Under the direction of Governor Arthur, Robinson’s purpose was ‘to employ himself wholly in the service of the natives, and ... to instruct them and their children.’<sup>55</sup> He began an establishment near Missionary Bay on the northern end of Bruny Island in March 1829. Over the subsequent three years he circuited the island of Van Diemen’s Land itself negotiating, on behalf of the Governor, for Aboriginal people to leave their country thereby effecting the cessation of the ‘Black War’ between them and the colonists. Robinson’s journals, as edited by Plomley, provide substantial amounts of text, but often frustratingly brief or oblique references to the religious world of the Aboriginal people with whom he travelled.

His writings therefore are an important though problematic source. It is only through writings such as Robinson’s that we glimpse, even opaquely, the

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<sup>53</sup> ‘Their attention was not so rivetted here as at the Protestant church, not only because there was less pageant but because it bore a resemblance to my own family worship’, Plomley, 1966, p. 94. It would appear that Robinson saw the Church of England as ‘church’ and the Methodist services and meetings as somewhat different.

<sup>54</sup> Six weeks after his arrival at Wybalenna Robinson wrote in his journal, ‘Abridged the church form of prayer and directed the whole service to be continued not longer than one hour. This service appeared more satisfactory than any of the former’, Plomley, N. J. B., 1987, *Weep In Silence*. Hobart, Blubber Head Press, p. 325.

<sup>55</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 51.

religious world of some Aboriginal people at that time. The immediate context of their conversations indicates that dynamic interactions were underway between Aboriginal people and Christian colonists.

These interactions occurred within the broader colonial context. Robinson began his work more than thirty years after the first European visitors arrived, and more than twenty-five years after the English colonists landed at Risdon Cove. By this time Aboriginal life had adapted significantly. The disintegration of clans and of many inter-clan relationships through the Black War was noticeable. Aboriginal life was surviving and adapting through a range of relationships and conflicts with various colonists.

Furthermore, much of Robinson's writings about the Aboriginal religious world were written several years after beginning his travels. So not only are his descriptions made almost a generation after the beginnings of broader colonial interactions, but they are also several years after the beginning of his own personal involvement. This 'distance' also occurred within Robinson's own writing. For example, much of his writings about the Nuenonne (Bruny Island) stories, as told by Wooraddy, were written while Wooraddy and Robinson were in the north-east of Trouwunna, several linguistic and religious boundaries removed from Wooraddy's and the stories' locale in the south.<sup>56</sup> Most of what is known of the religious life of Aboriginal people only came into Robinson's journal away from the storyteller's clan location and context, and beyond the story's communal ritual context. This remoteness is an important consideration when interpreting Robinson's writings.

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<sup>56</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 118.

An additional element of the conversations and therefore what Robinson recorded is that Robinson had been ‘instructing’ Aboriginal people in aspects of the Christian faith. This had begun on Bruny Island and continued through his travels. The topics of discussion were sometimes in response to particular questions from Robinson,<sup>57</sup> his own comparisons between the Aboriginal stories and his interpretations of the Bible<sup>58</sup> and in response to his instruction.<sup>59</sup> The storytelling was part of an ongoing conversation and relationship.

While Robinson described his own contribution as ‘instructing’, he did acknowledge that he was also learning from Wooraddy, Trugernanner / Lalla Rookh, and others.<sup>60</sup> These were exchanges between ‘subjects’. Robinson’s goal was primarily ‘instruction’ but the Aboriginal people’s goals ought to be acknowledged even if they were not enunciated by Robinson. This learning on Robinson’s part is indicated by changes in his own theological and missionary perspectives. His perceptions and interpretations of the Aboriginal peoples’ religious beliefs and practices, and theirs of his, altered and developed through the growing understanding of each other over time and the changing political context. Robinson’s initial respectful appreciation at Bruny Island<sup>61</sup> and during the travels around the south and west coasts and in the north-east evolved into more disparaging dismissal as ‘superstition’ when the expeditions moved into the central highlands and continued throughout his travels.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> For example, ‘I proposed a question to my sable friends – how and where the first black man came from...’. 7 July 1831, in Plomley, 1966, p. 373.

<sup>58</sup> For example, ‘There is a great similarity between this and Milton, where Lucifer is hurled down from heaven.’ Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Tonight explained to the natives the Creation of God, of the Flood, &c.’ in Ibid., p. 376.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 55, 59, 63, 140, 205, 217, 248, 255, 266, 280, 316, 376.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 527, 561.

It seems Robinson's changing role from storekeeper to conciliator to negotiator to Settlement Superintendent contributed to the changes in his interpretation of Aboriginal beliefs and practices. Therefore a more nuanced interpretation of Robinson is needed when considering his writings. They must be interpreted in the context of their location and timing, his role, the theological topics discussed, and to whom he was talking. Most of his conversations were with a small number of Aboriginal people, from diverse clans. Some had lived extensively with colonists, such as Tom, also known as Kickerterpoller who travelled in the 'roving party' of Gilbert Robertson, and some had not, such as Mannalargenna, clan leader of the north-east area.

The Aboriginal people were not a homogenous group. The political relationships between the small numbers who travelled with Robinson influenced what was shared, whom he listened to and what he wrote. One way of beginning to clarify variations in beliefs and practices is to note the particular Aboriginal storytellers or informants, if specifically identified, and the geographical and clan location in which the story is sourced and the one in which the telling occurs. These varieties of sources together with linguistic differentiation suggest multiple mythologies.

While there is a continually evolving appreciation of the range of linguistic and cultural practices across the island the degree of religious diversity is unclear. On occasions there appeared to be some degree of commonality. According to Robinson, 'the natives assured me that the same tradition was believed by the whole of the natives in the island'.<sup>63</sup> Though what 'same' meant in this context is not known.

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<sup>63</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 373.



There were also acknowledged variations, such as the particular powers of particular stars:

As far as this conversation went, it corresponded with the account given by woorrady, that (according to the Cape Portland natives) the fire was first made by porm.pen.er, the two stars in the Milky Way—the Brune natives call them law.way, but do not ascribe to them the same powers as the others—and that they made it by rubbing their hands together; and that they also made the river.<sup>64</sup>

There were more substantive differences between the clans, such as the presence or absence of a devil:

Woorraddy says they have no devil at Brune like the eastern natives, that their devil whistles and makes a noise like thunder and by and by he comes and stops with them.<sup>65</sup>

Without a comprehensive analysis of all the common and varied elements written by Robinson, and the fewer written by others, one cannot make definitive assessments. Yet religious differences are not surprising when also considering the socio-cultural and linguistic diversity between the clans. It was perhaps not dissimilar to the range of beliefs and practices among Christians from Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches and the streams within each.

## **A Creation Story**

Creation stories are significant in religious communities. Chapter Three discusses the attempt to translate the biblical creation story given in Genesis Chapter One into an Aboriginal language that occurred at Wybalenna on Flinders Island

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<sup>64</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 399.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 566.

between June and September 1833. Two years before this Robinson wrote an extensive journal entry about a creation story of the Nuenonne (Bruny Island) clan. It is necessary to quote it in full in order to highlight important points about the religious worldview through which they interpreted the Christian stories.

7 July 1831 I proposed a question to my sable friends – how and where the first black man came from – to which question WOORRADY gave in very full detail the traditional account of this and other subjects, as believed by all the natives along the southern and western coasts of the island, and the natives assured me that the same tradition was believed by the whole of the natives in the island. The animated manner in which WOORRADY related the several incidents gave considerable effect to the story, and the profound silence and attention of the rest and the assent to the veracity of his statements by two of the natives belonging to the south coast, rendered it still more interesting.

He stated that ... [unclear in original but thought to be 'Moihernee'] made the black man first, that on his first formation he had a tail like a kangaroo and no joints in his knee; that DROE.MER.DEEN.NE he never could lay[sic] down and always had to stand up, and was obliged to sleep standing; that DROE.MER.DEEN.NE cut off his tail and rubbed grease on the wound and made joints to his knees. He then for the first time sat on the ground and expressed his approbation of the comfort.

He said LALLER made all the rivers; he cut little streams and thus made big rivers.

Said that he made the kangaroo out of the ground and that they run[sic] away: he described it by putting his hand on the ground and shewing how they came out and run away.

Said that two black men was asleep when a DROEGERDY came at night and scraped fire on them, that they called out 'be quiet', that he came again and again, and that at last they awaking caught hold of his leg, and after examining him and being much pleased they put him in the ground; and that afterwards they used to catch him and eat him. This was the first intimation of the badger.

Said that MOIHERNEE, who dwelt off Louisa Bay (Cox's Bight) used to fight with the devils, that plenty of devils dwelt at the TOOGEE Low. WOORRADY said that MOIHERNEE made natives, that the devils stopped in the ground and that MOIHERNEE took him out of the ground and made PARLEVAR; that when he was first made he had a tail and no joints in his legs, that he could not sit down and always stood erect, that DROMERDEENE saw him in this situation and came to him and cut off his tail, rubbed grease over the wound and cured it and made joints to his knees and told PARLEVAR to sit down on the ground, that PARLEVAR sat down and said it was NYERRAE good, very good.

Said MOIHERNEE made all the rivers, that he cut the ground and made the rivers.

DROMERDEENER is the bright star seen in the south;

WOORRADY says he comes out of the sea, because seen from

Brune which is on the south part of the island he must necessarily do so.

Said that DROEMERDEENNE made kangaroo rat, that some natives was[sic] asleep when this animal made its appearance and that the rat came and threw stones at the natives, that the natives partly awoke and again slept, when he came again and threw more stones and repeated these visits till at length the natives caught him and put him in the ground, that by and by he came out and stopped in the bush and that afterwards the natives eat[sic] him.

WOORRADY says there is a large tree at Recherche Bay on which is cut the head of a man in large size and also children, that the natives call it WRAEGGOWRAPER and that the children cry when they see it, that the native men destroyed it, and that this was done by the first white men. WOORRADY said that MOI.NEE and DROME.MER.DEEN.NE fight in the heavens and that MOI.NEE tumbled down at Louisa Bay and dwelt on the land, that his wife came after him and dwelt in the sea, and that by and by the MOI.NEE children came down in the rain and went into the wife's womb and that afterwards they had plenty of children.

Said that MOI.NEE fight the WRAEGEOWRAPPE. There is a great similarity between this and Milton, where Lucifer is hurled down from heaven.

Said that MOI.NEE cut the ground and made the rivers, cut the land and made the islands.

Said that WRAG.GE.O.WRAPPER is like a black man only very big and ugly, and that he travels like the wind, that he comes and watches the natives all night and before daylight comes he goes away like swift wind.

Said that the TARNER, i.e. boomer kangaroo, made the LY.MEEN.NE, i.e. lagoons, that he sit down and make it.

*Note:* The natives like the animals of the forest feed during the night as well as the day.<sup>66</sup>

A further reference occurs in Robinson's journal a few days later on 12 July 1831:

Tonight explained to the natives the Creation-of God, of the Flood &c which I had frequently done when an opportunity afforded. They were very attentive.

In conversation with them on the same subject: WOORRADY said that when the natives first saw the porcupine that two of the natives was[sic] asleep and that the porcupine came and threw stones at them and hit them on the head, the forehead.

Said that LAL.LER the small piss ant perforated the penis.

TRUGERNANNA said that the black women learn the girls to make baskets, to swim &c, and that the father puts a spear in the boy's hand and learns him to spear and to hunt.

They say that MOINEE was hurled from heaven and dwelt on the earth, and died and was turned into a stone and is at Coxes Bight, which was his own country. The natives say that there is a large

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<sup>66</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 373.

stone standing up which is MOINEE and that he was a native and turned into this stone.

Also say that LALLER a small ant first made the natives (query).<sup>67</sup>

The following month Robinson wrote of a conversation with Mannalargenna from the north-east area:

16 August 1831 In conversation with the chief and other natives on the creation of man. The chief said that (1) pum.per.ne.owl.le (2) pine.ter.rin.ner, the two stars in the Milky Way made man, made rivers, gave the fire &c.

The Cape Portland natives believe the same.

I explained to them the being of a God, how man was created, the fall, Christ coming to save man; and if they believe not they will not be saved.

These conversations lasted for some time, Tom taking an active part. He said he believed what the white people said. The chief said that he only knew what his father told him.

I told them one God made black man and white man. When I spoke of heaven and how the good spirits live without food, Tom said how could they live without eating; and I explained.<sup>68</sup>

From these stories it is noticeable that rather than having a 'sterile soul', Aboriginal people of the Nuenonne and south coast recognised two Creator Beings. Each Being fulfilled a different role in the creation of the first person. One Creator Being, Moiernee, used to fight with the devils and these lived in the ground. From these devils in the ground Moiernee created the first person. The

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<sup>67</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 376.

<sup>68</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 403.

word 'devil' is ambiguous and problematic in Robinson's writings, to say the least, as will be discussed further on.

In the first creation, after taking 'him' out of the ground Moithernee made the first person with a tail and no knee joints. These two characteristics appear to be what distinguishes this first person from Woorraddy and his contemporaries. The presence of a tail, specifically that of a kangaroo, indicates an association between person and kangaroo that is closer than the relationships presented elsewhere, such as between clan and trees.<sup>69</sup> Kangaroo tails were prized by the Aboriginal people and on several occasions after hunting trips Robinson is presented with a kangaroo tail as an honoured gift.<sup>70</sup> While out hunting kangaroo the tails, together with the hind legs, were kept for eating while other parts were usually discarded.<sup>71</sup> Robinson himself describes kangaroos looking human-like even before he wrote the above summary of the creation story.<sup>72</sup>

Aboriginal men were involved in regular, almost daily, hunting of kangaroo for the primary meat protein source so their familiarity with the animal's movements and characteristics was intimate. Early colonial records note the large numbers of kangaroo, particularly through the more open woodland and grassland areas. For some years the early colony functioned as a 'kangaroo economy'<sup>73</sup> with the hunting dogs highly prized and their thefts making regular news<sup>74</sup> and in one week in 1808 convicts provided more than 100 kangaroo to the government store.<sup>75</sup> This suggests that in pre-colonial years the kangaroo population was abundant. It is therefore not surprising that people would develop such a close

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<sup>69</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 369.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. 419, 420, 515.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp. 487, 489, 540, 557.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 310.

<sup>73</sup> Boyce, J., 2008, *Van Diemen's Land*. Melbourne; Black Inc, pp. 24, 44, 45 – 60.

<sup>74</sup> For example, *Hobart Town Gazette*, Friday 30 July 1824.

<sup>75</sup> Boyce, J., 1996, 'Journeying Home,' *Island*, 66, pp. 39 – 63.

religious association with the creatures they saw most often and which comprised a desirable food source.

The second creator being, Dromerdeenne, interpreted the person's permanently erect position as unhelpful, though without any reference to malicious intent by Moihernee in creating him with this characteristic. The first person initially embodied a tail, but this prevented him fulfilling something integral to being a person in this religious world, namely to sit down. The act of separation wounded the person thus requiring further action from the creator being to effect the healing. The means of wounding remain unspecified (stone tool, shell, or fire, perhaps), but the healing process was familiar. It was common practice to rub grease, sometimes mixed with ochre<sup>76</sup> and to rub ash from various sources onto their bodies.<sup>77</sup> Wounding or marking of the body occurred in some ceremonies.<sup>78</sup> The response to the primal wounding is a noteworthy contrast to the bloodletting response to illnesses that Robinson noted elsewhere,<sup>79</sup> including the use of the blood of a kangaroo.<sup>80</sup>

Sitting down was 'very good'. Robinson's language here is probably reminiscent of the conclusion of one of the biblical creation stories when God saw everything he had made and it was 'very good'.<sup>81</sup> While we would benefit from further details of this and all other stories, we can be reasonably confident that this summary signals some of the important aspects of the Aboriginal religious world, specifically the presence and activity of several creator beings, their interactions with each other, people and some creatures.

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<sup>76</sup> Plomley, 1966, pp. 278, 283, 418, 501, 895.

<sup>77</sup> Plomley, 1966, pp. 638, 640, 649, and MacFarlane, 2008, *Beyond Awakening*. Launceston; Fullers Bookshop, p. 9.

<sup>78</sup> Plomley, 1966, pp. 59, 60, 67, 263.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pp. 57, 60, 67, 285, 542, 581.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 419.

<sup>81</sup> Genesis Chapter 1, Verse 31.



## **Other creation stories involving kangaroo**

As well as the identification with the first person the kangaroo appears in other stories. In Woorraddy's story the kangaroo was created out of the ground by a small ant, Laller. Laller also made the rivers. Tarner the kangaroo was involved in creating lagoons. The reference does not indicate how Tarner did this, but it does suggest interplay of creatures as creators. It also has the repeated theme of creatures, like people, being created out of the ground. The creature/creator dynamic is also present in other creation stories. Cameron has suggested that, in the north-east at least, rivers marked clan boundaries.<sup>82</sup> Therefore to cross a river may have had religious elements interwoven with political and social relationships.

Dromerdeene, a particular star, is named as creator of the kangaroo rat,<sup>83</sup> Robinson's description for one of the smaller marsupials. This creature is more active at night, when people are usually asleep and the story tells of the rat coming to people and throwing stones to awaken them. Another explicitly night time sleeping context for creation was Drogerdy (wombat) scraping fire on two men.<sup>84</sup> Like the kangaroo rat's stone throwing, the two initially rejected the sleep interruption, but finally awoke and put the wombat in the ground, later catching and eating him. The importance of the land is again present. It seems there were some creations occurring explicitly at night while people are sleeping, perhaps dreaming, and some where no 'day' or 'night' are mentioned.

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<sup>82</sup> Cameron, 2011, pp. 25 – 27.

<sup>83</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 374.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 373.

## **Gendered speakers**

The reference to Laller perforating the penis suggests it may be more related to men rather than women's stories. Each of the creator beings mentioned by Wooraddy as written by Robinson, are male. Moihernee, Dromerdeene, Tarner, Drogerdy, Laller, and the waking people putting creatures in the ground, are all male. It may be a universal aspect that all creators are male, or simply that a male storyteller is telling the stories he is able to tell and a male writer is summarising them.

The gender differentiation between Moihernee's location on land and his wife's location in water may be expressed in human gender roles. The religious identification of children coming from the sky in the rain prior to their mother's pregnancy, could at least indicate a link between children sourced in water, the woman in the water and the waters of birth. However, a simplistic identification of men=land and women=water is clearly insufficient with the second male creator being, Dromerdeene, coming out of the water to the south. Without more evidence it is difficult to know of any religious link between rain and the birth of children.

There are obviously many more creatures around the land and waters of Trouwunna, and there are likely to be more stories than those Robinson wrote about. One can only speculate as to what 'Mrs Robinson' may have been told if she was 'conversing' with the Aboriginal women.

Most storytellers mentioned in Robinson's writings were men, particularly Wooraddy and Mannalargenna and only occasionally did he write about women's contributions. While Robinson does not report explicitly about women's stories, the indication from the men's stories is that the essential aspects of life

were shaped by religious stories. It is likely therefore, that other aspects not explicitly mentioned by Robinson also had religious elements. It stands to reason that these formed the interpretive paradigm through which these Aboriginal people heard the Christian gospel and saw church practices. The predominant male leadership in the church was noticeable to Aboriginal people and probably affected how Aboriginal women and men interpreted Christian faith.

This gender bias will also be seen in later chapters at Wybalenna where records of writing, sermons and exhortations are almost exclusively from men. The gendered bias of Christian churches at the time was not an exclusively Tasmanian experience. The limited range of extant sources of Aboriginal religious practice suggest that a feminist oriented reading of those sources would be a significant challenge.<sup>85</sup>

## **Trees**

The identity association between humans and other elements of creation also included plants. Particular plant species were associated with particular clans. An example is 2 July 1831, when Robinson wrote a '*Note on the amusements of the natives*':

The natives make small spears which they throw at and stick into the different trees. Those of Oyster Bay spear the stringy bark trees, peppermint trees, honeysuckle trees. The gum trees they claim as theirs and call them countrymen. The stringy bark trees the Brune call theirs, as being their countrymen, the peppermint the Cape Portland call theirs, and the Swanport claim the honeysuckle. Thus, if the natives of

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<sup>85</sup> Cameron, 2011, is one recent attempt to give greater emphasis to the role of women in Aboriginal life.

Oyster Bay spear the tree of another native they are much annoyed and go and pull them out.<sup>86</sup>

While Robinson interpreted these associations as ‘amusement’, there does appear to be particular identity-forming, or totemic-like, relationships between specific clans and specific species of tree. This affected how each clan saw themselves and how other clans recognised that identity and engaged in inter-clan relationships, including conflict. Each clan’s naming of particular tree species as ‘countrymen’ indicates a totemic, or totemic-like, relationship between their whole clan and the particular species of tree.

There appears to be widespread agreement among the clans as to which trees each clan is identified with. Therefore, depending on the climate and soil type in each clan’s area, there might be countrymen/women of other clans present in the form of trees.<sup>87</sup> One can only speculate as to the degree to which this presence of another clan’s tree-kin affected the local clan’s religious world but it does suggest openness, even normality to the near presence of others. This may have shaped the ways in which Aboriginal people tolerated and incorporated the presence of other Aboriginal people, or even the colonists and their Christian faith, into their religious world. If Aboriginal people’s religious life had the flexibility to accommodate multiple and various clans simultaneously present in home country, it was perhaps not so difficult to incorporate Christian faith into it.

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<sup>86</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 369.

<sup>87</sup> There do not appear to be other tree-specific associations in regard to the types of wood each clan used to make spears, burn in their fires, construct their catamarans, or burn on funeral pyres.

## Sun & moon

As well as identification with particular tree species, Aboriginal people, particularly women, marked their bodies with representations of the sun or moon.

For example,

the aboriginal females on the islands have round circles cut in their flesh in imitation of the sun or the moon. Some are much larger than this outline. I have seen a woman with four of them on her body; others I have seen with two or three. They are very fond of them, are generally placed on each side of the backbone and about the hips.<sup>88</sup>

This again, indicates their practice of exercising multiple simultaneous connections not only with people, creatures, and plants, but also celestial bodies.

The identification of the creator beings Moihernee and Dromerdeene with particular stars is one of many indications of familiarity with and importance of individual stars, constellations, planets and other extra-terrestrial bodies in the religious world of the Aboriginal people.

Although there are no references to stars or star stories in Robinson's journals until he was in the north-west area almost a year into his travels, he was aware early on that the Nuenonne (Bruny Island) people's "good spirit" was located in the sky.<sup>89</sup> Robinson describes a range of stories that different clans ascribed to particular stars including resemblances to men and women, conflicts, family relationships between people and/or creatures and creators. Clans often had different names for the same stars, or sometimes the same clan would have multiple names.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Plomley, 1966, pp. 542, 581.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., pp. 366, 464.

The whole cluster of stars the colonists knew as the ‘milky way’ was known to the Aboriginal people as a track that creators walked along. Rather than being in only one direction at the beginning of creation, this road connecting stars and land/water was traversed in both directions going down to the sea<sup>91</sup> and coming out of the sea into the sky.<sup>92</sup> The nearness of such travel contrasts with Robinson’s, and many other Christians’ perspective at that time, who perceived Providence from a somewhat remote place in heaven. Aboriginal Christian preaching at Wybalenna regularly referred to God coming down from heaven and it is likely that these tracks from the stars were a primary interpretive analogy.

As well as a great familiarity with the stars, Robinson also describes occasions of fearfulness with particular nocturnal observations such as a ‘falling star’ at which they cry out and hide their heads<sup>93</sup> or ‘electric spark’, perhaps an aurora, which was thought to bring sickness if mentioned.<sup>94</sup> However, these occasions of apparent fearfulness are outnumbered by many more references to activities taking place during the night such as walking,<sup>95</sup> hunting pelican<sup>96</sup> or other animals.<sup>97</sup>

## **Where is ‘England’?**

Aboriginal people made several references to ‘England’:

[S]ay that the sun comes from England, that the seal comes from England, and that their people made large catamarans and went to England, that PARLEVAR sleep plenty night at sea, lost plenty of

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<sup>91</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 368.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 373.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 397.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 362.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 393.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 845.

days, that there was big wind and big sea, that they see plenty of seal.<sup>98</sup>

Robinson was surprised to be told the deceased went to 'England' after death.

I scarcely credited what I heard. I asked the question again, when they all replied that they went to England, that there was plenty of PARLEVAR in England.<sup>99</sup>

Plomley may be correct in interpreting these references to mean a place far away to the north.<sup>100</sup> The reference to England may describe an indefinite place a long way away, rather than the specific country in the United Kingdom. At the very least it demonstrates one way in which Aboriginal people were incorporating colonial language into their religious world. But by now it seems clear that there was no 'sterile' place in the Aboriginal religious world, that the deceased did not simply go 'far away'.

If white people were regarded as deceased Aboriginal people returning to their country, then future deceased Aboriginal people would go to that same place.<sup>101</sup> If these deceased Aboriginal people call that place 'England', then it is not surprising that not-yet-deceased Aboriginal people would use the same word.

The stories these returning white deceased Aboriginal people were telling about the Bible, the person Jesus, heaven, and singing songs of that country, were all occurring in a different religious context than one of 'colonisation'. As noted previously, this religious world was the interpretive context for what the Christian

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<sup>98</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 377.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 62, also p. 230.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 465.

<sup>101</sup> At Wybalenna in 1837 Walter Arthur expressed something of this when he wrote, '[W]e skin black people died then arose from the dead became white men we begin to make friends of them call them father or Brother', ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825. While it is a common belief well documented on mainland Australia this is the only reference I have found of this view in trouwunna. The idea may have come from contact with Aboriginal people from New South Wales, who travelled with John Batman before joining Robinson, Plomley, 1966, pp. 427, 428, 429, 430, 484, 597, 598, 599, 605, 609, 633.

stories meant to Aboriginal people. It shaped how they related to each other, ‘negotiated’ the end to hostilities with colonists, and their curiosity about and receptivity to the Christian faith.

It would have been illuminating to read of Robinson telling the biblical story of creation in the Garden of Eden and describing that ‘place’ in relationship to Van Diemen’s Land and England in a geographic and theological sense. We do not know how these Aboriginal people may have perceived a ‘garden’ that was not part of their island, nor that of the English, even though it was an important foundation to the Christian theology being presented to them at the time.

It is noteworthy that those Aboriginal people who refer to ‘England’ as the place of the dead are all Nuenonne (Bruny Island). Furthermore, it is one of their elders, Woorraddy who asked Robinson for more details about England, its direction, how far it was, the animals and trees there and the size of Robinson’s house there.<sup>102</sup> A few weeks later the women asked Robinson if his wife caught muttonfish, etc. in England before coming to this land.<sup>103</sup> Two years later Robinson discussed with some Aboriginal people the possibility of travelling to England which suggests that over time they were able to distinguish between earlier understandings of England and being able to visit there and return.<sup>104</sup>

### **Birth and Naming of children**

The most likely explanation for the minimal references to childbirth practices and their religious aspects are two-fold. Firstly, the rarity of children being born both among those travelling with Robinson and those gathered on the Bass Strait

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<sup>102</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 617.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 625.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 880.



islands, such as Swan Island or the later settlement at Wybalenna on Flinders Island. Secondly, the white male journal writer, such as Robinson was not privy to those practices that primarily belonged to women. One reference reports the after-birth was burned after sunset and the ash rubbed on people faces.<sup>105</sup>

Once birthed into their parent's and ancestor's religious world, an Aboriginal child was gradually introduced to that world as they grew. It seems to have been common not to name children at their birth,<sup>106</sup> rather they received the first of potentially several names when they reached two or three years of age. Wooraddy's daughter had two names,<sup>107</sup> another youth from the north-west had five.<sup>108</sup> A person tended to have a name within their clan and a different name by which they were known to other clans. In some cases an individual might have more than two names with the largest number recorded by Robinson being five.<sup>109</sup>

While no explicit explanation is given as to any religious meaning informing or shaping this practice, the very multiplicity of naming further indicates a capacity for multi-layered words and multiple meanings co-existing within a person, their closest relationships and in broader intra-clan and inter-clan relationships. This needs to be kept in mind when considering later questions about the formation of *hybridized* identity as Aboriginal-Christians. The appropriation and interpretation of elements of colonial life whereby Aboriginal people were creating for themselves 'transcultural identities'<sup>110</sup> grew out of

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<sup>105</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 779.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 362.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Peyer, B., 1997, *The Tutor'd Mind: Indian Missionary Writers in Antebellum America*. Amherst; University of Massachusetts Press.

existing Aboriginal religious practices which were ‘dialectical processe[s] of the making of the Aboriginal people and their making of themselves’.<sup>111</sup>

It suggests people’s capacity to live an intra-clan identity and a somewhat different inter-clan identity simultaneously. With this fundamental identity-forming practice it was probably not so difficult for people to live the anglicised names given by Robinson while they continued their own intra-clan name and identity. Robinson’s later naming of people at Wybalenna with mythic names from ancient Greece and India<sup>112</sup> may have been an imperialistic exercise on his part, but Aboriginal people had a lifelong practice of carrying multiple names simultaneously and Robinson’s naming was not necessarily more influential to them than a naming from another clan.

Several times Robinson describes Aboriginal parents naming their child with an anglicised name. At Macquarie Harbour TOWTERER and his wife WONG.ER.NEEP named their child after Robinson, which seemed strange to him because the child was female.<sup>113</sup> But like the reference to ‘England’ this demonstrates Aboriginal people incorporating Robinson’s name on their own terms and using it in their own contexts. They were not foregoing their own practices, but were incorporating these new names and places into their existing practices. It is likely this was also occurring when discussing the ‘religious’ stories and practices.

## **Wrageowrapper - Devil**

Probably the most ambiguous aspect of the Aboriginal religious life is the identity and characteristics of the ‘Wrageowrapper’ or ‘evil’ spirit. Robinson initially

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<sup>111</sup> Attwood, B., 1989, *The Making of the Aborigines*. Sydney; Allen & Unwin, p. 150.

<sup>112</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 337, 344.

<sup>113</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 741.

identified it with Lucifer in Christian theology,<sup>114</sup> with both Wrageowrapper and Lucifer being hurled from heaven after mythic conflict with God/good spirit.<sup>115</sup>

But even he soon recognised it as more complex than this. There was an interchangeable use of ‘devil’ for ‘evil spirit’, or a person’s ‘spirit’, as well as for the small foraging creature named by the colonists as the ‘devil’. Some of the names Robinson provides for the good and bad spirits are:

TYE.RE.NO.YER.PAN.NER god (Ben Lomond),<sup>116</sup> PLUCK.ER.TEE.BUR.RER god (Little Swanport), and WY.ER.KAR.TEN.NER bad spirit or devil.<sup>117</sup> Some clans said the devil lived in the fire, others said on a big hill

an eastern native calls him (1) KALE.PE.NUN.NE, (2)

KAR.PEN.NOO.YOU.HEN.ER, the Cape Portland natives

KORM.TEN.NER: KAR.TER.NEN.NE, and the Oyster Bay

MAR.KANE.YER.LORE.PANE.NER’.<sup>118</sup>

There are human similarities in that ‘Wrageowrapper is like a black man only very big and ugly’ and was thought to carry sickness in a pouch transferring it to the rest of the tribe.<sup>119</sup> But there were also significant differences in that he travelled like the wind, comes and watches people all night and goes before daylight.<sup>120</sup> The Wrageowrapper was seen by some as the cause of inner pain treatable by cutting themselves with stones or shells<sup>121</sup> or the strategic placement of the ashes of a

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<sup>114</sup> In the King James Bible (also known as Authorised Version), the translation available to Robinson in the 1830s, the only explicit mention of ‘Lucifer’ is in the book of Isaiah, Chapter 14, Verse 12, ‘How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!’

<sup>115</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 373.

<sup>116</sup> I will return to this clan when discussing the Bible translation at Wybalenna in Chapter Three.

<sup>117</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 281.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 403.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 373.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., pp. 57, 60.

deceased relative.<sup>122</sup> The women in the north-west sought to prevent interference from the devil by shaving their heads and keeping a narrow ring of hair as ornament and as a charm to keep away the devil.<sup>123</sup>

The identity could also be projected onto another person to curtail or end undesirable behaviour. It seems Trugernanner used it to great effect to keep Woorraddy at some distance when she did not appreciate his interest in her.<sup>124</sup> This projection onto people also involved white people, particularly those who used guns.<sup>125</sup>

The Wrageowrapper was represented in songs<sup>126</sup> and dances particularly the TYREELORE or devil dance performed by the women.<sup>127</sup> They performed it to persuade the devil to let them stop on the islands<sup>128</sup> because they were with child by this spirit or were encouraged by this devil to sing often.<sup>129</sup> Robinson interpreted the dance as a form of homage to the devil.<sup>130</sup>

Robinson mentions an occasion of performing divine service after which those Aboriginal people who had been with Robinson for some time interpreted the service to newly arrived Aboriginal people as being able to ‘put away the devil’. Both Aboriginal and colonial Christians repeat this phrase often in Christian sermons at Wybalenna. It is an example of the changes in theological language that were occurring.<sup>131</sup>

A noticeable shift occurred in Robinson’s interpretation of ‘devils’ after the meeting with Governor Arthur that occurred at Launceston in October 1831

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<sup>122</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 65.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 594.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 469.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 282.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 300.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 627.

immediately prior to leaving in search of the 'Big River' people. Prior to this his descriptions of the 'devil' or 'devils' are as more malevolent beings causing harm, sickness and death and who require homage through dance and song to assuage their harmful intentions.<sup>132</sup> However, it seems that as Robinson's role changed to rounding up the remaining Aboriginal people onto an offshore island, his interpretation of the 'devils' and other religious beliefs and ritual practices of Aboriginal people also changes.

The spirit whose guidance is sought by the Aboriginal people, particularly Mannalargenna, in locating the Big River people, is now identified as a 'devil' sometimes with physical expressions such as heavy breathing and trembling,<sup>133</sup> or shaking, which filled Robinson with such horror that he sought to divert Mannalargenna from 'this satanic delusion'.<sup>134</sup> During these months when the inexorable steps toward their removal were underway there were an increasing number of conflicts between Robinson's preferences and those of the Aboriginal people. Robinson expressed this in conflicting guidance from his 'God' and Mannalargenna's 'devil'.<sup>135</sup>

More than any other aspect of Aboriginal religious life the 'devil' is buried under layers of unidentifiable interpretations so as to make it impenetrable. Robinson's Christian theology governed his use of the word from the beginnings of his relationships on Bruny Island, and his political, social and economic ambitions strongly influenced him after the meeting with Governor Arthur in October 1831. Nevertheless, there are sufficient approximations of meaning to

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<sup>132</sup> Plomley, 1966, pp. 249, 281, 282, 285, 287, 300, 347, 374, 403. There are only two references prior to the meeting with the Governor where Robinson describes the 'devil' telling Mannalargenna where to travel, Ibid., pp. 413, 414.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 413.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., pp. 414, 488.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., pp. 488, 491, 493, 494, 518, 524, 526, 528, 539, 541, 545, 546, 556, 564.

suggest it was a regular topic of conversation and continued to have significant meaning for Aboriginal people throughout their lives.

## **Fire**

The polyvalent use of the word ‘devil’ also affects interpretations of some stories about fire. Aboriginal use of fire was extensive and included nightly fires around which hearth groups gathered for warmth and food. They fired the land (‘fire-stick farming’) to regenerate grasses and thereby attract grazing kangaroo. The creation of fire was linked with particular stars.<sup>136</sup> Fire was also involved at important life events such as burning the afterbirth and, in many clans, the deceased, as mentioned earlier. But it was also seen as a location for an ‘evil spirit’.

However, we cannot be certain that this description of ‘fire spirits’ is not in some ways an Aboriginal interpretation and adaptation of the contemporary Christian theology of the devil and the damned living in the fires of hell for eternity. Robinson himself had impressed upon the Aboriginal people the association of devil, fire and the damned in his early preaching<sup>137</sup> and a later exchange tends to confirm this:

15 October 1830 Asked the one who spoke English whether she knew who God was; said he stopped up, pointing to the sky.  
Asked where the devil stopped; said in the fire, pointing to the fire.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 380.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 249.

This conversation took place in English and began with explicit references to the Christian ‘God’ in the sky and Christian ‘devil’ in the fire. It is another example of the developing inter-religious dialogue that was occurring.

## Ochre

Red ochre was particularly significant to some clans. The occurrence of ochre deposits within a tribe’s country bestowed significant economic and social advantages. Valued primarily for its application as an adornment and means of exchange it also had some religious significance. As an adornment it was used to colour hair and when mixed with charcoal and grease it was rubbed into wounds in the production of cicatrices on both men and women.<sup>139</sup>

Red ochre had significant symbolic potency for Aboriginal people and colonists. Aboriginal people used red ochre in hair and body colouring. Women had a particular role in acquiring it. It was traded among various clans and had limited availability. When it was unavailable Aboriginal people used substitutes.<sup>140</sup> Robinson was aware of its importance and went to considerable lengths to prevent its importation when he became Commandant at Wybalenna on Flinders Island.<sup>141</sup> While Robinson was not aware of red ochre’s religious meaning<sup>142</sup> he was clear that it possessed significance for certain Aboriginal people.

When visiting the Toolumbunner (Mt Gog) site for the last time on 16 July 1834, the Aboriginal people showed Robinson their extensive mining activities.<sup>143</sup> The group was on its way back to Wybalenna, having gathered the remaining

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<sup>139</sup> MacFarlane, 2008, p. 9.

<sup>140</sup> Plomley, 1966, pp. 286, 670.

<sup>141</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 228.

<sup>142</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 501.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 904. This site is in the central mid-north of Van Diemen’s Land.

‘remnant’ of the west coast clans. With no ochre sites near Wybalenna the women’s acquisitions were very valuable and demonstrate their continued practice and use of ochre in the new context.

Robinson records more intensive singing, dancing and story-telling when the Aboriginal people were acquiring ochre than he generally reported on other days.<sup>144</sup> Ochre was also used, like charcoal, to pigment the skin after a cicatrice scarring operation<sup>145</sup> and mixed with grease in successive layers on their bodies as protection from the cold.<sup>146</sup> Insulation effectiveness, however, would have depended on the amount of fat alone, not the pigment mixed with it.<sup>147</sup>

Decorating oneself with red ochre was considered the natural thing to do because as Robinson observed: ‘one of the natives on being asked why he painted himself, asked the enquiring individual, “what do you wear fine clothes for?”’<sup>148</sup> Sagona suggests this statement indicates that ‘body decoration for pleasure’s sake applied to the Tasmanians too, or at least to this individual.’<sup>149</sup> It is noticeable that this Aboriginal person distinguished colonists’ ‘fine clothes’ as the comparable adornment to his own ochre, and not to the clothes worn everyday. Perhaps this reflected the observation that the colonists wore ‘fine clothes’ on special occasions, public/civic ceremonies, Sunday church services, etc., rather than as ‘decoration for pleasure’s sake.’ The conversation about ‘fine clothes’ occurred after the funerals of Robert Macauley and Eumarrah on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1832 so the

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<sup>144</sup> Sagona, A., (ed), 1994, ‘The Quest for Red Gold’, in Sagona, A., *Bruising the Red Earth*. Melbourne; Melbourne University Press, p. 22.

<sup>145</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 283.

<sup>146</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 246.

<sup>147</sup> Sagona, 1994, p. 23.

<sup>148</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 594.

<sup>149</sup> Sagona, 1994, p. 26.



context for ‘fine clothes’ was not ‘just for pleasure’, but was associated with an end of life funeral ceremony.<sup>150</sup>

The occasional references to the variant experience of those Aboriginal people who had not been initiated into the pre-colonial religious world are worth noting. Tom, one of the ‘civilised’ Aboriginal people, believed he had no devils, though Robinson disagreed.<sup>151</sup> Not only was there variation in mythologies among Aboriginal people from different clans but among the emerging generation who had not known life apart from interaction with colonists. This variation is discussed in the next chapter when considering the range of responses to the Christian faith presented to a wide range of Aboriginal people.

## **Conclusion**

A rich Aboriginal religious life existed at the time of first contact between Aborigines and colonists. Extant documentary sources are problematic given the lack of Aboriginal authors and the colonial context. Nevertheless, sufficient information is available to demonstrate a substantial religious context within which Aboriginal people interacted with the Christian faith and religious practice. Rather than ‘fallow ground’ seeking an external sower, they were skilful practitioner-storytellers with multiple interpretive paradigms. This ensured there were many conversation points with those Christians with whom they engaged during the significant political, cultural and religious upheaval that was occurring in the first generation of contact.

Surviving creation stories were one such contact point. The complexity of clan associations and multiple naming suggests an Aboriginal religious world

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<sup>150</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 594. Robert Macauley will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 541.

curious about and capable of engaging with other religious narratives such as those presented by colonists. Aboriginal people's incorporation of 'England' and 'devil' into their religious language are examples of the polyvalent nature of the religious topics, particularly the contrasting meanings they gave these words compared with colonists.

The dynamic and organic nature of the conversations together with the complexity of Aboriginal people's pre-existing religious world, led to quite diverse responses among Aboriginal people. These ranged from rejection to varying forms of interpretation and incorporation of Christian faith into their own lives.

## **Chapter 2: ‘Motti (one) Nyrae (good) Parlerdi (God)’**

Aboriginal people were living in a multilayered religious world when they encountered Christian people among the colonists spreading throughout their lands. This chapter considers a number of the quite varied encounters throughout the first generation of contact from the arrival of the colonists in 1803 through to the removal of most Aboriginal people from the main island by 1835.

The first known encounter of an Aboriginal person and Christian religion occurred in the aftermath of a violent incident in the first year of contact. In subsequent decades some Aboriginal people learnt about Christian faith through colonial families with whom they lived on farms and islands, and others through the organised government programs such as the Hobart Orphan School or the appointed ‘conciliator’ Robinson.

Each person and group interpreted the other from their existing religious perspectives, and within each group there were a variety of responses. There was no single, or uniform, Aboriginal response. Among the responses were attendance at church services, baptism of adults and children, engagement in ongoing conversations, and incorporation of Christian and Aboriginal religious artefacts in activities beyond the involvement of a Christian person or denomination.

### **First Christian baptism**

Contact between Aboriginal people and colonists in the very first years of settlement on the shores of the River Derwent in the south and the Tamar River in the north occurred, in most cases, when Europeans came across Aboriginal people

outside the European camp. Interactions were in most cases friendly.<sup>1</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, Aboriginal people continued their religious practices and interpreted and incorporated the presence of colonists from those perspectives. It is likely that initial negotiations of access to land were also seen from these perspectives. While the first decades of contact demonstrate that the exchange of religious beliefs was not mutual to any significant degree, it is clear that the Aboriginal people were engaging with colonists from their own religious world.

The first formal interaction between Aboriginal people and a representative of the Christian church was the baptism of an Aboriginal child on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> May 1804.<sup>2</sup> Christian 'Divine Service' is an explicit ritualization of the colonists' religious world. The first such performance in this Aboriginal land was on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1804 by the colonial chaplain, Reverend Robert Knopwood.<sup>3</sup> Like Aboriginal ceremonies, these services were performed outdoors.<sup>4</sup>

In the week preceding the baptism of the Aboriginal child Knopwood wrote in his diary that he heard a canon from Risdon. Later that day, Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> May, he received a note:

Dear Sir,

I beg to referr[sic] you to Mr. Moore for the particulars of an attack the natives made on the camp today, and I have every reason to think

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholls, M., (ed), 1977, *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood 1803 – 1838*. Launceston; Foot & Playsted, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Boyce, J., 2001, *God's Own Country?* Hobart; ISW, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Hookey, M., 1929, *Bobby Knopwood and His Times*. Hobart; W.E. Fuller, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> The first Christian funeral service occurred on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> April 1804, (Currey, J., (ed), 2005, *Knopwood's Hobart Town Diary*. Malvern; Colony Press, p. 29), after Knopwood and Lt Governor Collins had marked out a 'burial ground at a distance from the camp' following the death of Elizabeth Edwards, aged 4, (Nicholls, 1977, p. 50). Until the 'old' St David's church was consecrated in 1822, 'divine service' occurred in the store in Bathurst St, or the Barrack grounds, or under the verandah of Governor's cottage and surrounding gum trees, (Hookey, 1929, p. 131).

it was premeditated, as their number farr[sic] exceeded any that we have ever heard of. 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. I have likewise the body of a man that was killed. If Mr. Bowden wishes to see him dissected I will be happy to see him with you tomorrow. I would have wrote to him, but Mr. Moore waits.

Your friend

J. Mountgarret, Hobart, six o'clock.<sup>5</sup>

Following the reports of killings Knopwood stayed in Sullivan's Cove another week. There does not appear to be any sense of urgency on Knopwood's part to meet the child or 'oblige' Mountgarret with the christening. Although Woolmington has discussed the apparent reluctance of many early Christian missionaries to baptise Aboriginal people,<sup>6</sup> any reluctance on Knopwood's part was short lived and he baptised the child on Friday 11 May:

At 11 a.m., Lt. Lord and self went to Risdon with Capt. Bowen. Mr.

Lord returned in the eve and I stayd there. I xtianed a young native

boy whose name was Robert Hobart May.<sup>7</sup>

The religious worldview of the colonists was to the fore in the apparent urgency of conducting Christian baptism. But what might have been the religious paradigm through which the Aboriginal clan who were the subject of the incident

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<sup>5</sup> Nicholls, 1977, p. 51.

<sup>6</sup> Woolmington, J., 1985, 'Missionary Attitudes to the Baptism of Australian Aborigines Before 1850', *The Journal of Religious History*, 13 (3), pp. 283 - 293.

<sup>7</sup> Nicholls, 1977, p. 51.

at Risdon, the Moumairemener, interpreted what happened? The large group of Moumairemener moving suggests they were hunting kangaroo.<sup>8</sup> There was singing during the preparations,<sup>9</sup> spear making,<sup>10</sup> and walking among the trees.<sup>11</sup> The group were moving toward the river that marked the boundary between their lands and the Mouheneene across the river. The middens nearby indicate the site had been visited for generations.

The irregular sounds of gunshots and cannonade were possibly the first heard by the Moumairemener.<sup>12</sup> In this context their religious interpretations of the sounds and associated trauma, death and scale of the killings were likely to have been to the fore. The absence of the child from among them was also likely to have touched upon beliefs concerning the significance of ‘child,’ and kin responsibilities.

The child was ‘found’ by White, a soldier, or some other person during the afternoon, perhaps after clan members had scattered. He was kept by Surgeon Mountgarrett who, it seems, made immediate plans for the child to be baptised and for a deceased adult male to be dissected. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that the adult male was the boy’s father. Presumably the child was fed that night with the colonist’s food rather than *tarner*/kangaroo, and probably slept in Mountgarrett’s tent, a rather different experience from the bark shelters he had slept in previously. We are not told exactly who but it seems likely to have been Mountgarrett who became the boy’s godfather in the baptism service.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Plomley, N. J. B., 1966, *Friendly Mission*. Kingsgrove; Halstead Press, pp. 487, 489, 540, 557.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 220.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 376.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 369.

<sup>12</sup> Robinson noted that some Aboriginal people interpreted gunfire as ‘thunder’, Ibid., pp. 196, 205.

<sup>13</sup> The *Book of Common Prayer* states: ‘For every child to be baptized there shall be not fewer than three godparents, of whom at least two shall be of the same sex as the child and of whom at least one shall be of the opposite sex; save that, when three cannot be conveniently had, one godfather

Christian baptism was seen by these colonists as an ‘obligatory’ religious ceremony, one necessary to ‘save’ or ‘redeem’ the child out of his pre-existing ‘state’. Mountgarrett seems confident that the child’s mother and father were dead and the child orphaned, in the colonist’s sense of the word.

In the week between the deaths and the baptism, Mountgarret probably cared for the child. During this time the child was beginning to be dis-integrated from his religious world through separation from parents, community and culture, even though he remained in the same geographic place. As a young infant he had only begun to be introduced to that religious world, and was probably not yet initiated into it.

The urgency to baptise the child indicates the particular worldview of Knopwood, Mountgarret and the soldiers.<sup>14</sup> In practice there was no such urgency to baptise colonial children at that time or in subsequent decades. Some were baptised within days of their birth and others after several years. The urgency here seems provoked by the child’s ‘otherness’. And there appear to have been no attempts to baptise any other children or adults among those who were wounded at ‘Risdon’.

The performance of this sacramental act was symbolic of an incursion into the Aboriginal people’s religious world by the Christian world. It was also, though not obvious to the colonists, an incursion by this vulnerable Moumairemener child

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and one godmother shall suffice.’ It was the responsibility during the ‘Private Ministration of Baptism of a Child’, for the Godfathers and Godmothers to pronounce the name of the child, Church of England, 1968, *The book of common prayer and administration of the sacraments, and other rites and ceremonies of the church according to the use of the Church of England, together with the psalter or psalms of David, pointed as they are to be sung or said in churches, and the form and manner of making : ordaining and consecrating bishops, priests, and deacons*, London; W. Clowes by Eyre & Spottiswoode, pp. 154, 158.

<sup>14</sup> *Book of Common Prayer*: ‘No Minister shall refuse or, save for the purpose of preparing or instructing the parents or guardians or godparents, delay to baptize any infant within his cure that is brought to the church to be baptized, provided that due notice has been given and the provisions relating to godparents are observed’. Ibid., p. 154.

and the religious world he represented into the colonial religious world. This baptism marks the beginning of incorporating Aboriginal people and their religious world into the Christian faith. It is also the first sign of the later reinterpretation of Christian religious life by Aboriginal people.

The baptism was performed at the site of the Risdon killings with the most senior men of the colony present, except Lieutenant-Governor Collins. The 'Ministration of Private Baptism of Children in Houses' in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* prescribed that after the Lord's Prayer and

the Child being named by some one that is present, the Minister shall pour Water upon it, saying these words: I baptize thee in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Then, all kneeling down, the Minister shall give thanks unto God, and say, We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this infant with thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own Child by adoption, and to incorporate him into thy holy Church...'<sup>15</sup>

Through baptism this child had been incorporated into God's 'holy church' but this occurred without any acknowledgement of his birth name, family or clan relationships, or cultural identity. The baptism records of Hobart Town indicate that Knopwood baptised Catherine Poteskie on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1804 and George Kearly on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1804. 'Robert Hobart May' should appear in between these two but does not. We have only Knopwood's diary to inform us that the baptism even took place.

On his return from the Huon, Governor Collins met the child:

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<sup>15</sup> Church of England, 1968, p. 154.



This child, who is with Mr Mountgarrett, has been baptized by our chaplain (without my knowledge or consent having been asked) and I understand that gentleman intended to take him with him to England ... I judged it expedient to direct that the child be returned to his own people, who might if they never saw it again, imagine we had destroyed it.<sup>16</sup>

Collins did not support what had occurred. This might explain the omission from the baptism register. He seemed more than a little tentative about incorporating the orphaned child into the social, political, religious world of the colonisers, indicating his preference that the child remain in the realm of his clan. This variance in theology between Collins and Knopwood, Lord and Mountgarrett on the appropriateness of baptising this particular Aboriginal child and perhaps other Aboriginal people is worth noting.

The intended return of 'Robert' to his own people did not occur.<sup>17</sup> Boyce identifies the boy still living in the southern settlement nineteen months later: 'Robert Hobart May, native of Van Diemen's Land' was listed among the children inoculated with the small pox vaccine in November/December 1805. The last we seem to know of him is that he, along with other children, had 'taken the infection in the most distinct and favourable manner'.<sup>18</sup> There is no record of Robert's adult life, death or burial. If Mountgarret continued as his guardian, 'Robert' may have moved to Port Dalrymple when Mountgarret became the surgeon there. There are records of baptisms and marriages for Port Dalrymple from 1811 onwards but not of deaths until 1824. Aside from 'Robert's' baptism and inoculation, all other details of his life are unknown.

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<sup>16</sup> Boyce, J., 2004, Robert May, *Tasmania 40° South*, 35, p. 46.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

## **Cultural and religious adaptations – kangaroos and dogs**

The violent event of May 1804 at Risdon was not the primary or defining interaction between colonists and Aboriginal people. Other relationships formed, particularly around food gathering and kangaroos in particular. The mutual interest in eating kangaroos led to the trade in the dogs used to hunt them. Given the importance of kangaroo in the religious world of at least some Aboriginal people, the adoption of dogs by them is significant. It demonstrates another aspect of the cultural adaptations in which Aboriginal people were engaged, and also the ways these experiences impinged upon their relationships and religious practices.

Rhys Jones was perhaps the first to write about the relationship that developed between Aboriginal people and dogs in Van Diemen's Land. As Jones notes,

within a few years of seeing their first dogs, the Tasmanians had recognised the potentiality of the animal, formed close bonds with it, and had incorporated it fully within their culture.<sup>19</sup>

Jones, then more recently, Boyce<sup>20</sup> suggested dogs were crucial in early colonial life and in particular in the cross-cultural exchanges. 'For two decades the dog was central to a rapid change in the way of life of both British and Aboriginal people.'<sup>21</sup> What is of interest here is the relationship that developed between the religiously significant kangaroo and the introduced dogs. Dogs were used by colonists and Aboriginal people alike primarily to hunt kangaroo and there are examples, as Jones noted, of them being incorporated into Aboriginal cultural life.

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<sup>19</sup> Jones, R., 1970, 'Tasmanian Aborigines and Dogs', *Mankind*, 7 (4), pp. 256 - 271.

<sup>20</sup> Boyce, J., 2004, 'A Dog's Breakfast ... Lunch and Dinner: Canine Dependency in Early Van Diemen's Land', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, 52 (4), pp. 194 – 213; Boyce, J., 2006, 'Canine Revolution: the social and environmental impact of the introduction of the dog to Tasmania', *Environmental History*, 11 (1) pp. 102 – 129; and Boyce, J., 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Boyce, 2006, p. 102 .

This cultural adaptation was in some sense reciprocal as colonists used kangaroos for their primary food source and clothing for some years.

Large numbers of kangaroo were reported in the early days of the colony. One of the convicts recalled 'there were hundreds and hundreds of kangaroo about Risdon then.'<sup>22</sup> Within months of settlement the senior leaders, including the chaplain, Knopwood, and other land grant recipients who possessed dogs, were sending hunting parties of convicts and dogs into the areas surrounding the settlements of Hobart Town and Port Dalrymple.<sup>23</sup>

In September 1804 a year after the colony began, Governor Collins ordered the first purchase of kangaroo meat by the government store for the benefit of patients in the hospital.<sup>24</sup> This led to a rapid increase in the numbers of kangaroo killed, up to two to three thousand pounds weight per week<sup>25</sup> and by mid-1805 it had become an essential part of the colonists' diet.<sup>26</sup> The price of dogs escalated to more than the annual income of most people in the colony.<sup>27</sup> This activity did not go unnoticed by the Aboriginal people who began attacking the hunting parties and seizing the kangaroos. Initially the Aboriginal people speared the hunters, killed the dogs, and kept the kangaroo. But a turning point

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<sup>22</sup> Van Diemen's Land: Copies of All Correspondence between Lieutenant Governor Arthur and His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies on the Subject of the Military Operations Lately Carried on against the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land (Including Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Committee for the Affairs of the Aborigines, 1830), Hobart; *Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, 1971, p. 259. An officer wrote on arriving at the Derwent that 'the woods abound with kangaroos and emus' and that 'six or seven kangaroos have been killed in a forenoon with greyhounds by the surgeon at Risdon Cove', Hamilton-Arnold, B., (ed.), 1994, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land*, Victoria; Arden Press, p. 61.

<sup>23</sup> Knopwood claimed to have killed the first kangaroo by any of the gentlemen in the camp, Nicholls, 1977, p. 47, 51, 62, 80, 128.

<sup>24</sup> Boyce, 2006, p. 108.

<sup>25</sup> cited in Boyce, 2004, 'A Dog's Breakfast', p. 200.

<sup>26</sup> Boyce, 2006, p. 110.

<sup>27</sup> Jones, 1970, p. 260.

occurred reasonably quickly when the Aboriginal people stopped killing the dogs and began to use them themselves.<sup>28</sup>

What is of interest here is the brief reference Jones makes to Aboriginal people incorporating dogs into their religious life.<sup>29</sup> Jones cites four references to dogs in Robinson's journal:<sup>30</sup> incorporation of dogs into dances,<sup>31</sup> a fierce dog on the west coast that was feared by people who wore clothes,<sup>32</sup> a warning not to criticise dogs because a 'devil' would ensure they took on the characteristic of the criticism,<sup>33</sup> and a dog perceived to be influenced by its deceased master.<sup>34</sup>

The dogs in the dance had a peripheral role as part of the 'horse dance'.<sup>35</sup> The dog thought capable of eating people who wore clothes is an intriguing contrast to the dogs that usually hunted kangaroos, the earlier primary clothing source of Aboriginal people. This dog was perceived to hunt people who wore or had adopted colonial dress.<sup>36</sup> The final two references indicate the Aboriginal people's awareness that a dog's behaviour could be influenced by the people around it.

To Aboriginal people, kangaroos supplied more than food. Their skin was tanned using the bark of the blue gum and the black wattle and used for clothing. Likewise among the colonists, by the end of 1804 Governor Collins had issued a pair of shoes, locally made with kangaroo hide, to every prisoner.<sup>37</sup> And within a

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<sup>28</sup> Jones, 1970, p. 261.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> November 1830, Plomley, 1966, p. 278.

<sup>32</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1832, Ibid., p. 626.

<sup>33</sup> 21<sup>st</sup> June 1834, Ibid., p. 888.

<sup>34</sup> 13<sup>th</sup> July 1834, Ibid., p. 900.

<sup>35</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 278.

<sup>36</sup> Robinson writes that he was encouraged to 'go without clothes', Ibid., p. 626, and therefore adopt the Aboriginal dress.

<sup>37</sup> Boyce, 2006, p. 110.

few years, as a result of shortages and the inadequacy of imported clothing, many colonist's clothes were made from kangaroo fur.<sup>38</sup>

Knopwood suggested a potential 'ritual killing' associated with kangaroo.<sup>39</sup> When seen through the awareness of the religious role of the kangaroo in the Aboriginal creation story described in the previous chapter, these uses of kangaroo skins and meat by colonists and the interaction of Aboriginal people with the dogs becomes more intriguing. If Aboriginal people had religious interpretations of kangaroo, they were likely to also have religious interpretations of the colonists' interaction with kangaroo.

Within a few years the dog had been transformed within the Aboriginal worldview from threatening predator to an integral part of their social and conceivably their religious world too. It seems there were religious elements to this and other adaptations that were occurring. The dance and story of close connection between dog and master suggest the beginnings of a 'proto-myth'. Dogs continued to be integral to Aboriginal people's lives and in some later situations they outnumbered Aboriginal people at Wybalenna<sup>40</sup> and Oyster Cove.<sup>41</sup>

The west coast story of a dog eating any person who wore clothes could be interpreted as a clever role-reversal whereby the introduced animal became so deeply integrated into Aboriginal life that it ate anyone clothed as a colonist. This dog became predator to the colonial clothing, and perhaps its colonial religion, and therefore acted as protector of the Aboriginal 'clothing'. The hunting of

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<sup>38</sup> Boyce, 2006, p. 110.

<sup>39</sup> Fels, M., 1982, 'Culture Contact in the County of Buckinghamshire, Van Diemen's Land 1803 – 1811', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, 29 (2), p. 57; and Boyce, 2004, 'A Dog's Breakfast', p. 205.

<sup>40</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7065 CY550, p. 85.

<sup>41</sup> Correspondence, Kirwan to Colonial Secretary, TAHO CSD, 1/18/703.

colonial clothes starkly contrasts the dogs' earlier training to hunt kangaroo whose skins provided the Aboriginal people's clothing. The story has its parallel in regard to the 'devil' that was able to detect and kill any 'strange black person, especially if they saw them carrying knapsacks' which were another element colonists carried on their bodies.<sup>42</sup>

The widespread hunting led to a dramatic decline in kangaroo numbers in the 1820s. The decline of a creature with such religious significance is likely to have affected the religious life of Aboriginal people. This decline was linked with the dramatic increase in colonial land grants that led to an explosion in sheep numbers.<sup>43</sup> By then the Aboriginal population was much reduced and more sparsely dispersed, including among the colonists.

### **Baptism of other Aboriginal children**

Some Aboriginal people, particularly children, were living with colonial families. Through these relationships some were baptised in churches or admitted to the Orphan School in Hobart. Some of the adults were living with colonists, including Gilbert Robertson and John Batman. Others were travelling with Robinson, living on Bass Strait Islands, and probably elsewhere. The range of contexts, particularly the personal relationships, indicates the variances in exposure to, and incorporation of, Christian faith by Aboriginal people.

The Aboriginal children living with colonial families are of interest because they had minimal, if any, religious formation in the pre-contact Aboriginal life. It is to some of these children that we now turn. In the forty years

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<sup>42</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 496.

<sup>43</sup> Boyce, 2006, p. 120. See also, Kenny, R., 2007, *The Lamb Enters the Dreaming*. Melbourne; Scribe.

following the baptism of the Moumairemener boy, ‘Robert’, in 1804, more than forty other Aboriginal people, mostly children, were baptised by Christian churches. While the absolute number is not large, they were a sizeable proportion of Aboriginal children born after colonial contact. In the early years Governor Collins opposed the ‘capture’ of Aboriginal children and colonists seem to have heeded this as no baptisms of Aboriginal people are recorded from May 1804, when ‘Robert’ was baptized, until April 1810, after Collins died. The situation changed, but not dramatically, when Murray and others were subsequently in charge. There were never any ‘mass baptisms’ of Aboriginal people even with the occasionally large numbers visiting Hobart Town. In the baptism records of the churches on one occasion three were baptised—two adult women and a daughter of one—and there were seven occasions where two were baptised on the same day.<sup>44</sup> This practice of several baptisms occurring on the same day was not unusual at the time, partly due to the infrequent visits of clergy to colonial families.

Church records of Aboriginal children baptised up to 1811 list only a first name. The only occasion when three were baptised was on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1811 when two adult women, Mary and Anne were baptized and Anne’s daughter, Lucy, was given a surname / family name, seemingly in line with the name of the colony’s recent Commandant, Murray. This practice of adopting a colonial family name seems to have become the norm quite quickly as all but two subsequent entries include a name in the ‘Family’ column. However not all family names listed for these Aboriginal people can be associated with a known colonial family. Of the early ones, according to Fels, Mary Fitchett Farnum (14<sup>th</sup> January 1811),

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<sup>44</sup> TAHO RGD 32/1 is a general index that includes the various denominations in Hobart. See also, St David’s Hobart TAHO NS 282/8/1/1; Holy Trinity Hobart TAHO NS 349/1/1; St John’s Launceston TAHO NG 748/1.

George Weston (15<sup>th</sup> July 1811) and Sarah May (23<sup>rd</sup> September) do not seem to share a 'family' name with any listed convict, settler, or recently arrived Norfolk Islander. Fels suggests the most likely possibility is that they are names of soldiers of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Regiment that came to Van Diemen's Land with Murray to replace Collins' Royal Marines. But there is no name list available of this Regiment with which to compare.<sup>45</sup>

It is likely these baptised Aboriginal children were domestic servants of colonial families. Several have explanatory comments in the 'parent' column, such as 'Hogan's servant girl' (Catherine Van Diemen 8<sup>th</sup> September 1817) or 'E. Lord's boy' (Charles Frederick Van Diemen, 9<sup>th</sup> March 1818).<sup>46</sup> Virtually none have a parent's name listed, except Lucy Murray (4<sup>th</sup> January 1811). Apart from the three mentioned by Fels, where names are listed in the 'parent's' column they are linked with colonial families.

One example from among these baptism records indicates the variety of contexts in which these Aboriginal children were baptised and possibly introduced to the Christian faith.<sup>47</sup> Robert Macauley's story is of interest because he began in an Aboriginal family, was raised in a colonial family and then became part of Robinson's 'conciliation' activities.

## **Robert Macauley**

Robert Macauley was baptised on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1813 by Robert Knopwood in Hobart Town. According to Plomley, Robert (*McAlly/Macauley*) was 'found' at

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<sup>45</sup> Fels, 1982, p. 65.

<sup>46</sup> Edward Lord briefly served as Commandant of Hobart in 1810, <http://www.govhouse.tas.gov.au/governor/previous-governors>, accessed 10/5/2014.

<sup>47</sup> It would be a fascinating and worthwhile research project to trace all of these children through their later lives, however that is a project for others rather than this thesis. Others about whom there is some information are: Fanny Hardwicke, George Van Diemen.



the Cross Marsh in 1810 by Sergt. Macauley, whose wife, Mary, nursed the child. They thought him to be around 18 months old when he was ‘found’.<sup>48</sup>

Sergeant Macauley and his wife are mentioned in Knopwood’s diary in January 1808, receiving compensation from the government farm after suffering a house fire started by some settlers lodging there.<sup>49</sup> The circumstances of how they ‘found’ Robert are unknown. What is known is that he was a servant to the Macauleys throughout his childhood including after Sergeant Macauley died in 1822.<sup>50</sup>

In the two years before he died James Macauley was among those contracted to provide kangaroo meat, 1000lbs between January and April 1820, to the government store.<sup>51</sup> No doubt it was through these hunting expeditions that Robert became an excellent shot for which he was later praised by Robinson. Robert’s ‘initiation’ into a relationship with the kangaroo was very different from that described by Wooraddy in the previous chapter.

Mary Macauley then married Mr Busby of Muddy Plains.<sup>52</sup> Throughout his childhood Robert learnt the ways of this colonial family, the English language and the ‘habits of industry’. We can only speculate as to how Robert may have understood his own identity as he grew up.

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<sup>48</sup> see TAHO CSO 1/ 269/6468. There are several variant spellings of Sergeant James Macauley, such as M’Cauley, Macauley, and McAlley.

<sup>49</sup> Hookey, 1929, p. 74.

<sup>50</sup> James McAuley, Died 1822, Age 44, Born 1778, Location Hobart, Church of England, TAHO RGD 34/1, no. 566. See also Buchanan, A. M., 1994, *Index to Tasmanian Deaths / Burials, 1797 – 1840*. Hobart; A.M. Buchanan, p. 85.

<sup>51</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1820.

<sup>52</sup> Edward Busby, Convict/Medway(1), married Mary McAulay, 7 April 1828, Hobart Town, in McKay, T., 1992, *Van Diemen’s Land Early Marriages 1803 – 1830*, Vol 1. Kingston; T. McKay, p. 29. Muddy Plains adjoined Clarence Plains on the eastern shore of the River Derwent, Hobart, see Widowson, H., 1829, *Present State of Van Diemen’s Land comprising an account of its agricultural capabilities with observations on the present state of farming &c. pursued in that colony and other important matters connected with emigration*. London; Robinson, p. 101.

When Robinson took up the position at Bruny Island he wrote to the colonists throughout Van Diemen's Land<sup>53</sup> asking them to give up Aboriginal people who were in their employ. Mrs Macauley-Busby handed Robert over to Robinson about six weeks later. It is a strange aspect of the policy that having grown up in this family and for all outward appearances to have become part of colonial society in the ways the colony's leaders desired, Robert was then removed from colonial society onto the 'establishment' on Bruny Island. Robinson seems to have wanted Robert, and others like him, for two primary purposes. First, to be an example to the other Aboriginal people of how to adapt to colonial life, and second, to be a demonstration to colonial society of the capacity of Aboriginal people to live as part of that society:

[W]hen I [Robinson] view him [Robert] ... I no longer doubt the necessity which exists that as many of the aboriginal children as possible should be brought together and by a course of proper discipline taught to imbibe those impressions which through the assistance of Almighty God will ultimately lead to their general conversion.<sup>54</sup>

Robinson hoped Robert would

'incite' his countrymen to adopt similar agricultural and boating skills and other civilized habits such as sobriety.<sup>55</sup>

This desire for sobriety and temperance among Aboriginal people continued throughout subsequent decades and will be discussed in later chapters.

Robert was twenty-one years of age when handed over to Robinson.

Governor Arthur initially promised Robert ten acres of land, later increased to

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<sup>53</sup> 26<sup>th</sup> May 1829, Plomley, 1966, pp. 60, 102.

<sup>54</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 69.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

twenty with the addition of a boat, cart and bullock.<sup>56</sup> The grant of land appears not to have occurred, presumably because Robert left with Robinson for Port Davey as part of the 'friendly mission' in early 1830.<sup>57</sup>

Robert was an excellent shot with a gun<sup>58</sup> a skill probably learnt from many kangaroo hunting expeditions with James Macauley. We are not told much of Robert's interactions with other Aboriginal people. Robinson mentions one exchange between Robert and Woorraddy where Robert does not believe the malevolent spirit, the wraggeowrapper, was nearby to them.<sup>59</sup> Robinson occasionally mentions Robert when the young Aboriginal man was away hunting or sent somewhere carrying messages.<sup>60</sup>

Despite these few references, what is of particular interest is Robert's presence in the audience when Woorraddy told the creation story mentioned in the previous chapter.<sup>61</sup> The membership of that audience shows the diversity of mythologies among the Aboriginal people at that time, particularly as represented in two of the men present, Robert and Woorraddy. Woorraddy was conversant in Nuenone language, custom and, at least to some extent, creation narratives. He was telling the story of the creation of the first person. In so doing he was telling of the religious associations between people and kangaroo.

Robert, also an Aboriginal man, was younger than Woorraddy at about twenty-two years of age. He had grown up almost all of his life with a colonial family. He had learned to shoot kangaroo with a rifle and perhaps also with the assistance of kangaroo dogs. He had earned colonial money by selling the

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<sup>56</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 73.

<sup>57</sup> Fifty years later the initial land grant to Fanny Cochrane Smith was also not taken up immediately. *The Mercury*, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1884, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Plomley, 1966, pp. 70, 71.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 120, 162, 183, 366, 409, 565.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 373, 376.

kangaroo meat to the colonial Commissary store. It is intriguing to ponder the conversations Woorraddy and Robert may have had with each other about kangaroo and their different experiences and relationships with them, both at the Bruny establishment and while travelling.

Robinson makes little other explicit reference to Robert until March 1832 when Robert was ill in the hospital in Launceston, as was another Aboriginal man, Eumarrah. On 23<sup>rd</sup> March Robert died from lung inflammation, and Eumarrah died the next day.<sup>62</sup>

The deaths of these two Aboriginal men also provide examples of the variety of Aboriginal experiences that were occurring. Robert was buried with a Christian funeral service officiated by a Minister, Rev Browne.<sup>63</sup> Robinson described the coffin, the attendees, the weather and ‘the same rites was observed as over a white person’. Eumarrah was buried an hour later. ‘He was buried the same as Robert but without the funeral rites.’<sup>64</sup> After Eumarrah’s funeral ‘One of the natives on being asked why he painted himself, asked the enquiring individual, “what do you wear fine clothes for?”’<sup>65</sup> It is not clear in this if the Aboriginal people who ‘ochred’ themselves did so for both Robert and Eumarrah’s funerals or just Eumarrah’s. Also, it may be the Christian funeral was performed because of Robert’s baptism but was not done for Eumarrah because he was not baptized, or there may be other reasons. But the difference itself indicates the varied lives of Aboriginal people and how colonists interacted with them. Robert is an example of one of the changing ways of being Aboriginal at that time.

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<sup>62</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 594.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. The discussion of ‘fine clothes’ in the previous chapter considered the perceived parallel between ochre and fine clothes in the report of an Aboriginal person. This discussion concerns the contrasting funeral rites used for Robert and Eumarrah.

## Aboriginal children at the Hobart Orphan School

As well as individual Aboriginal people living in colonial families, others were subject to colonial government humanitarian activities such as the Orphan School in New Town, Hobart. Preparations for the school began in 1825 when Governor Arthur together with the Church of England set it up modelled on a similar school in New South Wales.<sup>66</sup> Meetings of the Committee of Management were held weekly, usually in the Vestry of St. David's Church.<sup>67</sup> The school was to be a school of industry, where labour as well as learning is taught ... the Colony is overrun with illegitimate children ... born to no certain provision of inheritance but the vices of their parents and their consequent misery.<sup>68</sup>

In 1827 Governor Arthur sent circulars to several clergymen and magistrates requesting they provide names of children within their districts, who would be brought to the school. About 400 children were found to be of need, but only fifty were admitted in the first intake. The buildings were intended to house 300 children. Within two years of beginning the Committee of Management were turning children away due to a lack of accommodation.<sup>69</sup> In April 1844 there were 513 children living there.<sup>70</sup>

The school was primarily for the illegitimate and poor or orphaned children. During the troubled years of its operation, about forty Aboriginal children were registered there. Other children were also admitted, including those

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<sup>66</sup> Minutes of Committee of Management, 24<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> April 1828, TAHO SWD 24. See also letters of Superintendent Charles O'Hara Booth, TAHO CSO 24/149/1401 and reports of Inspector of Education, C. Bradbury in 1848, TAHO GO 33/68.

<sup>67</sup> Minutes of Committee of Management, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1828, TAHO SWD 24.

<sup>68</sup> Purtscher, J., 1993, *Infants at Queen's Orphanage, 1851 – 1863*. Hobart; Van Diemens Land and Norfolk Island Interest Group, unpaginated.

<sup>69</sup> Minutes of Committee of Management, 9<sup>th</sup> January 1830, TAHO SWD 24.

<sup>70</sup> Purtscher, 1993, *Infants*, unpaginated.

of settlers and soldiers, who were required to pay.<sup>71</sup> The school was under resourced and conditions were poor. Rations were minimal, and often sold to others.<sup>72</sup>

Of the approximately forty Aboriginal children admitted to the school between 1828 and 1850, thirty-four were explicitly identified in the Register as Aboriginal people, with a couple, such as Mathinna, staying more than once. About four others are identified indirectly as Aboriginal in the Minutes of the Committee of Management. These were usually children of Aboriginal women and sealers in Bass Strait. Given that there were several hundred children in the school at any one time, and several thousand over the life of the school, the numbers of Aboriginal children admitted were only a small proportion. Without knowing the total number of Aboriginal children living with colonists, it is difficult to know the proportion of Aboriginal children throughout the colony admitted to the school.

According to the Register, the first Aboriginal child admitted was Thomas Bunce, a seven-year-old boy whose mother was unnamed but designated as ‘aborigine’. There is no entry for his father. He was probably in the first intake since his name appears on the first page of the Register, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1828.<sup>73</sup> Minutes of the Committee of Management two weeks after his admission indicate some interest in him prior to his admission:

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<sup>71</sup> For example, the children of the Chief Constable of Tea Tree district were admitted and the father was required to pay £12 per half year from his salary for his two children, but most others were required to pay £6 per annum to be paid in quarterly instalments. These ‘fee-paying’ parents were permitted to see their children on the first Monday of each month between 11:00 am and 2:00 pm in the presence of the master or matron and all admissions required the approval of the Governor, or at least the Colonial Secretary, Minutes of Committee of Management, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1828, TAHO SWD 24.

<sup>72</sup> Minutes of Committee of Management, 20<sup>th</sup> April & 26<sup>th</sup> July 1828, TAHO SWD 24.

<sup>73</sup> TAHO SWD 28. George Robinson began the establishment on Bruny Island in March 1829.

The Committee received an official from the Colonial Secretary dated the 12<sup>th</sup> instant transmitting a letter from James Grant dated the 1<sup>st</sup> instant, referrable as is supposed, to the aboriginal Boy called Tommy admitted on the 2<sup>nd</sup> instant ... it appears Mr Grant is desirous of taking into his service. The Committee on their part will see that the wishes of His Excellency and Mr Grant are complied with.<sup>74</sup>

It is unlikely that James Grant is the boy's father as the correspondence indicates his desire to take Thomas 'into his service'.<sup>75</sup> This phrase was used consistently by those colonists who sought children from the school for domestic service or labouring work. Like James Grant, members of the public were able to make application to have a child discharged into their service. The girls were usually discharged to be domestic servants and the boys to learn a trade.<sup>76</sup>

According to the Register, Thomas was the only known Aboriginal child at the school for four years, a period which saw the end of the 'Black War', the 'Black Line' and the formation of the Aboriginal Establishment in the Bass Strait Islands. In August 1832, two boys, Daniel, aged 10, and Peter, aged 9, were admitted.<sup>77</sup> However, not every child was recorded in the register. The Minutes of the Committee of Management occasionally provide further information. For example, sixteen months after Thomas was admitted, two sisters, Sarah Scott, aged 11 years, and Rebecca Scott, unknown age, were admitted, 3<sup>rd</sup> December

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<sup>74</sup> Minutes of Committee of Management, 16<sup>th</sup> August 1828, TAHO SWD 24.

<sup>75</sup> A 'James Grant' appeared in several Hobart newspapers, selling a horse (*Hobart Town Courier*, 19 July 1828), and being appointed to settle accounts for a James Gilligan who was leaving the colony (*Hobart Town Courier*, 19 July 1828). In Oct 1828 he bought land (Lot 69 for 5s 6d) through a tender process and was involved in the sale of a house in Macquarie Street (*Hobart Town Courier*, 25 Oct 1828). A James Grant Esq was involved in the sale of quantities of wool in England (*Hobart Town Courier*, 28 Oct 1828).

<sup>76</sup> For example, Minutes of Committee of Management, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1830, TAHO SWD 24.

<sup>77</sup> TAHO SWD 28.

1829. They were admitted ‘on the foundation’ (i.e., at government expense) as ‘children of a deceased Native Woman by a Sealer who deserted them some time since.’<sup>78</sup>

It is worth remembering Robinson began the establishment on Bruny Island in March 1829 and desired to bring Aboriginal children together for instruction.<sup>79</sup> However, while some children such as Robert Macauley and others were brought into Robinson’s enterprise, others were not, such as Sarah and Rebecca Scott. Another such child living with a colonial family was Mary Ann Robinson. She had lived with Mrs Harriet Alwyn in Launceston for seven years, since 1826, when aged two. Alwyn applied in July 1833 and Mary Ann was admitted to the school in August 1833.<sup>80</sup>

Sarah and Rebecca Scott do not appear in the school Register at all, yet Sarah was still at the school six months after admission when a Mrs Moore applied to have her discharged into her care to work as a domestic servant.<sup>81</sup> It was not until November that year that the Committee granted this request due to overcrowding in the school.<sup>82</sup>

These absences and incomplete descriptions in the Register are in some ways like the early baptism records in that the records themselves explicitly identify a number of Aboriginal children even though there were other Aboriginal children who were not labelled as such by those making the entries. To further

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<sup>78</sup> Minutes of Committee of Management, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1829, TAHO SWD 24. Other families from the Bass Strait Islands sought to have children admitted. John Smith, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1832, applied for his son to be admitted. The child’s mother was an Aboriginal woman living at Wybalenna on Flinders Island, TAHO SWD 24. Another sealer, Lawrence Read admitted his daughter, a child of a ‘Native of Kangaroo Island’, on 15<sup>th</sup> March 1832. Read was required to pay a fee and his daughter was the only Aboriginal child whose presence at the school was paid for by a parent, TAHO SWD 24.

<sup>79</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 69.

<sup>80</sup> Minutes of Committee of Management, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1833, TAHO SWD 24.

<sup>81</sup> 29<sup>th</sup> May 1830, Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Minutes of Committee of Management, 27<sup>th</sup> November 1830, TAHO SWD 24.



complicate the situation there was the regular situation of Aboriginal children having multiple Aboriginal and multiple English names. Some children whom Robinson later recorded being discharged into his care were not recorded in the Register under the same names that Robinson used.<sup>83</sup>

One interesting aside is an application for admission on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1830. The mother of William Perry, 8 years and John Perry 6 years, applied for them to be admitted ‘on the foundation’ because her husband, a convict in the service of Lieutenant Griffiths of the Tea Tree Bush, was currently engaged in the pursuit of the hostile Aboriginal people and so she was unable to provide for her children for the present time. This ‘pursuit’ in October 1830 was the ‘Black Line’, so it is interesting that orphaned Aboriginal children were in the school alongside colonial children ‘orphaned’ while a parent was out pursuing Aboriginal people.

The late 1820s and early 1830s saw a number of events that disrupted Aboriginal life. These included the ‘Black War’ in the late 1820s, the Government’s inquiry into the Aboriginal children living with colonial families in Launceston in 1827, the ‘Black Line’ of 1830 and the activities of Robinson from 1829 – 1834. It is surprising in this context that there were not many more Aboriginal children admitted to the school. It seems that in the first years of its operation the school was not a primary site for incorporating Aboriginal children into colonial society even though it fitted the broader agenda of Governor Arthur and others to ‘civilise and Christianise’ the Aboriginal people.

From the records of the Orphan School at least it seems that those colonial farmers, families, and humanitarians who had Aboriginal children in their households preferred to keep them than give them to the school or to Robinson. So

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<sup>83</sup> Plomley, N. J. B., 1987, *Weep In Silence*. Hobart, Blubber Head Press, Annotation 14 Sept 1835, pp. 619 – 620.

while the school may have been established, at least in part, to address concerns about the large numbers of ‘illegitimate’ children in the colony, relatively few Aboriginal children seem to have been ‘legitimised’ in this way.

However, the place of the school in the lives of Aboriginal people changed significantly after 1831. From 1832 – 1835, correlating with the first years of the Wybalenna settlement on Flinders Island, more and more Aboriginal children were admitted to the school. Here again the records in the Register and those in the Minutes of the Committee of Management differ in the names and number of children.<sup>84</sup> Two or three boys arrived in August 1832 and a little over three months later, three more boys, ‘one half caste and two native’, were brought along with a ‘native girl aged 18 years’.<sup>85</sup> Of the three boys, one named Friday, aged 10, grew into a significant leadership role when he returned to Wybalenna in October 1835.<sup>86</sup>

The following year, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1834, a group of five boys from Wybalenna were admitted, Charles, Frederick, George, Samuel, and William. Five months later, 6<sup>th</sup> February 1835, the next and largest single intake of nine boys and girls, Pungewalla, Mowana, Walkenny, Tully, Tina, Beamanrook, Fireboke, Mendou, and Tommerick were admitted. Like Friday/Walter, these Aboriginal

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<sup>84</sup> The Management Committee records three boys (all unnamed) arriving 16<sup>th</sup> August for immediate admission and requiring clothing, Minutes of Committee of Management, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1832, TAHO SWD 24. The Register records two boys, Daniel and Peter admitted on 17<sup>th</sup> August, TAHO SWD 28.

<sup>85</sup> The Management Committee decided it could not recommend the admission of the girl on account of her age and referred her situation to the Aboriginal Committee, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1832, TAHO SWD 24. The Register records the three boys as Luke, aged 6, Arthur, aged 11, and Friday, aged 10, TAHO SWD 28.

<sup>86</sup> ‘Friday’ is another example of the multiple names by which a number of Aboriginal children were known. At Wybalenna in 1836, the Catechist, Robert Clark, reported to Commandant Robinson, ‘the clerk who assists me at the Divine service is the Native youth formerly called Friday now Walter he is the son of a Chieftain he reads the responses very well has a knowledge of the scriptural history and is a well conducted lad.’ ML Robinson Papers, A7064 Vol. 43, CY550, p. 9. Walter’s role at Wybalenna and Oyster Cove will be examined in several of the following chapters.

children were not orphans. Walter's parents, Rolepa / King George<sup>87</sup> and his wife Luggernemennener<sup>88</sup> were living at Wybalenna at the time. One explanation for the removal of children from Wybalenna was the lack of a catechist/teacher, but most children were not returned to their parents even when the first catechist, Thomas Wilkinson, arrived at Wybalenna in June 1833.<sup>89</sup>

These examples indicate that there was not a single or universal experience of Aboriginal people at this time.<sup>90</sup> Some Aboriginal children were living with colonial families,<sup>91</sup> and others were part of the sealing community in the Furneaux Islands.<sup>92</sup> Other children were living with their parents and other adults from their own and other clans at the Aboriginal Establishment on Flinders (Great) Island, other children not connected to these families were also at the Orphan School.<sup>93</sup>

The cause of the sudden and short-lived increase in Aboriginal children at the Orphan School appears to be because of policies of particular Commandants at Wybalenna. At the end of February 1835 there were twenty Aboriginal children at the Orphan School.<sup>94</sup> When Robinson became Commandant at Wybalenna and left Hobart in early October 1835 to take up the position, only four boys remained at the school, Thomas Bunce, Thomas Thompson, Duke and Charles. Boyce

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<sup>87</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 824.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 806.

<sup>89</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, p. 79.

<sup>90</sup> This is further indicated by the Aboriginal adults living among colonists, such as Bill Ponsonby and Catherine Kennedy who were married in the St John's Church, Launceston on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1830, Plomley, 1966, p. 582. 'On Monday 16<sup>th</sup> instant, two of the Aborigines of this country were married at St John's Church, Launceston. This is the first marriage of the kind which has ever fell under our notice in this colony. They had both been domesticated for some time amongst the European population'. *Launceston Advertiser*, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1830, p. 3.

<sup>91</sup> Such as the previously mentioned Robert Macauley, Fanny Hardwicke and Mary Ann Robinson, among others.

<sup>92</sup> Such as the previously mentioned John Smith, and other sealing families such as James Munro, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1830, Plomley, 1966, p. 269.

<sup>93</sup> Such as Thomas Bunce/Brune/Bruny, TAHO SWD 24. For the coalescing of Thomas' 'family' name, see correspondence Clark to Robinson, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1835, CSO 1/18798, p. 80.

<sup>94</sup> According to the Register there were 11 in 1834; 6 in 1833; 6 in 1832; 1 in each of the years previous to that. In the subsequent years there were 4 in 1836; 3 in 1837; 3 in 1838, TAHO SWD 28/1/1, unpaginated.

argues that Robinson's actions in returning children to Wybalenna were probably part of the treaty or understanding between Arthur, Robinson, and the Aboriginal people.<sup>95</sup>

### **Christian teaching – instruction and services**

Until 1844 all the children including Aboriginal children at the Orphan School were registered and taught as Protestants.<sup>96</sup> Prior to the construction of the St John's Anglican Church at New Town in about 1833, the children walked each Sunday to St David's church for 'Divine Service'. With the opening of the new church the children were spared the walk into Hobart Town that allayed the Management Committee's concerns about the children's exposure to 'profane and improper language' on their way to church. The Civil Engineer was requested to install sufficient seats for boys and girls in the new St. John's church.<sup>97</sup>

The report into the school in 1848 by the Inspector of Education, C. Bradbury, indicates religious instruction was taught on Wednesdays and Saturdays.<sup>98</sup> This report was after the closure of Wybalenna when seven Aboriginal children were registered on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1847. The specific content of the instruction was not described in the report but the method of instruction was reported as being of 'no defined character' with 'no attempt made to accuracy,

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<sup>95</sup> Boyce, 2001, p 33. Sadly one of the children, Frederick, died 30<sup>th</sup> September 1835, the day before Robinson took five other children with him to Wybalenna.

<sup>96</sup> This irked the Catholic and Jewish communities in particular. In the 1840s the Catholic population at the school was about equal to the Protestant population, whereas in the community at large, Protestant numbers were five-times greater than Catholic. After 1844, Catholic children were instructed in their faith, had their own dormitories and cemetery, TAHO GO 33/68, Purtscher, J., 1993, *Children in Queen's Orphanage 1828 – 1863*. New Town; Schaffer, unpaginated.

<sup>97</sup> Minutes of Committee of Management, 12<sup>th</sup> September 1833, TAHO SWD 24.

<sup>98</sup> TAHO GO 33/68, see also letters by Superintendent Charles O'Hara Booth TAHO CSO 24/149/1401. Cited in Purtscher, 1993, *Children*, unpaginated.

parrots prayer’.<sup>99</sup> This ill-defined content and method were in stark contrast to the ‘Madras’ or ‘Bell and Lancaster’ method and quarterly catechetical examinations that occurred at Wybalenna,<sup>100</sup> see Chapter Four.

An additional note regarding church services at the school concerns children’s clothes. During the week the senior boys wore moleskin clothes but on Sundays they had rough, blue cloth suits when they went to divine service in St. John’s Anglican Church. Girls wore blue and white-patterned dresses with a white pinafore, and were given socks as well as shoes.<sup>101</sup> The colonial Christian practice of wearing particular clothes for regular church services, and for funerals such as the ones mentioned for Robert Macauley and Eumarrah, indicate that as well as the beliefs, some of which will be discussed later in this chapter, the location, clothes and other aspects of the rituals were also part of the ‘instruction’ and process of Christian enculturation.

### **Assessing the experience and impact**

In assessing the impact of the Orphan School in the interaction of Aboriginal people with the Christian church and Christian faith, it is important not to overstate the case based on later activities in Tasmania or elsewhere. According to the Register, except for the years 1834 and 1835, there were rarely more than six or seven Aboriginal children in the School at one time. This is a small minority of

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<sup>99</sup> TAHO CSO 24/149/1401, 311 & 320.

<sup>100</sup> Robinson had identified this system when beginning at Bruny Island in 1829, Plomley, 1966, p. 56. Catechist Robert Clark introduced Bell’s Madras system at Wybalenna in 1834, ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, p. 168. The earliest surviving catechetical examinations at Wybalenna are from May 1837, Plomley, 1987, pp. 858 – 59, ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, pp. 131 – 141.

<sup>101</sup> Purtscher, 1993, *Children*, unpaginated.

children in the school and a small minority of Aboriginal children in the whole Aboriginal population.<sup>102</sup>

The Orphan School was not a major factor in colonial policies in regard to Aboriginal people. The presence of Aboriginal children at the Orphan School during the years of the Wybalenna Settlement indicate that there was not a single fixed colonial policy in regard to Aboriginal people, particularly children, at this time. On the one hand the general intention to “civilise and Christianise” in order to incorporate Aboriginal people in colonial life would seem to be fulfilled by keeping Aboriginal children at the Orphan School until they were apprenticed out to a colonial tradesperson or household. Yet their removal to Wybalenna removed them from interaction with that colonisal society and gave them some limited freedoms to distinguish themselves from colonial society. These contrasting policies of trying to incorporate Aboriginal people into, and also separating them from, colonial society continued to be enacted for some time.

The Orphan School was not a major site of exposure of Aboriginal people to Christian faith. For most Aboriginal children there were other experiences of colonial life that had greater impact. However, for those Aboriginal people who were at the school for a lengthy period of time, the extensive teaching and consistent attendance at Sunday church services did contribute to their understanding and experience of that particular form of the Christian faith. Those who survived beyond childhood were at a significant advantage in adapting to

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<sup>102</sup> In James Barnard’s paper examining the 1848 census of Van Diemen’s Land, Table 23 details the working of the Queen’s Orphan School. The total number in the school at the end of 1848 was 460; of whom 396 were the offspring of convicts and 64 the children of free parents. Of these again, 3 boys and 4 girls were children of the Aboriginal people. Barnard, J., 1850, ‘Observations on Statistics of Van Diemen’s Land for 1848: compiled from Official Records in the Colonial Secretary’s Office’, *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania*, 1 (2), p. 110.

colonial life compared with those who had little familiarity with Christianity. They were therefore on the cusp of a fundamental shift in what being ‘Aboriginal’ meant in Aboriginal and colonial religious expressions. The routines, work, literacy and education at the School did, albeit unintentionally, empower some individuals to adjust, manipulate and resist the less rigorous institutional life at Wybalenna.<sup>103</sup> The return of these children to their parents and their wider clans at Wybalenna identifies that site as a significant locale for evolving Aboriginal identities and for Aboriginal Christian experience in particular.

## **Religious discussions**

While changes were occurring in the lives of Aboriginal children through participation in colonial families and the Orphan School, adults were also learning more of Christian faith through some of the same families as well as through the Government’s ‘Conciliator’ Robinson.<sup>104</sup> This next section will discuss some conversations of Christian theology between Aboriginal people and Robinson as they appear in his journal that records his experiences between the beginnings of the establishment on Bruny Island in March 1829 until when he took up the position of Commandant at Wybalenna on Flinders Island in October 1835.

In these conversations Robinson shows the beginnings of his own efforts to interact with the religious world of the Aboriginal people including his interpretations and attempts at translation of Christian beliefs into the local language of those with whom he was conversing. These conversations are also indicative of ways in which some Aboriginal people were interacting with

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<sup>103</sup> Boyce, 2001, p. 33.

<sup>104</sup> There was no explicit mission to the Aboriginal people by any of the churches. Governor Arthur had approached the (Anglican) Church Missionary Society in 1828, but they declined. ‘The failure was in not even trying’, Harris, J., 1990, *One Blood*. Sutherland; Albatross, p. 93, 94.

Robinson and interpreting the Christian faith that he was presenting. As noted in the previous chapter, the context of those conversations was in the bush, and therefore vastly different to the Orphan School or later catechetical classes at Wybalenna. They were more akin to informal conversations occurring between Aboriginal people and colonists within the families on the Bass Strait Islands and other places.

At the beginning of the establishment on Bruny Island Robinson began trying to learn the language of the local Nuenone people.<sup>105</sup> As already mentioned, the purpose of the establishment was to ‘ameliorate’ the Aboriginal people by means of ‘civilization’ and ‘instruction in the principles of Christianity’.<sup>106</sup> Robinson’s evangelical fervour is seen in his immediate preaching and reading of scripture to the sawyers.<sup>107</sup> This was a development of earlier preaching to seamen as a member of the Bethel Mission.<sup>108</sup>

The first specifically theological conversation is alluded to on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1829, on the topic ‘the being of God’. Robinson described his appreciation of the reality, if not the full extent, of his misunderstanding due to his unfamiliarity with their language.<sup>109</sup>

Despite his rudimentary understanding of the Nuenone language, a few days after these tentative beginnings, on Sunday 31 May 1829, Robinson ‘performed divine service in the natives’ hut’.<sup>110</sup> He says he ‘preached to the aborigines in their own tongue’ and describes part of the sermon:

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<sup>105</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 58.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., pp. 55, 59.

<sup>108</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, *Colonial Times*, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1828, p. 1. *Hobart Town Courier*, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1828, p. 4. *Hobart Town Courier*, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1828, p. 3.

<sup>109</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 60.

<sup>110</sup> If Robinson ‘performed’ from the *Book of Common Prayer* it was probably the first such service where a majority of participants were Aboriginal. In 1829, Easter Day was 19<sup>th</sup> April, therefore Friday 29<sup>th</sup> May was Ascension Day, forty days after Easter. The *Book of Common*



MOTTI (one) NYRAE (good) PARLERDI (God) MOTTI (one)  
 NOVILLY (bad) RAEGEWROPPER (devil). PARLERDI (God)  
 NYRAE (good). PARLERDI (God) MAGGERER (Stop)  
 WARRANGELLY (sky), RAEGEWROPPER (devil) MAGGERER  
 (Stop) TOUGENNER (below) UENEE (fire). NYRAE (good)  
 PARLERWAR (native) LOGERNER (dead) TAGGERER (go)  
 TEENNY (road) LAWWAY (up) WARRANGELLY (sky)  
 PARLERDI (God) NYRAE (good) RAEGE (whiteman) etc, etc.  
 NOVILLY (bad) PARLERWAR (native) LOGERNER (dead)  
 TAGGERER (go) TEENNY (road) TOOGUNNER (below)  
 RAEGEWROPPER (devil) UENEE (fire) MAGGERER (Stop)  
 UENEE (fire).<sup>111</sup>

We can see here the basic outline of an evangelistic sermon: there is one God and one devil. God is good and is up in the sky/heaven. The devil is bad and is down in the fire. When a good Aboriginal person or white man dies he will go the way to heaven. When a bad Aboriginal person or white man dies he will go the way to the devil and stop in the fire.

It is worth considering how the Aboriginal audience may have interpreted some or all of these words and the combination of images Robinson presented, and the different meanings they, and Robinson, gave to these words and combinations. For Robinson, 'Motti (one)' was the monotheist's foundation of there being one God, understood as Trinitarian (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). By contrast the Nuenone Aboriginal people had at least two Creator Beings, Moishernee and Dromerdene, named in the creation story told by Wooraddy

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*Prayer* had prescribed Bible readings, Collects and the requirement to read the Athanasian Creed during 'Divine Service' on the Sunday following Ascension Day, Church of England, 1968.

<sup>111</sup> Plomley, 1966, p, 61.

discussed in Chapter One. There is no indication of the Aboriginal people's interpretation of Robinson's words about the 'one good God'.

For Robinson, 'Parlerde (God)' was the God understood as Trinity, with several centuries of church Reformation and fifteen hundred years of creeds and debates within the Christian church as the background to his use of the word. The Aboriginal people without that background would have understood the word quite differently. For the local Nuenone, 'parlede' identified the specific planet known to Robinson as Saturn. More than a year later following further conversation about the stars, Robinson writes that:

All the stars and constellations near to Saturn and the planets are  
figurative of men: natives fighting, courting; husband and wife;  
men's legs, limbs...<sup>112</sup>

It is possible he may not have known the specific identification of 'parlede' with 'Saturn' at the time of his sermon. It is not difficult to imagine some tentative conversations about the 'being of God' a week earlier and the Aboriginal people making reference to 'parlede' (Saturn) and gesturing toward the sky, which Robinson misunderstood as 'God' (in the heavens).

From Chapter One we know that the Aboriginal people identified particular stars with particular Creator Beings<sup>113</sup> so it is possible that Robinson's audience on Bruny Island understood his reference to 'parlede/Saturn' as a reference to a particular Creator Being or some other religious identity. This sermon, and the previous week's discussion, were at the tentative beginning of understanding each other's religious world and it would seem that this involved some degree of mutual recognition or resonance and some degree of dissonance

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<sup>112</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 366, 464.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., pp. 373, 399, 402.

and divergence. Both acknowledged the existence of Creator Beings beyond themselves. They acknowledged some interaction between humans and these Beings. Both used anthropomorphic (human-like) characteristics and language to describe these Beings, such as ‘natives fighting’, ‘courting’ or God ‘judging’.

There was also divergence when looking in more detail at the myths. We lack the information about the details of interaction between the Aboriginal Creator Beings to know if there was a hierarchy among them, or if all were mutually equivalent, or the possibility that there are several names for the same Being. Woorraddy’s creation story mentions Moihernee and Dromerdene fighting in the sky and Dromerdene tumbling to the earth so in that story one is more powerful than the other but there is not a moral difference of good and evil ascribed to either Being. In Robinson’s Anglo-Christian theology there is only one God who reigns supreme over all creation, including all other angelic beings, and a stark moral difference with the devil. This one God was also referred to using different names.

For Robinson and other nineteenth-century Protestant Christians, MOTTI (one) NOVILLY (bad) RAEGEWROPPER (devil) referred to the Satan, Lucifer who fell from heaven, the tempter of Christ and Christian people. There is some resonance for the Aboriginal people for whom the RAEGEWROPPER was a somewhat malevolent being. However, in the extant sources, there is not any reference to the kind of conflict between RAEGEWROPPER and Creator Beings that is the mainstream nineteenth-century Protestant understanding of God and devil in conflict. The RAEGEWROPPER seems to have more of a personal nuisance role than the morally evil and anti-Christ role of the devil in Christian theology. There seems some resonance but not a dynamic equivalence.

PARLERDI (God) MAGGERER (Stop) WARRANGELLY (sky) is common Christian shorthand for God's transcendent location in heaven that was thought to be above the earth in the sky, stars, and 'heavens'. There is some resonance here in the Aboriginal myths of Creator Beings identified with particular stars and there being some interaction between these beings and humans, animals, and the land, but Robinson's theology did not limit God to one particular star, but rather as creator of all stars.

The sources are too limited to know if the Aboriginal people's Creator Beings had a similarly somewhat distant interaction with people. There do appear to be more references to immediate effects of the Wraggeowrapper's activities upon people.

In regard to the phrase, 'RAEGEWROPPER (devil) MAGGERER (Stop) TOUGENNER (below) UENEE (fire)', the precise identity and characteristics of the Wraggeowrapper/devil is difficult to determine because of the multiple uses and meanings mentioned by Robinson. It seems in this sermon Robinson was presenting the common Anglo-Christian view of a three tiered universe of God in heaven above, devil in hellfire below, and people/creation existing on the earth in between. In Robinson's writings about the Aboriginal people 'devil' refers to their own seemingly personal spirit, for a malevolent being causing sickness and death, a Being whom the tyreelore women dance in order to please, and it is also the blue flame in the fire. This Being also has different names among different clans, which suggests its varying characteristics and qualities.<sup>114</sup>

Having announced in his sermon what he believed happens to the Aboriginal person and the white man when they die, Robinson, later that same

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<sup>114</sup> Plomley, 1966, pp. 182, 249, 281-2, 373, 616.

day asked Nuenonne people ‘where they went to after death’. An Aboriginal man died the same day as this sermon and Robinson describes in some detail the funeral preparations, including cremating the body on a pyre. This is helpful in interpreting the context of sermon. The response to his question startled him:

One said to England. I scarcely credited what I heard. I asked the question again, when they all replied that they went to England, that there was plenty of PARLEVAR in England.<sup>115</sup>

At the very least this indicates that the Aboriginal people did not believe, as Robinson did, that following death there was a moral separation of people, good from bad, the former in the sky and the latter in the fire beneath the ground. This is a substantial point of difference in mythologies. While there were differing mortuary and funerary practices around the island, for example, cremation or entombment in hollow tree trunks,<sup>116</sup> there are not clear indications of the religious beliefs.

Like the references to God as good spirit, the references to devil may have had some general approximation to the Aboriginal people’s religious beliefs about the Wraggeowrapper, at least enough to continue conversing and sharing different understandings and thereby gaining greater appreciation of the nuances of each other’s beliefs. At the very least the Aboriginal people and Robinson began revealing to each other their own mythologies and through these conversations they developed a vocabulary with sufficiently general and somewhat mutually intelligible meanings to build on each one’s understanding of the other.

About a week after this sermon Robinson wrote that he,

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<sup>115</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 62. See discussion of ‘England’ in previous chapter.

<sup>116</sup> Cameron, P., 2011, *Grease and Ochre*. Launceston; Fullers Bookshop, p. 39.

conversed with the natives on religious subjects. Learnt that they had some idea of a good spirit whom they called parllerde, and that he stopped in the sky (Warranggelly)'.<sup>117</sup>

Both Robinson and the Aboriginal people continued in various conversations over an extended period of time. The religious beliefs of each did not prevent such conversations.

### **Religious adaptation – ochre and prayer book**

Like the spoken words and their conceptual meanings, Robinson mentions one fascinating instance of the interaction of artefacts and other physical items of each other's religious worlds. A couple of weeks after the creation story conversations in July and August 1831, Robinson wrote about an experience he found quite startling. The group came across an Aboriginal shelter:

All the ground in front of this habitation was thickly strewn with the feathers of the emu, and bones of this stately bird as also other animals such as the kangaroo covered the ground, which the natives had broken to pieces to obtain the marrow to anoint their head and body. In front of this domicile a row of small fires had been kindled, which were burning at the time Mannalargenna and the other natives had discovered them. On searching about, found the claw of an emu and some red ochre, but what appeared to me the most extraordinary was finding some pieces of the leaves of the Common Prayer Book, covered with red ochre. On examining these I found them to contain parts of psalms 30, 31, 32, 33 and 96, and on reading the first five

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<sup>117</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 63.

verses of the 31st psalm, I found it so peculiarly adapted to me that I could not help exclaiming, 'Marvellous are thy ways, O Lord, and thy paths are past finding out'; and on reading the 33rd psalm at the 13th and 14th verses, 'The Lord looked down from heaven and beheld all the children of men' &c, I thought them peculiarly applicable to this forlorn and hapless race of human beings.<sup>118</sup>

Here we see the interaction of several religious artefacts from either side of the colonial exchange that have been brought together by this group of Aboriginal people who were absent from their shelter. The several fires indicate several hearth groups gathered together. Thickly strewn feathers and bones suggest a substantial feast of emu and kangaroo. The possible religious attributes of the emu are unknown, however the kangaroo's significance is known from the earlier creation story. The breaking of the tail (again from the creation story) to obtain marrow for healing is also familiar.

On searching further, Robinson found an emu claw, ochre and, what are for him the most extraordinary items, fragments of psalms from the Anglican Church's *Book of Common Prayer*, which were covered with red ochre. While the particular psalms are what arouses his delight, one could first of all consider how these Aboriginal people seemed to be using these fragments, incorporating these pages into their world and thereby creating their own meaning, the tearing of the pages perhaps paralleling the breaking of kangaroo bones to release the anointing marrow. In her insightful article, Van Toorn suggests the pages were 'red but unread':

Red ochre played an important part in Aboriginal ritual life, so it is

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<sup>118</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 410.

probable that the people of north-east Van Diemen's Land used the pages from the Prayer Book—part of the script for Christian worship—for different ritual purposes. Although these people would not have been able to decipher the words of the text, they covered the pages with red ochre, perhaps ritually appropriating the power of what they correctly saw as one of the white man's sacred instruments.<sup>119</sup>

These Aboriginal people are thought to have been responsible for recent killings and had confiscated these, and possibly other, items from their victims. They may have had sufficient familiarity with the colonists to know the role of this book in their religious life. Regardless of what these absent Aboriginal people knew or did not know about the place of the *Book of Common Prayer* in colonial life, they had retrieved these pages, kept them, and incorporated them into a substantive gathering including by the use of the much valued symbolic substance of red ochre, marrow from kangaroo tail, and possibly emu feathers. For these Aboriginal people these religious artefacts belonged together in this locale, and as such it is a site of religious hybridity. The beliefs about the pages interact with the ochre, marrow and bones, as they do, though in a much different way, for Robinson.

For Robinson it seems the text, specifically the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> verses of Psalm 33 is somehow mediating the 'looking down' of God upon all the children of men, including those who are now not present at the fireside but for whom Robinson is searching. These particular words are probably not the focal point for the Aboriginal people who brought together claw, marrow, ochre and pages, but the very fact of them bringing these artefacts together suggests something of the

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<sup>119</sup> Toorn, P. V., 2002, 'Before the Second Reformation: Nineteenth-Century Aboriginal Mediations of the Bible in Van Diemens Land', *Semeia*, 88, p. 44.



religious dialogue and interpretation in which they were engaging, largely on their own terms. There was, apparently, no colonial Christian person present. The circumstances of these people's acquisition of the pages are uncertain, as is their familiarity with the religious nature of the book, and these pages in particular. While we do not know if they possessed the entire Book of Common Prayer they have clearly used these pages in a dynamic relationship with ochre, marrow and bone.

### **Religious adaptation – attending church**

Mention was made earlier of the Orphan School children attending church services each Sunday. Robinson also regularly performed 'divine service' during his travels. As well as these occasions, Robinson also mentions Aboriginal people going to church services, usually while in or visiting Hobart. One Aboriginal person, a woman, Luggenemenener / Tuery was known by other Aboriginal people to go to church and attend prayers.<sup>120</sup> She was from the 'Ben Lomond' clan and had taken a group of Aboriginal people to John Batman's house in that area for refuge from those hunting them, probably to avoid the Black Line.<sup>121</sup> She had earlier stayed at Robinson's home in Hobart Town, or more precisely, the 'asylum' next to Robinson's house.<sup>122</sup> Luggenemenener was the mother of Walter Arthur who was removed from her at Wybalenna to the Orphan School from 1832 – 1835. As will become clear in the next chapter, she was likely involved in the first Bible translation at Wybalenna. These early references to her attending church services were part of a range of engagements with the Christian faith.

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<sup>120</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 281.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., pp. 279, 439.

What is particularly distinctive is that she was one of only a few adult Aboriginal people who have known life before the colonists who then became actively involved in Christian activities.<sup>123</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter we have seen examples of the varieties of contexts, people and artefacts of Christian faith to which a range of Aboriginal people were exposed. This occurred primarily through personal conversations on mainland and islands, among families and with particular individuals, such as Robinson.

Aboriginal people experienced Christian baptism outdoors and in churches. At least one instance was without any consent of any Aboriginal person.

Aboriginal people engaged in these conversations from a variety of religious beliefs, life experiences, and encounters with colonists. Some Aboriginal people with ‘pre-contact’ religious life, such as Luggenemenener, became attended church and engaged in prayer. Others, such as Trugernanner and Mannalargenna, ‘only knew what his father told him’<sup>124</sup> and did not incorporate Christian faith into their religious beliefs. Some, who only knew life in the colonial context, such as Robert Macauley and Tom Birch, ‘believed what the white people said’<sup>125</sup> and appear to have incorporated Christian faith into their lives.

Those who accepted Christian teaching were not necessarily incorporating it in the form Robinson, or other colonial Christians, preferred or even understood. The ongoing nature of the conversations, the diversity of and the disparity of numbers of Aboriginal people and colonists participating in the

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<sup>123</sup> Mary and Ann, mother of Lucy Murray, who were baptized on 4 November 1811, are others.

<sup>124</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 403.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

conversation indicates a much more dynamic interaction and organic exploration of Aboriginal-Christian theology than Robinson, or church records describe. These religious adaptations were occurring within institutional Christian settings such as church services and the Orphan School, and within personal relationships such as between adult colonists and Aboriginal children in their care, and between adults such as those conversing with Robinson. They were also occurring among Aboriginal people themselves beyond any colonist's involvement, such as the example of ochre and prayer book. These examples suggest Aboriginal people were interpreting the Christian faith in their own terms both within and beyond their relationships with colonial Christians. In the less rigorous institutional life at Wybalenna, the gathering in one place of such diverse Aboriginal people, and quite different Christian people, points to it as a significant locale for evolving Aboriginal Christian identity and practice.

### Chapter 3: ‘Black Man’s Church’

Aboriginal people had diverse experiences of colonial life and the Christian faith that was an integral part of it. They were introduced to it in varying degrees through colonial families with whom they lived, attending church services with those families, or on their own, or in the formal setting of the Orphan School. Some experienced ‘divine service’ away from colonial towns and churches, either when travelling with Robinson through the bush, as part of family prayers on the Bass Strait Islands, or by acquiring Christian artefacts during raids on houses. The range of these contexts narrowed somewhat during the 1830s as the largest portion of surviving Aboriginal people, about 200, became concentrated at the ‘Aboriginal Settlement’ of Wybalenna on the west coast of Flinders Island, off the north-east coast of Van Diemen’s Land.

In this chapter I will examine in more detail experiences of Aboriginal people at this settlement. Wybalenna is a crucial location in the experiences of Aboriginal people, both in the 1830s through to today. It is pivotal in considering the interaction of Aboriginal and Christian religious beliefs and practices. It is a site of attempts, among the earliest in Australia, to translate portions of the Bible into an anglicised version of an Aboriginal language in the midst of continuing inter-clan relationships and religious practices, and an evolving *pidgin* among those clans.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Creole’ and ‘pidgin’ are technical linguistic terms: “‘Pidgin’ is a contact language used among people who have no other language in common. When a nativised pidgin becomes the language of a new speech community, the process is known as “creolisation”. This creolised pidgin, or “creole” is structurally more complex as it has to meet all the communicative requirements of native speakers. The structural complexity of a creole is comparable to that of other languages’. Muhlhausler, P., 1991, ‘Overview of the pidgin and creole languages of Australia’, in Romaine, S., (ed.), *Language in Australia*. Melbourne; Cambridge University Press, pp. 159 - 173. Further research into the languages spoken at Wybalenna would be helpful. The short time in which multiple Aboriginal languages were interacting at Wybalenna, suggests a pidgin language was

With little history of Christian mission among Aboriginal people to draw upon, Christian practice and teaching at Wybalenna was experimental and shaped by the interaction of the particular people, especially leaders, who lived there. There were a variety of methodologies employed, including tentative conversations as well as regimented catechetical classes. Writing English text became a religious, and political, act by Aboriginal people. Some of the earliest Christian preaching by Aboriginal people in first language, *pidgin*, and English occurred at Wybalenna.

Furthermore, few of the documentary records of this period have as yet been published. With such diverse Aboriginal and colonial participants, many of whom were redefining themselves and each other, the context is multi-faceted and multi-layered. In that context, polyvalent Aboriginal – Christian theologies began to emerge, and therefore a range of these facets, layers and theologies will be considered in this, and the following two chapters.

While I will focus on different aspects of life at Wybalenna it is important to remember they were often occurring concurrently. As Aboriginal people simultaneously interacted with these multiple forms of Christian faith they were also continuing to hunt, perform ceremonies, and fulfil other pre-existing cultural roles, as well as adapting to, and creating, new ones. I will examine each of these aspects in distinct sections before bringing them together.

It is impossible to assess the degree to which particular Tasmanian Aboriginal people integrated the Christian faith into their identity. It is possible however, through examining extant documents, to identify particular practices in which they engaged, how often they did so, and the various contexts in which they

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developing which had not yet evolved into a creole. Therefore I will use ‘pidgin’ in describing the evolving common language rather than creole.

performed them. Rather than showing a totalitarian regime indoctrinating passive and helpless victims, the extant documents show evidence of diverse experiences over the years of 'Wybalenna' from 1832 to 1847. At the settlement there were various Aboriginal Christian and non-Christian actors performing a variety of roles. There was not a single, 'monologicistic', Aboriginal voice, nor was there a single Aboriginal Christian voice or experience. Aboriginal people responded to the context in a variety of ways and were actively interpreting what was occurring and were adapting and using their new context to strengthen some existing roles, clan relationships and indeed aspects of their spiritual worldview. It makes sense in this context to speak of multiple and multi-faceted Aboriginal experiences and identities<sup>2</sup> and of the precarious nature of colonial, particularly colonial Christian, identities and practices.<sup>3</sup>

These interpretations and adaptations do not diminish the realities of the active efforts undertaken by governors, commandants, catechists, and others to persuade and sometimes coerce Aboriginal people to cease their existing languages and practices and the significant disruption these efforts caused. Nor does it ignore the clear trauma Aboriginal people experienced in the sustained bereavement, particularly in those periods when up to ten per cent of their number died within a short time. But I hope to show that in the midst of these experiences and efforts by colonists, Aboriginal people were actively pursuing their own adaptations. For some periods there are few if any records and for others, particularly when Robinson was Commandant, they are extensive. In these the emphases of the Christian Commandants, Catechists (Bible teachers) and

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<sup>2</sup> Attwood, B., 1989, *The Making of the Aborigines*. Sydney; Allen & Unwin, p. 150.

<sup>3</sup> Johnston, A., 2004, 'The Little Empire of Wybalenna: Becoming Colonial in Australia', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 81, p. 19.

Chaplain can be seen, but more importantly, some of the interpretations and responses Aboriginal people were making are also evident.

This chapter discusses the initial years of the settlement, various colonists and Aboriginal people who interacted, the brief attempt at Bible translation and the practice of Sunday services. In the next chapter I will examine the schools and related activities such as writing, the *Flinders Island Chronicle*, catechetical teaching and first language and pidgin addresses given by various Aboriginal men. The subsequent chapter will compare the Christian writings of two Aboriginal people, Walter Arthur and Thomas Brune to illustrate some of the diverse Aboriginal-Christian perspectives.

The desire among colonists for a separate 'settlement' for Aboriginal people began as early as December 1826<sup>4</sup> before Robinson was appointed to begin an establishment on Bruny Island in 1829.<sup>5</sup> Swan Island located just off the north-east coast of Van Diemen's Land became something of a *de facto* settlement in 1830<sup>6</sup> comprising 'captured natives' from the north-east<sup>7</sup> including the 'Ben Lomond' area. In early 1831 they were moved to Preservation Island in Bass Strait, then to Gun Carriage (Vansittart) Island under the oversight of Archibald Maclachlan, a convict, and then Sergeant Alexander Wight who oversaw the move to 'the Lagoons' on Great (Flinders) Island in mid-November 1831.<sup>8</sup> Around this time Aboriginal people from 'Big River' arrived,<sup>9</sup> followed by those

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<sup>4</sup> King Island was suggested. *Colonial Times*, 1 December 1826.

<sup>5</sup> Plomley, N. J. B., 1987, *Weep In Silence*. Hobart; Blubber Head Press, p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Plomley, N. J. B., 1966, *Friendly Mission*. Kingsgrove; Halstead Press, pp. 479 – 480.

<sup>8</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 35, 36.

<sup>9</sup> Plomley, 1966, pp. 585 – 586.

from the north-west in the second half of 1832,<sup>10</sup> and Macquarie Harbour in the first half of 1833.<sup>11</sup>

Once on Flinders Island, and when opportunity presented, the Aboriginal people continued to hunt and in the evenings gathered for singing, dancing and storytelling.<sup>12</sup> Colonial participants such as commandants (with overall responsibility), catechists (a teacher of Christian faith and the Bible), other officers (medical officer, storekeeper, overseer) and convicts, were all appointed by the Governor. There was no catechist and therefore no organised program of Christian practices such as Sunday services or education until W. J. Darling became Commandant in March 1832 with specific instructions from Governor Arthur to ‘civilise’ the Aboriginal people.<sup>13</sup>

In February 1833 the settlement moved to ‘Civilization Point’, despite the poor water supply and exposure to the prevailing, and often cold, westerly winds.<sup>14</sup> During Darling’s time the site became known as ‘Wybalenna’, ‘signifying in the language of the Ben Lomond Natives, Black man’s houses’.<sup>15</sup> The naming appears to be in response to Governor Arthur’s suggestion that Mr Darling will find some native name for it.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Plomley, 1966, pp. 701 – 703.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 741 – 743, 819 – 821.

<sup>12</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 35.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> ML Walker Papers, B727 CY1408 p. 310.

<sup>16</sup> As Commandant, Robinson does not seem to have ever referred to it by its Aboriginal name, but only as the ‘Settlement’. Likewise correspondence from the Colonial Secretary’s Office. It is named as Wybalenna throughout this chapter as part of trying to consider the Aboriginal peoples’ interpretations of what was occurring there, and in particular their interpretations of the forms of Christian faith they were presented with.



## Removal of children

Upon arrival at Wybalenna, Darling instituted church services almost immediately. As noted earlier, he also removed several Aboriginal children to the Orphan School. There are some discrepancies in records between the Orphan School Register, Minutes of the Committee of Management of the Orphan School and those in Plomley's edited extracts from Robinson's Papers in regard to the names and the numbers of Aboriginal children removed. However, it is clear that several groups of Aboriginal children were removed on two separate occasions between August and December 1832.<sup>17</sup> One explanation for the removal of these Aboriginal children was the lack of a catechist/teacher at the settlement but most children were not returned to their parents, even when the first catechist, Thomas Wilkinson, arrived in June 1833.<sup>18</sup>

At the beginning of 1834 the visiting Quakers, Backhouse and Walker, reported there were one hundred and eleven Aboriginal people at Wybalenna including eleven adolescents and eleven children under five years of age.<sup>19</sup> A few months later about ten children were returned from the Orphan School to their parents from 26<sup>th</sup> April to 18<sup>th</sup> June 1834<sup>20</sup> though four seem to have died of pneumonia soon after arriving.<sup>21</sup> These returning, and surviving, children would have increased the adolescent and infant population from twenty-two to almost thirty. A further eight or nine were returned with the next Commandant,

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<sup>17</sup> One group was removed between August and October, though the Orphan School Register and Darling's reports differ on the dates, and a second group between November – December, where again, the dates differ. ML Walker Papers, B727 CY1408, 9<sup>th</sup> October 1832, and Plomley, 1987, p. 63.

<sup>18</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, p. 79.

<sup>19</sup> ML Walker Papers, B727 CY1408, p. 322. This was a little less than two years before Robinson became Commandant.

<sup>20</sup> Purtscher, J., 1993, *Children in Queen's Orphanage 1828 – 1863*. New Town; Schaffer, unpaginated. This is another indication that the numbers of Aboriginal children at the Orphan School were, in this peak year, a substantial proportion, but still not a majority of the overall number of Aboriginal children.

<sup>21</sup> Plomley, 1987, pp. 940 – 941.

Robinson, in October 1835.<sup>22</sup> These returning children became a particular focus for Commandant and Catechist, but many were returning to parents and clan and to a context where their first language continued to be spoken and other ancestral practices continued, albeit in modified forms.

Also underlying the removal of children to the Orphan School was the ongoing conflict between successive commandants and catechists. In a letter to the Colonial Secretary, 19<sup>th</sup> February 1835, Commandant Nickolls referred to the nine children removed to the Orphan School<sup>23</sup> and followed this with another, on 21<sup>st</sup> February, alluding to the ‘inefficiency of the catechist’, Robert Clark.<sup>24</sup> Several children were removed even while a catechist was present.<sup>25</sup> Despite criticisms, Clark remained as Catechist until early 1838 when Rev Thomas Dove arrived as Chaplain, but even then Clark continued teaching<sup>26</sup> and in fact took over from Dove who refused to teach the Aboriginal children. The alleged ‘lack’ of a ‘competent’ teacher seems a façade to cover other interpersonal factors among the colonial leaders.

## **Bible translation**

The arrival of Thomas and Louisa Wilkinson at Wybalenna marked the beginnings of some significant developments. The Wilkinsons had arrived in Van Diemen’s Land in March 1833. Thomas’ appointment as Catechist was on the

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<sup>22</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 Vol. 23, CY548.

<sup>23</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, p. 161.

<sup>24</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 83.

<sup>25</sup> Five boys are entered in the Orphan School Register on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1834 while James Allen was ‘interim’ Commandant and one month after Robert Clark had been appointed as Catechist following the removal of Thomas Wilkinson, Orphan School Register, TAHO SWD 28.

<sup>26</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 102 – 13.

recommendation of Archdeacon Bedford who considered him ‘very capable of instructing the natives’.<sup>27</sup> The Hobart Town Courier reported,

We have much pleasure in announcing that the Rev. Thomas Wilkinson, the missionary appointed by the government for the Aboriginal people, has arrived at the colony on Flinders Island and commenced his arduous but interesting labors. We shall be most anxious to hear by every opportunity what success he meets with.<sup>28</sup>

Thomas began conversations about the Christian faith and Louisa began teaching the women ‘domestic and feminine occupations’.<sup>29</sup>

The conversations between Wilkinson and various ‘Ben Lomond’ people progressed well enough that just on three months after his arrival, Wilkinson wrote to Governor Arthur on 17<sup>th</sup> September 1833, with a sample of what he said was his translation into the ‘Ben Lomond’ language of the ‘principal parts of the first four chapters of Genesis’.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately all that survives are the ‘principal parts’ from Genesis Chapter One in Arthur’s papers<sup>31</sup> and a mostly similar version in the diary of the Quaker, George Washington Walker.<sup>32</sup>

The translation conversations occurred while at the same time there was deepening conflict between Commandant Darling, Catechist Wilkinson, and the

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<sup>27</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 69.

<sup>28</sup> *Hobart Town Courier*, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1833, p. 3. Wilkinson appears in the Wesleyan Methodist Biographies, ‘WILKINSON, Thomas (1799-1881) Born on 6 April 1799 at Sunderland, County Durham, England, the son of David Wilkinson, sea pilot, and his wife Elizabeth, nee Dixon. He married on 5 November 1820 at London, England, to Louisa Price, daughter of Henry Price and his wife Charlotte, nee Frisley. Worked in the East London area for many years. Arrived at Hobart, Van Diemen's Land, in March 1833. Religious instructor to the Aboriginal people on Flinder's Island’, Wesleyan Methodist Biographies, <http://www.companyofangels.net/evbiomth.html>, accessed 17/5/2014.

<sup>29</sup> ML Walker Papers, B727 CY1408, p. 322.

<sup>30</sup> Plomley, N. J. B., 1976, *A Word-list of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Languages*. Launceston; Foot & Playstead, pp. 41 – 42.

<sup>31</sup> TAHO CSO 7578.

<sup>32</sup> ML Walker Papers, 9 Dec 1833, B727 CY1408, p. 313. I do not propose to examine these translations in detail as the particular linguistics are not the focus of this chapter, but both versions and a copy of the King James Version of Genesis 1 with a ~~strike through~~ the words Wilkinson omitted from it, are in Appendix C.

Medical Officer McLachlan (see below). Arthur despatched the two Quakers, Backhouse and Walker in November 1833 to investigate and seek mediation. Walker reported to Governor Arthur affirming Wilkinson's teaching and language learning.

T Wilkinson ... has succeeded as well as could have been anticipated considering the difficulties he has to contend with. The language has never been reduced to writing and it is extremely difficult to come at the idiom ...  
... but this is to be expected in the study of a language hitherto only known orally by those who speak it and of which Europeans have hitherto been almost wholly ignorant. The literal translation is almost confined in great measure to the verbs and nouns.

... T. W. has composed a considerable vocabulary of words.<sup>33</sup>

Translating these portions highlighted some significant challenges in communicating across the different languages and worldviews among the evolving Wybalenna community. Unlike Robinson's conversations with Nuenone people in May 1829, Walker believed that the Aboriginal people

seem to have had no idea of the existence of a creative presiding power implied by the word God nor any word corresponding with such sentiment in their own language<sup>34</sup>

and that in regard to their languages

some of the Aboriginal terms have a very indefinite and extended meaning as in the words crackneh and pomleh.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> ML Walker Papers, 9 Dec 1833, B727 CY1408, p. 311.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

As well as the challenges, it also shows the capacity and skill of Aboriginal people in incorporating English words in the development of an evolving *pidgin*, or *lingua franca*, unique to Wybalenna such that Walker noted that ‘several of [the] anglified terms [such as Godneh, grassneh] are now in such common use among the natives that they may be considered as incorporated with the language’.<sup>36</sup>

This development of bi-lingual communication between Wilkinson and certain ‘Ben Lomond’ people, and a new evolving *pidgin* ‘among the natives’ suggests that there were multiple contexts operating simultaneously at Wybalenna. There were interactions among the various Aboriginal clans, those among various colonists (Commandant, Catechist, soldiers, overseer and convicts), and the few Aboriginal and colonists interacting with each other. The documents suggest the successive catechists, Wilkinson and Clark, were among the few, if not the only colonists, using, or attempting to use, the evolving *pidgin*, while many, if not most, of the Aboriginal people were using it primarily with each other.

The surviving documents are written in English, yet most Aboriginal people were conversing with each other in the evolving *pidgin* and not writing in English at all. At that time the Aboriginal population was approximately one hundred and thirty comprising people mostly from north and north-eastern parts of Van Diemen’s Land, including the ‘Ben Lomond’ area,<sup>37</sup> yet there are very few surviving documents of their interactions with each other. What have survived are documents primarily about colonial interpretations of interactions between

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<sup>35</sup> ML Walker Papers, 9 Dec 1833, B727 CY1408, p. 311. Crackneh meant something akin to ‘sit down’ and pomleh akin to ‘make’, Plomley, 1976, p. 391, 291. Walker also gathered Aboriginal words and songs, transcribing some into literate form, Plomley, 1987, pp. 288 – 291.

<sup>36</sup> ML Walker Papers, 9 Dec 1833, B727 CY1408, p. 311.

<sup>37</sup> ML Walker Papers, B727 CY1408, unpaginated.

Aboriginal people and colonists. It is important to remember the larger context of Aboriginal people's inter-clan relationships. These were likely to have been more significant to Aboriginal people's daily life than relationships with colonists.

Like the earlier Aboriginal people being baptised, or conversing with Robinson, or the children at the Orphan School, the conversations between Wilkinson and 'Ben Lomond' people opened new thoughts about their own and the other's religious world. It is arguable that the use of English and the evolving *pidgin* were contributing factors that added to rather than subtracted from their existing religious world views. These changes were developing *pidgin* and anglicised words and incorporating them into their existing languages. The meanings of the words developed through the conversations. In this way the context was something of a threshold which was neither wholly English nor wholly 'Ben Lomond' (or other Aboriginal languages) but the beginnings of an exploration of something new through which each was enlarging their understanding and experience of themselves, the other, and their creation stories within their worlds.<sup>38</sup>

The topic of Genesis as the initial Bible translation is noteworthy. The choice may have been simply that it is the first book of the Bible. However, as discussed in the previous chapters, these origin stories are identity-defining meta-narratives through which all later stories are interpreted. It is unknown if Wilkinson or the Aboriginal people raised the topic of the beginnings of creation, but Wilkinson was certainly focussing exclusively on translating the foundational stories of Genesis. This resonating topic of creation stories is understandable in the early stages rather than beginning with the more dissonant elements such as the person

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<sup>38</sup> See also, Johnson, A., 2001, 'The Book Eaters: Textuality, modernity, and the London Missionary Society', *Semeia*, 88, pp. 25 – 6.

of Jesus Christ. While the content of the creation stories from Ben Lomond and Genesis Chapter One are different and the form in which they are carried, oral and written, is different, the common theme of the beginnings of land, people, and so on, appears to have had sufficient resonance to enable each to recognise the other and to interpret the other's story from within their own worldview. And though we do not have any documentary evidence, it is likely the 'Ben Lomond' person, or people, were also doing their own oral translation of the 'principal parts' of Wilkinson's creation story into their own language.

At Wybalenna, as in churches and Robinson's travels, the Bible was read regularly during weekly Divine Services. Darling had been performing these for over a year, and Wilkinson since his more recent arrival, so the 'Ben Lomond' people had some familiarity with the colonial Christian reverence for the biblical text. Wilkinson's translation suggests the printed biblical text was present in their conversations. He wrote to Governor Arthur '... I am certain they understand what I read to them and show at times a considerable interest in what they hear...' <sup>39</sup> however, the exact role the written text played, and the interpretation the people formed about it, is unclear. The example in the previous chapter of the coalescing of kangaroo marrow, ochre and text suggests Aboriginal people had various ways of engaging with the written text.

Nevertheless, in this translation and interpretive experience we glimpse something of the different worldviews sharing in the conversation. The Coastal Plains people, <sup>40</sup> whose country was nearby the 'Ben Lomond', had stories of creation, which are interpreted by Robinson in his journals. As mentioned in

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<sup>39</sup> In author's possession.

<sup>40</sup> Cameron, P., 2011, *Grease and Ochre*. Launceston; Fullers Bookshop, pp. 8 – 19.

Chapter One, in these stories beings came from the stars to the earth.<sup>41</sup> In Genesis God (one being) made the heavens and the earth. In at least one Aboriginal story (Nuenone, Bruny Island) the moon was female and sun male,<sup>42</sup> while in Genesis God (understood as exclusively male by contemporary Christians) made these ‘lights’, a greater and a lesser one (Genesis 1:16).

During his own language learning and conversations Wilkinson is likely to have explained something about the biblical creation stories, Genesis chapters, and their place within the larger book of the Bible. So although the formation of the translation into a new written form is important, the preceding oral dialogue from which the translation emerged, is perhaps more so. For this is where the two different languages and worlds are open to each other and seeking some mutual understanding and perhaps resonance in meaning. This occurred prior to the story becoming text. Through this dialogue both stories, and speakers, are changed.

For his part Wilkinson shows adaptability and flexibility, rather than a ‘monologic’ view. ‘God’ in the King James Version text of the Bible became ‘Godneh’ with the meanings created through the conversations that preceded the formation of the translated text. In this translated text Wilkinson introduced creatures that do not appear in the biblical text (Genesis 1:25).<sup>43</sup> This ‘Godneh’ making ‘bullock’ and ‘bush kangaroo’ may be somewhat similar to the ‘Ben Lomond’ creation story, but unfortunately we do not have it to compare.<sup>44</sup> The reference to the kangaroo is evocative of the creation story Woorraddy told

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<sup>41</sup> Plomley, 1966, pp. 373 – 74, 376, 392, 399.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 380.

<sup>43</sup> ML Walker Papers, 9 Dec 1833, B727 CY1408, p. 311, and Plomley, 1976, pp. 41, 42.

<sup>44</sup> Robinson had gone further than Wilkinson in his initial attempts translating sermons into Nuenone language where he used ‘parlerdi’ for God (31 May 1829), (Plomley, 1966, p. 61), see Chapter Two, but his initial openness closed down before, or at, Wybalenna where he maintained an English-only practice of Christian faith and discouraged the catechist, and others from using anything other than English.



Robinson in July 1831<sup>45</sup> but it is unknown if the ‘Ben Lomond’ clan had the same, or a similar story.

The insertion of ‘bush kangaroo’ may seem a minor point, but it does express Wilkinson’s acknowledgement of ‘Godneh’ creating the animals of ‘Ben Lomond’ country and therefore ‘God’ is not limited to creatures appearing in the biblical narrative. These variations from the KJV text suggest an opening and expansion of Wilkinson’s theological worldview, even if only for reasons of expediency. The insertion of ‘Godneh’ into ‘Ben Lomond’ language was an enlarging of the Aboriginal people’s worlds. Like the developing *pidgin*, the outcome is not *not exactly* the King James Version of the Bible nor the ‘Ben Lomond’ story, but an approximation taking some steps at interpreting each for the audience of the other.

It is also unclear how the Aboriginal people might have interpreted the Genesis story with its specific days of creation and people being made in the ‘image’ or ‘likeness’ of the creator. In Woorraddy’s story, moihernee was married and his wife and children came to earth in the rain, thus indicating moihernee is male, husband and father.<sup>46</sup> While Robinson noted some correspondence between Woorraddy’s and Mannalargenna’s creation stories,<sup>47</sup> it is unclear if the ‘Ben Lomond’ stories were similar. Nor is it clear if the Aboriginal people interpreted God as supreme over all other Gods or how they regarded the relationships between the various creator beings of different clans and stories from their own clan. But it does demonstrate they were willing to converse about their origin stories and hear Wilkinson at least talk, if not also read, about his.

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<sup>45</sup> Plomley, 1966, pp. 373 – 74, see Chapter One.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 373 – 74.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 399.

As well as the insertions, there are many deletions from the biblical text of Genesis. About three quarters of the words in Genesis Chapters One and Two are omitted from the translation. Words such as, ‘day’, ‘night’, ‘firmament’, and so on, disappeared in the translation as did the specific geographic location of Eden near the headwaters of the Pishon, Gihon, Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Genesis 2: 10-14). Attempts to explain these omissions are pure conjecture, however some points can be made. One clear omission is the construction of time into seven days. This construction of time certainly became a regular part of life at Wybalenna, particularly the transference of the seventh day of rest (Sabbath) onto the first day of the week (Sunday) when Divine Service was performed and no work was to be done.<sup>48</sup> It was also incorporated into questions in catechetical examinations.<sup>49</sup> Wilkinson may have omitted it because life at Wybalenna was not as regimented as when Robinson became Commandant two years later.

The omission of ‘heaven’ in the ‘firmament’ was also only temporary. It became a regular feature of preaching by both Aboriginal and colonial preachers. Like the construction of time, these metaphors and the construction of one’s spatial context are foundational to meaning-making. However, even when later Aboriginal preachers used the same words, European constructions of ‘up’ and ‘down’ should not be assumed as the only way of interpreting such metaphors as ‘heaven’ and ‘hell’.

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<sup>48</sup> Settlement Order 9, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1832, ML Robinson Papers A7074 Vol 52, CY825, unpaginated. Another example was when Dray and her husband stopped their ‘work’ of fishing on Sundays, ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, pp. 166 – 167. These changes to people’s interpretation of time is similar to Attwood’s discussion of the changing spatial context at Ramahyuck. See Attwood, B., 1994, *A Life Together, A Life Apart*. Carlton; Melbourne University Press. See also, Nanni, G., 2012, *The Colonisation of Time: Ritual, Routine and Resistance in the British Empire*. Manchester; Manchester University Press.

<sup>49</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 282 – 288, also A7066 CY551, pp. 105 – 109.

Another intriguing omission is the reference to people having ‘dominion’ over the creatures (Genesis 1:26). Like the lack of construction of time, and the spatial context, the absence, perhaps avoidance, of reference to the human relational context in the created world might have aided the beginnings of the conversation, but the contrast at the core of these worldviews could not be avoided for long. The appearance of the word ‘dominion’ in the earliest surviving writing tests of Aboriginal children suggest the concept was part of conversations at least from 1835 onwards when Robinson became Commandant.<sup>50</sup>

The translation of Genesis occurred sometime between June 1833, when Wilkinson arrived, and September when he wrote to Arthur. While there are no documents naming the participants we can surmise their identities to some extent based on the language used and which speakers were at Wybalenna at that time.

Van Toorn believes:

The most likely explanation for his [Wilkinson’s] choice [of the Ben Lomond language] was the presence of a Ben Lomond boy, Walter George Arthur.<sup>51</sup>

Born in 1819 or 1820, Walter had been taken from his family at a young age and taught to read and write at the Orphan School in Hobart. Van Toorn suggests that in 1833 he appears to have been the only Aboriginal resident at Wybalenna who was literate in alphabetic script and familiar with both English and the Ben Lomond language.<sup>52</sup>

However, if the Hobart Orphan School Register is reliable, Walter George Arthur was not at Wybalenna at all during Wilkinson’s time as catechist.

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<sup>50</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 55.

<sup>51</sup> Van Toorn, P., 2002, ‘Before the Second Reformation: Nineteenth Aboriginal Mediations of the Bible in Van Diemens Land’, *Semeia*, 88, p. 48.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

According to the Register, Walter, known as Friday, was admitted to the School on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1832 and remained there until 26<sup>th</sup> May 1835.<sup>53</sup> It is possible that he had several separate stays at the School but this seems unlikely. The Aboriginal girl, Mathinna had separate entries for her separate sojourns at the School, but there is only one entry for Walter. It seems unlikely that Walter was not at the Orphan School during the translation experience at Wybalenna. As noted in the previous chapter, there are instances, however, where the dates in the Orphan School Register do not synchronise with other sources, such as Robinson's journal, or catechist reports from Flinders Island.<sup>54</sup>

Walter is an obvious candidate for participation in the translation exercise, because of his later participation in writing the *Flinders Island Chronicle* with Thomas Bruny and his later sermon and letter writing. He would have been 10 or 11 years of age at the time and, as will be seen in the catechism classes, children of this age could be sufficiently competent in their English to teach adults. As noted, Wilkinson was the first catechist at Wybalenna and only arrived half way through 1833. It is possible that Walter was fluent in English before going to the Orphan School, and it is possible that Walter was at Wybalenna and participated in the translation, despite the Register records. However, for this to be the case he would have had to have been removed from Wybalenna sometime after the translation (September 1833) but before Robinson became Commandant (October

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<sup>53</sup> Orphan School Register, TAHO SWD, 28.

<sup>54</sup> One example is that of Thomas Thompson who is entered in the Orphan School Register as arriving on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1836 (4 year old, parents unknown, half caste) and leaving 26 August 1847, Purtscher, 1993, *Children*, unpaginated. However Robert Clark's report of examinations on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1837 (exactly one year after Thomas' arrival at the Orphan School) has extensive questioning of Thomas Thompson where he is described as 'about 11 years of age and well conducted, being instructed in the trade of a carpenter. He is a teacher in the school', ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 288 – 291, but note the age difference between Orphan School Register (4 years old in 1836) and Catechetical Examination (11 years old in 1837). It seems more likely that Thomas was at Wybalenna doing catechetical examinations rather than at the Orphan School.

1835) because Walter, along with seven other children, are named as travelling with Robinson from the Orphan School to Wybalenna in October 1835.<sup>55</sup>

It is more likely that others from the ‘Ben Lomond’ clan were involved in the translation. One can only ponder at why those involved in the translation did not talk about doing more translation later on when Walter was writing the *Flinders Island Chronicle*, sermons and letters. The ‘English-only’ policy of Robinson is the most likely explanation. It is possible that Walter no longer had any of his first language by the time he left the Orphan School, but this seems unlikely since he entered the school at about ten years of age, spent a possible maximum of two and a half years there and had at least six adults at Wybalenna, including his parents, who continued speaking his first language when he returned in October 1835.

Identifying other ‘Ben Lomond’ people at Wybalenna in 1833 who might have been involved is somewhat problematic because of reliance on Robinson’s sometimes confusing records and Plomley linking multiple names. Nevertheless, some of those who might have been involved in the translation include Rolepa<sup>56</sup> and his wife Luggernemennener<sup>57</sup> who were leaders of the ‘Ben Lomond’ clan and about the same age as Wilkinson. Robinson believed these two were in fact the parents of Walter, and that he was their eldest son.<sup>58</sup>

Luggernemennener is mentioned several times in Robinson’s journal, including taking people to John Batman’s in November 1830 to avoid the ‘Black

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<sup>55</sup> Plomley, 1987, Annotation 14 Sept 1835, pp. 619 – 620.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 824.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 806.

<sup>58</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 278 – 282. See also Plomley, 1987, pp. 851, 843, 824. Their other son, Rolepana, was living with John Batman at Ben Lomond at the time with a boy from a neighbouring clan. Rolepa is listed as his father and Luggernemennener as his possible mother, Plomley, 1987, pp. 824, 910, note 4.

Line'<sup>59</sup> and the previously mentioned visit to church and Robinson's house in Hobart.<sup>60</sup> In this she appears comfortable conversing with Robinson and Batman and so would have been a competent participant in the conversation and translation with Wilkinson.

Another possibility is the brother of Luggernemennener, Trowlebunner / Achilles<sup>61</sup> and his wife Toogernuppertootenner / Maria II<sup>62</sup> who both travelled with Robinson in the north-east.<sup>63</sup> Neither is recorded with Robinson on the west coast during 1833 when Wilkinson was translating Genesis at Wybalenna. Another person, Tarenootairrer / Sarah, also travelled with Robinson in the north-east.<sup>64</sup> She also was not with Robinson in 1833 so is likely to have been at Wybalenna and could also have been involved in the translation.<sup>65</sup> A further possible participant is Margaret who is listed in Robinson's 1832 census of the Aboriginal people at Wybalenna, but her clan identity is unclear.<sup>66</sup> Several other people are identified with the 'Ben Lomond' clan in the list of those attending the school in February 1836<sup>67</sup> and later catechism examinations<sup>68</sup> but it is not clear if they were at Wybalenna when the translation conversations were occurring throughout June to September 1833.

Wilkinson's letter to Governor Arthur suggests more than one Ben Lomond person was involved. He wrote,

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<sup>59</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 276.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 830.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 863.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 364, 391.

<sup>65</sup> She is also listed as 'being with child by Rew', (Ibid., p. 873), and as the mother of Fanny Cochrane, (Ibid., Appendix 2:D, p. 946). Fanny's later involvement with the church will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 873.

<sup>67</sup> School list February 1836: Christopher, Philip, ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, pp. 145 – 146 and A7062 CY549, p. 337.

<sup>68</sup> Catechism list May 1837: Christopher, Philip and Maria, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 272, 274, 297.

... I am certain *they* understand what I read to *them* and show at times a considerable interest in what *they* hear ...[my emphasis]<sup>69</sup>

Several of those mentioned above could have been involved, and/or others.

It seems conclusive at least that Walter Arthur was not involved, and likely that two or more 'Ben Lomond' adults were.

Each of these people mentioned above had extensive involvement with either Robinson or other colonists such as John Batman. They demonstrated a growing familiarity with the English language and a continuing use of their own first language at Wybalenna. However, there is no evidence of Walter or any of the other 'Ben Lomond' people, or other clans, choosing to write their own translations of their own stories into English, or of translating the Bible or other English books into their own languages. The most obvious explanation is that they were not yet literate people and continued to prefer their customary oral rather than written communications. Van Toorn suggests Governor Arthur's assimilationist agenda was the more likely explanation<sup>70</sup> but it may have been that they did not want to tell their stories in the language of the colonists, particularly when most Aboriginal people did not write in English at all.

A further issue is the intended audience for the written translation. If the 'Ben Lomond' people were not literate, who was? And whom did Wilkinson provide it to? Surviving documents show Wilkinson provided a written excerpt of his work to the Lieutenant Governor and to Backhouse and Walker. Neither of these 'audiences' could read or speak the 'Ben Lomond' language, but both had significant power over Wilkinson's place at Wybalenna, particularly in the context of his conflict with Darling and Maclachlan, the medical officer. His copy to the

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<sup>69</sup> In author's possession.

<sup>70</sup> Van Toorn, P., 2006, *Writing Never Arrives Naked*. Canberra; Aboriginal Studies Press, p. 101.

Governor was probably to demonstrate an example of his work since arriving at the settlement and as evidence of fulfilling his primary role during the flurry of other written correspondence complaining to the Governor about Darling and Maclachlan.

Walker wrote his copy from Wilkinson's notes while visiting Wybalenna between November 1833 and January 1834. He visited the settlement on behalf of the Governor to try to resolve the conflict between Wilkinson, Darling and others. Walker's report would have a significant influence on the Governor's decision about Wilkinson's future.

Another possible audience is the congregation in the Sunday Services at Wybalenna. As mentioned earlier, Scriptures were read during the weekly Sabbath services so it is possible that the translation was read on one or more of these occasions. Given Darling's use of 'Wybalenna' (a Ben Lomond word) and continuing to use Aboriginal people's names in their first language, it is possible the translation could have been read during a Sunday Service. But weighted against this is the depth of conflict between Darling and Wilkinson and to what degree this affected the content and practice of Sunday Services. Walter Arthur is the only 'Ben Lomond' person shown by the records from Wybalenna to be sufficiently literate to be able to read such a document, but he was not at Wybalenna at that time.

When Robinson arrived, there is no indication of any similar translation ever taking place, and he actively discouraged any use of *pidgin* in Sunday services.<sup>71</sup> It is therefore likely that the translation of Genesis remained an oral

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<sup>71</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 304.



experience for the ‘Ben Lomond’ people and it is unknown how they viewed this transformation of their spoken words into the written form.<sup>72</sup>

According to Plomley, Wilkinson’s efforts with Genesis were not appreciated by Governor Arthur, who, in annotating Backhouse and Walker’s report wrote: ‘The perusal of this leads me deeply to regret that a person who can be so useful should have, unfortunately, acted so imprudently’.<sup>73</sup> While Plomley, and following him, Van Toorn,<sup>74</sup> seem to assume that Arthur’s regret was specifically related to the translation of Genesis, I think it is more likely that the large volume of correspondence to Arthur from Darling and Wilkinson complaining about each other and making various accusations about ‘bigotry’, ‘indiscreet language’ and other behaviour<sup>75</sup> is much more likely to be the source of Arthur’s ‘regret’ than the beginnings of the Bible translation. Wilkinson’s translation was sent to the Governor in September 1833. Amidst several letters complaining about Wilkinson, Darling suspended him in October. In response Arthur sent Backhouse and Walker to investigate the situation during November 1833 – January 1834.

In their report (January 1834) Backhouse and Walker refer to:

the expression used by Mr Tho Wilkinson tow<sup>d</sup> the Commandant

in some of his official communications + his indiscreet conduct

relative to the Surgeon...

and

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<sup>72</sup> Hofmeyer, in writing about the story of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, in African contexts, described the interplay of oral and written forms of the story. Oral forms preceded the written thereby creating a ‘proto-audience’ for when the text became available, Hofmeyr, I., 2003, ‘Portable Landscapes’ in Trigger, D., & Griffiths, G., *Disputed Territories*. Hong Kong; Hong Kong University Press, p. 139. While Wilkinson’s translation did not proceed, the existence of the Genesis creation story in pre- or neo-literate form among ‘Ben Lomond’ people and between them and Wilkinson was itself a significant inter-religious dialogue and probably contributed to ongoing involvement of ‘Ben Lomond’ people in catechetical classes and writing.

<sup>73</sup> Plomley, 1976, p. 69.

<sup>74</sup> Van Toorn, 2006, p. 100.

<sup>75</sup> ML Walker Papers, 9 Dec 1833, B727 CY1408, pp. 310-11, see also Johnston, 2004, pp. 23 – 31.

... intimating in his communication to the Govt that after what had passed it was impossible that the Catechist and himself could ever co-operate again.<sup>76</sup>

T. W's chief defect appears to be a want of tact in keeping up an amicable intercourse with his brother officers with all of whom he has had some difference or misunderstanding that has led to the entire estrangement of himself and family from their society.<sup>77</sup>

Arthur's annotation to Wilkinson's September translation is dated 27<sup>th</sup> January 1834, *following* the report by Backhouse and Walker about the prolonged conflict between Commandant, Catechist, Medical Officer and Storekeeper.<sup>78</sup> The 'reconciliation' they mediated was unable to address the underlying conflict and within a few months Arthur removed Wilkinson.<sup>79</sup> The dating of the annotation in January 1834 suggests Arthur's regret is at the conflict, the irreconcilable differences between catechist and other officers, and the sooner than expected dismissal. Arthur's annotation could actually be read as appreciating the usefulness of Wilkinson's translation rather than dismissing it.

The removal of Wilkinson as Catechist in early 1834 was followed by the removal of Darling as Commandant in July.<sup>80</sup> Soon after Darling's departure, Governor Arthur appointed another Catechist from the Church of England, Robert Clark (11<sup>th</sup> July 1834),<sup>81</sup> and Henry Nickolls arrived on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1834 to

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<sup>76</sup> ML Walker Papers, B727 CY1408, p. 299.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

<sup>78</sup> See for example, Johnston, 2004.

<sup>79</sup> It may have occurred in April, Plomley, 1987, p. 70, however the *Daily Journal* records '18<sup>th</sup> February 1834 *Shamrock* returned and got under way for Green Island to carry Mr Wilkinson and family', ML Robinson Papers, A7074 Vol 52, CY825.

<sup>80</sup> Settlement Order, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1834, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 Vol 52, CY825.

<sup>81</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, p. 79, Harris, J., 1990, *One Blood*. Sutherland; Albatross, p. 99.

become the new Commandant, but for only a year.<sup>82</sup> Clark continued the practices of Sunday services and teaching people in his home. He did not resume any translations of biblical text into any of the Aboriginal languages. He did, however, introduce other changes, some of which were at least as controversial with the subsequent Commandant, Robinson. Some of these were played out during Sunday services and it is to this aspect of Aboriginal Christian life that I will now turn.

### **Sunday church services**

Sunday church services were a regular and pivotal part of life at Wybalenna, and in the broader colonial life as noted in previous chapters. During Robinson's travels he continued to perform 'divine service' in the bush.<sup>83</sup> The performance of Christian worship was central to the identity and relationships of colonists, particularly those with political power. Of particular interest are the ways Aboriginal people interacted with and interpreted these religious rituals.

The earliest reference to a Sunday church service seems to be on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1832 when Robinson was visiting the Settlement two days after Darling arrived. Robinson described the occasion:

Today the whole of the aborigines on the establishment (near a hundred in number) attended divine service under a large awning that was erected for the occasion. The whole of the whites also attended, likewise Ensign Darling and Captain Bateman. I read the prayers, at the conclusion of which I read the fifty-third chapter of Isiah[sic] and then concluded with an extempore prayer. It was an interesting

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<sup>82</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 78.

<sup>83</sup> For example, Plomley, 1966, pp. 97, 117, 187, 195, 331.

occasion. The most marked attention was observed. Before the service commenced Tom explained to the natives the nature of the service. All the chiefs with their wives sat by themselves.<sup>84</sup>

The following week Darling ordered that Divine Service be performed, 'every Sunday morning at 11 o'clock when all persons belonging to the Establishment will attend'.<sup>85</sup> This was while the settlement was at 'the Lagoons.' All men were to cease work at noon on Saturday in order to 'wash their clothes and make themselves clean for the following Sunday'.<sup>86</sup> The performance of Christian worship was therefore closely linked with the authority of the Commandant, the cessation of 'work' and washing clothes and bodies in preparation. The cessation of work and requirement of bodily, and clothing, cleanliness was an expression of how the colonists understood 'civilise and Christianise' for their own lives. To Aboriginal eyes, the practice of preparation for performance of ritual and sacred storytelling was familiar, as was a directive given by a clan leader. But what was clearly different here was that whereas Aboriginal people smeared their bodies with grease and ochre in their preparations, the colonists completely washed their bodies and clothes in readiness for their performance of ritual and sacred storytelling.<sup>87</sup> This sharp contrast between 'cleaning' and 'smearing' was quite different to the adoption by Aboriginal people of the colonial practice of special dress for Sunday services.

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<sup>84</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 593.

<sup>85</sup> Settlement Order 9, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1832, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 Vol. 52, CY825, unpaginated.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., Settlement Order 1, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1832. The cleaning of bodies and wearing of 'fine clothes' for Christian services had already been noticed by Aboriginal people and an interpretation that linked it with their practice of applying grease and ochre, Plomley, 1966, p. 594.

<sup>87</sup> The washing of grease and ochre from the bodies of Aboriginal people was later identified as a factor in their ill health at Wybalenna, ML Robinson Papers, A7066 CY551, pp. 201 – 221.

Initially the buildings at Wybalenna were rudimentary. In the earlier outdoor church services Aboriginal people are likely to have sat where and with whom they chose. The lack of architecture at the time suggests they were likely to have been on the ground, perhaps in clan groups.<sup>88</sup> In late 1833 of the entire population of approximately one hundred and fifty people, one hundred and twenty were Aboriginal and approximately thirty colonists. If most Aboriginal people were at the service, they are still likely to have outnumbered the colonists by about three to one. After two years of services performed in the open air, Backhouse and Walker reported in January 1834,

It is highly expedient that a suitable building should be erected on the Settlement as a school room and a Chapel.<sup>89</sup>

The first such building adjoined the catechist's quarters soon after Clark arrived. The cramped space in the chapel was a noted factor in people being absent from services: 'the smallness of the place in which we met and the manner in which the people were wedged together ... would have produced the same effect in any congregation.'<sup>90</sup> It seems there was simply no room to fit them in.

When Robinson arrived in October 1835 he described the room as 'extremely damp, in want of a wooded floor and having no chimney'.<sup>91</sup> By then the chapel had been changed to a room adjoining a 'native hut' which Robinson described as

incommodious and bleak and moreover without a fireplace (warmth being essential to the comfort of the natives), and it was likewise wet

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<sup>88</sup> A little over two years later Robinson describes a meal where they 'sat down on the grass to dine in true aboriginal style'. Plomley, 1987, p. 339.

<sup>89</sup> ML Walker Papers, Report to Arthur, B727 CY1408, p. 322.

<sup>90</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, pp. 315 – 317.

<sup>91</sup> TAHO CSO 1/18798, pp. 84 – 85.

(the rain not only came in at the roof which is in some parts was quite flat or leanto, but run in off the ground and covered the floor).<sup>92</sup>

Following Robinson's survey he immediately made plans for the chapel to take over the adjoining Aboriginal hut. The renovations included a fireplace, windows and an east-facing door sheltered from the westerly winds. It was completed by the beginning of December 1835.<sup>93</sup>

This spatial move from outdoors to damp indoors firstly adjoining the catechist's, then commandant's<sup>94</sup> house and then an Aboriginal family's hut influenced how Aboriginal people interpreted 'Sunday services'. As mentioned above when examining the Bible translation, and as will become apparent when discussing the schools, the Ben Lomond clan seem to have been the largest clan and taken a particular interest in the religious practices of the colonists. It seems the chapel-hut was among those 'upper huts' occupied by 'Ben Lomond' and 'Big River' people.<sup>95</sup> It is worth considering how they, and other clans, may have interpreted the location of the colonist's religious ceremony in what was identifiably one of their buildings. The chapel-hut remained located among Aboriginal huts for almost three more years before the brick chapel was completed in July 1838.<sup>96</sup>

Not every Aboriginal person attended Christian worship at Wybalenna, though the convicts were forced to. There was strong pressure to attend<sup>97</sup> but not everyone did so and there does not seem to be any punishment for not attending. Perhaps

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<sup>92</sup> Plomley, 1987, pp. 313 – 14.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> There is some apparent contradiction between chapel adjoining Catechist's quarters, CSO 1/18798, p. 85; or Commandant's quarters, Ibid., p. 625.

<sup>95</sup> Journal for 21 November and 4 December 1835, Plomley, 1987, p. 625, and the smaller Big River clan, Ibid., p. 495.

<sup>96</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 570. Miller, R. S., 1985, *Thomas Dove and the Tasmanian Aborigines*. Melbourne; Spectrum, p. 41.

<sup>97</sup> Settlement Order 1, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1833, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 Vol. 52, CY825.

those who did attend were making a choice to do so. It is important to consider their experience of ‘worship’ was initially outdoors, among tree limbs, sitting down, probably on the ground, (the rudimentary nature of the houses at the time suggests chairs were unlikely to have been available), and in a public group. It could be regarded as something similar to, though clearly also different from, the Aboriginal clan gatherings with people of various ages,<sup>98</sup> genders, and leaders with particular roles in storytelling and ritual performance, as described in Chapter One.

The service followed the order prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer and therefore was conducted in English and led by those who could read English. Sunday services were led by Wilkinson who within a short time had completed his translation of the ‘principal parts’ of Genesis into ‘Ben Lomond’ language. This is likely to have been incorporated into how Aboriginal people interpreted Wilkinson’s role leading the ceremony. Other officers or visitors, such as Backhouse and Walker, read from the recognisable book (Bible) containing the colonist ‘origin-story’ and other stories. Some Aboriginal adults (most of the children were still at the Orphan School) had seen a form of this service in huts,<sup>99</sup> buildings,<sup>100</sup> and in the open air<sup>101</sup> and so are likely to have been familiar with its religious nature. It seems more likely that Aboriginal people were spectators, rather than participants, at this colonial ‘corroboree’. Many were fluent in English but it seems more conversed with each other in the evolving *pidgin* of Wybalenna. This suggests their first languages and worldviews were their primary frames of reference for interpreting what they witnessed.

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<sup>98</sup> Less than half the children were not at Wybalenna at this time.

<sup>99</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 61.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., pp. 94, 95.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

Therefore they may have interpreted Wilkinson's role as something like one of their own ceremonial leaders, such as 'Ben Lomond' leader, Rolepa, who is likely to have been conversing regularly with Wilkinson during the recent cold season about their respective origin-stories. Backhouse and Walker could be regarded as visiting storytellers from a neighbouring clan. They read several chapters from the New Testament, taking about 15 minutes to read, depending on the passage chosen, and if it were from a Gospel would be a narrative style probably similar to a series of stories told by a clan leader.

It is one among many unanswered questions to wonder at how Aboriginal people might have interpreted 'a reading from the Gospel of St Matthew...' of a story about the person Jesus, but written by an unknown and not present person, Matthew, for example, and being read by Wilkinson, Walker or one of the other colonists present. It is clearly a story from another place, another person's story, but known by the colonists who are now sharing it with the Aboriginal people. This practice of story sharing seems similar to story sharing referred to by Robinson where after Wooraddy told his creation story, Robinson asked the other Aboriginal people present if their creation stories were similar.<sup>102</sup>

Another consideration is how the Aboriginal people interpreted the person of Jesus whom they heard about in the stories and whom the colonists sometimes addressed with the particular posturing in prayer. Was Jesus seen as a spirit ancestor like those from the stars? A returned, but not physically present, ancestor, like the 'white' people? A storyteller – lawgiver from another tribe? While the colonial distinction between Scripture reading and prayer is recognisable to those familiar with church practice, it is worth considering how those Aboriginal people

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<sup>102</sup> Plomley, 1966, pp. 374, 376 – 77.



less familiar might have interpreted this practice of readings addressed to the people and prayers addressed to God, and to consider how they distinguished between stories to other Aboriginal people and those to their spirit beings, if they did so at all.

The later catechist, Clark, kept records of the number of services and number of Aboriginal people attending for the three months of September to December 1836. He reported that Aboriginal people averaged from sixty to eighty both forenoon and afternoon and Tuesday evening attendances varied from thirty to sixty, a cold evening and a late hour of them taking tea being cited as cause for the falling attendance.<sup>103</sup> Robinson's census in January 1836 indicated a population of 108 with 12 children.<sup>104</sup> Only four deaths were recorded that year<sup>105</sup> so the overall Aboriginal population was about 110 or so. This shows that between twenty and forty per cent of Aboriginal people did not attend Sunday services and between forty and seventy per cent did not attend school in those three months. It therefore seems apparent that those who did probably wanted to be there, even though the reasons for their choice may be difficult to know.

It seems, as Robinson reported, Aboriginal people were not forced to attend church in the same way the convicts were. Different clans were regularly away from Wybalenna on hunting trips, visiting other islands, or some other activity, including on Sundays.<sup>106</sup> Robinson wrote, 'If the people should once object to come, it would not be in my power nor would it be right had I the power to compel them against their will. They are free subjects'.<sup>107</sup> People may argue

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<sup>103</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7064 Vol 43. CY550, p. 303.

<sup>104</sup> Plomley, 1987, pp. 878 – 881 and ML Robinson Papers, A7074 Part 6, CY825.

<sup>105</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 941.

<sup>106</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 337. On one trip forty-two Aborigines were away, Correspondence Robinson to Colonial Secretary, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1832, ML CY1470 A7056, p. 99.

<sup>107</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 314.

about what it meant for Aboriginal people at Wybalenna to be ‘free subjects’ but it seems clear that they were not forced to attend church services. Robinson, however, did offer a number of incentives and, it seems, gave preferential treatment to those Aboriginal people who complied with his desire for an English language Christian faith.

The content of the church services express much of the dynamic of Wybalenna. Superficially it appears as a site of colonial imposition. The erection of the seventy-five foot (about twenty metres) flagstaff at the end of December 1835 and the Sunday (Sabbath) day flag raising connected Christian worship with a crucial symbol of colonial identity and authority.<sup>108</sup> But behind these apparent expressions of compliance or a lack of protest, successive commandants, catechists, and visitors such as Walker acknowledged that Aboriginal languages and behavioural differences continued.<sup>109</sup> Like the previously discussed Bible translation, the ‘outer conformity’ of clothing ought not be assumed to indicate ‘inner’ conformity.

During the earlier years services were described as beginning with ‘church prayer’, meaning from the Church of England Book of Common Prayer, and involved ‘hearing Scripture’ read in English by an officer of the settlement, singing hymns in English, an exhortation from an officer of the settlement, before concluding with church prayers.<sup>110</sup> The reference to portions from the Book of Common Prayer do not indicate if the whole service was followed each week or just the prayers, but it is indicative of the regular format practiced by Wilkinson,

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<sup>108</sup> It was also raised when a boat was sighted or in harbour, *Ibid.*, p. 332. Robinson began his travels from Bruny Island hoisting the flag of the Bethel Union Society when conducting church services so it was not new to those who were familiar with him, Plomley, 1966, pp. 96, 97, 117, 182, 187, 191, 335, 339, 352.

<sup>109</sup> ML Walker Papers, B727 CY1408, p. 322.

<sup>110</sup> ML Walker Papers, B727 CY1408, 8 Dec 1833, p. 310.

and by Clark, as instructed by the rural Dean, Rev Palmer.<sup>111</sup> However, Clark also made a number of adaptations, most of which appear to be seeking a way that was more akin to Aboriginal gatherings, and most of which Robinson despised.

When Robinson arrived in October 1835 he was unhappy with what he witnessed and immediately began his long, but ultimately unsuccessful, campaign to change Clark's practices, especially from speaking the 'gibberish so common on the settlement'. Robinson believed the practice 'had a bad tendency by exciting ridicule in the minds of the natives, particularly as it was not the native language.'<sup>112</sup> This criticism was in stark contrast to Robinson's own initial practice at Bruny Island where he sought to learn and preach in the local language.<sup>113</sup>

Clark's practice therefore seems to have been to abide by the rural Dean's instructions to 'read the church prayers'<sup>114</sup> but he also adapted this and sought to address Aboriginal people in the 'language of the settlement', the evolving *pidgin*. He delivered sermons without written notes and in the 'gibberish' as Robinson called it.<sup>115</sup> He changed his style of prayer from the more common kneeling with head bowed and eyes closed to one of opening his eyes and being 'full of gesture'.<sup>116</sup> Robinson's agitation about Clark's prayers was exacerbated whenever Clark failed to include particular reference to Robinson in the prayers.<sup>117</sup> The pettiness of this last criticism is clear in Robinson's report that in praying for the Governor, Clark prayed that God would 'preserve him that is over this colony and

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<sup>111</sup> Plomley, 1987, pp. 316, 625, note 1.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 304.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 316.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., pp. 304, 320.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., pp. 319, 320.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., pp. 430, 436, and others.

settlement; query F I colony?’<sup>118</sup> It seems Robinson was agitated that Clark did not make it explicit that ‘this colony’ was the settlement on Flinders Island, and the ‘Governor’ of that colony was Robinson. It suggests more about Robinson’s pomposity than a noteworthy error by Clark.<sup>119</sup>

Clark’s clothing during services was also a constant irritation, particularly that he did not wear a black gown like a clergyman.<sup>120</sup> In these examples, though, Clark could be seen to be attempting to develop something of a bi-cultural approach to the prayer book and evolving *pidgin*. In the next chapter I will examine the evolving *pidgin* records of several Aboriginal people at the evening schools but it is important to note that Clark seems to be alone among the officers of Wybalenna in speaking sermons sometimes in this evolving *pidgin* or plain English. Needless to say, Robinson was never impressed.<sup>121</sup>

Some examples of Clark’s sermons, as reported by Robinson include:

28 Dec 1835 “my black brothers and sisters”. He spoke about the fall of our first parents, about the Devil jumping up in the heart of Adam and making him eat the apple, but the manner and language used was altogether absurd.<sup>122</sup>

On Tuesday (9 February 1836) last [Clark] said God did not gammon, there was no gammon with God, it was beneath him to gammon.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 501.

<sup>119</sup> Clark referred to the ‘Aborigine Colony on Flinders Island’ in his return of attendances for church services, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1837, ML Robinson Papers, A7066 CY551, p. 69. The ‘Prospectus’ of the *Flinders Island Chronicle*, which Robinson oversaw, described it as a ‘register of events of the colony Moral and religious’, where the ‘colony’ is clearly Wybalenna. ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 1.

<sup>120</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 320.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., pp. 319, 328, 330, 345, 434 and many others.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 345.

9<sup>th</sup> May 1837 Mr Clark gave at this meeting another specimen of what he considers the native language. He told Louisa and Juliet they would CRACK.A.BUGYAR (meaning “dead”) when they would die. Mr Dickenson remembered the catechist saying to his audience on Sunday that Jesus Christ tumbled down from his mother; I also heard the same.<sup>124</sup>

19<sup>th</sup> November 1837 A specimen of the catechist's sermon: he began - CARNE black woman too LUBRE what I say don't be lolling about sit up right there mind what I say to you. I am going to talk about death. You don't like to hear about death. I don't wonder of it. I seen the two woman that died, they were as well as you. Now mind what I say. What for you lost it, what for you having forgotten it?<sup>125</sup>

Like the Aboriginal preachers at the Saturday evening of ‘mutual instruction’, discussed in the next chapter, Clark’s use of the evolving *pidgin* in Sunday services was happening at the same time as the fairly regimented English language catechetical examinations and so Clark, in some ways like Aboriginal people, was performing the regimented catechetical examinations for Robinson and at the same time speaking evolving *pidgin* to Aboriginal people in Sunday Services. His reference to the Aboriginal people as ‘brothers and sisters’ needs to be seen in the context of the wider colonial context where Aboriginal people’s humanity was not only doubted but also often rejected.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 440.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 501.

<sup>126</sup> There were strong ideas of the ‘Great Chain of Being’ and later social Darwinist ideas in the nineteenth century (see Harris, 1990, pp. 25 – 36 for these general views). Even contemporary newspaper articles promulgated such discourse, eg., ‘One great cause that we consider to have hitherto stood in the way of effecting proper relationship between ourselves

Clark's use of spatial language, at least as reported by Robinson, is also noteworthy. Humanity's first parents 'fall', Jesus Christ 'tumbled down' or 'dropped' from his mother and the devil 'jumped up in the heart of Adam'. A number of the Aboriginal clans had creation stories where creator beings first came down from the stars. Woorraddy had told a story of moihernee tumbling down to earth and his wife and children coming down in the rain.<sup>127</sup> Clark's reference to Jesus Christ 'tumbling down' may be his attempt to convey the Christian teaching of the Son of God being from God who is 'up in heaven'. If 'tumbling' was simply a reference to Jesus being born from his mother, it is doubtful it would have elicited a report from Dickenson to Robinson.<sup>128</sup>

The reference to the devil 'jumping up' in the heart of Adam may be an attempt to connect with those Aboriginal beliefs where the devils were in the ground<sup>129</sup> but became more active when they jumped up. This 'jumping up' is also used to describe their expectation that after they die they would 'jump up' into the next. Several Aboriginal people used this same phrase in similar contexts in their addresses in 1838 such as Dowwringgi, let Jesus Christ "jump up" in your

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and our sable neighbours has been, the erroneous conceptions that we have formed of them, and which have led us to regard them as greatly inferior to all others of their race, in what chiefly distinguishes men from brutes' (*Colonial Times*, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1830).

Robinson mentioned these views in his journal: eg., 'I looked upon them as brethren not, as they have been maligned, savages. No, they are my brethren by creation... God has made of one blood all nations of people and I am not ashamed to call them brothers and would to God I could call them brethren by redemption... They have been represented as only a link between the human and brute species, and nothing more false could proceed from the lips of men-they are equal if not superior to ourselves' (Plomley, 1966, p. 276).

See also references in Chapter 1, to some specific examples and sources such as that advocated in the 1970s by Rhys Jones that Tasmanian Aborigines had the simplest tool kit. Others described Aboriginal religious life as rudimentary or atrophied form of cultural expression. See also, Clark, 1988, p. 50.

<sup>127</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 374.

<sup>128</sup> Similar language was used by Drinene during one of his addresses reported in 1838 that in heaven people will be with God and 'you will not fall down from him', ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 42.

<sup>129</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 373.

hearts,<sup>130</sup> and Druemerterpunner that Jesus “jump up and went to heaven” after he died.<sup>131</sup> Clark’s description of “God did not gammon” is that God does not deceive or lie.<sup>132</sup> Exhorting people to not tell lies is a regular theme in the school addresses by Aboriginal speakers such as Noemy,<sup>133</sup> Drinene,<sup>134</sup> Druemerterpunner,<sup>135</sup> and Dowwringgi.<sup>136</sup>

### **Aboriginal contributors to Sunday services**

The participation of Aboriginal people in the Sunday services was very limited. Aside from congregational singing, few Aboriginal people shared in the leadership of services. Walter Arthur and Thomas Bruny were involved most often.<sup>137</sup> Clark reported

the clerk who assists me at the Divine service is the Native youth formerly called Friday now Walter he is the son of a Chieftain he reads the responses very well has a knowledge of the scriptural history and is a well conducted lad.<sup>138</sup>

In February 1837 Robinson appointed Walter and Thomas to read prayers at the school and Walter to lead the congregational singing and receive 1/- weekly. An older man, Makeaduru was elected verger and received 1/- each week.<sup>139</sup> The role of verger is usually associated with Christian worship but in this instance seems to be limited to the Saturday school. The payments may have been a ‘reward’ given

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<sup>130</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 49.

<sup>131</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 50 – 51.

<sup>132</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 200.

<sup>133</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044, CY548, pp. 38, 43 – 44.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., pp. 40, 44 – 45.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., pp. 45 – 46.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>137</sup> The Orphan School Register records Thomas Brune being discharged on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1836, Purtscher, *Children*, 1993, unpaginated.

<sup>138</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7064 Vol. 43, CY550, p. 9.

<sup>139</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 421.

out by Robinson to encourage attendance, particularly when twenty to forty per cent of Aboriginal people were not attending services.<sup>140</sup>

Later that year, 15<sup>th</sup> Oct 1837, one of Thomas' papers was read at the morning and evening services.<sup>141</sup> These papers are editions of the *Flinders Island Chronicle* and other writings by Thomas and Walter Arthur. What is unusual about this is it is the only reference to one of their papers being read during a *Sunday* service. The other four occasions, all during 1837, all occurred at school, three at a Saturday school<sup>142</sup> and one at a Wednesday school.<sup>143</sup> It is unclear if Thomas read his own papers. At the service a fortnight later Robinson was quite critical of Thomas' reading, probably from the Book of Common Prayer, describing it as 'very bad'. Not surprisingly he held Clark responsible.<sup>144</sup> As noted previously, there were varied interpretations by Aboriginal people of what they experienced. The cessation of 'work' such as catching fish, collecting firewood or bathing was mentioned earlier.<sup>145</sup> Toward the end of 1836 a group informed Robinson

that they did not hunt on God's day that they were singing hymns  
and repeating the Lord's Prayer.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Though Commandant, Catechist and surgeon were all being paid for their services. Noticeably, it seems to be in 'real' rather than the 'settlement' money used in the markets. This money was placed in the 'Aboriginal Fund' to the credit of each person and could be drawn from for market purchases, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 Vol. 23, CY548, p. 63.

<sup>141</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 487.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., pp. 484, 491, 493.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 489.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 493.

<sup>145</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, pp. 165 – 67.

<sup>146</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7064 Vol 43, CY550, pp. 301 – 302. Other references to Aboriginal people singing hymns, 7 December 1836, 22 February 1837 and 24 June 1837 (note 1), Note 1, Plomley, 1987, 20<sup>th</sup> February 1837. In October 1836 during Robinson's visit to Hobart, Mr Logan set an Aboriginal song to music, Plomley, 1987, pp. 391 and 657.



One Sunday in May 1837 Clark reported ten to twelve people in one of the native huts singing hymns and receiving catechetical instruction from Warwe.<sup>147</sup>

A few months later Clark reported a

party who had been out hunting informed me that on the Sabbath day they observed the settlement flag which is hoisted every Sunday and that they would not hunt but continued in their huts singing and praying and talking of God.<sup>148</sup>

Woorraddy returned from a separate trip a few weeks later and reported that while out in the bush Albert

sung Sunday corroboree and read book and prayed to God at night but the sealing women used red ochre and grease and danced their native song and did not mind those things, Saturday 30 September 1837.<sup>149</sup>

These are further examples of ways Aboriginal people not only varied from each other in their responses to Christian faith but were also interpreting it from within their own world, noting the parallel between Sunday corroboree, book and prayer and the red ochre, grease and dancing and singing native songs. This seems to be reciprocated in Clark's attempts to use *pidgin* and adapting his own practices in Sunday services.

But not everyone was actively engaged in these interpretations. Robinson reported soon after his arrival that the Aboriginal people seem disinterested in what happened during the services, describing them as 'listless, drowsy, careless and indifferent, and indulging in somnolency'.<sup>150</sup> While this is also part of his

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<sup>147</sup> Albert, ML Robinson Papers, A7066 CY551, pp. 95 – 96.

<sup>148</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 709 and ML Robinson Papers, A7066 CY551, pp. 247 – 248.

<sup>149</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 480.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., pp. 313, 314, 447, 643, note 1(c).

ongoing criticism of Clark and was used as some of the rationale for introducing the schools in early 1836, there is probably some truth to these observations, at least on some occasions. While noting Robinson's criticisms of Clark, it ought to also be noted that Robinson only ever described his own audiences as 'attentive' and his sermons being well received even though he preached exclusively in English, some being sixty pages long and taking more than two hours to deliver.<sup>151</sup> Clark himself reported,

there are still a large number who do not appear to have their attention awakened, sometimes they appear to be alive to the statements made to them at other times they remain in a listless state in the same manner in which many congregations in civilized society appear at different periods.<sup>152</sup>

Clark noted his own fluctuating engagement,  
My mind rises and falls with that undulating interest but which frequently terminates with disappointment when on the following Monday I make enquiry relative to what they heard on the previous day.<sup>153</sup>

Clark interpreted the apparent listlessness as being similar to many colonist attendees at church. It is important to note the contrasting behaviour recorded by Robinson and others when Aboriginal people were listening to each other. Aboriginal conversations may have been a more interactive style with story-telling and the acrobatic dances rather than just sitting still.

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<sup>151</sup> Plomley, 1987, pp. 331, 337, 433 and ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, pp. 7 – 24.

He also gave a lecture on 'pneumatics' that would take almost three hours to present

<sup>152</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7064 Vol. 43, CY550, pp. 9 – 10.

<sup>153</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7066 CY551, pp. 165 – 168.

## **Children at church services**

One final point to note in regard to the Sunday church services is the regular separation of Aboriginal children from the adults. I mentioned earlier the removal of Aboriginal children to the Orphan School from 1832 to 1834 with most returning by October 1835. The reports by the Catechist, Robert Clark, for Sunday services in 1837 indicate that for most of that year seven to ten Aboriginal children regularly attended the convicts' church services, mostly the service at 4pm.<sup>154</sup> This period includes the first four months of 1837 when the children had been sleeping 'at the native houses'<sup>155</sup> as well as subsequently when they were living in the Catechist's hut, so their sleeping arrangements are not sufficient explanation. Robinson's strong abhorrence at liaisons between convicts and Aboriginal people makes this Sunday practice all the more noteworthy even if there is no obvious explanation. It may have been simply for reasons of space, given the crowded chapel during the other services, which usually had more than twice the number of people. In the next chapter I will provide more detailed examination of the school classes occurring at this time, but suffice to say at this point that children and adults were involved together in those classes. It suggests the separation in the Sunday services, where they were less involved and more like spectators, to be for reasons of space than pedagogy.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter it has become clearer that Aboriginal people were exposed to various Christian faith expressions at Wybalenna. The formal gatherings for

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<sup>154</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7065 CY550, p. 83. A7066, CY551, pp. 3, 17, 33, 71, 81, 97, 125, 155, 167, 179, 209, 223, 275, 351.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., pp. 65 – 67.

Sunday church services commenced with the arrival of the first Commandant, Darling. They were conducted in the open air, and according to the Book of Common Prayer. The arrival of the first Catechist, Thomas Wilkinson, led to conversations and attempts to translate a biblical creation story into a written form of the 'Ben Lomond' language. Those involved are likely to have included Rolepa and Luggernemennener, the parents of Walter Arthur, as well as other adult clan members. These conversations and translations were interrupted by the escalating conflict between Wilkinson, Darling and the Medical Officer, Maclachlan, but they provide evidence of the inter-religious dialogue occurring between some Aboriginal people and Wilkinson.

The changing location of church services from open air to indoors is likely to have affected the ways Aboriginal people participated in and interpreted the religious practices. The first built chapel was a hut adjoining the catechist's house. It was later moved to a hut among the 'Ben Lomond' people, the largest clan at the settlement. Their involvement in the Bible translation and the location of chapel among their huts probably affected inter-clan relationships.

Most Aboriginal people at Wybalenna did not attend church services and were not forced to. Those who did attend heard addresses in pidgin from the catechist, Clark, who delivered them in an animated fashion akin to Aboriginal people's own story-telling style. This style put Clark at odds with the Commandant Robinson but is an example of the diverse presentations of the Christian faith to Aboriginal people. The incorporation of Aboriginal and pidgin words by Clark was an example of his attempts in different contexts to communicate in Aboriginal people's language but church services remained virtually an English-only experience. The few leading roles in church services

exercised by Aboriginal people were occasional readings by the younger men, Walter and Thomas, or chapel preparations by one older man, Makeaduru. The conversations beyond these weekly services were considerably more flexible and dynamic particularly in the evening schools of 'mutual instruction'. It is those aspects of life at Wybalenna that will now receive attention.

## Chapter 4: ‘Cracks in the Catechism’

The previous chapter examined the context of the early years at the Wybalenna Settlement on Flinders Island, and in particular the translation of some biblical text into the ‘Ben Lomond’ language, and some of the experiences of Sunday services from 1832 to early 1839. This chapter examines the various Schools, forms of writing such as the *Flinders Island Chronicle* and catechetical examinations, and various forms of Christian addresses in first languages, in the evolving *pidgin* of the settlement, and in English in oral and written forms.

These various expressions demonstrate that Aboriginal people continued to interpret Christian faith from multiple and diverse perspectives. The various languages used show that they did this from their pre-existing word-views that continued to evolve and adapt to new contexts and concepts. Through examining the surviving reports it will become evident that rather than acquiescing to ‘the colonising society’s monopoly over the power of biblical knowledge’,<sup>1</sup> Aboriginal people actively interpreted the Christian faith for themselves.

### Schools

The emphasis on English language in church services and catechetical examinations constrained the expression and recording of Aboriginal interpretations, however, the schools provided some opportunity, albeit limited, for first language and *pidgin* addresses. These school addresses were occasionally recorded in the documents that survive of Commandant Robinson and Catechist Clark. These documents are one part of one aspect of the Wybalenna context but

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<sup>1</sup> Van Toorn, P., 2006, *Writing Never Arrives Naked*, Canberra; Aboriginal Studies Press, p. 101.

they give insight into ways that some Aboriginal people were interpreting and incorporating Christian faith into their lives.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a school of sorts had begun at Wybalenna in 1833 with the arrival of the first catechist, Thomas Wilkinson. A more formal arrangement developed in 1835 as the second catechist, Robert Clark, taught colonial and Aboriginal children together.<sup>2</sup> Following enquiries from various Aboriginal adults, particularly from the ‘Ben Lomond’ clan, Clark began regular classes instructing people in the English alphabet.<sup>3</sup> Following the arrival of Robinson as Commandant in October 1835, a series of schools began in 1836 with Sabbath day and Weekday evening schools. Clark began a catechetical lecture for Aboriginal people on Tuesday evenings (and one for the convicts on Thursdays) and a prayer meeting for the Aboriginal people on Saturdays.<sup>4</sup> There were also Sunday services in the forenoon and evening,<sup>5</sup> and a Sunday school.<sup>6</sup> From time to time instruction was given almost every day of the week.<sup>7</sup> While it is tempting to assume that in the context of Wybalenna and these services and schools that Aboriginal people simply adopted what they were told and parroted back pre-formatted catechetical answers without any reflection or critique, the records tell a different story.

## **Schools and Catechisms**

Wilkinson’s school began soon after his arrival in June 1833. It was located in his house or in that of one of the Aboriginal people,<sup>8</sup> and was more a mutual

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<sup>2</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, pp. 165 – 67.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Plomley, N. J. B., 1987, *Weep In Silence*. Hobart; Blubber Head Press, p. 684.

<sup>5</sup> Eg., ML Robinson Papers, A7065 CY550, p. 83.

<sup>6</sup> Eg., ML Robinson Papers, A7066 CY551, p. 265.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 79 – 80, 125 – 126, 137.

<sup>8</sup> ML Walker Papers, B727 CY1408, p. 322.

conversation than a formal method of instruction. It appears to have involved several 'Ben Lomond' people teaching Wilkinson their language, though some of them already knew English, and led to translating some biblical text into 'Ben Lomond' language. As already noted, only a few Aboriginal children were at Wybalenna until the middle of 1834 so the 'school' initially involved adult Aboriginal people conversing with adult catechist and commandant. In their report in January 1834, Backhouse and Walker recommended 'that a suitable building should be erected as a school room and a Chapel',<sup>9</sup> indicating the close association between the performance of Christian worship and school education. Governor Arthur's role in determining the purpose of instructing Aboriginal people is set out in a letter to Commandant Nickolls on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1834. The

most likely method of bringing the natives to habits of civilisation and industry will be by gradually withdrawing them from their former customs in doing so however much caution and circumspection is evidently necessary...<sup>10</sup>

Wilkinson's omission of substantial portions of Genesis 1 in his translation, and the mutual language learning in his home, and also initially by Clark, could be seen as examples of this 'caution and circumspection'. As mentioned, when Clark's school class began Aboriginal and colonial children were together.<sup>11</sup> In later classes children and adults participated together. It seems that at Wybalenna there was not an explicit or exclusive focus on Aboriginal children<sup>12</sup> as developed in later 'missions' and reserves around Australia.

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<sup>9</sup> ML Walker Papers, B727 CY1408, p. 322.

<sup>10</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, pp. 119 – 126.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 165 – 67.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



Whether or not it was ‘caution and circumspection’ or some other factor, a significant school development occurred in early May 1835. Clark wrote to Archdeacon Bedford:

Last week one of the tribes waited on me to request I would instruct them about 26 men and the next day the remainder of the men of the other tribes did the same. I immediately commenced their education on the plan of Bell and Lancaster so far as I could carry their method in effect so far as I could having no school room the people came regularly to my own house and my room being invaded.

At nine o’clock the first division comes in regular here from their huts to my house and takes their places. I have pipes and tobacco prepared for them, which they smoke. Over the fire places or on the slates I have made the letters which they have to learn ...when all have completed this task they hand me the slate to examine and tell me the name of the letters they have made. At 12 they leave me and the white children and black children come to school they leave at 2 o’clock and then the Ben Lomond attend me and are instructed in the same manner as above.’<sup>13</sup>

It appears Clark began teaching Aboriginal adults on the invitation from one unnamed clan. This clan’s identity can probably be surmised from the only clan Clark names as having a class for itself, the ‘Ben Lomond’. Given the involvement of this clan in close conversation with Wilkinson two years earlier, it is not surprising they took up the conversation with his successor, Clark. It also

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<sup>13</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, p. 168.

suggests some conversation among the clans between the initial invitation and the other clans' request the following day. While there was the initial use of pictures and plates,<sup>14</sup> once the classes began in Clark's home the focus turned to learning letters on slates. One can only speculate at the potential associations the men made between Christian faith, learning letters and pipe smoking, with the latter perhaps contributing to the lung inflammations suffered by so many in subsequent years.<sup>15</sup>

Like the Sunday services, instruction was interrupted when people were 'out hunting' or by ongoing 'hostile feeling' between clans.<sup>16</sup> This conflict seems to have arisen from previous disagreements prior to being at Wybalenna. The impetus for going into the bush could have been seeking some separation from one another, as well as opportunity to continue ceremonial singing and storytelling. Another interruption was the occasional outbreak of disease, such as 'affliction of the eyes'.<sup>17</sup> It indicates at this time some degree of 'caution and circumspection' on the part of catechist adjusting to the comings and goings of the clans and that Christian instruction occurred when people requested it.

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<sup>14</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, p. 168.

<sup>15</sup> Regarding trade in tobacco, see Birmingham J., and Wilson, A., 2010, 'Archaeologies of Cultural Interaction Wybalenna Settlement and Killalpaninna Mission', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 14, p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 Part 6, CY825, unpaginated. This continuation of hunting for substantial periods of time seems partly explained by the Aboriginal people's general dislike of the rationed 'salt meat'. Major Ryan reported in March, July and August 1836 that the Aboriginal people did not like it and therefore sought fresh meat in the bush, ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, pp. 213 – 257. Years later, at Oyster Cove, Aboriginal people spent considerable time in the bush getting fresh meat when the rations from Hobart were spoiled or of inferior quality, *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, 28<sup>th</sup> March, & 27<sup>th</sup> April 1857, J. Kirwan Visiting Magistrate, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, pp. 19, 21.

<sup>17</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, p. 88.

## Schools – Robinson’s intentions and Aboriginal responses

The arrival of Robinson as Commandant in October 1835 marked the beginning of several new school practices as part of his, and Governor Arthur’s, larger scheme to ‘civilise and Christianise’ the Aboriginal people. During February 1836 Robinson introduced the Sabbath School and a School Committee,<sup>18</sup> appointed various teachers, Aboriginal and colonial,<sup>19</sup> and renamed virtually every Aboriginal person.<sup>20</sup>

In September 1836 Robinson introduced and supervised the first edition of the journal, *‘The Aboriginal or Flinders Island Chronicle’*.<sup>21</sup> He also instituted the weekly market and related ‘Aboriginal Fund’.<sup>22</sup> Throughout his years as Commandant, Robinson oversaw building work, such as the brick ‘terrace’ houses, the separate brick chapel and some road construction. He sought to regulate relationships among Aboriginal people in the form of ‘marriages’, and actively sought to abolish Aboriginal gatherings, such as ‘corroborees’,<sup>23</sup> trade in ochre,<sup>24</sup> and ‘hunting trips’.<sup>25</sup> Collectively, these activities form a picture of Robinson’s desire that Wybalenna become a ‘model English village’<sup>26</sup> in its housing, food growing, trade, newspaper and central focus on an evangelical Christian life.

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<sup>18</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7064 Vol. 43, CY550, p. 295.

<sup>19</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 343.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 337, 344. This re-naming was discussed in Chapter One.

<sup>21</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 Vol. 23, CY548, p. 63.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., also Plomley, 1987, pp. 346, 468.

<sup>24</sup> Plomley, 1987, pp. 312, 437, 468, 643.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 333, 334, 336, 377, etc.

<sup>26</sup> Robinson outlined these ideas when he first went to Bruny Island, Plomley, N. J. B., 1966, *Friendly Mission*. Kingsgrove; Halstead Press, p. 56. However, they were only partially fulfilled at Wybalenna. Some later Christian missions developed a more thorough reconstructed landscape than happened at Wybalenna. See, for example, Attwood, B., 1989, *The Making of the Aborigines*. Sydney; Allen & Unwin, p. 7. See also, Birmingham, J., and Wilson, A., 2010, pp. 15 – 38.

While this was the picture Robinson created in his journal and reports, the experiences at Wybalenna suggest a more complex situation. While Robinson's papers and reports are voluminous, he was not necessarily the primary person to whom Aboriginal people related at Wybalenna. His descriptions indicate the role and affect he thought he had, but they do not adequately describe any of the one hundred and fifty other points of view at Wybalenna.

Soon after his arrival Robinson required a report from Clark on attendances at the boy's school.<sup>27</sup> The day after Clark made his report the school was removed from the house adjoining the Commandant's to an 'upper house' on the settlement.<sup>28</sup> At this time the Aboriginal houses at Wybalenna were separated into two main groups, with the 'lower' occupied by west coast people and the 'upper' comprising Ben Lomond, Big River and other clans. It is likely that with most of the school participants coming from the Ben Lomond clan that the school-house / chapel was among their houses.<sup>29</sup> It is unclear how this location influenced Aboriginal interpretations of the school and church services but it is important to note that this location lasted for several years, at least until July 1838, and the Christian teaching and services, while no longer in the open air, were in an identifiable 'Aboriginal' place and not that of a model English village. Clark also gave instruction at several native cottages.<sup>30</sup>

As well as moving the school Robinson expressed increasing frustration at the perceived incompetence of Clark.<sup>31</sup> However when the officers, Commandant,

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<sup>27</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7062, pp. 291 – 94.

<sup>28</sup> Journal for 21 November and 6 December 1835, Plomley, 1987, p. 625.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 495. The brick chapel that still stands today was not completed until July 1838.

<sup>30</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7066 CY551, p. 126. See Birmingham, J., 1976, 'The Archaeological Contribution to Nineteenth-Century History: Some Australian Case Studies', *World Archaeology*, 7 (3), pp. 311 – 315; and Birmingham, 2010, for archaeological evidence of continuing cultural practices and incorporation of elements of 'British' in the cottages constructed at Wybalenna in 1837 – 1838.

<sup>31</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 316.

Catechist, Surgeon and Storekeeper, instituted the Sunday School for Aboriginal people in February 1836, Clark was appointed superintendent.<sup>32</sup> They gave it the rather grandiose title ‘The Flinders Island Sunday and Evening School for the Instruction of the Aboriginal people’<sup>33</sup> and the usual optimistic beginnings were reported.<sup>34</sup>

The teachers were a mix of colonists, as well as five Aboriginal youths comprising three males, Walter Arthur, and the brothers Droierloine and Maiki, and two females, Mary Ann and Pengernoburric / Bessy Clark.<sup>35</sup> Robinson described it as ‘a new era at Flinders’. Walter was about sixteen, the son of Rolepa<sup>36</sup> and his wife Luggernemennener<sup>37</sup> who were likely to have been involved in the Bible translation with Wilkinson. Droierloine<sup>38</sup> and Maiki<sup>39</sup> were sons of Wooraddy who assisted Robinson on the ‘friendly mission’.<sup>40</sup> Mary Ann was eighteen, and Pengernoburric, aged twelve, was the daughter of Tingernoop from Port Davey.<sup>41</sup> Another boy, Timemeniddic was appointed a ‘monitor’, or assistant. His parents were from Sandy Cape – Macquarie Harbour<sup>42</sup> and Port Davey.<sup>43</sup> This highlights one of the early features of the school: Aboriginal youths were teaching adults. While these youths were more competent in writing in English than

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<sup>32</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 342.

<sup>33</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, pp. 131 – 141. Plomley, 1987, pp. 343 – 44.

<sup>34</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, pp. 131 – 141.

<sup>35</sup> While Thomas Bruny became a teacher later on, when the school began he was still at the Hobart Orphan School. Although the Orphan School Register records Thomas being discharged on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1836, Robinson records having to get an order from the Colonial Secretary to get him on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1836, Plomley, 1987, p. 355. It is more likely that Thomas arrived at Wybalenna in early June 1836 and became a teacher soon after because a sample of writing at Wybalenna that bears Thomas’ name is dated 24<sup>th</sup> June 1836, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 Vol. 52, Part 6, unpaginated.

<sup>36</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 824.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 806.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 840.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 839.

<sup>40</sup> Plomley, N. J. B., 1966, *Weep in Silence*, Kingsgrove, Halstead Press, pp. 241, 478, 586, 701, 819.

<sup>41</sup> Plomley, 1987, pp. 818, 853.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 804.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 797.

virtually all the adults, it no doubt affected the cultural and religious context of their existing family and clan relationships.<sup>44</sup>

Droierloine's and Maiki's father, Woorraddy, was a clan leader, had travelled extensively with Robinson and conversed with him many times so he may have had a role in his sons becoming teachers. Until Robinson met Mannalargenna, Woorraddy had been his primary source for stories, particularly the Nuenone, such as the creation story discussed in Chapter One. Similarly, Walter's parents were also clan leaders, both with previous experience with Robinson and the previous Catechist, Wilkinson. In the classes Mary Ann was teaching her mother, as was Pengernoburric.<sup>45</sup> At least four of these five Aboriginal youths were children of clan leaders. It is possible their parents actually put them forward as part of continuing their own leadership roles. It seems reasonable to suggest that these leaders saw the emerging new context requiring them to engage with the colonists in their English language and perhaps wanted their children to have a leading role.

### **School – Bell and Lancaster**

There appear to be no surviving records of Wilkinson's method of instruction other than Walker's report. The arrival of Clark in July 1834 introduced his educational preferences. Just twenty years earlier educational theory and methodology had been hotly contested in England as the methodology of Dr Andrew Bell's 'Madras' system and soon after the 'Lancaster' system came to prominence. This was essentially a method of 'mutual instruction' where pupils taught fellow pupils. In England rival organisations such as the 'National Society

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<sup>44</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 346.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

for promoting the education of the Poor in the principles of the Established Church' (1811) and the Lancasterian alternative 'the British and Foreign School Society', (1814) became established.<sup>46</sup>

Robinson had identified 'Dr. Bell's system' when outlining his initial plans for the Bruny Island establishment in April 1829.<sup>47</sup> Likewise Clark when writing from Wybalenna to Archdeacon Bedford in May 1836 said 'I immediately commenced their education on the plan of Bell and Lancaster so far as I could carry their method in effect...'.<sup>48</sup> Like other aspects of settlement life, this method had its local variations. Of particular interest is this method's contribution to changing relationships between Aboriginal people and between Aboriginal and colonial people. The emphasis on mutual instruction seems to have enhanced the role of Aboriginal teachers, such as Walter Arthur who opened the school with prayer and is named as particularly crucial to a number of other Aboriginal people wanting to learn.<sup>49</sup> This growing knowledge and familiarity with colonial religious language, the 'God book' and 'Sunday ceremony' could have enhanced, rather than diminished, Walter's intra-clan role and that of the 'Ben Lomond' clan among others at Wybalenna.

## **Wybalenna Catechism**

It appears that the primary tool of instruction was the catechism. While the earliest surviving reports of catechetical examinations are from May 1837, there are references to the catechism in 1836 when Robinson conducted an examination on

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<sup>46</sup> Ward & Trent (et al), 2000, *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, New York; G. P., Putnam's Sons, 1907 – 21, <http://www.bartleby.com/224/1417.html>, accessed 2/3/2012.

<sup>47</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 56.

<sup>48</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, p. 168.

<sup>49</sup> Plomley, 1987, pp. 858 – 59, ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, pp. 131 – 141.

the 23<sup>rd</sup> August.<sup>50</sup> At the end of the year he wrote that he believed Clark was diverting from the ‘assembly’s catechism’ regarding the body of a divine person atoning for sin.<sup>51</sup> This reference to the ‘assembly’s catechism’ identifies it as the Longer and Shorter Catechisms of the Westminster Assembly. The Assembly was a group established by the parliament in London (House of Commons and House of Lords) in 1643 ‘to advise as to a further and more perfect reformation in the Liturgy, Discipline, and Government of the Church of England’ and beyond this church to the ‘Churches of Christ in the three kingdoms’ (England, Scotland and Ireland).<sup>52</sup> The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly became the primary tool for Christian instruction in the Church of England and other English reformed churches. Like the Bell and Lancaster method of teaching, the catechism was one of a number of common colonial practices in use throughout the Anglican and English speaking reformed churches introduced to Aboriginal people at Wybalenna.

While today’s readers may feel offended, even violated, by the preformatted answers and rote style, the Commandant and Catechist were working within a colonial context where the very humanity of Aboriginal people was not only challenged but also often strongly denied.<sup>53</sup> Their methods and content were part of their response in that they believed Aboriginal children and adults were as capable of learning the Christian faith as any colonist, child or adult, and for them these were the prescribed method and content to teach the Christian faith.

Robinson indicates something of this when he wrote, ‘I have had no more trouble in teaching a black boy his letters than in teaching a white boy.’ He then set out

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<sup>50</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 377.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 402.

<sup>52</sup> Carruthers, S. W., 1957, *Three Centuries of the Westminster Shorter Catechism*. Fredericton; Beaverbrook Foundations/University of New Brunswick.

<sup>53</sup> See Chapter 3, page 142, footnote 126.



for Clark the plan he would adopt, were he the Catechist, to which Clark conformed.<sup>54</sup>

Like the earlier translation of the ‘principal parts’ of Genesis Chapter One by Wilkinson, the form of catechism used by Robinson and Clark varied substantially from the Shorter Westminster Catechism. An example is the question ‘What is God?’ In the Catechism the required answer was, ‘God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.’ At Wybalenna the same question is answered simply as, ‘A Spirit.’<sup>55</sup> Of the 107 questions in the Shorter Catechism, most Aboriginal pupils were only asked between seven and twelve questions during examinations.<sup>56</sup> The Aboriginal teachers were asked many more. For example Thomas Thompson was asked forty-three questions<sup>57</sup> and Thomas Brune one hundred and twenty which included a large number that were beyond the Shorter Catechism.<sup>58</sup> Another variation was the inclusion of biblical and general knowledge questions, such as those regarding Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and Noah<sup>59</sup> and questions on geographical and maritime terms,<sup>60</sup> days of the week, and seasons of the year.<sup>61</sup>

A further variation is shown when comparing questions asked in the catechetical examination with phrases appearing in several of Robinson’s sermons. Two of Robinson’s sermons delivered in December 1835 following the deaths of Mannalargenna and Nooerer, contain phrases that appear regularly in the catechetical examinations but which are not in the Assembly Catechism. Some

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<sup>54</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, pp. 255 – 258. Also, Correspondence Clark to Robinson, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1835, TAHO CSO 1/18798, p. 78.

<sup>55</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 268.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 266 – 278.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 288 – 291, also ML Robinson Papers, A7066 CY551, pp. 110 – 11.

<sup>58</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 282 – 88, also A7066 CY551, pp. 105 – 09.

<sup>59</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 287 – 88, also A7066 CY551, pp. 109 - 10.

<sup>60</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 282 – 88.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 288 – 91, also ML Robinson Papers, A7066 CY551, pp. 110 – 11.

examples are questions of the nature of soul and body, eternal destination of heaven or hell following death, questions about the Bible, and the importance of praying at home and in the bush.<sup>62</sup> So while at first glance the catechism examinations can appear to be regimented, they were substantially modified according to Robinson's own personal preferences and directives given to the catechist to follow. This suggests Robinson's criticism of Clark mentioned earlier—that he was diverting from the 'assembly's catechism'<sup>63</sup>—is more likely another instance of Robinson's petty complaint about Clark, since Robinson himself did not follow much of the full form of the catechism either.

After ten months under the regime of Sabbath and Weekday Evening Schools, Clark reported to Robinson that the school operated from ten to noon with twelve attending of whom four read the testament, three had writing lessons, two were learning arithmetic, four were beginning to read, and four were spelling words of three letters. Their progress had been interrupted by their hunting trips. Clark believed they had

acquired a knowledge of the character of the supreme being as the creator of all things; the fall of man; a heaven for good people and a hell for bad; that Jesus Christ came into the world to save man both black and white from the power of the devil here and the punishment of wickedness hereafter.<sup>64</sup>

The people were examined every Tuesday evening and instructed in the calendar, counting, singing psalms and hymns, and the Lord's Prayer. He noted an increasing knowledge of English, improvement by the women in sewing under Mrs Clark's tuition and a growing regard for one another in place of tribal

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<sup>62</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, pp. 8 – 22, see also Plomley, 1987, p. 314.

<sup>63</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 402.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp. 667 – 68.

hatreds.<sup>65</sup> Robinson's census earlier in January 1836 indicated twelve children among the population.<sup>66</sup> In Clark's report there are twelve boys and girls attending school<sup>67</sup> including the five Aboriginal teachers. The report also highlights the gender separation continuing with the women being taught 'domestic and feminine occupations'.<sup>68</sup>

## **Writing relationships**

As mentioned previously the conflict between the earlier commandant, Darling, and catechist, Wilkinson, demonstrated the importance of writing in the exercise of certain kinds of power in relationships at the settlement. Anna Johnston noted the important role of writing in 'becoming colonial' at Wybalenna.<sup>69</sup> The closely associated elements of 'civilise' and 'christianise' meant there was a growing association between learning to write in English and learning Christian teachings for Aboriginal people as well. Therefore it is necessary to examine the earliest extant sources of Aboriginal people writing in English as part of assessing their interaction with and interpretation of Christian faith. While there is no documentary evidence of Thomas Wilkinson teaching 'Ben Lomond' people to write in 1833, there are extensive reports of Robert Clark teaching people, at least from May 1835. As noted earlier Clark began teaching the alphabet using slates. The earliest surviving records of Aboriginal people writing whole words in

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<sup>65</sup> Plomley 1987, pp. 667 – 68.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 878 – 81.

<sup>67</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 Part 6, CY825, no page number.

<sup>68</sup> ML Robinson Papers, 8 Dec 1833, B727 CY1408, p. 310.

<sup>69</sup> Johnston, A., 2004, 'The "little empire of Wybalenna:" Becoming Colonial in Australia', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 81, pp. 17 – 31.

English on paper are from an initial assessment of the children Robinson brought from the Orphan School when he became Commandant in October 1835.<sup>70</sup>

The first, dated 27<sup>th</sup> October 1835, is the most extensive and is identified as Friday's, that is, Walter Arthur.

#### Lesson the first

In six days the Lord made the Heavens and the Earth the sea and  
all that there in is And on the seventh day God ended his work  
and he rested on that day for this Reason we keep the Sabbath  
holy because the Lord rested on that day. Six days are for  
working in which our Labouring is to be done but the seventh is  
a day of rest. And the Lord God Planted a Garden in Eden and  
placed there Adam whom he had formed.<sup>71</sup>

Other specimens are dated 1<sup>st</sup> December 1835 and name Bryan McSweeney as being present. The papers were signed by Robert Clark.<sup>72</sup> This explicit verification of the authenticity of the writing suggests the catechist was aware of people's disbelief in the ability of these Aboriginal children, and Aboriginal people more generally, to understand English and to write. The presence of an independent witness presumably was an attempt to add authoritative weight to the evidence.

In regard to Walter's 'Lesson the first...' it is somewhat complementary that his parents were probably involved with Wilkinson in translating the 'principal parts' of Genesis into a written form of their 'Ben Lomond' language in mid 1833. Then within ten days of their son, Walter, being reunited with them,

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<sup>70</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 305.

<sup>71</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 53. This is followed by Maiki / Davy Bruny, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 54, Droierloine / Peter Bruny, ML Robinson Papers, A7074, CY825, p. 55, Ben, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 57, and Rolepa, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 59.

<sup>72</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 Vol. 52, Part 6, CY825.

Wilkinson's successor, Clark, asked Walter to copy out Clark's 'principal parts' of the same part of Genesis. But unlike his parents Walter was required to copy an English, and not a 'Ben Lomond', translation. Again it is important to remember the documentary archive tells only part of the story, but it seems not beyond the realms of probability that Walter and his parents may have had a rather fascinating conversation about this biblical creation story. Indeed, it is possible that by requiring Walter to write this summary in English Clark may have prompted a particular conversation between Walter and his parents in which they could have taken the opportunity to reawaken some first language words which he may have forgotten during his years in Launceston<sup>73</sup> and the two and a half years at the Orphan School in Hobart. It could be that what on first reading appears to be an instrument of assimilation could have been used as an instrument for strengthening first language oral familiarity.

In regard to this piece of writing, Van Toorn argues that 'in the process of reinforcing the doctrine that God created the world, the passage functions as an instrument of cultural assimilation by teaching that the Sabbath should be observed as a day of rest.'<sup>74</sup> However, after two and a half years in the Orphan School Walter had already experienced multiple 'instruments' of cultural assimilation including over one hundred and twenty 'Sabbaths' within the sandstone walls of St. John's church. Wybalenna was substantially less an assimilationist context. Walter was reunited with his parents who were still speaking his first language. At the time of writing his 'Lesson' he had experienced only two church services at Wybalenna, in two different buildings,<sup>75</sup> with the first

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<sup>73</sup> Dammary, S., 2001, *Walter George Arthur A Free Tasmanian?* Clayton; Monash Publications in History, p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> Van Toorn, P., 2006, *Writing Never Arrives Naked*. Canberra; Aboriginal Studies Press, p. 102.

<sup>75</sup> Plomley, 1987, pp. 304, 305.

held in a hut and probably among those occupied by his own ‘Ben Lomond’ people. Furthermore, in that service the person leading the worship, Clark, spoke in the ‘language of the settlement’,<sup>76</sup> a *pidgin* of Aboriginal languages. This would be somewhat less of an assimilationist instrument than anything he had experienced in the previous two and a half years at the Orphan School. While Van Toorn rightly points out that ‘writing never arrives naked’,<sup>77</sup> it may be wearing several culturally and religiously diverse layers when arriving in different locales simultaneously. I will return to this point below.

The varied writing contexts can be seen when considering other Aboriginal children. Droierloine’s and Maiki’s reunion with their father, Woorraddy, was somewhat different to Walter’s. Droierloine and Maiki had been in the Orphan School longer than Walter, just over three years, according to the Register. And while Walter’s parents had been at Wybalenna for several years, Woorraddy had been travelling with Robinson throughout Van Diemen’s Land since before his boys went into the Orphan School. It appears he was reunited with them in Hobart Town<sup>78</sup> prior to travelling to Flinders Island. The documentary evidence shows him to be a master boat builder, multilingual and a respected storyteller.<sup>79</sup> He had conversed with Robinson many times, including on biblical topics of Creation, God, and the Flood.<sup>80</sup> Like Walter’s parents, it seems harder to imagine Woorraddy *not* talking with his sons about these things, including giving his opinion about Robinson and the situation of being on the island. While Walter, Droierloine and Maiki had spent the previous two and a half

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<sup>76</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 304.

<sup>77</sup> Van Toorn, 2006.

<sup>78</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 621.

<sup>79</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7064 Vol. 43, CY550, pp. 169 – 70, and Plomley, 1966, pp. 374, 375, 376.

<sup>80</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 376.

years in the Orphan School, their parents were from different parts of the island, spoke different languages, and for the previous several years had quite different experiences with Christian people. With such diverse relationships one cannot assume a single interpretation of their writing.

Six months later a more extensive writing sample shows further variation among the authors but also the continued coalescing of theology and writing skills. One sample dated 24<sup>th</sup> June 1836 bears Thomas Bruny's name.<sup>81</sup> As already noted, although the Orphan School Register records him being discharged on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1836, Robinson records having to get an order from the Colonial Secretary to get him on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1836.<sup>82</sup> It seems more likely that Thomas was discharged, along with four others, into Robinson's care on 27<sup>th</sup> May and they arrived at the Settlement 17<sup>th</sup> June 1836.<sup>83</sup> Therefore the sample text, dated 24<sup>th</sup> June 1836, is probably part of Robinson's assessment of Thomas about a week after he arrived at Wybalenna.

#### Protection

Protection Protec[sic]

#### 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm

The Lord is my shepherd therefore can I  
lack nothing. He shall feed me in a green  
pasture: and lead me forth beside the water  
of comfort. He shall convert my soul: and  
bring me forth in the paths of righteousness  
for His Name's sake

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<sup>81</sup> Thomas' 'family name' is initially spelt 'Bruney' but later became 'Bruny' in reports and correspondence. It was sometimes spelt both ways in the same letter. See correspondence Clark to Robinson, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1835 CSO 1/18798, p. 80.

<sup>82</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 355.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 360.

Thomas Bruney 24<sup>th</sup> June 1836

Flinders Island<sup>84</sup>

The headline of ‘protection’ expresses the teacher’s primary interpretive guide for the student. Without knowing Thomas’ thoughts and interpretation of the psalm, it is worth pondering the shepherd(s), sheep, pasture, and water in the context of his almost six years at the Orphan School, about half his life time at that point. Thomas had only just arrived at Wybalenna. Having no previous relationship with any adults there he was probably unaware of the Settlement sheep on Prime Seal Island, so was more likely to have interpreted it from his School experience.<sup>85</sup>

Clark inserted ‘convert’ rather than the King James rendering ‘restore’ my soul.<sup>86</sup> Whereas the biblical version is a *restoration* back to previously experienced food and comfort, the evangelical interest of the catechist directs the (current) psalm writer (Thomas Bruny) towards a ‘conversion’ of his soul into a new path of ‘righteousness’ expressed in written English text, submission to catechetical oversight and commandant approval. However, although probably unknown to Thomas, within the psalm there are also the anti-monarchical elements written in a context when God, rather than the kings of Israel, was seen as the ‘shepherd’ of the psalmist. While at Wybalenna as a 16 year old Aboriginal youth straight from six years at the Orphan School, ‘protection’ was likely to be interpreted as that provided in housing, rations, and clothing from the

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<sup>84</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 Vol. 52, Part 6, unpaginated.

<sup>85</sup> Kenny has written of the context in Victoria of how an Aboriginal man interpreted and incorporated sheep and Christian theology into his existing religious world, in Kenny, R., 2007, *The Lamb Enters the Dreaming*. Melbourne; Scribe. Aboriginal people at Wybalenna had their own flock on off-shore islands since 1832 and sold wool in Launceston. The settlement had supplies of sheep for food and so people would have at least seen colonists killing and eating sheep even if they hadn’t eaten it themselves. Among the adult generation at Wybalenna were those with religious stories of close associations between people and kangaroo/turner that were also hunted and eaten, Plomley, 1966, p. 373.

<sup>86</sup> See also Van Toorn, 2006, pp. 106 & 107.



Commandant and Storekeeper, nevertheless, there are within this psalm the potential seeds for rejecting that colonial mediated protection in favour of a direct Aboriginal experience of God. The emphasis on ‘my’ shepherd, together with the individualised answers to the catechism, no doubt came from the European emphasis on individual faith and it is difficult to assess what resonance or dissonance this had with existing Aboriginal concepts of a person, or how a parent-less, and clan-less, Thomas Bruny might have interpreted it.

Nevertheless it is important to consider that Thomas, and every other Aboriginal person at Wybalenna, engaged in their own direct experience of Christian faith. Beyond the control, emphases and various influences of commandant and catechist, Aboriginal people were developing their own interpretations of Christian text, teaching and ritual, and doing so from their existing language and worldview. For some, such as Thomas, this was only in English. For others it was likely to have been multi-lingual, including first language, the evolving *pidgin*, and English, and for others multi-lingual Aboriginal languages and the evolving *pidgin*. With so few Aboriginal people possessing writing skills, these Aboriginal interpretive experiences are most commonly demonstrated in conversations and other oral forms rather than these few examples of written text.

### **Oral responses – examinations and addresses**

Robinson reports one such conversation in January 1837 during an evening class. Robinson asked ‘Who made me?’ and one of the pupils, Pernermeroick / Milton, answered ‘the Devil.’<sup>87</sup> Classes continued the following day during which an

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<sup>87</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 417.

unnamed woman and a man, Makeaduru, who would soon be elected verger,<sup>88</sup> were tested by Robinson. The woman was asked, ‘Who is God?’ To which she answered, ‘Eve.’ She was asked, ‘Who made you?’ To which she replied, ‘Heaven.’<sup>89</sup> Makeaduru was asked, ‘Who made you?’ He replied, ‘My father.’<sup>90</sup> Robinson’s journal then says ‘Davy Bruny, one of the young teachers, responded to the woman saying, ‘what did you say “Eve”, you should say “God”, God is a spirit, is not a woman, God is a white man.’<sup>91</sup>

I speculated earlier on a possible conversation between Walter Arthur and his parents about the creation story in Genesis One, textually rendered in ‘Ben Lomond’ language and English. This response by Maiki about ‘God’ as creator is a reminder both of Woorraddy’s creation story of Moihernee and Dromerdeene, and of Robinson’s ‘sermon’ summary on Bruny Island in May 1829, discussed in Chapter Two. Again, it would have been a fascinating conversation between the Nuenone father and son on this topic. As Van Toorn notes regarding these responses: ‘it is difficult to know today—as it was difficult for Robinson in his time to know—precisely what the people “learned” in the classroom.’<sup>92</sup>

While Pernermeroick, the unnamed woman, and Makeaduru may have misunderstood the questions, or misconnected their growing storage of prepared catechetical answers, it is possible that they did not misunderstand or misconnect but were giving alternate interpretations. Maiki answered the woman’s question not just with the answer expected from the ‘Wybalenna Catechism’, ‘God is a spirit’, but made two additional statements that God is not a woman, and God is a

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<sup>88</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 421.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 417.

<sup>90</sup> This is reminiscent of Mannalargenna’s reply to Robinson that he ‘only knew what his father told him’, Plomley, 1966, p. 403.

<sup>91</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 417.

<sup>92</sup> Van Toorn, 2006, p. 61.

white man. So although nothing in the Bible says God is a white man, Maiki had ‘learned’ from his lessons in the Orphan School, from Catechist and Commandant that God is a white man. This could mean God is a colonist<sup>93</sup> like Robinson, Clark and others, thereby associating God with colonisation, or that God is at least the white man’s God. It could mean God is a dead Aboriginal who has jumped up into life again thereby associating God with Aboriginal ancestors visiting clans again.<sup>94</sup> Like the surviving examples of writing, these dialogues suggest multiple and varied ‘learnings’ were occurring.

Penermeroick’s answer to Robinson’s question ‘Who made me?’ could be much more disturbing. The answer ‘The Devil’ was one among many references to the Devil that stirred Robinson so often in his journal writing, particularly in the performance of the ‘Devil dance’.<sup>95</sup> While Van Toorn suggests ‘some Aboriginal pupils were deviating from the script’<sup>96</sup> there are follow up catechetical examinations four months later which provide further information which needs to be considered. In these reports of 1<sup>st</sup> May Penermeroick and Makeaduru were in the same class, along with Moultehelargine / Ajax, another ‘older man’. Penermeroick was not questioned because of illness. In this report Makeaduru is described as ‘not perfect in his letters’. In response to ‘who made you?’ he answered ‘God’.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> A few years earlier Trugernanner had criticised Black Tom for saying he believed in the white man’s God, Plomley, 1966, p. 379.

<sup>94</sup> Walter Arthur, ‘we skin black people died then arose from the dead became white men we begin to make friends of them call them father or Brother’, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825.

<sup>95</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 301. It is curious that the man, Penermeroick carried the English name ‘Milton’. Robinson refers to the author Milton and his book, ‘Paradise Lost’, in the notes of the creation story told by Wooraddy, Ibid., p. 373.

<sup>96</sup> Van Toorn, 2006, p. 61.

<sup>97</sup> A further biographical note is added, ‘This pupil is a good husband and industrious – he holds the office of Clerk and Chapel Vesper is a stout man of about 30 years of age from the Central part of V D L’, ML Robinson Papers, A7066 CY551, p. 146.

On 9<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> May there were the quarterly examinations over which Robinson presided. Again, these men are in the same class as Moultehelargine and Maiki was their teacher. Makeaduru is described as ‘imperfect in his alphabet’. His only question was, ‘Who made you?’ to which he again replied ‘God’. It is reported that ‘this pupil is inattentive but is a good husband and a quiet well behaved man. He holds the office of Cook<sup>98</sup> and Chapel keeper. Is stout made about 30 years of age from the central part of V. D. Land’. There is no report of Pernermeroick being questioned.<sup>99</sup> The woman is unnamed so it is not possible to match her answers to any particular person’s catechetical examination.

There is a degree of speculation to any explanation, but it is clear that between January and May the records of Makeaduru’s answer to ‘Who made you?’ changed from ‘My father’ to ‘God’. It is possible to explain this as a ‘subaltern’ expressing outward compliance.<sup>100</sup> Makeaduru was born about 1802/3<sup>101</sup> and was one of the generation who were older than the colony. He could be like Trugernanner regarding ‘God’ as belonging to the ‘white man’.<sup>102</sup> Against this, however, is that in early February he was elected verger / Chapel keeper, for the Sunday services, for which he received 1/- per week.<sup>103</sup> It is possible Makeaduru performed this role for the sake of the money, or some other role, motivation or benefit. Being one of the oldest people at Wybalenna, elected by the people to the role, it may have been recognition of his seniority. Because of his age he is likely to have been in a leading role in clan ceremonies and possibly inter-clan ceremonies, so to have and be seen by his and other clans to have a role

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<sup>98</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 420.

<sup>99</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 275.

<sup>100</sup> A subaltern in this context is a person of ‘inferior rank ... [and] denied access to hegemonic power’, in Ashcroft, B., (et al), 2013, *Post-colonial Studies*. London; Routledge, pp. 244 – 247.

<sup>101</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 841.

<sup>102</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 379.

<sup>103</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 421.

in the colonial religious ceremonies was probably also a factor. His performance as ‘verger/chapel keeper’ was in an audience of various Aboriginal clans and colonists, so was a multi-faceted-performance to clans and colonists simultaneously. He therefore could have performed this role with multiple purposes and meanings, an example of multiple layers in simultaneous locales.

Post-colonial discourse on ‘liminality’ is relevant here. This liminal, or transcultural, space is one in which Aboriginal, colonial and Christian forms are, as yet, indefinable in this context. Makeaduru’s clan, and inter-clan role is being fulfilled in a new context of the chapel and simultaneously the role of verger is being fulfilled in a new context of Aboriginal clan and inter-clan relationships. It is not clear to what degree each element in the discourse is interpreting the other as Makeaduru is engaged in a ‘constant process of engagement, contestation and appropriation’<sup>104</sup> simultaneously.

As mentioned previously those pupils with the most extensive knowledge were questioned and recorded at greater length. The written records were also part of the performance review of the catechist, commandant, and indeed the whole enterprise of the settlement. This is perhaps why so few variant answers are recorded in the examination records. Reporting a brief list of questions is suggestive of fewer ‘correct’ answers from the pupil. Unfortunately Makeaduru died 29<sup>th</sup> December 1837<sup>105</sup> and so no further responses are known.

Another consideration is that the ‘variant answers’ come from Robinson’s personal journal, and not from any catechetical examination report. It is worth considering Robinson’s own motivations in recording the variant answers. On 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Aschcroft, 2013, p. 145.

<sup>105</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 841.

January 1837, immediately prior to asking the woman ‘who is God’, Robinson wrote:

Again put questions on the first principles of religion. The catechist said I did not ask those who had regularly attended. I assured him I had, and then asked the parties he referred to. They were equally at a loss. He referred me to a woman whom he said would understand who is God. She answered ‘Eve’; who made you, ‘heaven’. The catechist then said she did not understand my question and he purposed asking some questions. Constantine said he, who made you; answer ‘my father’. He was therefore silenced.<sup>106</sup>

Following Maiki’s comment about God being a white man, Robinson wrote:

The evening was concluded by singing by the natives. The parson was evidently astonished at my mode of questioning the natives.<sup>107</sup>

As well as suggesting variant interpretations among Aboriginal people, Robinson’s journal entries of the variant answers are also part of his ongoing criticism of Clark and needs to be kept in mind as part of the context. Nor can the possibility be discounted that the answers given by these particular Aboriginal people was a way of embarrassing Clark in front of Robinson.

As well as these indications of diverse, some would say, subaltern responses to questions, the classes themselves were not fully attended by Aboriginal people, including those involved in the catechetical examinations. Clark’s records show

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<sup>106</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 417.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

that Aboriginal teachers and students were absent due to influenza epidemics,<sup>108</sup> ophthalmia,<sup>109</sup> or for no apparent reason.<sup>110</sup> In April 1837 the results of the catechetical examination show that forty-six were present and twenty-two absent.<sup>111</sup> This suggests Aboriginal people were not as regimented or regular in their attendance or participation as might first be assumed, or later ‘missions’ practiced, but they were clearly learning the Christian faith through the catechism, writing and, probably more importantly, conversations with each other. This attendance of only two thirds of the students in April seems to have been the catalyst for an important development that actually strengthened Aboriginal voices and more diverse interpretations and expressions of Aboriginal Christian faith.

At the end of April 1837 Clark left Wybalenna for a few days to go to nearby Chalky Island. While he was away Robinson arranged the evening school on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> April, where he says he ‘playfully asked them to commence to exhort and admonish each other from the desk’. This was done by Tongerlongerter / William, Rolepa, Philip, and Noemy. Noemy began and spoke ‘partly in his own and partly in English’.<sup>112</sup> It is not clear if Robinson specifically asked them to use their first language, but given Robinson’s emphasis on learning English and the catechetical style of set answers, this seems unlikely. The initiative for first language seems to have come from the first speaker, Noemy from the west coast.

These men and their messages will be examined subsequently because the only written records of interpreted notes are from addresses they, and others, gave

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<sup>108</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 680.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 684.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 681.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 688.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 439.

in 1838. However, the timing of the decline in attendances, particularly at the catechetical examinations, seems to have stirred Robinson to try something different and seizing the opportunity, Noemy and others spoke first of all in their own languages. Also of interest is Clark's reaction when he returned. He wrote to Robinson on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1837:

I have the honour to state the very great satisfaction and delight I experienced on my return from Chalky last week in witnessing the native chiefs and others address their countrymen at the Saturday night prayer meeting particularly when I heard some of them introduce the name of God and our Lord Jesus Christ. To me this meeting afforded more heart felt delight than any I ever witnessed or assisted in thro the course of my life and called up the liveliest feelings of gratitude to my God for his goodness and love

I take leave respectfully to request your permission to form a class of the persons who you will please to select and on such days of the week as you will appoint to instruct them more fully in the Precepts of Religion and Truth *to enable them to speak of the Truths of Revelation in their vernacular languages* on those interesting occasions. I have already spoken to one or two of the Natives and it has met their approbation subject to your approval.<sup>113</sup>(my emphasis)

Clark, like Wilkinson, attempted to encourage what was already occurring among the clans. Aboriginal people, particularly clan leaders, were discussing Christian faith with each other in their own first languages and the *pidgin* of the settlement.

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<sup>113</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7066 CY551, p. 49. Plomley, 1987, pp. 691, 692, note 1.



They were exploring their own unmediated experience of God and their own interpretations of the mediated experiences of school catechisms and church services. However, Robinson ‘gave a negative’ to Clark’s request.<sup>114</sup>

Something seems to have changed between the April examinations and those in May. The first language sermons are at least part of the answer and another part could be that Robinson introduced monetary rewards in ‘Settlement currency’ for attendance and answering questions.<sup>115</sup> In the April catechetical examinations forty-six of sixty-eight participated with twenty-two absent.<sup>116</sup> On 9<sup>th</sup> May the picture was quite different. There were twelve male classes with a total of forty-two students examined. The three female classes comprised twenty-eight students, giving a total of seventy Aboriginal people examined in the catechism.<sup>117</sup> While Robinson refused Clark’s participation in ‘vernacular language’ classes, the continuation of first language addresses suggests the clan leaders were not as constrained.

The size and membership of the classes is of interest for a number of reasons, particularly the age and clan mix. Among the twelve male classes two had two pupils, seven three pupils, and three had four pupils. Only one class comprised all pupils from the same clan (the first class, all from Big River) and all others had pupils from at least two or sometimes three clans. In regard to ages all six Aboriginal teachers were under eighteen years of age while only two pupils were in the same age cohort. Fourteen were identified as being in their twenties, fourteen in their thirties, and seven in their forties. The widest age difference was

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<sup>114</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 691.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 450. Later that year Walsh made a report and reiterated this recommendation, ML Robinson Papers, A7066 CY551, p. 149.

<sup>116</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 688.

<sup>117</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7066 CY551, pp. 13 – 24, 129 – 49.

thirteen-year-old Maiki teaching thirty-year-old Makeaduru, forty-seven-year-old Moultehelargine, and forty-six-year-old Penermeroick.<sup>118</sup>

There were only three female classes: Mrs Dickenson's with eleven pupils, Mrs Clark's with twelve and Mary Ann's with four.<sup>119</sup> Five pupils were under twenty-six with twelve men in the same cohort; eighteen were between twenty-seven and forty with twenty men in the same cohort; and two between forty-five and fifty with four men in the same cohort. It is difficult to know how these demographic mixes and gender separation affected the learning but it is worth noting it as an element of the context. There was real potential for gender differentiation in the interpretations of the Christian faith. Further examination of Aboriginal women's interpretations will be a significant challenge due to the scarcity of sources.

Monthly examinations were also held in June<sup>120</sup> where Clark reported that the students had generally not improved.<sup>121</sup> So while Robinson had introduced monetary rewards for school participation it did not have any immediate impact on their adherence to the set catechetical answers. It is noticeable that Robinson made no mention of the first language, or *pidgin*, addresses in his report to the Governor of 24<sup>th</sup> June 1837. Instead he maintained the façade of compliance among the Aboriginal people. The picture he gave the Governor was that religious and other instruction of the natives were conducted in the English language and 'many speak it fluently and with a perfectly English idiom'.<sup>122</sup>

Robinson intensified his efforts on English language learning. In August he further separated Walter Arthur and Thomas Bruny from their cohort of young

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<sup>118</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 266 – 307.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., pp. 293 – 307.

<sup>120</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 448.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 695.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 699.

Aboriginal teachers. At a special meeting of the School Committee he annulled the rule for appointing Aboriginal boys as teachers, except for Thomas and Walter. He then appointed two of his own sons, George and Charles, as teachers and downgraded the other Aboriginal youths to ‘monitors’, assistants to the teachers.<sup>123</sup> The attendance at the August examinations remained relatively high with eighty-nine students, forty-four males and forty-five females participating.<sup>124</sup> Robinson’s English-only faith appeared to be in the ascendancy.

### **The Aboriginal or Flinders Island Chronicle**

It is not surprising with these efforts of Robinson’s that the regular editions of *The Flinders Island Chronicle*, the English language hand written journal, resumed in earnest in September 1837, apparently a year after the one-off first edition.<sup>125</sup>

There seems some confusion concerning the date of the first edition.<sup>126</sup> A single first edition in September 1836 with no subsequent editions for just over a year seems improbable. However, Robinson left Wybalenna on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1836 for Hobart Town<sup>127</sup> before returning to Wybalenna, via Launceston and George Town, on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1836.<sup>128</sup> This temporary absence does not fully explain a

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<sup>123</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 467.

<sup>124</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 387 – 90.

<sup>125</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 1 – 17, Plomley, 1987, Appendix 4:C, pp. 1009 – 13. There are six surviving copies of an edition which outlines the ‘objects of this journal’. Three are signed by both Walter Arthur and Thomas Bruny, and three by only Thomas. Five bear Robinson’s signature and the date ‘10<sup>th</sup> September 1836’ on the reverse side of the page, and one does not have any verification. These appear to be a ‘prospectus’ similar to the school committee establishing its objects, naming its officers and giving itself a name. All editions of the *Chronicle* found in the Robinson Papers are in Appendix E.

<sup>126</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, pp. 13 – 16.

<sup>127</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 381.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 398.

year's hiatus in the production of the journal but it does suggest some restraint is required before amending original documents.<sup>129</sup>

Robinson's emphasis on the English language *Chronicle*<sup>130</sup> intended to be published each Saturday,<sup>131</sup> appears to be an attempt to assert control over, or at least counter, the growing expressions of Saturday evening Christian addresses in Aboriginal first languages and the evolving *pidgin*. It was perhaps also an attempt to exert authority over a Catechist who more and more spoke in the *pidgin* rather than English when preaching in Sunday services through mid to late 1837. The first edition reads in part like a 'Robinson-Settlement-origin-story':

we date our history of events from the Month of October 1835  
when our beloved father made his appearance among us  
dispelling the darkness and cheering us with a dawn of hope  
freedom and happiness.<sup>132</sup>

Robinson's control is clear: 'Proof sheets are to be Submitted to the commandant for correction before publishing'.<sup>133</sup> The *Chronicle* was to bear Robinson's, rather than Clark's authority, at least initially.

It is difficult to see the prospectus and first edition of the *Chronicle* as anything more than Robinson's English-only faith being ventriloquised through the two youths in order to improve his reputation among colonists. One of the copyists, Thomas Bruny, an orphan, was still at the Hobart Orphan School in October 1835, when, through the *Chronicle*, he wrote that it was the time from which 'we date our history'. The 'beloved father', Robinson, visited the Orphan

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<sup>129</sup> The first reference in Robinson's journal is on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1837 which Plomley incorrectly identifies as 'the first of a series...', Plomley, 1987, p. 713.

<sup>130</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, pp. 1 – 11.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., pp. 13 – 16.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., pp. 13 – 16.

School at that time,<sup>134</sup> but left Thomas behind with much less than ‘a dawn of hope freedom and happiness’. Thomas remained at the Orphan School for at least nine months after this ‘beginning’ of ‘our history’. Robinson’s visit led to Walter’s move to Flinders Island, and return to his father, mother and sister, and probably a greater degree of happiness. Walter is unlikely to have known Robinson at all prior to this, having entered the School while Robinson was only briefly in Hobart between his ventures in the north-west and Macquarie Harbour at the end of 1832.<sup>135</sup> Walter’s ‘beloved father’ is unlikely to have been Robinson, but more likely to be someone from within his own Ben Lomond clan, perhaps even his own still living father.

Furthermore few Aboriginal people, other than Walter and Thomas themselves and the other Aboriginal ‘teachers’, were able to read much English at that time. Therefore the primary audience for the written text, like Wilkinson’s Bible translation, was unlikely to have been the ‘captive audience’ of Aboriginal people,<sup>136</sup> but rather colonists, many of whom were not at Wybalenna at all, such as the Governor, church leaders, or content colonial pastoralists who had donated subscriptions to thank Robinson for ridding the island of its first people.<sup>137</sup>

The grandiose claims of the prospectus and first edition echo those expressed at the commencement of the Sunday and weekday evening schools in February 1836. And like the schools, subsequent editions of the *Chronicle* suggest

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<sup>134</sup> Plomley, 1987, pp. 295, 620, 621.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., pp. 680, 704.

<sup>136</sup> Rose, M., (ed.), 1996, *For the Record: 160 years of Aboriginal Print Journalism*. St Leonards; Allen and Unwin, pp. 1 – 19.

<sup>137</sup> Eg., *Colonial Times*, 7<sup>th</sup> October 1834, p. 3. *Hobart Town Courier*, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1834, p. 2; 20<sup>th</sup> March 1835, p. 2. See also, Van Toorn, 2006, pp. 111 – 12. Soon after Robinson left Wybalenna on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1836, the *Hobart Town Courier*, printed a glowing endorsement of Robinson’s activities, including the *Chronicle*. ‘Mr. Robinson has been the means of establishing a weekly newspaper among them. It is entirely written by the Aborigines, and is published under the name of ‘The Aboriginal Flinders Island Chronicle,’ on half a sheet of foolscap every Saturday, price 2d each, and the profits arising from the work are equally divided among the editors’. *Hobart Town Courier*, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1836, pp. 2, 3.

Aboriginal people used the experience to develop skills they valued and they incorporated them into existing clan relationships and cultural practices.

Aboriginal people adapted the school experience into opportunities for Saturday evening first languages addresses by clan leaders offering 'mutual instruction', in an apparent continuation of their existing, but changing, roles. Likewise Divine Service was adapted in the 'bush' to become 'Sunday corroboree' celebrated alongside dances. The *Chronicle* never became an Aboriginal language journal. The desired 'emulation' in writing did not occur. Instead Aboriginal people continued to communicate with each other primarily in oral forms and adapted colonial Christian practices into their own relationships, with their interpretations.

The practice of writing did, however, influence personal and clan relationships to a degree. While the readers of the *Chronicle*'s English text were almost entirely colonists, the 'readers' (i.e., interpreters) of the context at Wybalenna were much wider and included Aboriginal people. Thomas and Walter themselves appear to be aware that their involvement in the *Chronicle* affected their relationships with each other and with other Aboriginal people. It was not so much the particular words they used but the power they garnered through the performance of writing. They appear to have used threats of naming women in the paper to persuade several to clean themselves and their houses. Several women 'said they [Walter and Thomas] might KARNY speak but not write'.<sup>138</sup> Within the *Chronicle* whose audience was primarily not Aboriginal, Thomas mentions unnamed men taking books into the bush and going hunting<sup>139</sup> and native women carrying grass.<sup>140</sup> Thomas names himself and Walter 'assisting Mr Clark in the

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<sup>138</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 489.

<sup>139</sup> 28/9/1837, *Flinders Island Chronicle*, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 17.

<sup>140</sup> 28/9/1837, *Flinders Island Chronicle*, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 20.

church on Sundays'.<sup>141</sup> Walter names Thomas, 'when we are in school I always see Mr Thomas Brune laughing and playing away in the middle of school'. He writes of 'Flora and Louisa' going to off shore islands to hunt and for skins, and of 'Natives' making their own garden... own fruit ... own fences'.<sup>142</sup> Thomas names 'the Aboriginal male Noemy has got the love of God shed abroad in his heart...'.<sup>143</sup> Each of these written examples were of people 'emulating' colonial work and are likely to have engendered appreciation among their colonial readers. The beginning of 1838 marked the start of another tumultuous year among the officers at Wybalenna. Robinson's frustrations with Clark seem to have played a role in Governor Franklin's appointment of a Chaplain, Rev Thomas Dove, however Clark continued to have a teaching role due to Dove's apparent lack of interest in teaching Aboriginal people, particularly children.<sup>144</sup> The annual catechetical examinations were conducted between 9<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> February, and certified by the newly arrived Chaplain. In his report Dove credited the improvement to Clark, Dickenson and the three Robinson boys and, noticeably, no Aboriginal teachers. He recommended that the method of instruction continue.<sup>145</sup> Robinson likewise placed credit with the teachers and saw it as 'conclusive evidence of the success of his plan and role as Commandant'.<sup>146</sup> A contrasting view is alluded to when, after a fortnight of catechetical examinations some of the Aboriginal people were asked if they liked the examination. They

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<sup>141</sup> 2/10/1837, *Flinders Island Chronicle*, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 22.

<sup>142</sup> 2/10/1837, *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>143</sup> 6/10/1837, *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>144</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 535.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 725.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 535.

replied that they did not like the ‘damnation’. Robinson interpreted this as a ‘mispronunciation’<sup>147</sup> but perhaps it was not.

Conflict emerged again between officers.<sup>148</sup> Robinson sought a report from Clark regarding the Aboriginal people, something that should have been Dove’s responsibility. It was not until July, after several months of complaints and conflict,<sup>149</sup> that Dove finally commenced teaching at the school.<sup>150</sup> He reported there were several Aboriginal clans continuing to speak their first languages. His reference to the ‘sealer’s jargon’ may actually be the evolving *pidgin* of the Aboriginal people, but he reports a preference for using English.<sup>151</sup>

Among the officers, Robinson and Dove regarded colonists speaking *pidgin*, or ‘bad English’ as a degradation of themselves.<sup>152</sup> Clark desired to speak to the Aboriginal people primarily in *pidgin* but was discouraged from doing so.<sup>153</sup> Aboriginal speakers spoke in first language to their own clan, *pidgin* to a mixed Aboriginal audience, and in English to colonists. This multilingual practice is indicative of a growing sophistication in interpreting Christian faith and conversing about it in multiple languages, worldviews and formats simultaneously.

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<sup>147</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 535.

<sup>148</sup> Robinson was in conflict not just with Clark but also Dove: ‘The gross effrontery of this insignificant personage exceeds all I have ever met with, and this a parson. To dare to dictate to me what I should do in command of the settlement! As well might I dictate to him the subject and method of his sermon!’ cited in Plomley, 1987, p. 573. See also, Miller, R. S., 1985, *Thomas Dove and the Tasmanian Aborigines*. Melbourne; Spectrum, p. 27.

<sup>149</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 563.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 571.

<sup>151</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 744. Also, Miller, 1985, pp. 39, 42 – 44.

<sup>152</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 568.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 304.



## Conclusion

In this chapter the school and catechetical classes in particular provide descriptions of the heterogenous interpretations Aboriginal people were making of the Christian faith at Wybalenna. Unlike the church services that were largely monolingual and had minimal Aboriginal leadership, the classes involved a number of Aboriginal teachers, most of whom were children of clan leaders. The transformation of the Westminster Catechism into a form unique to Wybalenna brought variant Aboriginal responses into the written records. These indicate the conversations among Aboriginal people that were occurring beyond the classes and practices such as ‘Sunday corroboree’ that were occurring beyond the settlement.

Furthermore, what at first glance can appear to be an instrument of assimilation, such as writing biblical text, may be more complex and have divergent contexts for the Aboriginal people involved. Similarly responses to the oral catechetical questions demonstrate that variant learning was occurring among the Aboriginal people. Their ‘correct’ answers may have been an outward compliance to the required answers, but several responses suggest subaltern, resistant, or heterogenous theologies may have been developing through inter-Aboriginal conversations. Robinson’s attempts to assert control over these conversations through the *Flinders Island Chronicle* and English-only church services were stifled by the growing number of Aboriginal voices speaking in first language and pidgin in the Saturday evening school and less formal conversations around the settlement and beyond.

Some of the variety of Aboriginal interpretations is expressed through the extant sources of addresses given during the Saturday evening school and other publications. It is these addresses upon which the next chapter shall focus.

## Chapter 5: ‘Always crackne in Heaven’

The previous chapter introduced the schools and writings of Aboriginal people at Wybalenna. This chapter focuses on surviving documents that summarise Christian sermons and addresses presented by various Aboriginal men at the weekday evening and Saturday evening schools. These addresses will be located in the context of evangelical Christian preaching in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century. Some comparisons will be made between the speakers to further elucidate ways Aboriginal people were interpreting the Christian faith, incorporating it into pre-existing worldviews, and adapting to the evolving context at Wybalenna and the wider colonial world.

Aboriginal people had been conversing with each other about the Christian faith since early contact with colonial Christians. This occurred with the participation of adults and children in early baptism services, attempts by Robinson to preach in a pidgin at Bruny Island,<sup>1</sup> in discussing church services<sup>2</sup> and during the so-called ‘friendly missions’<sup>3</sup> At Wybalenna the conversations between ‘Ben Lomond’ people and Thomas Wilkinson in translating Genesis into a written version of their language is likely to have involved conversations among ‘Ben Lomond’ people themselves in clarifying words and meanings. They had requested the later Catechist to teach them,<sup>4</sup> engaged with each other in ‘Sunday corroboree’,<sup>5</sup> and sang English language Christian hymns in their cottages.<sup>6</sup> These

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<sup>1</sup> Plomley, N. J. B., 1966, *Friendly Mission*. Kingsgrove; Halstead Press, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 319.

<sup>4</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, pp. 165 – 67.

<sup>5</sup> Druemerterpunner (Alexander), 14<sup>th</sup> April 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 48 – 49, and Plomley, N. J. B., 1987, *Weep In Silence*. Hobart; Blubber Head Press, p. 481.

<sup>6</sup> Plomley, 1987, pp. 436, 440.

indicate a variety of discussions of Christian stories and practices were occurring in multiple languages.<sup>7</sup>

### **Aboriginal addresses in the context of Christian evangelicalism**

In order to appreciate these writings and addresses by Aboriginal people at Wybalenna, it is important to be aware of the place and practice of evangelical Christian preaching within the context of eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century Christianity. Evangelicalism was a broad movement among Christian churches particularly in England and America. It was not restricted to a particular denomination. One expression, ‘methodism’, traces its roots to the 24<sup>th</sup> May 1738 when founder, John Wesley, felt his ‘heart strangely warmed’. Methodism began as a ‘method’ followed by small group of Christian people. As noted earlier, it became known as a distinct stream within the Church of England, at least from the 1750s.<sup>8</sup>

The Methodist denomination only came into existence as a denomination formally separate from the Church of England after Wesley’s death in 1791, though there was movement in this direction before then. Many of the missionary organisations that emerged in the late eighteenth century, including those in which Robinson was a member in London and in Hobart, grew out of the influence of Methodism within and beyond the Church of England. What is relevant for Robinson’s behaviour in the context at Wybalenna is Wesley’s system of reading, writing and speaking, that ‘violated prevailing rules of eighteenth-century British propriety’ by authorizing non-ordained preachers with limited education to speak

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<sup>7</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 94 – 5.

<sup>8</sup> See, Wesley, J., 'Reasons Against a Separation from the Church of England by John Wesley A. M., printed in 1758 with Hymns for the Preachers among the Methodists (so called) by Charles Wesley A. M.' <http://anglicanhistory.org/wesley/reasons1760.html> accessed 14/5/2014.

publicly and to write extensively.<sup>9</sup> As noted in Chapter One, many missionaries came from among ‘lower’ or marginal ‘middle’ classes. While not sponsored by any missionary society, Robinson and Clark are examples of that broader group of mission minded evangelicals.

This, along with the ‘Bell and Lancaster’ school system and catechetical teaching, seems to have influenced the development of their methods among the Aboriginal people at Wybalenna. The evangelical practice of regular meetings to study Scripture, and provide mutual spiritual nurture, was another feature introduced at Wybalenna in the form of the evening classes for ‘mutual instruction’. The absence of female speakers in these classes is likely to be a consequence of the suppression of evangelical women preachers such as occurred within Methodism after John Wesley’s death in 1791.<sup>10</sup> These were the immediate contexts in which the sermons and addresses were delivered at the settlement.

Within these broader characteristics of evangelicalism, Robinson and Clark were the more immediate influences and role models for the Aboriginal speakers. Robinson’s desire for emulation among the Aboriginal people expressed in the *Flinders Island Chronicle*<sup>11</sup> was also seen in the classes for mutual instruction. Such role modelling by colonial powers that sought to induce emulation, or mimicry, among the colonised was common in colonial contexts. Bhabha has critiqued the practice in India of an evangelical system of mission education conducted uncompromisingly in the English language through which

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<sup>9</sup> Tolar Burton, V., 2001, ‘John Wesley and the Liberty to Speak: the Rhetorical and Literary Practices of Early Methodism’, *College, Composition and Communication*, 53 (1), p. 67. Robinson, however, did not take up Wesley’s affirmation of women as preachers.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>11</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 1.

Indians would become outwardly ‘like’ the English but remain dependent and not ever become equal.<sup>12</sup>

In considering this type of critique in the context of the Aboriginal speakers at Wybalenna, there are several clear examples of the speakers, particularly Walter Arthur, Thomas Brune, and Noemy, mimicking Clark and Robinson in their writing and speaking styles. These mimicking characteristics include regular quoting of, and indirect references to, biblical passages, quoting Christian hymns, exhorting people to pray each day, and referring to peoples’ sin and their need to turn away from the devil so they can go to heaven when they die. In at least two addresses Walter Arthur describes Noemy speaking, “as if he were a minister”.<sup>13</sup>

It is problematic to assess the extent to which Robinson desired the Aboriginal people to become ‘like’ him but not ‘equal’ to him. There are indications of aspirations to equality in the desire that Walter Arthur become a catechist<sup>14</sup> and therefore be equal to Clark. The production of the *Chronicle*<sup>15</sup> was somewhat similar to Robinson’s own writing practices describing daily life within the settlement and writing sermons and other addresses for that context. The invitation to the Aboriginal people to address the same weekday evening school as Robinson and Clark is another. In the sermons, equality is expressed in the references to ‘black men and white men’ being created by God, descendant from the same ancestors, Adam and Eve.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bhabha, H., 1994, *The Location of Culture*. London; Routledge, p. 96f. For some discussion of ‘mimicry’ at Wybalenna, see also Van Toorn, 2006, pp. 112 – 115.

<sup>13</sup> 24/9/1837 & 6/2/1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825. See also Van Toorn, 2006, pp. 112 – 115.

<sup>14</sup> In a catechetical examination by Robinson he described Walter: ‘Is one of the Clerks to the Catechist and assists at the school’ ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 278 – 282.

<sup>15</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Eg., Thomas Brune, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1838, Ibid., p. 127.

But there are also elements of inequality. The first language addresses were limited to evening schools only, never in Sunday services. Robinson, as Commandant, had superior authority over all others at the settlement. This suggests the Aboriginal people were encouraged to become something towards being equal, or at least less unequal, but at Wybalenna they would always remain dependent upon Robinson, or any other Commandant. The earlier aspiration that Walter Arthur could perhaps become Catechist, the second highest paid position at Wybalenna, disappeared when Walter and Mary Ann were removed to Chalky Island.<sup>17</sup> Robinson's strong emphasis on an English language Christian faith<sup>18</sup> meant the path towards independence and equality would need to be through competency in English writing and speaking, and few Aboriginal people could write a sentence.

While this mimicry can be seen from the colonial perspective as teaching colonised people enough for them to be useful but not enough to become equal, post-colonial perspectives from the viewpoints of the colonised, interpret these same sources as examples of agency or parody.<sup>19</sup> The context at Wybalenna can be seen as a 'contact zone'<sup>20</sup> or 'contested place'<sup>21</sup> where Aboriginal people appropriated and interpreted elements of colonial life and were in the process of creating for themselves 'transcultural identities'<sup>22</sup> in a 'dialectical process of the making of the Aboriginal people and their making of themselves'.<sup>23</sup> Therefore it is

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<sup>17</sup> Plomley, 1966, pp. 544, 573, 776.

<sup>18</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 Vol 23. CY548, pp. 31 – 34.

<sup>19</sup> Bhabha, 1994, pp. 85 – 122.

<sup>20</sup> Ashcroft, B., (et al), 2013, *Post-colonial Studies*. London; Routledge, pp. 62 – 63. See also, Pratt, M., 1991, 'Art in the Contact Zone', *Profession*, pp. 33 – 40.

<sup>21</sup> McGrath, A., 1995, 'Contested ground: what is 'Aboriginal history'?' in McGrath, A. (ed.), *Contested Ground: Australian Aborigines under the British Crown*. St Leonard's; Allen and Unwin, pp. 359 - 97.

<sup>22</sup> Ashcroft, 2013, p. 263; Peyer, B., 1997, *The Tutor'd Mind: Indian Missionary Writers in Antebellum America*. Amherst; University of Massachusetts Press.

<sup>23</sup> Attwood, B., 1989, *The Making of the Aborigines*. Sydney; Allen & Unwin, p. 150.

appropriate to see the addresses as examples of ‘survivance narratives’,<sup>24</sup> developed in the context of a deep rupturing of much of their previous sense of themselves, and the beginnings of new and provisional narratives, which, for some, incorporated Christian faith.

This ‘mixing’ of Aboriginal and Christian rhetorical styles and broader spiritual cosmologies did not constitute an adulteration or denial of Aboriginality. Rather, they expressed creative strategies for emerging Aboriginal identities in a contested cultural and political space, particularly where Aboriginal people were at a political and economic disadvantage. The addresses are dialogical discourses that enabled adaptation, incorporation, and resistance while attending to survival. The improvisational nature of these addresses was seen as each Aboriginal writer/speaker expressed multiple speaking positions simultaneously. Van Toorn has noted the conspicuous oscillations in both Walter’s and Thomas’ use of first, second and third-person pronouns.<sup>25</sup> They both had uncertain and ambiguous cultural, social, and political positions at Wybalenna, being part of some groups but not others.<sup>26</sup> These ‘oscillations’ are more profound than the ambiguous speaking position of every preacher who is simultaneously addressing an audience and part of the same audience.

Walter, as a younger person, had other religious role models at Wybalenna who were likely to be at least as influential, if not more so, than Clark or Robinson. Walter’s father Rolepa was leader of one of the largest clans at

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<sup>24</sup> Powell, M., 2002, ‘Rhetorics of Survivance: How Native Americans use Writing’, *College, Composition and Communication* 53 (3), pp. 396 - 434.

<sup>25</sup> Writers/speakers also regularly used the phrase ‘my friends’, eg., Walter Arthur, 6<sup>th</sup> February 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 97; Thomas Brune, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1837, *Ibid.*, p. 75; Druemerterpunner / Alexander, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 48 – 49; Drinene / Neptune, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1838, *Ibid.*, pp. 44 – 45; Wooraddy / Alpha 14<sup>th</sup> April 1838, *Ibid.*, pp. 49 – 50.

<sup>26</sup> Van Toorn, P., 2006, *Writing Never Arrives Naked*. Canberra; Aboriginal Studies Press, p. 111.



Wybalenna, the ‘Ben Lomond’, and showed signs of continuing his leadership role. It seems reasonable to interpret Rolepa’s behaviour as seeking to pass on his knowledge and practices through subsequent generations. To maintain family and clan narratives across these frontier generations would be invaluable. But their relationship was problematic. Walter had experienced childhood cultural disruption and dislocation from family and clan but reconnected, to some degree, with family and clan at Wybalenna.<sup>27</sup> Thomas Brune, by contrast, was an orphan without any family or clan relatives at Wybalenna. Colonists had been his role models and shaped his identity for most of his childhood years. Therefore, his writing/speaking position was significantly different.

### **Aboriginal addresses and writings**

While researchers rightly give attention to the surviving writings of the *Flinders Island Chronicle*,<sup>28</sup> it is important to remember there are more references to first language, pidgin, and English sermons and addresses of ‘mutual instruction’, and more participant voices, than there are editions and writers of the *Chronicle*. The voluminous writings of Robinson and the written text of the *Chronicle*, can skew our perception and give rise to preferencing text above voice. But Wybalenna was primarily an oral context. This variety of languages and breadth of participants are therefore much more significant in considering Aboriginal interpretations of Christian faith at Wybalenna. Indeed, the increasing number of first language Aboriginal Christian voices and addresses, particularly during September and

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<sup>27</sup> Dammary, S., 2001, *Walter George Arthur A Free Tasmanian?* Melbourne; Monash University, p. 1 – 7.

<sup>28</sup> Van Toorn, P., 2006. Rose, M., (ed). 1996, *For the Record*. St Leonards; Allen & Unwin.

October 1837, may have contributed to the demise of the *Chronicle*, last issued on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1837.

The largest number of surviving ‘sermons’ are in English, however, and belong to Thomas Bruny with twenty-four,<sup>29</sup> and Walter Arthur, thirteen.<sup>30</sup> Of the Aboriginal people at Wybalenna they were the most familiar with the Christian faith and had experienced a variety of sermon presenters, including at the Orphan School. There is a marked difference in writing style and content between the English addresses of these two younger men and Clark’s notes of the first language addresses given by the older men between February and April 1838.

Over the seven weeks from 24<sup>th</sup> February to 21<sup>st</sup> April 1838, Clark reported first language addresses given by seven Aboriginal men from different clans on six of the Saturday Evening Schools.<sup>31</sup> By this time it seems Robinson’s ‘English-only’ faith was losing what support it had among the Aboriginal people. Walter Arthur fell quickly into the status of *persona non grata*. Like the demise of the *Chronicle*, the reports of first language addresses coincided with the last dated English addresses given by Walter, on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> February 1838.<sup>32</sup> There are seven undated sermons bearing Walter’s name so it is possible he preached again after this time, but not for at least a year. As a climax to Robinson’s increasing frustration,<sup>33</sup> Walter and Mary Ann were married by the Chaplain, Rev Thomas

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<sup>29</sup> Seven are undated and three have two copies, ML Robinson Papers A7074 CY825, CY979, A7044 CY548.

<sup>30</sup> Eight are undated and one has three copies, ML Robinson Papers A7074 CY825.

<sup>31</sup> There are written reports for five due to Clark’s absence and deaths occurring on one weekend. Plomley, 1987, pp. 538, 549.

<sup>32</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, pp. 97, 131.

<sup>33</sup> Robinson’s daughter had found Walter and Mary Ann in bed together on 2 December 1837, Plomley, 1987, p. 506. In response, Robinson put Walter in gaol for seven days, *Ibid.*, p. 508. In January 1838, Walter was ‘tried before a jury of natives for having stolen from the government stores four knives. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to wear irons for four days. The whole of the officers were present on the occasion and the proceedings were instituted with their concurrence’, *Ibid.*, p. 523.

Dove on 16<sup>th</sup> March 1838<sup>34</sup> and within three days, purportedly with the consent of Walter and Mary Ann, the officers of the Settlement agreed to send them to Chalky Island.<sup>35</sup> Four months later Walter and Mary Ann were moved to Prime Seal Island on 18<sup>th</sup> July<sup>36</sup> and did not return to Wybalenna until 25<sup>th</sup> January 1839.<sup>37</sup>

It is intriguing to ponder why Robinson saw it as preferable to exile Walter and Mary Ann rather than have them at Wybalenna. Both had been involved as teachers of other Aboriginal people for two years and, according to their catechetical examinations, were among the most knowledgeable of Christian teaching and most capable in writing. As a writer of the *Chronicle* Walter had been held up as someone to emulate, an example of Robinson's achievements in 'Christianising and civilising'. However for Robinson and the other officers it became more important to cease the *Chronicle* than continue it, even with Thomas Brune as sole author, and more important to remove Walter and Mary Ann entirely from the Settlement.

While the exact reasons are unclear, the inter-clan relationships are another potential factor. Thomas, an orphan, had arrived later than virtually all other Aboriginal people at Wybalenna, in 1836. His youthful age and clan-less status are likely to have mitigated his influence or 'emulation' among the clans if he had

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<sup>34</sup> The certificate of marriage reads – 'Flinders Island. 16th March 1838. The two aboriginal youths Walter and Mary Ann, having signified their desire of being united to each other in marriage, and having obtained for this purpose the consent of the Commandant, they appeared before me this day in the presence of the undersigned witnesses and others, and having solemnly declared their sense of the mutual obligations which that relation involves, and their determination through the help of divine grace faithfully to discharge them, as also their ignorance of any obstacle to their being so united, arising from consanguinity, previous contract or otherwise, were married by me agreeably to the forms of the Church of Scotland. Robert Clark Thomas Dove late catechist Chaplain of Flinders Island M Walsh M D medl officer', ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p.114.

<sup>35</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 544.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 573.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 776.

continued as sole chronicler. Walter's clan, the 'Ben Lomond', had been a substantial portion of the Wybalenna population, but no one from that clan is mentioned giving an address during these weeks in 1838. Instead the west coast, north and Big River clan leaders gave the most addresses. This may express a change in the inter-clan political relationships at that time.

The addresses given in this period by clan leaders total twenty-six. Most are 'in their own language' or the 'language of the settlement' but some are in English. Addresses were given by Noemy (West Coast) and Drinene (North) in each of the five reports, Dowwringgi (Big River) and Druemerterpunner (Big River) in three, Woorraddy (Brune) in two and Pevay / Napoleon / Tunnerminnerwait (Cape Grim) and Robert (North-East) in one, the last. With several clan leaders and most clans involved, except it seems the 'Ben Lomond', these first language and pidgin addresses were likely to be more influential than the *Chronicle* or English language sermons by Walter or Thomas.

A further contrast is that the addresses by Walter and Thomas were firstly written, usually under supervision of Robinson or Clark, and later performed in the evening school, whereas the addresses by older Aboriginal men were first delivered orally in first languages and then translated into the local *pidgin*, before being written by Clark in his reports to Robinson. While Johnston has noted the intricate connection between writing, identity and colonial culture and the important role of writing in construction of 'Britishness' under empire,<sup>38</sup> the role of writing was also shaping new forms of Aboriginal identity. As mentioned previously, Walter and Thomas were aware of their increased power in being able

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<sup>38</sup> Johnston, A., 2004, 'The Little Empire of Wybalenna: Becoming Colonial in Australia', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 81, p. 23.

to name people in the *Chronicle*.<sup>39</sup> Dammary suggests ‘Walter had observed how Robinson exercised his authority, and had made the connection between power and writing’.<sup>40</sup> However the absence of any evidence of Walter keeping his own writing collection with his own copies of sermons, other letters, or an autobiography suggests that writing was not a primary element in his emerging Aboriginal-Christian identity. It was only in the mid-1840s, in the post-Robinson era that with some assistance from Clark, Walter Arthur began writing directly to the wider colonial audience of the Governor.<sup>41</sup>

It may be a simple coincidence but perhaps worth noting that the Christian season of Lent, which covers the forty weekdays plus six Sundays leading up to Holy Saturday (the eve of Easter day), began on Ash Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> February 1838 with Easter Day on 15<sup>th</sup> April. The reports of sermons therefore began just prior to Lent and finished on the first Saturday after Easter. While it is unknown if this played a role in the first language sermons, nor is it known what the Lenten practices of Robinson, Dove and Clark were in 1838 (Easter is not mentioned in Robinson’s journal), the season of Lent is a time for Christian people to focus on the meaning and significance of being Christian through attending to the life, suffering and death of Jesus Christ.

The earliest surviving example of an Aboriginal person speaking about God in ‘Aboriginal-English’ at Wybalenna is not in an address, but earlier, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1835, prior to Robinson’s arrival, when Clark reported an unnamed Aboriginal man who was very sick. Clark wrote:

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<sup>39</sup> Several women ‘said they [Walter and Thomas] might KARNY speak but not write’, Plomley, 1987, p. 489.

<sup>40</sup> Dammary, S., 2001, p.11.

<sup>41</sup> Ryan, L., 2012, *Tasmanian Aborigines A History Since 1803*. Sydney; Allen & Unwin, p. 247.

desired him to call upon God Almighty as none other could  
relieve him ... he told me in his own language ‘meena carny God  
almighty to parraway menatti and neenna too an appav—  
[indecipherable] and meenatti a little one meena locthia God  
almighty’ that is I prayed to God to put away my sickness and  
understood me or heard me and I am but little sick I love God  
almighty I attributed his recovery to the intervention of the  
Divine powers.<sup>42</sup>

While this is another example of the evolving pidgin, the report further substantiates the multi-faceted ‘transcultural identities’ Aboriginal people were manifesting linguistically and religiously. In this man previous interpretations and responses to illness were now incorporating elements of Christian prayer.

### **Addresses and ‘mutual instruction’**

The earliest surviving documentary references to Aboriginal people addressing each other in first languages about Christian faith are on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1837 when Robinson wrote:

I had long resolved when the opportunity offered to induce the male Aboriginal people to attempt the instruction of their countrymen, and during the catechist's absence from the settlement at Chalky I took the occasion to playfully ask them to commence to exhort and admonish each other from the desk. This was done by King William, King George, Philip, Nome, and was well observed and attended to by all present. I

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<sup>42</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7062 CY549, pp. 165 – 66.

requested them to bear it in mind that they would have to speak this day. The native youth opened the school by prayer. I then called upon Mr Dickenson to read a portion of scripture, as they were the foundation of all morality. Mr Allen was then requested by me to address them; he spoke to them on the fall of man. I then asked the natives if they understood what had been said to them. Nome said he understood it. This was the reply I wanted. I then desired him to come forward and address his countrymen. He did so and spoke with great confidence and vehemence and delivered a most instructive and interesting discourse partly in his own and partly in English. Spoke against the practice of thieving and desired them to live honestly. Told them of Jesus Christ and God our Father, of heaven, of glory, of going up to heaven, of hell. Said bad people went to hell, that good people went up to heaven; Devil is in Hell. King William, King George, Philip and Alfred spoke as well. It was a most interesting meeting. Singing was introduced at intervals.<sup>43</sup>

The format for the evening school followed a regular pattern: A Youth (unnamed) but probably Walter or Thomas,<sup>44</sup> began with prayer, likely to have come from the Book of Common Prayer.<sup>45</sup> An officer of the Settlement followed this, in this case Mr Allen the surgeon, reading a portion of the Christian scriptures (unknown

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<sup>43</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 439.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 422, 439, 648. An example of a prayer by Thomas Brune is in ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 113.

<sup>45</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 47.

passage), and then addressing the whole group in a general exhortation.<sup>46</sup> Those Aboriginal people in regular attendance had witnessed this format for over a year and so were familiar with the routine. Robinson sought assurance from the people about their understanding, and then invited Noemy to speak from the ‘desk’.

It is noticeable that Robinson chose only males. This is in contrast to earlier evangelicals within the Church of England, such as John Wesley, who encouraged women to preach in public gatherings of men and women.<sup>47</sup> Gender separation was a common practice in the classes at Wybalenna so that while Mary Ann is listed as a teacher<sup>48</sup> the students in her class were also all women. Two months earlier some women expressed reluctance, or shame, if asked questions at the school in the presence of the men.<sup>49</sup> This gender differentiation is noteworthy. Women later became ‘translators’ of the men’s first language addresses, at least in those surviving addresses from February – April 1838,<sup>50</sup> so had a significant role in reporting to Clark, and through him to Robinson. In this role they were able to provide some of their own ‘interpretation’ in the translation. So while it seems they were not permitted to speak to the whole group, they did have a role in translating and interpreting. There is no documentation of the women ‘addressing’ each other in their first language but if there were several of them in the Evening School it seems unlikely that they would not have. As well as considering if the men’s addresses were ventriloquised versions of what Robinson, Clark and Allen wanted to hear, we ought also consider that what these settlement documents from 1838 show are not necessarily what the Aboriginal

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<sup>46</sup> Plomley, 1987, pp. 422, 424.

<sup>47</sup> Tolar Burton, 2001, p. 67.

<sup>48</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044, CY548, pp. 306 – 07.

<sup>49</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 421.

<sup>50</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 38.



men said, but what the women reported, and of that the documents are what Clark wrote to Robinson of what the women said.

The four Aboriginal men whom Robinson ‘induced’ to speak were Tongerlongerter, Rolepa, Philip, and Noemy. A brief biographical sketch of two will illustrate their roles and status at Wybalenna and the place of these addresses within that context. Rolepa was leader of the Ben Lomond clan and father of Walter Arthur. He was probably involved in the beginnings of the translation work with Wilkinson in June – September 1833 and seems to have fulfilled a leadership role on the settlement particularly in nominating constables,<sup>51</sup> arranging and celebrating marriages<sup>52</sup> and acting in a protective role for some others.<sup>53</sup> Together with Purngerpar / Alfred and Woorraddy, Rolepa welcomed Governor Franklin to the settlement.<sup>54</sup> He and Robinson exchanged gifts,<sup>55</sup> however, Robinson’s generosity did not extend to writing to John Batman on behalf of Rolepa to have his other son, Rolepana, returned.<sup>56</sup> He did not participate in the addresses for which there are more extensive records in February – April 1838, even though he was still at Wybalenna. Perhaps the ‘exile’ of his son, Walter, in March that year was part of the reason. Rolepa died on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1840.<sup>57</sup>

It is likely that Rolepa’s address in the school was an expression of his continuing leadership role at Wybalenna. He was familiar with Christian traditions and continued to speak his first language. His wife, Luggernemennener had attended church services in Hobart and was likely to have been involved in the

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<sup>51</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 441.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 470, 518 – 19.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 452.

<sup>54</sup> January 1838, Ibid., p. 524.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 463, 468, 490.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 670.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 942, or 30<sup>th</sup> June 1838, Ibid., p. 843.

Bible translation a few years earlier. While Rolepa cultivated a relationship with Robinson, he clearly, and perhaps more importantly, involved himself in arranging marriage relationships and ordering life among various Aboriginal people within and beyond his own clan. Interestingly, like Tongerlongerter, he was not involved in the English language catechism tests that began a week or so after his address. It seems these two older men chose to participate in the more open context of ‘mutual instruction’ than the narrower pre-formatted English language answers of the catechism, though Rolepa’s son, Walter, performed very capably.

Noemy was a constable<sup>58</sup> and his wife gave birth to a daughter the day before his address.<sup>59</sup> Like the ‘Kings’ he received a coat from Robinson<sup>60</sup> and participated in nuptial<sup>61</sup> and funerary arrangements within his clan, including burial and cremations outside the ‘official’ cemetery.<sup>62</sup> The Settlement Journal refers to Noemy being beaten by Purngerpar and others in December 1838.<sup>63</sup> Both were ‘constables’ but Noemy for the ‘upper huts’ and Purngerpar for the ‘lower huts’,<sup>64</sup> so the fight was between two clan leaders and could have been about inter-clan conflict. In these examples, it seems the pre-existing practices of older men were continuing and the additional roles and meanings of ‘constable’, ‘coat’ and ‘address’ were incorporated into these arrangements and relationships. Noemy continued to instruct Robinson in the translation of particular words.<sup>65</sup> He also incorporated adaptations in the form of acquiring reading skills<sup>66</sup> and

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<sup>58</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 375.

<sup>59</sup> 28<sup>th</sup> April 1837, Ibid., p. 439.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 454.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 462, 470.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 500, 516, 568.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 768.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 420.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 490.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 482.

developing a practice of holding a book in his hand while giving his address<sup>67</sup> perhaps more an indication of its symbolic power, than its literary content.<sup>68</sup>

These men were a generation older than Walter Arthur and Thomas Brune. The two youths were fifteen to seventeen years of age in 1837 – 1838. By contrast, Rolepa, Walter's father, was about forty-seven or forty-eight. The age of Tongerlongerter was unknown but being 'King' he is not a youth. Philip was thirty-three or thirty-four, the same age as Noemy. The men represented at least three different clans, Oyster Bay, Ben Lomond and West Coast. Philip's is unknown. It is possible that these four men used the opportunity of giving an address to (re-)assert their personal seniority among their own clan's people, and the other clans, through their use of their first language, the encouragement to focus on 'moral' teaching from Mr Allen's general exhortation, and the newly added, and potentially authoritative, speaking position of the school 'desk'.<sup>69</sup>

When Clark returned from Chalky Island he sought permission from Robinson to address the natives 'in the language generally spoken by them on the settlement'. He had previously been prohibited by Nickolls from doing so, and also by Allen when acting commandant. Allen recommended Clark not use the language because his address to them 'was highly ridiculous', and Robinson refused the request.<sup>70</sup>

The following Saturday, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1837, Robinson reported further addresses given by Noemy who spoke, this time in English, 'about J Christ [and]

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<sup>67</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 491.

<sup>68</sup> Johnston notes a similar experience in the Pacific context, 'missionaries invested these books with such significance that native communities picked up on their importance as cultural signifiers and artefacts, potentially without also adopting the biblical message that the missionaries intended'. Johnson, A., 2001, *The Book Eaters: Textuality, Modernity, and the London Missionary Society*, *Semeia*, 88, p. 21.

<sup>69</sup> It had been Robinson's desk but he gave it to the school in December 1835. Plomley, 1987, p. 319.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 691 – 92, note 1.

put questions to the natives very pertly'; Druemerterpunner from Big River clan 'spoke in English about J Christ'; Tongerlongerter spoke in his own language and said 'God made everything, named animals, birds' (someone must have translated his first language into this English summary); and Rolepa 'spoke partly in his own and partly in English.' 'Dr Allen spoke. Mr Dickenson read 6th Chapter of John, the raising of Lazarus,<sup>71</sup> and I [Robinson] spoke. Catechist concluded with prayer. Several other natives spoke on the occasion.'<sup>72</sup>

The absence of Philip and the presence of a new speaker, Druemerterpunner is worth noting. Druemerterpunner from Big River was about twenty-five-years-old at the time and married to Drunameliyer / Caroline.<sup>73</sup> He nearly died in June 1837<sup>74</sup> but recovered sufficiently that in the following month, like the other 'Kings', he was appointed a constable '*viva voce* of the assembly'.<sup>75</sup> He, like many others, continued to practice cultural ways in regard to deceased relatives. For example, he gave Robinson a bone of his deceased brother on the day of the funeral.<sup>76</sup> Like Noemy, Druemerterpunner was involved in a conflict with a member, possibly leader, of another clan, Pevay about the mistreatment of his dogs.<sup>77</sup> He is among those Robinson writes as saying the Collect and Lord's Prayer.<sup>78</sup> In 1838 he is among those who give addresses at the Evening School<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> The raising of Lazarus is actually in John Chapter 11. This topic of resurrection and afterlife will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

<sup>72</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 440.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 837.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 448.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 462.

<sup>76</sup> Plomley, 1987, pp. 496, 498. For examples of other continuing cultural practices, see Birmingham, J., 1976, 'The Archaeological Contribution to Nineteenth-Century History: Some Australian Case Studies', *World Archaeology*, 7 (3), pp. 311 – 315.

<sup>77</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 495.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 509.

<sup>79</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 45 – 6, 48, 54.

and in August he signed the declaration about accompanying Robinson to Port Phillip.<sup>80</sup>

After several months of ‘silence’ in the documents, there are occasional references to further addresses, such as 3<sup>rd</sup> September<sup>81</sup> and Saturday evening school 7 October 1837 where four papers, two each by Thomas Brune and Walter Arthur on ‘general subjects and religion’ were read in English followed by addresses from Walter, Thomas, Nicermenic / Eugene, Woorraddy, Moultehelargine, Maccamee / Washington, Lerpullermener / Henry, Meterluererparrityer / Christopher, and a few others.<sup>82</sup> Clearly the number of speakers had grown since March and April.

Noemy’s address, 2 September 1837 (Saturday), reported by Clark (Sunday 3 September) as being given first in his native language and then in the dialect of the settlement, is as follows:

God noracoopa he coethee us, you coethee God - coethee plenty a  
big one you taplaldy weethicallee God send Jesus Christ to save us  
to parraway the Devil, potheae you coethe the Devil parraway,  
coethe God coethe Jesus Christ the son of God - you taplady lutha  
you coethe you norocoopa God make you good man you go top  
weekthiekatha.<sup>83</sup>

This reporting of the ‘dialect of the settlement’ illustrates some of the potentially varied interpretations of Christian teaching that were occurring outside of the control of catechist and commandant, a ‘second Reformation’ as Van Toorn

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<sup>80</sup> Plomley, 1987, pp. 576, 751.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., pp. 476, 707.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 484. These addresses by Thomas and Walter, if they survive, must be among the ‘undated’ as these dates do not appear among their writings.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., pp. 476, 707, note 3.

describes it.<sup>84</sup> Linguistic translation is more approximate than exact and the lack of documentary evidence for a number of the evolving pidgin words, as distinct from first language words, simply adds to their tentative nature. The address in first language is likely to have flowed more smoothly with more words as it was the language most familiar to Noemy, rather than this haltingly written pidgin reported by Clark. These pidgin words are also likely to have been more comprehensible to the Aboriginal audience than to Clark because the pidgin was evolving from their languages rather than directly from English.

An approximate translation of the address is:<sup>85</sup>

Noracoopa – very good<sup>86</sup>

Coethee – could be: cothe, hastily, soon, instant<sup>87</sup>

Could be: koety, hole or cave<sup>88</sup>

Could be: coot.er.wen, frighten<sup>89</sup>

Taplaldy / taplady – could be: tabelty, go on<sup>90</sup>

Weethicallee – could be: we.tick.et.ter – high up<sup>91</sup>

Weekthiekatha could be a variant spelling of weethicallee / weticketter – high up<sup>92</sup>

Lutha – could be: loatta – gum tree<sup>93</sup>

Parraway – go away, put it away<sup>94</sup>

Potheae – could be: no<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Van Toorn, 2006, p. 118.

<sup>85</sup> These translations are mostly from what is described in other contemporaneous documents rather than today's *palawa kani* language program run by the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre which includes elements of several pre-colonial languages and additional material.

<sup>86</sup> Plomley, 1976, pp. 240 – 241.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 366.

<sup>88</sup> Plomley, 1976, p. 255.

<sup>89</sup> Plomley, 1976, p. 255, and email Theresa Sainty, 4<sup>th</sup> February, 2012.

<sup>90</sup> Plomley 1976, p. 239.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 436.

<sup>94</sup> Plomley, N. J. B., 1976, *A Word List of Tasmanian Aboriginal Languages*. Launceston; Foot and Playstead, pp. 238, 365, 426.

An approximate English translation could be:

God *very good*, he *fear* us, you *fear* God, *fear* plenty big one, you *go on high up* God send Jesus Christ to save us *put away* the Devil, *no* you *fear* the Devil *put [Devil] away*, *fear* God *fear* Jesus Christ the son of God – you *go up a gum tree* you *fear* you *very good* God make you good man you go top *high up*.

This could then be read as something like:

God is very good to us, if we fear (respect?) each other a lot you will go to heaven

God sent Jesus Christ to save us and put away the Devil. Don't fear the devil but reject the Devil.

If you fear God, and Jesus Christ the son of God, you will go up higher than a gum tree

To fear God is very good and God will make you a good person and you will go to heaven

About six weeks later, 15 October 1837, the catechist reported a conversation that he had had with Kartiteyer / Hector the previous morning in the presence of Dr Walsh:

I said to Hector 'you are very sick?' Answer 'yes me plenty manaty'. You coethee God? Hector, 'yes me coethee plenty, you coethee Jesus Christ? 'Yes me coethee Jesus Christ the son of God'. Do you pray to him? 'Yes me pray to him plenty, me pray last night our Father which art in heaven plenty'. You very sick you krakabuka by and bye? 'Yes me tabletee werthickathe to God,

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<sup>95</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 329.

me coethee'. On making this answer the poor fellow smiled. After some more conversation we departed... He died the following night.<sup>96</sup>

A more thorough linguistic analysis and interpretation would be beneficial. Nevertheless, these fragments are suggestive of a continuing dialogical religious identity expressed by Aboriginal people.<sup>97</sup>

These first language addresses of April, September and October 1837 were occurring concurrently with English language catechetical examinations, which began 9<sup>th</sup> May 1837, and the schools, which began in February 1836. These 'addresses' occurred only in weekday or Saturday evening schools rather than Sunday services (and therefore are referred to as 'addresses' rather than 'sermons'). Several of Thomas Brune's and Walter Arthur's papers, written only in English, were read at Sunday morning and evening services. Some of these appear to be read by Robinson,<sup>98</sup> and other times it is not clear who read them.<sup>99</sup> Both youths occasionally read from the Bible at school and church service<sup>100</sup> and sometimes it is not clear what they were reading.<sup>101</sup> However it is clear that no first language addresses were delivered during Sunday services in either spoken or written form.

From these addresses it is evident that Aboriginal people continued speaking their own first languages several years into their experiences at Wybalenna. These continuing languages and cultural practices are indicative of

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<sup>96</sup> Plomley, 1987, pp. 714 – 715.

<sup>97</sup> See also, Ricoeur, P., 1992, *Oneself as Another*. Chicago; Chicago University Press, and Sandywell, B., 2013, *Reflexivity and the Crisis of Western Reason* Vol. 1. Hoboken; Taylor & Francis.

<sup>98</sup> Plomley, 1987, pp. 484, 488.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., pp. 489, 491.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., pp. 422, 493.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 444.



their continuing worldviews and that these were expanding as were their mythologies through interaction with Christian teachings. Each of these men, as noticed by Robinson in his journal, were involved in behaviours that strengthened their changing cultural roles within their clans, and they were adapting in the Wybalenna context to further strengthen these roles. Rather than giving up their languages, worldviews, and cultural practices, they were translating the Christian teaching into their own changing cultural context, languages and meanings. This is not to say that these expressions of faith were not genuine or were a façade or an expression of apparent compliance to colonial masters, but that part of their experience of Christian faith was a strengthening and adaptation of existing clan leadership roles. Furthermore, this exploration may have enriched their cultural and spiritual power and to some extent confirmed, rather than overturned their existing and adapting religious life.

### **Women as translators**

One key difference between the first language addresses in 1837 and those in 1838 is the role of women as translators in the latter. Their involvement seems to have been linguistically unnecessary as at least some of the men did not seem to need a translator during 1837. This suggests another explanation, such as cultural practice. As mentioned previously, women in evangelical streams were active preachers but became suppressed, at least within Methodism, following the death of John Wesley. The crucial role of the women in the creation of these surviving sources from Wybalenna invites readers to consider the addresses by the older men as addresses actually given by the women for it is their translations to Clark that became the reports to Robinson that still survive. This aspect of the addresses,

the theology espoused in them and the interaction of gender relationships among Aboriginal people and between Aboriginal people and colonists, is worthy of greater examination, though the brevity of the addresses limits the breadth and depth of such examinations. The strong focus of Robinson and Clark on men in catechetical classes, and in giving addresses, is clear from the written records. However, the continuing role of women within and between clans and colonists ought not be discounted or underestimated.

In 1838 the women translating were usually from the same clan as the speaker. Noemy was translated by Pengernoburric or Tedehburer / Clara.<sup>102</sup> The first sermon by Wooraddy was reported as translated by Pieyenkomeyenner / Wild Mary and himself,<sup>103</sup> and his second by Dray / Sophia.<sup>104</sup> Pieyenkomeyenner / Wild Mary was from a different clan, Big River<sup>105</sup> and Dray / Sophia, Port Davey<sup>106</sup> whereas Wooraddy, was Nuenonne (Bruny Island). Wooraddy himself was conversant in several Aboriginal languages<sup>107</sup> but reportedly spoke ‘in his native language’ during his addresses.<sup>108</sup> The multilingual proficiency of these three suggests there were more nuanced and multifaceted Aboriginal Christian interpretations occurring at Wybalenna. Furthermore, just as the male clan leaders were enriching their status and role among their clan by participating in these addresses, these, mostly younger, women were also not only adapting to the context but enhancing their roles through their participation.

Comments about women by Walter Arthur and Thomas Brune were unmediated by women. Walter mentions women only once: ‘that work that you

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<sup>102</sup> Plomley, 1987, pp. 250, 836, 853, 855; ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 293 – 94.

<sup>103</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 49 – 50.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., pp. 53 – 54.

<sup>105</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 864.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>107</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7064 Vol. 43, CY550, pp. 169 – 170.

<sup>108</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 49 – 50.

some of you women was going on with other night was most abominable'.<sup>109</sup>

Thomas mentions them twice, complementing their work ethic: 'some of the women are industrious and strong', and in one of these contrasting them to Augustus and Walter.<sup>110</sup>

Several older men's addresses contain criticisms of women and these may be influenced to some degree by the relationships among the women at Wybalenna. These criticisms include going 'to the bush for firewood', 'living like dogs',<sup>111</sup> not going to school,<sup>112</sup> playing too much at balls (marbles)<sup>113</sup> and 'putting grease and ochre on yourselves – you dirty your clothes you dirty yourselves'.<sup>114</sup> It is unclear if these were general criticisms of all women or only those in a particular clan. While some recent studies have examined the emergence of Australian Indigenous feminist theology,<sup>115</sup> the absence of any surviving writings by women at Wybalenna constrains discussion on this topic from within this context.

## **Emergence of a pan-Aboriginal identity**

The addresses enhanced the cultural and political role of the speakers and translators. They also give insight into emerging pan-Aboriginal identity across clan differences. Several speakers summarised common colonial experiences but

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<sup>109</sup> Undated, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 117.

<sup>110</sup> 10<sup>th</sup> September 1837, Ibid., p. 63, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 114 – 115.

<sup>111</sup> Noemy, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 39 – 40, Drinene / Neptune, 17<sup>th</sup> March 1838, Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>112</sup> Drinene / Neptune, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1838, Ibid., pp. 38-39.

<sup>113</sup> Dowwringgi / Leonidas, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1838, Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>114</sup> Wooraddy / Alpha, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1838, Ibid., pp. 53 – 54.

<sup>115</sup> Skye, L., 2007, *Kerygmatics of the New Millenium*. Delhi; ISPCK. See also Douglas, B., 2001, 'Encounters with the Enemy? Academic Readings of Missionary Narratives on Melanesians', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 43 (1), January 2001, pp. 37 – 64, for an assessment of missionary writings about women's agency in Melanesia.

gave different interpretations.<sup>116</sup> Noemy (west coast) described their ignorance of God:

In your own country you did not know there was a God all that you knew was to make spears and waddies and to kill one another.<sup>117</sup>

Drinene (west coast) presented a moral interpretation:

In your own country you were bad people and a great many of you died God did not love what you were doing – God sent you from your own country Why are you continuing those bad things – after a little time you will all die You ought to love God for God is very good to us all.<sup>118</sup>

Drinene (west coast) emphasised their ignorance of Christ:

In your own country you did not know Jesus Christ no you were like the kangaroos you went about every place the white man came to your country they kill your countrymen a great many of them you then came to live in this place and good white men came to teach you about God about Jesus Christ you are not bad now the white men does not kill you now not never.<sup>119</sup>

And Woorraddy (Bruny Island) noted their declining population:

My brothers in our own country a long time ago we were a great many men a great number – but the white men have killed us all – they shot a great many – we are now only a few people here and we ought to be fond of one another we ought to love God

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<sup>116</sup> This recounting of colonial experience built on earlier conversations, eg., Plomley, 1966, p. 88.

<sup>117</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 51 – 52.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

God made everything the Salt water the bullock the horse the  
opossum the kangaroo and wombat Love him and you will go to  
him by + by.<sup>120</sup>

These, and other speakers, were using the opportunity to expound their interpretation of recent experiences and to advocate a particular, potentially unifying, or at least collective, responses among the audience and were using Christian theology as part of this interpretation and advocacy. The audience included most, if not all, clans at Wybalenna, though not every person, and the addresses also functioned for intra-clan and inter-clan purposes. The audience also included Commandant, Chaplain and Catechist and the addresses were one way Aboriginal people sought to influence those relationships. Dove commented on Noemy as an ‘eloquent’ and ‘elegant’ speaker and Robinson stated Woorraddy was not as ‘advanced’ as others because of his involvement with Robinson in the bush.<sup>121</sup> Van Toorn suggests Woorraddy’s address is a ‘reclotting’ of the Bible with ‘meanings capable of advancing his agenda’<sup>122</sup> and this agenda is likely to have had different emphases for Aboriginal and colonial listeners. Interestingly, Woorraddy alone is reported using ‘we’ and the others ‘you’ in his addresses.<sup>123</sup> His pre-existing multi-lingual skills<sup>124</sup> and participation in the ‘friendly mission’ may have contributed to developing a stronger sense of ‘pan-Aboriginal’ identity earlier than others who came to Wybalenna as part of their own clan group.

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<sup>120</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 49 – 50.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>122</sup> Van Toorn, 2006, p. 118.

<sup>123</sup> Note the contrast in excerpts above between ‘in your own country’ and ‘in our own country’.

<sup>124</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7064 Vol. 43, CY550, pp. 169 – 70, and Plomley, 1966, pp. 374, 375, 376.

## **Addresses – forms and structures**

The written addresses regularly expressed formulaic statements, ‘like pieces of a mosaic that have been assembled in a variety of ways to form different configurations of the same basic picture’.<sup>125</sup> Van Toorn suggests the catechetical method as a likely explanation, however Robinson himself also practiced the style.<sup>126</sup> The ‘pieces’ were part of a common rhetorical device, the ‘sound bites’ of the era for mostly non-literate audiences. The mosaic comprised biblical quotations and allusions,<sup>127</sup> quotes from contemporary hymns<sup>128</sup> as well as the catechetical answers identified by Van Toorn. While the addresses survive today in written form it is important to remember it was a written genre designed for oral delivery.<sup>129</sup> In this way it is not dissimilar to earlier Aboriginal storytelling oratory.<sup>130</sup>

## **Adaptation of conversion narratives**

One of the greatest literary legacies of evangelicalism, alongside its hymnody, is the plethora of conversion literature in public magazines and private letters. Behind all of these stand the oral tradition of spoken testimony in band and society meetings.<sup>131</sup> These are testimonies of individual, rather than collective, experiences of God, but they do follow narrative conventions. In the sermons at

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<sup>125</sup> Van Toorn, 2006, p. 108.

<sup>126</sup> For example a sermon by Robinson ‘On Prayer’ began with part of an earlier sermon, ‘Thoughts on Religion’ ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, Volume 53, pp. 30 – 72.

<sup>127</sup> Eg., Thomas Brune, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1837, Gospel of Matthew, Chapters 25 and 28, Revelation, Chapter 4, Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>128</sup> Eg., Walter Arthur, quoted ‘I Sing the Almighty Power of God’ by Isaac Watts, Undated, Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>129</sup> Van Toorn, 2006, p. 108.

<sup>130</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 376.

<sup>131</sup> Hindmarsh, B., 1999, ‘ “My Chains Fell Off, My Heart Was Free” Early Methodist Conversion Narrative in England’ *Church History*, 68 (4), pp. 9 – 10.

Wybalenna there are aspects of collective memory and also exhortations about personal behaviour.

Hindmarsh identifies several conventions in evangelical, particularly Methodist conversion narratives. They include original prosperity, descent into humiliation, and return. As such it is a microcosm of the biblical story of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and new Creation. In these narratives a shadow was cast over the speaker's earlier life. Where they narrated an awareness of religious concerns early in life, it subsequently faded as they fell into vices and oscillated between wrongdoing and remorse. Where they had grown up in formal religious observances such as church services, these were cast as a form of pharisaic legalism. Another element was retrospective interpretations of providential deliverances that prepared them for later experiences of God's grace as steps on the way to conversion.<sup>132</sup>

These narrative patterns sometimes varied, as different elements were foregrounded more or less than others but, on the whole, it operated within a basic pattern of biblical narrative and Reformation theology. The pattern offered an opportunity for the subjects to locate themselves personally in a spiritual and moral, social and political meta-narrative, or tradition and explored how their story uniquely reflected common broader themes. By so doing the orator articulated a narrative-self, newly enfranchised and empowered to respond to daily life.<sup>133</sup>

At Wybalenna the addresses by the Aboriginal men show elements consistent with these 'conversion' narratives, with some significant variations. The following is a brief discussion of several of these elements: God's Providence, sin,

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<sup>132</sup> Hindmarsh, 1999, pp. 16 – 20.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 26. See also, Sandywell, 2013; and Scott, J., 1990, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. New Haven; Yale University Press.

prayer and heaven/hell. One of the strongest similarities is in interpreting their earlier individual and collective lives. This was expressed as not knowing God ‘in their own country’. This previously unrecognised providential care prepared the way for ‘good white men’, such as Robinson or Clark, to teach them about God and Jesus Christ in more recent times so that they now knew. An example of this narrative of ignorance changing to knowledge is by Drinene:

You did not know God in your own country ... God sent the white man Parson/Catechist and he has instructed us about God and Jesus Christ the Son of God we now know that Jesus Christ made the trees the salt water the sun and moon and the kangaroo and the emu and every thing God loves every thing that is good and he loves good men and good men love God’.<sup>134</sup>

The elements of trees, salt water, sun, moon, kangaroo and emu evoke memories of the creation stories of each, and the Creator Beings who were the active agents in creation. Drinene implies Jesus Christ did the creating previously ascribed to the Creator Beings, but, at least in this documentary source, he stopped short of naming Jesus Christ as the Creator Being. This theological point that God saw everything people did ‘in their native country’ is likely to be ‘mimicking’ Robinson’s preaching. In one of his earliest sermons at Wybalenna in December 1835 he spoke in a rhetorical exchange with God: ‘I know you regard them, and this because you have lived with them’.<sup>135</sup> This emerges from Robinson’s theology of God as omniscient (all knowing), omnipresent (all present), and

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<sup>134</sup> 31<sup>st</sup> March 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 44 – 45. See also, Walter Arthur, 6<sup>th</sup> February 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 97; Noemy, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 51 – 52. Thomas Brune, is the only one to say, ‘I did not know...’ 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1837, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 72, *emphasis mine*.

<sup>135</sup> 27<sup>th</sup> December 1835, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, Vol 53, pp. 51 – 52.



omnipotent (all powerful).<sup>136</sup> However, this idea stops at the points of God being in the land, living with the people, and watching people's 'bad thoughts'. It does not progress to naming God as part of Aboriginal people's religious expressions. From the geographic and mythic distance of Wybalenna God is named in creation, in the land and animals, everywhere except in the people themselves. Walter Arthur wrote: 'they did not have these things in their heads before they came on Flinders now [sic, 'no'] they did not have these words in their own country'.<sup>137</sup>

The absence of the words suggests the act of 'naming' God, Jesus Christ, in their country was a crucial gap in their experience. Of these Aboriginal people at Wybalenna, only Trugernanner and Dray / Sophia returned to their own, or at least nearby, country. All others lived somewhat displaced from ancestral country and their evolving dialogical religious identity was adapting to that context.<sup>138</sup> As well as 'reading' God into their country, Walter Arthur 'read' Aboriginal people into the biblical narrative.<sup>139</sup> An undated and unnamed sermon also links Aboriginal people with the biblical story of creation:

My dear friends you know that God made the heavens and the earth and sea and the trees and the stones and everything that moveth and he made you and me that we might serve him he made man and put him into the garden of eden a garden of pleasant and the all animals were not savage and transgression fallied upon Adam and sin came upon all men black and white

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<sup>136</sup> Eg., 'Thoughts on Religion', ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, Vol 53, pp. 3 – 56.

<sup>137</sup> 24<sup>th</sup> October 1837, Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> This dis-location was also the situation of every colonist, who was also adapting to their new context, though in a different way to the Aboriginal people.

<sup>139</sup> Undated, Ibid., p. 107. Also, *Flinders Island Chronicle*, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1837, Ibid., p. 23.

and then Jesus Christ came into the world to die for our sins  
according to the scriptures.<sup>140</sup>

This dialogic ‘reading’ and ‘speaking’ between Aboriginal and Christian stories and places by Aboriginal people is an expression of a profound religious transformation that was occurring. One consequence of not knowing God in their own country is that Robinson, and the Aboriginal speakers, rarely refer to their earlier, and continuing, religious life as ‘sinful’ or ‘evil’. Most often they describe themselves as ignorant, I/you/they ‘did not know God’. They were saved from previously ‘not knowing’ to now ‘knowing’ about God and Jesus Christ. They were also ‘saved’ from the bad white men who were killing them.<sup>141</sup>

The strongest criticism of their earlier life is from Drinene:

In your own country you were bad people and a great many of  
you died God did not love what you were doing – God sent you  
from your own country Why are you continuing those bad things  
– after a little time you will all die’,<sup>142</sup> and  
‘You did not know God in your own country - you were  
evild[sic] me[n][sic] there’.<sup>143</sup>

It is unclear why Drinene alone spoke so critically, but it does suggest a variety of views among the Aboriginal speakers. It would appear the rote catechetical answers and few colonial teachers did not prevent Aboriginal speakers developing their personal emphases. In some ways their narratives are not dissimilar to

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<sup>140</sup> While the authorship is not stated, the handwriting is very similar to that of Thomas Brune in writings immediately prior, and subsequent, to this one. ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, Vol 53, p. 113. Thomas Brune, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1838, Ibid., p. 127. Drinene / Neptune, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 44 – 45. Dowwringgi / Leonidas, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1838, Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>141</sup> Thomas Brune, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 130. Drinene / Neptune, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 48. Alpha, 14<sup>th</sup> April, Ibid., pp. 49 – 50.

<sup>142</sup> Drinene / Neptune, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1838, Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>143</sup> Drinene / Neptune, 31<sup>st</sup> March, Ibid., pp. 44 – 45.

addresses by leaders of the early church where Jesus is read back into the history of Israel and where specific psalms and prophetic writings were given Christological interpretations and ‘ignorance’ and culpability were common themes.<sup>144</sup>

Other words not as strong but striking nonetheless, were from Noemy, also from the west coast like Drinene: ‘God sent Jesus Christ his son to bring us to his country’[emphasis added].<sup>145</sup> Their displacement from their own country and being brought to Wybalenna appears as a salvation motif in at least two speakers, without the ‘returning’ metaphor of the conversion narratives. They do not seem to perceive that God would send Jesus Christ into their own country but rather remove them. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that there was a simple theme of old-own country-pre-colonial religion equals a bad-sinful-life from which God-Jesus-Robinson-Clark-good-white-men saved them and brought them to salvation-Wybalenna-white-colonial-Christian life-heaven. The phrase, ‘God’s country’ will be examined further on as it most often appears in sentences about ‘heaven’ rather than contrasting their ‘own country’ with ‘Wybalenna’.

### **Critique of themselves and each other**

It is somewhat surprising that the strongest critiques of pre-contact Aboriginal religious life came from the older men, and not from the younger Walter Arthur or Thomas Brune. This is in stark contrast to the common perception that Aboriginal children were more ‘vulnerable’ to conversion because of their impressionable psychological development. The examples in Robinson’s journals of

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<sup>144</sup> Eg., Gospel of John, Chapter 1; Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 2, Verses 17 – 21 and 25 – 28.

See also, Duling, D.C., 2011, ‘Memory, collective memory, orality and the gospels’, *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies* 67 (1), Art. #915, 11 pages. DOI: 10.4102/hts.v67i1.915.

<sup>145</sup> Noemy, 31<sup>st</sup> March ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 43 – 44.

Trugernanner and Mannalargenna seemingly rejecting Christian faith<sup>146</sup> and the roles of the younger dis-located Aboriginal people such as Walter and Thomas, could give this impression. Similar theories of Aboriginal conversion can be found elsewhere:

Anthropological literature on cultural rites of passage, in which young members of a group are initiated into the community through a process strikingly similar to that of conversion, stresses the nearly universal practice of performing rituals of initiation while the novitiates are still of an impressionable age. It is obviously much more difficult to break down pre-existing notions of the self and reaggregate the elements of selfhood into a new social persona when the individual has already achieved biological and social maturity.<sup>147</sup>

The extant sources appear to show a different scene at Wybalenna. Rolepa and Luggernemennener were involved in Bible translation. Drinene's words have been mentioned already. Wooraddy criticised people's continuing practices saying, 'you make your persons too filthy by putting grease and ochre on yourselves – you dirty your clothes you dirty yourselves – put it away you women'.<sup>148</sup> Druemerterpunner said,

You should not go to the bush a long way to corroberry you are to come here to learn to sing and to pray you ought to be more attentive and learn to work'.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 403.

<sup>147</sup> Juster, S., 1989, 'In a Different Voice: Male and Female Narratives of Religious Conversion in Post-Revolutionary America', *American Quarterly*, 41 (1), pp. 34 – 62.

<sup>148</sup> Wooraddy / Alpha, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 53 – 54.

<sup>149</sup> Druemerterpunner / Alexander, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1838, *Ibid.*, pp. 50 – 51.

Each of these people were adult clan leaders whose pre-existing notions of selfhood appear to have included a dialogical identity. For them, it seems, Christian faith was a new dialogical experience that could be built upon previous dialogical interactions. The addresses contain exhortations to upright moral behaviour and to relationships with each other. Most often this is phrased as ‘don’t scold each other’, ‘fight’, ‘growl’. Here again Walter<sup>150</sup> and Thomas<sup>151</sup> have fewer references than the older men, who appear to have continued exercising their senior roles in these matters.<sup>152</sup> Walter’s only critique of pre-colonial life seems to be a reading back into that context of behaviour happening at Wybalenna: ‘God knows all the bad thoughts that you did while you was in your native woods You thought that God did not see you then and now’.<sup>153</sup> It may simply be that Walter and Thomas were less familiar with that life and therefore could not comment.

### **Heaven/Hell – ‘God’s country’ / ‘Devil’s country’**

Like other evangelical themes, a person’s place in eternity received significant attention. There appear to be more contrasts among the writers and speakers on this theme. Walter wrote on four occasions about ‘a world above the sky where you and I must go by and by when we die’ where the final judgement and separation of ‘good’ from ‘bad’ will occur.<sup>154</sup> The ‘good’ will ‘go to the houses of God’ and to the bad ‘the Devil will take you to his own country there you be

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<sup>150</sup> Undated, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 109.

<sup>151</sup> 28<sup>th</sup> January 1838, Ibid., p. 79, and undated, Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>152</sup> Noemy, eg., 24<sup>th</sup> February 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 38; Druemerterpunner / Alexander, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1838, Ibid., pp. 45 – 46; Drinene / Neptune, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1838, Ibid., p. 48; Dowwringgi / Leonidas, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1838, Ibid., p. 49; Wooraddy / Alpha, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1838, Ibid., pp. 49 – 50.

<sup>153</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> February 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 97.

<sup>154</sup> Undated, Ibid., p. 103.

tormented forever'.<sup>155</sup> Biblical related metaphors are mentioned in only one address and include a trumpet call<sup>156</sup> and 'singing to the Lamb that was slayne[sic] for us'.<sup>157</sup>

Thomas wrote more varied descriptions 'about the way that we should get to heaven'<sup>158</sup> with more written about heaven than of hell. He once used the metaphor of 'house' as Walter did<sup>159</sup>, but did not use 'country' like Walter and the older men. His dis-located experience may be an explanation. Thomas most often used biblical phrases and metaphors such as the parable of the sheep and goats,<sup>160</sup> 'singing to God and the Lamb',<sup>161</sup> and teachings of Jesus.<sup>162</sup> He is the only one to use the word 'resurrection'.<sup>163</sup>

The 'returning' motif of conversion narratives is present in Thomas' writings where heaven is a place of returning to an innocence lost. Thomas described looking forward to heaven where 'I am returning unto God and to Jesus Christ'.<sup>164</sup> This theme of heaven as a form of 'returning' is expanded to describe people's age in heaven: 'there will be no end of you you will be young men in heaven'.<sup>165</sup> Several of the older men also used this metaphor.<sup>166</sup>

Among the older Aboriginal men the most common metaphor for heaven is 'Gods country', 'a good country', 'a happy place', in contrast to hell which is

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<sup>155</sup> Undated, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, pp. 105, 109.

<sup>156</sup> First Corinthians, Chapter 15, Verse 52.

<sup>157</sup> Revelation, Chapter 5, Undated ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 105.

<sup>158</sup> 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1837, Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>159</sup> 28<sup>th</sup> January 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 117 – 118.

<sup>160</sup> Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25, Verses 31 to 46, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1837, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 73.

<sup>161</sup> Revelation, Chapter 5.

<sup>162</sup> 21<sup>st</sup> February 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 133, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1838, Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>163</sup> Undated, Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>164</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> January 1838, Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>165</sup> Thomas Brune, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1838, Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>166</sup> Eg., Noemy, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 51 – 52.

the Devil's house/country, a bad place.<sup>167</sup> Like the younger speakers, the older men described heaven as a place where they would return to a younger version of themselves. Noemy described it as:

if you go to heaven you will not die any more – you will be there  
little boys Angels little girls to you old women there always young  
forever there'.<sup>168</sup>

'God's country' was not at all associated with being at Wybalenna, or being displaced from their own country through colonisation. The ageing, sickness and death they experience at Wybalenna were not heaven. Colonial life was not heaven. They will only be in 'God's country' after they die. Like their earlier, pre-contact, stories of life after death, once they die they will be located in a place away from where they were living before the colony began and away from where they are living now. The reference to being restored to younger versions of themselves does not seem to harken back to pre-contact time in their lives nor to their pre-contact places. The scarcity of sources makes it impossible to make more detailed comparisons between the earlier stories and the Christian addresses, but there are glimpses of similarities and new thoughts.

Crucial to the new thoughts is the Bible, 'God's book',<sup>169</sup> however, the older men used fewer biblical references, probably because of fewer skills in English literacy. Drinene made a general reference to the Bible, 'the Bible tells us plenty about Gods country',<sup>170</sup> and only Noemy gave a specific verse.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Noemy, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 39 – 40; 17<sup>th</sup> March 1838, Ibid., p. 41; 14<sup>th</sup> April 1838, Ibid., pp. 47 – 48. Drinene / Neptune, 17<sup>th</sup> March 1838, Ibid., p. 42. Druemerterpunner / Alexander, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1838, Ibid., pp. 45 – 46. Dowwringgi / Leonidas, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1838, Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>168</sup> Noemy, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1838, Ibid., pp. 51 – 52. Similarly, Drinene / Neptune, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1838, Ibid., pp. 44 – 45, and Druemerterpunner / Alexander, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1838, Ibid., pp. 45 – 46; 14<sup>th</sup> April 1838, Ibid., pp. 48 – 49.

<sup>169</sup> See also Johnson, 2001, p. 25.

<sup>170</sup> 31<sup>st</sup> March 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 44 – 45.

Equally crucial are their first language, and pidgin, interpretations. Clark's notes include occasional pidgin words used by other men such as

Druemerterpunner:

we die we go to heaven good people always *crackney* in heaven Mr  
Clark tell me + you Jesus Christ die was crucified – He die a little  
one not a long one then he jump up and went to Heaven by + by he  
bring you and me to Heaven if you are good people'.<sup>172</sup>

*Crackney* is translated 'to sit',<sup>173</sup> and was an important aspect of a creation story told by Wooraddy, when the first person 'sat down' for the first time and 'said it was NYERRAE good, very good.'<sup>174</sup>

Dowwringgi also used the phrase 'jump up', 'Let Jesus Christ jump up in your hearts then you are good and you are on your road to heaven',<sup>175</sup> and 'pray to him that Jesus Christ may spring up in your hearts You go to heaven a good place that you did not make'.<sup>176</sup> Druemerterpunner seems to use the phrase to describe resurrection, and Dowwringgi uses it for conversion, which itself is a foretaste of the final resurrection in Christian theology. So while biblical text, catechism, formulaic prayers and hymns were influential, continuing Aboriginal languages, adaptive pidgin, and cultural roles continued to shape people's translations as they explored new narratives in their lives.

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<sup>171</sup> Gospel of John, Chapter 3, Verse 16. 31<sup>st</sup> March 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 43 – 44.

<sup>172</sup> 21<sup>st</sup> April 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 50 – 51.

<sup>173</sup> Plomley, 1976, p. 391.

<sup>174</sup> Plomley, 1966, p. 373.

<sup>175</sup> This 'road' is a reminder of the 'tracks' from the stars of the 'Milky Way' mentioned in Chapter One, Ibid., p 368.

<sup>176</sup> 14<sup>th</sup> April 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 49, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1838, Ibid., p. 53.



## **All people, black and white, in heaven**

Another of the new thoughts was an expanding sense of the human population. Noemy, like Thomas, spoke of the universal population in heaven, 'white men and black men there they are always singing about God'.<sup>177</sup> The colonising experience seems to have contributed to an expanding sense of becoming 'Aboriginal' beyond the clan differentiations. Christian theology seems to have encouraged a growing experience of identifying with other 'black' people, and of 'black and white' together in heaven or hell. This idea of equality of all blacks, and of black and white before God is used by Thomas to affirm that the Aboriginal people have all they need to know:

yes my friends ... there is black men in other countries they knows [sic] about God and Jesus Christ they don't have more instructions than what you have they can read the Bible and understand it.<sup>178</sup>

Drinene:

The parson/Catechist reads it in the Bible and he tells us there are a great many black men in another country who read Gods book about Jesus Christ the son of God.<sup>179</sup>

These are signs of self-confidence and self-reliance at Wybalenna. They anticipate a time when Aboriginal people know they will not need colonial teachers but will continue their current emphasis on teaching each other. This appears to be stronger in Walter's writing and perhaps is a precursor to his later

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<sup>177</sup> Noemy, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 51 – 52. Thomas undated, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 87.

<sup>178</sup> 28<sup>th</sup> January 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 77.

<sup>179</sup> 31<sup>st</sup> March 1838, ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 44 – 45.

letters to the Governor about having their own land, their own resources and whichever colonists among them that they, rather than the Governor, chose.<sup>180</sup>

The addresses express a variety of individual theological and cultural emphases, biblical and cultural knowledge, as well as linguistic, literacy and oratory skills. They also express evolving interpretations of their collective experience of dispossession and removal. The responses were provisional and improvisational. The writings and addresses contain references to remembering their lives before arriving at Wybalenna. In this regard they contain elements of collective memory and on this point the words of political anthropologist John Gillis are useful:

We need to be reminded that memories and identities are not fixed things, but representations or constructions of reality, subjective rather than objective phenomena ... We are constantly revising our memories to suit our current identities. Memories help us make sense of the world we live in; and ‘memory work’ is ... embedded in complex class, gender and power relations that determine what is remembered (or forgotten), by whom, and for what end ... National identities are, like everything, constructed and reconstructed ...<sup>181</sup>

The addresses exemplify a variety of subjective narratives of people articulating emerging identities and negotiating new relationships with each other and with colonists who exercised some power over them. An example of this ‘negotiation’ was when Walter retold commitments made by Robinson:

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<sup>180</sup> The petition to Queen Victoria was dated February 1846, TAHO CSO 11/26/378. See also correspondence Walter Arthur to George Washington Walker, 30<sup>th</sup> December 1845, ML CY979 pp. 227 – 230.

<sup>181</sup> Gillis, in Duling, 2011, p. 3 of 11.

The commandant told them they should have everything given to them and they should have plenty of flower [sic] plenty of tea and sugar and new trousers and new blankets rugs and everything what they want.

And commandant did fulfilled his promises and give them as they require. The new cottages his facing to the hill [away from cold westerly winds] and Natives are nearly all got in their new houses. The commandant told them that they should have their new houses long before and when they came to Flinders they had everything given to them and they were satisfied.’<sup>182</sup>

In recounting the initial honouring of Robinson’s promises of food and housing, these public oral acts of memory also created accountability. They were the antecedents for later written requests to colonial authorities to honour promises and agreements.<sup>183</sup> By naming the promises, Walter provided a basis for critiquing failures to fulfil them.

It is noticeable that there are no criticisms of Robinson and Clark in the sermons. The only ‘bad white men’ are those who sought to kill Aboriginal people. It is unimaginable that Clark would write them when reporting to Robinson, even if they were spoken in *pidgin* or in English.

## Conclusion

In this chapter it has become clearer that through church services, conversations and classes, Aboriginal people engaged with and interpreted the Christian faith. During this time they were adapting to the context and continuing to practice

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<sup>182</sup> Walter Arthur, 21<sup>st</sup> September 1837, ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, unpaginated.

<sup>183</sup> TAHO CSO 11/26/378, Plomley, 1987, pp. 148 – 49.

many of their pre-existing languages, roles and religious practices. The addresses were one example of their religious translations and improvisational adaptations.

Existing intra-clan and inter-clan relationships changed in the context of Wybalenna. The oral addresses by the older men were one way in which they continued to exercise leadership within their clan and negotiate relationships with other clans. There were differences between the younger literate men and the older men's oral addresses. These men express different interpretations of their lives before they heard about Christian faith and other aspects of Christian theology. These addresses contrast the homogenised rote responses required in the catechetical classes and were a counter to Robinson's efforts to assert an 'English-only' Christian faith through the *Flinders Island Chronicle*.

The addresses also functioned as opportunities to negotiate changing inter-clan relationships as an increasingly 'pan-Aboriginal' identity formed among them. Interwoven with this was the crucial role women played in translating the addresses to Clark who transformed them into written text in the context of reporting to Robinson. The addresses demonstrate that when Aboriginal people had opportunity to interpret, adapt and incorporate Christian faith into their lives, they did so in multiple ways as part of other interpretations, adaptations and incorporations of broader colonial life.

The contrasting emphasis and content in addresses by Walter Arthur and Thomas Bruny demonstrates the emerging diversity of Christian faith among Aboriginal people. This diversity was affected by personal and clan relationships, linguistic and cultural knowledge and practices, and relationships with colonists, particularly those with power over aspects of Aboriginal people's lives.

The addresses were opportunities to interpret their pre-contact religious lives and the colonising experience. They were opportunities for critiquing behaviour among Aboriginal people at the settlement as a growing sense of a collective, or pan-Aboriginal, identity evolved from the earlier clan differentiations. The addresses contributed to the increasing assertion of concern for more control over their lives and accountability of colonists for promises made. As such, the addresses were not only religious oratory expressing aspects of emerging Christian theology, but contributed to articulating social and political concerns which would become starkly defined in the later years and affect the future of those at the settlement and beyond.

## Chapter 6: ‘Neglecting the Simplest Duties’

While the activities at Wybalenna were unfolding through the 1830s and 1840s, a distinctly different experience was occurring on the nearby Bass Strait islands before, during and after this period. Throughout the nineteenth century, the islander families with their mix of Aboriginal and colonial ancestors changed from living largely independent lives to living under strict laws closely overseen by the government just after the beginning of the twentieth century.

Representatives of the Christian church were involved to an increasing degree throughout this period and influenced the people’s experience of the Christian faith.

The relationship between Aboriginal people on the islands and the institutional church rarely developed to their mutual satisfaction. For the most part the islanders did as they had done for decades. They did for themselves, as best they could in their circumstances, what needed to be done to live a relatively comfortable life. Within the wider church the islanders and their concerns were largely ignored, aside from the interest of occasional individual clergy. The government did not regard them as ‘Aboriginal’ like those survivors of Wybalenna living at Oyster Cove, and the church did not regard them as an ‘Aboriginal mission’ like the missions they developed in other parts of Australia.

The earliest introduction of Aboriginal people to the Christian faith in the north-east area of Van Diemen’s Land, including the Furneaux islands appears to have been through the sealers, such as James Munro. Munro was one of a number of sealers and lived with several Aboriginal women including Drummer, ner.looner / Jumbo, Smoker, Isaac and Little Judy. Cameron proposes that these Straitsmen and *tyereelore* developed ‘endearing relationships’ in which

the husbands taught their wives to speak English and the women ‘maintained close connections with country, their spirituality and kin’.<sup>1</sup> Robinson visited the islands for several months in late 1830 and from March – June 1831 as part of his conciliatory ‘mission’ seeking to remove Aboriginal women.<sup>2</sup> Robinson conducted church services, reading from the Bible and Divine Service of the Book of Common Prayer.<sup>3</sup>

Munro appears to have been familiar with the Bible and possibly read it to the three women and three children with him.<sup>4</sup> Several sealers delivered Munro ‘some Testaments and spelling books from the Mission’.<sup>5</sup> When Munro visited Hobart to petition for the return of women who had been removed by Robinson, he is reported to have said, ‘They [the women] do not pay any attention to the Sabbath. I do read the Bible to my children I have two but they are not my own’.<sup>6</sup> This suggests Munro followed the style of family Bible reading rather than abiding by Robinson’s ‘notice’ that he perform divine service from the Book of Common Prayer each Sunday. The sealers’ expressions of Christian faith were different from the leaders of wider colonial society.

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<sup>1</sup> Cameron, P., 2011, *Grease and Ochre*. Launceston; Fullers Bookshop, p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> Robinson’s efforts on the islands in this regard were much more active and effective than his letter to colonists in 1829 which ‘netted’ Robert Macauley. Robinson’s dislike of the sealers is well known, Plomley, N. J. B., 1966, *Friendly Mission*. Kingsgrove; Halstead Press, pp. 278, 294 – 95, and Plomley’s editorial note, *Ibid.*, pp. 431 – 32. Several women were removed to the ‘establishment’, then on Swan Island, *Ibid.*, p. 333.

<sup>3</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> March 1830, *Ibid.*, p. 333; 3<sup>rd</sup> April, *Ibid.*, p. 335; 29<sup>th</sup> May, *Ibid.*, p. 357; 5<sup>th</sup> June, *Ibid.*, p. 359.

<sup>4</sup> 9<sup>th</sup> November 1830, *Ibid.*, p. 269. See also, Stokes, J., 1846, *Discoveries in Australia* Vol. 2. London; T & W Boone, p. 451. The number of evangelical missions active in Van Diemen’s Land at that time was noted in Chapter One in regard to Robinson and will be mentioned in Chapter Seven in regard to Rev Miller. The distribution of ‘testaments’ suggests the British and Foreign Bible Society. *Church News*, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1872, p. 248, or another, such as the Bethel Union which also distributed tracts, and of which Robinson was the inaugural secretary. *Colonial Times*, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1828, p. 1, and 15<sup>th</sup> February 1828, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> 13<sup>th</sup> November 1830, Plomley, 1966, p. 273.

<sup>6</sup> May 1831 in *Ibid.*, footnote 166, p. 457. It is understandable that Munro would present himself to Governor Arthur in the most favourable light, particularly when they had been removed by Arthur’s appointed ‘conciliator’. By presenting himself as attending to the Christian instruction of the children, just as Robinson had in 1829, Munro succeeded in regaining the women.

A similar practice is reported a few years later in November 1842 of a family on Preservation Island.<sup>7</sup> It is impossible to know which parts of the Bible these fathers such as Munro and Thomas Beeton read most, and what role the Bible played in their families' lives, but some fathers were clearly using the Bible in teaching their children.

These family relationships, not formal institutional relationships, were the context in which these children learned to read the Bible. It is a striking contrast to the Orphan School in Hobart and the rote learning catechetical classes at Wybalenna. In these islander families Bible passages were chosen by these fathers who had had twenty to thirty years of rarely, if ever, visiting a church building or participating in 'divine service'. Like the Aboriginal mothers who continued to tell stories and undertake cultural practices while separated from their kin and birth country, these fathers gave their own teaching and interpretation of Christian faith without a gathered church community, without sacraments, and in some instances without a Prayer Book. One can only imagine how these children brought together in their own lives these stories and practices from the adults around them.

### **Islander Christian practice – Lucy Beeton**

One early Aboriginal person among the Islander families involved in Christian practice is Lucy Beeton's mother, Bet, or Betsy Smith.<sup>8</sup> Lucy's parents and other relatives lived on Gun Carriage Island until the mid 1830s.<sup>9</sup> They moved to

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<sup>7</sup> Plomley, N.J.B. & Henley, K.A., 1990, 'The Sealers of Bass Strait and the Cape Barren Island Community', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, 37 (2 & 3), p. 59.

<sup>8</sup> In the documents there are various ways of spelling Beeton, such as Beedon, Beadon, and Beaton. For the sake of consistency I will use the later, and predominant form, Beeton.

<sup>9</sup> WORE.TER.NEEM.ME.RUN.NER TAT.TE.YAN.NE alias Bet Smith had lived with Thomas Beeton since the mid-1820s. By 1831 they had two children. One died and was buried at



Longford, near Launceston<sup>10</sup> for a period of time and then returned to the islands.<sup>11</sup> Lucy's father, Thomas Beeton, like Munro, used petitions to Governor Arthur to counter the activities of Robinson. His literacy and active engagement with colonial leaders were probably a contributing factors to Lucy's strong emphasis on education among islander families throughout her life.

Lucy's encounter with the Christian faith was firstly through her father, Thomas, and his personal endeavours reading the Bible and other tracts that he acquired from sealers and traders visiting from Hobart or Launceston. The Beeton family's knowledge, practice and experience developed without the guidance of a representative of the church and without the regular practice of communal worship. It seems they had a Bible, a Prayer Book and a limited number of Christian tracts.

Little is known of Lucy's childhood. After her early years at Gun Carriage, she later lived at Longford, outside Launceston in 1836 and was baptised by R. R. Davies, at the Longford Anglican Church on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> February 1836, along with her brothers James and Henry. Her parents' names are listed as 'Beeton and

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Preservation Island, the other was Lucy. Plomley, 1966, p. 333. Beeton had extensive conflict with Robinson over the removal of Betsy and other women. He wrote several petitions to Governor Arthur seeking her return, and, like Munro, was eventually successful, Ibid., pp. 457 – 460. Thomas' and Betsy's move to the Longford area outside Launceston coincided with the return of Robinson to the straits as Commandant at Wybalenna. Robinson's arrival may have contributed to them leaving.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 1011.

<sup>11</sup> Skira, I., 1997, "I hope you will be my friend": Tasmanian Aborigines in the Furneaux Group in the nineteenth century – population and land tenure', *Aboriginal History*, 21 (30), p. 33.

Betsy Herbert', his occupation as 'Sealer, Gun Carriage Island'.<sup>12</sup> She was later described as 'a firm believer in Christianity'.<sup>13</sup>

## **Islanders and Church of England – beginnings and baptisms**

In 1851 Thomas Beeton applied to Lt-Gov Denison for the appointment of a missionary-catechist to educate their children.<sup>14</sup> Lucy was then twenty-two.

Thomas Beeton suggested the salary for such a person be paid from the same fund as that which supported the Aboriginal Station at Oyster Cove. Governor Denison refused their application on the grounds that they 'could not fairly be termed Aborigines'.<sup>15</sup> This link between education and catechism was close and strong within colonial society, as shown in previous chapters concerning Wybalenna. As was the link at that time between the Church of England and the government.<sup>16</sup>

Churches rarely, if ever, differentiated themselves from government decisions in regard to Aboriginal people. As will be discussed later, churches more often than not were involved in the formation of government policy, and encouraged Aboriginal people's acquiescence and compliance.

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<sup>12</sup> TAHO RGD 32/1/2. James and Henry are also listed on the petition to Rev. John Fereday, George Town clergyman, in 1862 requesting clergy visits to the islands. *Cornwall Chronicle*, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1863, p. 4. N. B. Tindale states that Beeton's family name was Herbert, Plomley, 1966, p. 1012, as does the *Cornwall Chronicle*, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1867, p. 4, although the Chronicle refers to him as James Herbert Beeton, not Thomas. However, Thomas Beeton is the only Beeton old enough to have been in the straits for the previous forty years, as described in the *Chronicle*. James was a son of Thomas.

<sup>13</sup> The *Tasmanian, Supplement*, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1886, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Correspondence Archdeacon Davies to Governor Denison, 22 July, 1850, TAHO CSO 24/167/4898.

<sup>15</sup> But he suggested that the Anglican Bishop, Francis Russell Nixon, might take an interest in their welfare. Ryan, 2012, p. 279. *Tasmanian Church Chronicle*, 6 March 1852.

<sup>16</sup> Eg., "it is the sole province of the Governor to create a parish: the utmost that the Bishop can do, is to assign to each clergyman his own particular work". Nixon, F. R. Charge delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Tasmania, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1855, pp. 8 & 15  
<http://www.anglican.org.au/docs/archive/72.pdf> accessed 14/3/2013.

Responding to Thomas Beeton, Bishop Nixon visited the islands in September 1854 on board the government schooner, *Beacon*, as it resupplied lighthouses.<sup>17</sup> Nixon was uncomplimentary of Aboriginal religious expression:

No trace can be found on the existence of any religious usage, or even sentiment, amongst them, unless, indeed we may call by that name the dread of a malignant and destructive spirit, which seems to have been their predominant, if not their only, feeling on the subject.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast, when visiting Gun Carriage Island, Nixon wrote:

we came at last, to the residence of the ‘greatest lady’ it has ever been my good fortune to encounter. Lucy Beadon, a noble looking half-caste of some twenty-five years of age, bears the burden of some twenty-three stone. Good humoured and kind-hearted, she is everyone’s friend upon the island. High-minded, and earnest in her Christian profession, she has set herself to work to do good in her generation. From the pure love of those around her, she daily gathers together the children of the sealers and does her best to impart to them the rudiments both of secular and religious knowledge. The daughter of one of the sealers, Lucy Beadon, takes upon herself the honourable charge of teaching day by day the younger members of the community.<sup>19</sup>

During this trip Nixon also baptised six children and performed the marriage of Edward Mansell and Judy Thomas, an Aboriginal woman whose English was

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<sup>17</sup> Skira, 1997, p. 34. *The Courier*, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1854, pp. 2 & 3.

<sup>18</sup> Nixon, Francis, R., DD, Bishop of Tasmania, *The Cruise of the Beacon, a narrative of a visit to the islands in Bass’s Straits*. London; Bell and Daldy, 1857. p. 19. This was similar to the summary expressed by Backhouse and Walker when visiting Wybalenna in 1833.

<sup>19</sup> *The Courier*, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1854, pp. 2. & 3.

minimal.<sup>20</sup> Her lack of English suggests it was not needed for daily life. But a different choice was being made for the children who it was thought needed to learn English and receive adequate schooling. Nixon performed divine service at the sealer, Tucker's house, with twenty-eight people present, which comprised the population of the whole island, plus some from nearby. He noticed, somewhat surprisingly, the people were familiar with the format including psalm singing.<sup>21</sup> It seems James Munro and Thomas Beeton were not the only ones maintaining Christian practices.

These baptisms by Bishop Nixon are recorded in the register for the Anglican Church at George Town, where Rev. John Fereday was the local clergyman. The baptisms included children of John and Frances Maynard from Gun Carriage Island, Richard and Elizabeth Maynard from Long Island, John and Jane Smith from Tin Kettle Island and George and Jane Everett from Woody Island.<sup>22</sup> Other baptisms of islander children are also recorded in the register. It includes children baptised during Rev. W. Richardson's visit to the islands in November 1862, but also other baptisms that were independent of a visit to the islands by a clergyman.<sup>23</sup> This demonstrates the islander's initiative in seeking out baptism for their children while they were visiting George Town. At least ten Aboriginal children from the Furneaux Islands were baptised at the George Town Anglican Church between 1861 and 1880 during family visits there.<sup>24</sup>

The purpose of these visits may have been for trade, but they were also

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<sup>20</sup> Nixon, 1857, p. 42.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>22</sup> TAHO NS 642/1/1.

<sup>23</sup> On September 10<sup>th</sup> 1855 (No. 152) Amelia, daughter of Henry & Sarah Beeton, was baptised by Rev. John Fereday. On January 16<sup>th</sup> 1859 (No's. 219 – 222), Lucy and Harriet, daughters of James and Rachel Beeton, and Lucy and Laura, daughters of George and Jane Everett were baptised by Rev. John Fereday, Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. There are several gaps in the baptism records for the years: April 1848 – January 1851 [57 – 84]; July 1861 – June 1862 [268 – 295]; November 1873 – August 1874 [477 – 505]) so the actual number may be higher.

likely to have been because of leases on various islands. Fereday was involved in brokering leases between various islander families and the Lands Department. The Beeton and Everett baptisms in January 1859 may have been at the beginning of discussions that led to Fereday applying on behalf of George Everett and James Beeton for Preservation Island and the Inner Sisters respectively in December 1862. Two years later Fereday asked the Surveyor-General to prepare leases for George Everett on Preservation Island.<sup>25</sup> According to Skira the George Town clergyman held money on behalf of Islanders, embezzled some, but continued to act on their behalf.<sup>26</sup>

These families had by this time been living on these islands for several decades without any clergyman or catechist. Notwithstanding the sometimes-violent acts by several men in earlier decades,<sup>27</sup> it appears that some families had developed their own Christian practices and methods of teaching their children. Some of these practices, such as at Tucker's, seem to have included the Book of Common Prayer.<sup>28</sup>

Tucker's statement and Nixon's writing of it may, to some extent, be shaped by the desire of both men to impress their audiences: Tucker to impress the Bishop, and the Bishop to impress his parishioners reading his report. Nevertheless, the location on Gun Carriage Island where Lucy Beeton was also living at the time, and twenty-eight people filling Tucker's house, including a

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<sup>25</sup> This correspondence also included applications for leases for Robert Dunbar on Little Green Island, Elizabeth Davis, the widow of the superintendent of the Goose Island lighthouse, on Big Green Island, and John Smith for 500 acres at Hogans Point on Cape Barren Island, Fereday to Surveyor-General, 9 December 1862, TAHO LSD 2/2/924; Fereday to Surveyor-General, 2 September 1862, TAHO LSD 1/51/636; Fereday to Surveyor-General, 20 September 1864, TAHO LSD 1/51/642; Boothman to Fereday, 23 May 1865, TAHO LSD 1/51/644, cited in Skira, 1997, p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> Skira, 1997, p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> Plomley, 1966, pp. 274, 278 – 79, 324, 450.

<sup>28</sup> Nixon, 1857, p. 47.

bedroom, for the church service, does suggest some Christian worship practice occurred in this, and other, families.

However the desire for Christian services was not universal among the islanders. At Clarke Island Nixon found ‘the sacrament of baptism was declined on behalf of six children by their parents’.<sup>29</sup> This may have been the occasion Nixon described ‘when the congregation was composed almost entirely of Wesleyans, and therefore less favourably affected toward the ordinances of the Church’.<sup>30</sup> But it is more likely the occasion of Dr Allen on nearby Preservation Island refusing to have his children baptised.<sup>31</sup>

Lucy Beeton could have become the teacher-catechist her father desired to see appointed to the islands but her identity as single, Aboriginal, and a woman, were probably factors that prevented formal training and placement within the Board of Education at that time. As an adult Lucy continued her father’s interest in education and she arranged for a catechist to provide spiritual and religious instruction. Following her death an unnamed correspondent paid tribute to her:

Lucy was a woman of fine character – generous, virtuous and deeply imbued with the highest principles of her duty to God and to her ‘own people’. With me, she felt we had dispossessed ‘her people’ of this fair land, and banished them to die on Flinders Island, and I have often heard her say, “Why do you blessed with civilisation and

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<sup>29</sup> *The Courier*, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1854, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> *The Courier*, 20<sup>th</sup> January 1858, p. 2. The sensitivity between Anglican and Wesleyan churches will re-emerge later in this chapter and the next.

<sup>31</sup> Nixon, 1857, pp. 52 – 55, although five Allen children were baptised eight years later when Rev. Richardson visited Clarke Island, as recorded in the George Town Anglican Church, on November 16<sup>th</sup> 1862, TAHO NS 642/1/1.

Christianity, neglect to afford to us poor half-castes the simplest duties laid upon you by the requirements of Christian charity?<sup>32</sup>

### **Islanders, church and government – changing agendas**

During Nixon's tenure government financial support for the church altered significantly. The government had for several decades supported the Church of England's mission activities in Tasmania with £1800 per annum used to fund five chaplains, but this was discontinued in July 1856.<sup>33</sup> Previously, the government had paid for a catechist at Wybalenna, but from this time forward the church was required to provide donations from its own sources to support a catechist among the islands.<sup>34</sup>

In October 1861 the Tasmanian parliament debated the provision of £150 for a 'school master and catechist for the half castes and other inhabitants of the Furneaux Islands'. It was estimated there were sixty children among the 150 inhabitants. Mr Meredith spoke of Lucy Beeton 'who had instructed the children and whose charity exceeded anything they could believe'. Where she obtained her

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<sup>32</sup> The *Tasmanian, Supplement*, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1886. The 'correspondent' is likely to have been Thomas Reibey. This final quote is almost identical to a sentence in Reibey's 1863 report to parliament, "that there is no case which has a stronger claim upon the inhabitants of this island; and that sin will lie heavy at our doors if we, blessed with civilisation and Christianity, neglect to fulfil to them the simplest duties laid upon us by the requirements of Christian charity", Archdeacon Thomas Reibey, 'Half-Caste Islanders in Bass's Straits. Report of the Ven. Archdeacon Reibey'. *Journal of The Legislative Council*, No 48, August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1863. It is also similar to his request for funds in the *Church News*, November 1862, '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 civilization and Christianity neglected, when opportunity was offered us to fulfil to them the simplest duties laid upon us by the requirements of Christian charity'. *Church News*, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1862, p. 95.

<sup>33</sup> Nixon, F. R., 1855, Charge delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Tasmania, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1855, pp. 8 & 15 <http://www.anglican.org.au/docs/archive/72.pdf> accessed 14/3/2013, p. 9. From 1868 it became unlawful for the government to reserve lands for sites of places of Public Worship or for any religious purpose, or as burial grounds for any particular denomination. Correspondence, Minister of Lands to Bishop Montgomery, TAHO NS 373/214/47.

<sup>34</sup> At this time the government was paying Rev. Freeman £20 for 'expenses' to act as Visiting Chaplain at Oyster Cove.

education, he could not say, but she ‘devoted a good portion of her time to those who were anxious to improve’.<sup>35</sup>

Following this debate, Thomas Reibey, Archdeacon at Launceston, visited the islands for the first time in March 1862.<sup>36</sup> Like the earlier visit of Nixon, the services he conducted seem to have been well attended by most but not all of the islanders. Reibey took up the earlier request in proposing a schoolmaster and catechist and recommended Mr. Mitchell.<sup>37</sup> Parents offered to pay for board and lodging of the children away from their homes.<sup>38</sup> Green and Cape Barren islands were considered the most accessible most of the year and Cape Barren was the preferred option.<sup>39</sup> Within the church debate continued. The government grant required that ‘a like sum was contributed by a religious body inclined to take up the work’. Reibey argued that

this important work ought to be taken up by the Church of England; the Islanders were attached to the Church, made use of her services, and were our own people.

If we allowed the matter to drop, others would try and make terms.<sup>40</sup>

In September 1862 the Legislative Council resolved to increase its contribution and provide £250 for a schoolmaster and catechist for the half-caste and other inhabitants of the Furneaux Islands provided a like amount was raised by private subscription.<sup>41</sup> But church funds were lacking, as was a suitable

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<sup>35</sup> *Cornwall Chronicle*, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1861, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Church News*, 21<sup>st</sup> May, 1862, pp. 4 & 5.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>38</sup> This was similar to the Orphan School in Hobart and at Wybalenna where children sometimes lived with the catechist’s family.

<sup>39</sup> *Church News*, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1862, pp. 4 & 5.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1862 p79. The ‘rivalry’ with other evangelicals is again evident.

<sup>41</sup> *The Mercury*, 19<sup>th</sup> September 1862, p. 5.



teacher, and by the end of the year, the islanders were still waiting. Reibey wrote again, echoing Bishop Nixon a few years earlier:

The presence of a 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 civilization and Christianity neglected, when opportunity was offered us to fulfil to them the simplest duties laid upon us by the requirements of Christian charity.<sup>42</sup>

The following month Rev William Richardson, Anglican clergyman at Avoca, and others, visited the islands aboard the *Flying Arrow*. Richardson baptised several children and preached to those on Chappell Island.<sup>43</sup> Richardson suggested a monthly clergy visit to the adults, and that the children be accommodated at a school along the Tamar River.<sup>44</sup>

Following Richardson's visit, and no doubt aware of the work of the clergymen, Reibey, Fereday and Richardson in seeking someone to visit them, Lucy Beeton and others from the islands, wrote to Fereday on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1862 requesting an annual visit from a clergyman. Fereday forwarded the request to the Finance Committee of the Launceston Archdeaconry and added his parish's willingness to free him to visit the islands each year. The letter was publicised in the *Cornwall Chronicle*, a few months later on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1863:

Rev and Dear Sir,

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<sup>42</sup> *Church News*, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1862, p. 95.

<sup>43</sup> *Cornwall Chronicle*, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1862. p. 4. These baptisms are recorded in the Baptism Register of the George Town Anglican Church, TAHO NS 642/1/1.

<sup>44</sup> *Cornwall Chronicle*, 24<sup>th</sup> July 1869, p. 7.

We the undersigned inhabitants of Bass's Straits Islands, most respectfully beg of you to take into your consideration that we are left without the means of attending upon any religious ordinances, and that our children scarcely know what it is to join in the public worship of God.

We very much lament this state of things for our own sakes, but we are especially anxious that our children should not grow up as if they were in a heathen land; but rather they should have some opportunities for hearing the Gospel preached to them by a Minister of Christ.

We therefore entreat you to come over and help us; we have all known you long and esteem you very highly and most gratefully bear in mind the many kindnesses we have received at your hands, and we beg that if you can possibly arrange it, you will visit us more frequently than you have hitherto done, and come down regularly at certain appointed times to minister amongst us.

Most humbly entreating that you will take into serious and speedy consideration our earnest request of your coming to assist us.<sup>45</sup>

It was signed by thirty-five islanders, and again, demonstrates a desire to link with the church community, particularly in ensuring their children learn the Christian faith and participate in worship.

Despite the letters from Reibey, Richardson, and the islanders themselves, the £250 required from private subscriptions to complement the government grant was not forthcoming.<sup>46</sup> However, despite this lack of money, within a few months a teacher-catechist was working on Badger Island. This first teacher-catechist was

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<sup>45</sup> *Cornwall Chronicle*, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1863, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> *Church News*, 20<sup>th</sup> January 1863, p. 125.

not appointed by the government's Board of Education, nor by the Anglican Church, but by Lucy Beeton herself. For two years, from May 1863 – June 1865, Mr Edwin Richardson worked as teacher on Badger Island, and later Goose and Cape Barren islands teaching the two Beeton families.<sup>47</sup>

Richardson had been Church of England School master at Avenel, Victoria. He was eligible to receive a title deed on application at the Receipt and Pay Office, Beechworth (Victoria)<sup>48</sup> but it appears he did not take it up. It is not known how and why a schoolmaster in a town en route to the goldfields, and on the mail route between Melbourne and Sydney would move to the remote Bass Strait islands, particularly without communication with the local bishop or archdeacon. It may be that Edwin Richardson, schoolmaster, was related to Rev. William Richardson, clergyman, who visited the islands in late November 1862, but this is not known.

A month after Edwin Richardson had begun Reibey visited the islands accompanied by Fereday.<sup>49</sup> They baptised children, distributed schoolbooks and tracts, conducted a funeral and examined potential sites for locating a teacher.<sup>50</sup> The presence of other graves at Gun Carriage Island is a reminder that the people conducted their own locally adapted ceremonies, possibly using the Book of Common Prayer, on the more usual days when clergy were not present. Reibey

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<sup>47</sup> *Cornwall Chronicle*, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1870, p. 4. Lucy Beeton applied to occupy Badger Island in December 1857. Together with her brother, James, they placed a deposit and eventually paid off fifty acres each on Badger Island beginning in 1868. TAHO LSD 209/2/227; Fereday to Surveyor-General, 9 December 1862, TAHO LSD 2/2/924; TRE 21/2,21/2/49; DELM Dorset 7/70,71, cited in Skira, J., 1997, p. 37.

<sup>48</sup> *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1862, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> Murray-Smith, and following him Boyce, name a Rev. George Fereday travelling with Reibey Murray-Smith, S., (ed.), 1987, *Mission to the Islands*. Launceston; Foot & Playsted, p. 3; Boyce, J., 2001, *God's Own Country?* Hobart; ISW, p. 55. However Reibey's reports only mention Rev. John Fereday, from George Town, travelling with him, in Reibey, 1863, p. 3. The Register of the Clergy within the Diocese of Tasmania also only names a Rev. John, and not a George, Fereday, TAHO NS 3588/1/1, p. 27.

<sup>50</sup> *Church News*, 19<sup>th</sup> August 1863, pp. 208 & 209.

was not impressed with Richardson on Badger Island. On returning to Launceston he recommended that Richardson not continue,<sup>51</sup> however, Richardson did continue at least until June 1865.

In his 1863 report to parliament Reibey noted that of the £250 sought from subscriptions, only £80 was collected. He hoped the parliament would include £250 on the Estimates for 1864 without the requirement for private subscriptions. He also asked that the six Aboriginal people still remaining at Oyster Cove be sent to their relatives at these Islands.<sup>52</sup> In the following year Reibey visited England.<sup>53</sup> While he was there, along with former Bishop Nixon, they sought donations towards a boat to assist the church's work in the islands. Over £400 was donated from sources in England,<sup>54</sup> and thus began the 'fleet' that was to be built over subsequent decades.

The 'mission' to the Furneaux Islands was, in a number of ways, not unique. Within the Anglican church similar boat trips by a clergyman were occurring along the D'Entrecasteaux Channel in the south. These were described in almost identical terms, and included the same activities of baptising children, distributing Bibles, Prayer Books, tracts and story books.<sup>55</sup> Some of these missions in the 'bush' (i.e., those areas outside the designated parishes) survived on donations while others were financially supported by the Diocese through the Ripon Fund.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., also Reibey, 1863, p. 5.

<sup>52</sup> Reibey, 1863. Only a couple of Aboriginal people at Oyster Cove, such as Wapperty, had family relatives on the islands.

<sup>53</sup> *Church News*, 21<sup>st</sup> September 1864 p. 365.

<sup>54</sup> *Church News*, 20<sup>th</sup> March 1866, p. 231. A fundraising effort among 'independent' churches had raised £3600 for a mission boat to the Pacific, the *John Williams*, which visited Hobart, and Oyster Cove, in March and April 1861. *Oyster Cove Visitor's Book*, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 16, *The Mercury*, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1861, p. 2, and 20<sup>th</sup> April 1861, p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> *Church News*, 21<sup>st</sup> November 1864 p. 389 – 393.

<sup>56</sup> The Ripon Fund began when £10 000 was bestowed by a lady in the Diocese of Ripon (near Leeds in England) to maintain 'Missions in the Bush', Ibid., 18<sup>th</sup> December 1863 p. 256.

In October 1865 the first ‘mission’ boat, the *Gift*, was launched in Hobart. It had been built for £600 by Mr Ross, primarily from donations Reibey gained while in England.<sup>57</sup> The first trip in the *Gift*, and Reibey’s third visit to the islands, was in March 1866. At Chappell Island on Good Friday, 30<sup>th</sup> March, he conducted an open-air service attended by fifty people, baptised four children and distributed tracts and books.<sup>58</sup> Despite the lack of financial support from within the church, Reibey again visited the islands aboard the *Gift* in October 1866. He baptised several children, conducted a wedding and performed divine service.<sup>59</sup> By early 1868 a new boat was being built to replace the *Gift*, ‘which was found to be very unsuitable, she not being the class of vessel required’.<sup>60</sup> The *Pearl* was launched on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1868.<sup>61</sup>

Along with the troubles on the water, there was apparent conflict among the clergy in Launceston later that year as Reibey was overlooked by the Bishop for the role of curate at the prestigious St. John’s church in favour of a much younger man nominated by the Boards of Patronage, Rev. Marcus B. Brownrigg.<sup>62</sup>

Beneath these conflicts simmered a more disturbing issue that burst into the public arena at the Synod meeting in February 1870, when Mr Clark ‘attempted to table petition charging Archdeacon Reibey with the grossest and most cowardly immorality’.<sup>63</sup> The issue came to a very public climax when Reibey launched legal proceedings against Henry Blomfield. The court case occurred 1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> June 1870 in the Launceston Supreme Court.<sup>64</sup> The action was

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 20<sup>th</sup> October 1865, p. 149.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 4<sup>th</sup> May 1866, p. 261.

<sup>59</sup> *Cornwall Chronicle*, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1866, p. 7; 24<sup>th</sup> November 1866, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Church News*, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1868, p. 57.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 1<sup>st</sup> August 1868, p. 121.

<sup>63</sup> *The Mercury*, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1870, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1870, p. 3.

brought by Reibey claiming that Blomfield published ‘false, scandalous and defamatory libel’ using the words, ‘The Archdeacon during my absence from home made an indecent assault on my wife’. Reibey sought damages of £1000. The events were said to have occurred in July 1868. The jury found in favour of Blomfield.<sup>65</sup> Reibey resigned virtually immediately as a clergyman and within weeks from school boards.<sup>66</sup>

The breakdown of relationship between Reibey and the church appears to have had a detrimental effect on the church’s involvement in the ‘Furneaux Mission’. It is hard to know how many, if any, of the islanders were aware of the conflict between the ‘late Archdeacon’ and the Anglican Church nor of how much money was being spent on the ‘mission’ which amounted almost entirely, it seems, in the maintenance of the boats that sat idle in the Tamar River for about ten months of the year. It is hard to imagine the price of Bibles, prayer books, tracts, and other Christian reading material, outweighing that of the boat. Reibey’s sale of the *Gift* immediately prior to the meeting of the northern Finance Committee, then claiming to be ‘£300 to £400 out of pocket by the mission’<sup>67</sup> suggests the use of the Fund was almost solely on the boat. He interpreted the lack of donations from among the church members, £83 in the previous year,<sup>68</sup> as a vote of no-confidence in the mission, compelling him ‘to abandon the attempt to benefit the half-castes of the Furneaux Group’ and leaving him, on his estimation, ‘£300 to £400 out of pocket’.<sup>69</sup>

With so much denominational effort and resources put into auditing the accounts and purchasing and refurbishing the boats to carry the annual visitors, it

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<sup>65</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1870, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1870, p. 5.

<sup>67</sup> *The Mercury*, 29<sup>th</sup> April 1873, p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

seems the primary object of the mission, the islanders themselves, continued their usual lifestyle and expressed their Christian faith as they had been doing for years before without much interest or attention from the institutional church. It draws attention to the role of the 'Furneaux Mission' within the rhetoric and the politics of the Anglican Church. This is distinct from the day-to-day faith experience of Islander people, families and communities.

Following Reibey's resignation the church's processes began moving towards identifying a schoolteacher for the islands, now eight years since the Beetons had privately employed Edwin Richardson on Badger Island. Bishop Bromby requested George Town clergyman, Rev John Fereday, to visit the Islands and in February 1871 he travelled in the *Freak* to several islands conducting open air services, baptising children, conducting religious instruction, distributing books, tracts and texts, and solemnising two weddings. More than fifty people participated in these services across seven islands, including thirty at Chappell Island.<sup>70</sup>

Tragically within a few weeks of returning the islander's longest active church supporter, Rev. John Fereday, died in an accident in a 'dog-cart' driven by Archdeacon Browne. A 'wheel of the carriage came into collision with the stump of a tree' and Fereday died of his injuries.<sup>71</sup> For all the documents by, and about, Reibey, it is important to recognise that Fereday visited the islands more often and over a longer period of time.

Following their petition in January, and Fereday's visit, the islanders met Governor Du Cane on Goose Island in August 1871 to discuss leases. Du Cane reported the government had appointed a schoolmaster with a suitable salary, and

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<sup>70</sup> *Church News*, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1871, pp. 58 – 60.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

allowance for a boat and boat's crew. Money was also available for the erection of a schoolhouse on a suitable site.<sup>72</sup> As well as appointing Henry Collis as schoolmaster, and perhaps also in response to requests for security of leases, Lucy Beeton was given a lifetime lease of Badger Island at a yearly rent of £24 for her efforts to 'instruct and civilise' the islander children.<sup>73</sup> Almost ten years after the islanders first asked for a teacher-catechist, an appointment was made, funded by the government. This appointment also marked the renewal of the partnership between the Anglican Church and the government's Board of Education in providing a school teacher and church catechist in the one person, as had often occurred prior to 1856.

Reibey's replacement, Brownrigg, offered to go to the islands, and the expenses, some £14 or £15, were to be charged against Archdeacon Browne's expenses.<sup>74</sup> Between 1872 when he first travelled to the islands and his retirement in 1887, Brownrigg undertook thirteen trips, which were each reported in the *Launceston Examiner* and the *Church News*, and have been compiled in Stephen Murray-Smith's book, *Mission to the Islands*.<sup>75</sup>

Brownrigg's first visit began in February 1872 aboard the *Freak*. In his report he indicated the costs of the anticipated annual trips would be 'defrayed by the residents themselves' and therefore only required identifying suitable clergymen. Islanders' contributions would be received by Lucy Beeton during the birding season and forwarded to Launceston.

The readiness evinced by all the residents of the Islands to help in providing for their own spiritual requirements may surely be accepted

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<sup>72</sup> *The Mercury*, 7<sup>th</sup> August, 1871, p. 2; *Launceston Examiner*, 8<sup>th</sup> August, 1871, p. 3.

<sup>73</sup> Ryan, L., 2012, *Tasmanian Aborigines A History Since 1803*. Sydney, Allen & Unwin, p. 281.

<sup>74</sup> *Church News*, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1872, p. 200. Rev Freeman was being paid £20 to visit Oyster Cove, also by boat. Correspondence Freeman to Colonial Secretary, TAHO CSD 1/18/703.

<sup>75</sup> Murray-Smith, 1987.



as an earnest of their desire for the extension towards themselves of some spiritual care.<sup>76</sup>

At each place he visited, Brownrigg conducted a short service comprising Bible reading and prayer. On each Sunday he conducted Morning and Evening Prayers.<sup>77</sup> As well as the prayers, Brownrigg conducted fifteen baptisms and one practice of Holy Communion. This is the first explicit mention of the sacrament of Holy Communion among a congregation comprised primarily of Aboriginal people.<sup>78</sup> There does not appear to have been any mention of Holy Communion being practiced at the Wybalenna settlement nor in previous visits to the islands by Fereday or Reibey.

This may be partly explained by the Anglican practice of only permitting confirmed members to be communicants in Holy Communion, and the Presbyterian practice, the denomination of Thomas Dove chaplain at Wybalenna from 1838, of celebrating Holy Communion three times each year with extensive preparation for communicants.<sup>79</sup> The celebration on Badger Island is therefore a significant occasion in the liturgical history of people on the islands.

Brownrigg would have followed 'The Order of Ministrations of the Holy Communion' in the Book of Common Prayer. This order includes recitation of the Lord's Prayer, Ten Commandments, and Nicene Creed, each of which was central to public Christian worship at that time. It is intriguing to ponder where the elements of bread and wine were sourced, whether from among the people or

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<sup>76</sup> *Church News*, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1872, p. 248.

<sup>77</sup> Murray-Smith, 1987, p. 11.

<sup>78</sup> Brownrigg celebrated Holy Communion among a non-Aboriginal gathering in the Kent Group on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1872. Murray-Smith, 1987, p. 43.

<sup>79</sup> The Presbyterian practice of celebrating Holy Communion three times each year was called Quarterly Communion.

transported from Launceston.<sup>80</sup> A large number of tracts and Prayer Books, courtesy of the Committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society, were also distributed.<sup>81</sup>

The following year Brownrigg published a booklet about his visit and the profits of sale of the '*Cruise of the Freak*', were to go towards 'procuring books for circulation among the islanders'.<sup>82</sup> It is important to recognise the primary purpose of the publications was to raise funds to support his visits. The reports therefore are skewed towards presenting the islanders in ways that would generate donations from church members. Brownrigg also undertook a number of visits to Hobart to raise funds for the 'Furneaux Mission' in 1873,<sup>83</sup> 1877,<sup>84</sup> and 1880<sup>85</sup> with only relatively small amounts being donated.

In January 1876 Bishop Bromby's visit coincided with Brownrigg's. Brownrigg reported that at Long Beach the Bishop conducted the service as elsewhere, addressing the young people on the subjects of confirmation and the Lord's Supper. There were services in the morning, afternoon and evening, the mission form being used, a baptism, confirmation of eight children, 'five of whom were half-castes', and the administration of the Lord's Supper to twelve communicants. Services were well attended, with fifty in the evening. The Sunday School classes of Mrs. Collis were valuable preparations for the confirmees.<sup>86</sup> The role of the schoolteacher in preparing children for confirmation within the church highlights the confluence of church and state in the lives of these Aboriginal people.

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<sup>80</sup> Years later, Bishop Nixon brought the 'communion vessels', chalice and paten, on each visit. On one occasion he left the vessels at home. The 'improvised paten and chalice were the homeliest description'. *Church News*, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1894, pp. 124 – 5.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1872, p. 248.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1873, p. 425.

<sup>83</sup> *Church News*, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1873, p. 504.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1877, p. 44.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1880, p. 185.

<sup>86</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1876, p. 3; and *Church News*, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1876, pp. 424 – 425.

Bishop Bromby's report contrasted with Archdeacon Brownrigg's in mentioning the extent of drunkenness among some adults. Brownrigg had not mentioned anything about alcohol consumption in his previous reports, but it became a regular feature from this time on. The catalyst appears to have been the wreck of the *Cambridgeshire* with its large quantity of brandy. The islanders took advantage of the availability of the cargo. Brownrigg reported that the islanders' consumption of the brandy was 'producing the greatest demoralization'.<sup>87</sup> Later that year Brownrigg became more active in the Temperance Society in Launceston<sup>88</sup> and the following year saw a new and explicit focus on the 'temperance pledge' during his visits. Brownrigg saw a clear link between being Christian and living a sober life. During his next visit, thirty-five signed the pledge and he wrote, 'There is perhaps no more serious obstacle to the spread of Christianity than intemperance.'<sup>89</sup> In 1878,

[a] Temperance Lecture fitly crowned the observance of the day. The Schoolroom was completely filled – temperance hymns were sung – and the utmost attention was given to the lecture, which was illustrated with diagrams. At the close twenty seven persons signed the total abstinence pledge, and we may be allowed to hope that next year there will be a branch of the Church of England Temperance Society established in "the Straits".<sup>90</sup>

Throughout Brownrigg's visits the most common gathering was 'family prayers'. Larger gatherings were usually limited to Badger Island and Cape Barren Island at the school. There continued to be a change over in boats and in 1881, Brownrigg

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<sup>87</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1876, p. 3; and *Church News*, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1876, pp. 424 – 425.

<sup>88</sup> *Church News*, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1876, pp. 502 – 503; 1<sup>st</sup> September 1876, pp. 518 – 519.

<sup>89</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 6<sup>th</sup> February 1877, pp. 3 & 4; *Ibid.*, 6<sup>th</sup> February, 1878, p. 2.

<sup>90</sup> *Church News*, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1878, p. 226.

travelled for the first and only time in an islander's boat when he 'took passage in ketch, *Julia*, owned by Mr Harry Armstrong, one of the half-castes.'<sup>91</sup>

As a sign of the increasing participation of clergy in the longer term plans of the government, Brownrigg participated in setting out the allotments for the new township on Cape Barren Island during his visit in 1882. These multiple roles intensified for the permanent schoolteacher, Collis, who fulfilled church, education and other government roles.<sup>92</sup> The schools run by Henry and Hannah Collis closed in December 1882 and did not re-open until eight years later when Edward Stephens was appointed in June 1890.<sup>93</sup> With the departure of Collis, Brownrigg publicised the request for a catechist/teacher 'who would, for his part, find among the Straits Islands an interesting field of usefulness alike promoting the welfare of man and the glory of God'.<sup>94</sup>

The closure of the school saw the subsequent church services conducted in John Maynard's shed and cottage.<sup>95</sup> In 1885 Bishop Sandford conducted services on Cape Barren in an unfinished log hut. Due to damage to the boat the Bishop and Archdeacon had to remain at Port Furneaux (Cape Barren Island township) for several days. As a result, the next day, Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> February was a 'red letter' day for them as

eighty to ninety persons attended services at Port Furneaux, services held daily and three on Sunday. Festival the following day, triumphal arch constructed and Bishop welcomed, games followed by tea and temperance meeting, with thirty to forty taking the pledge.

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<sup>91</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1881, p. 2; see also West, 1987, pp. 66 – 69.

<sup>92</sup> Morgan, A., 1986, 'Aboriginal Education in the Furneaux Islands (1798 – 1986)', University of Tasmania; Department of Education, p. 117.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>94</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 15<sup>th</sup> March 1882, p 1.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1883, p. 1.

Bishop presented to Miss Beedon, middle-aged spinster, known as the ‘Queen of the Isles’, who came from her royal residence on Badger Island to welcome the visitors.’<sup>96</sup>

The Islander’s appreciation for these visits were expressed in a statement read by Mr Summers,

My Lord, we the inhabitants of the Furneaux beg respectfully to welcome you to this part of your diocese and to assure you that we do so with heartfelt sincerity and with gratitude for your kindness in coming to visit us, and we trust that when circumstances and your onerous duties permit we shall have the pleasure at some future period of seeing you again. We take this opportunity to mention that we receive most kind and acceptable visits from Rev. Canon Marcus Brownrigg whose kindness and advice we greatly appreciate.

This address was kindly followed by one to myself [Brownrigg], Sir, we the undersigned inhabitants of the township of Furneaux tender our most sincere thanks for the interest and good you are trying to do towards us. We sincerely hope you will continue your visits to us, knowing you are trying your best to do us good. We only wish you could do a little more with us; in fact we want somebody with us that will lead us the right road and to help put down that demon – drink.<sup>97</sup>

The Islanders’ desire to have ‘somebody with us that will lead us to the right road’ suggests that when it was seen as beneficial, they wanted to strengthen their

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<sup>96</sup> *The Mercury*, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1885, p. 3. Lucy Beeton died the following year, 7<sup>th</sup> July 1886, at Badger Island, aged 57, *Launceston Examiner*, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1886, p. 1. She was listed among the most prominent people who died that year, “Miss Lucy Beeton, of Badger Island, aged 57, known as “The Queen” of the Straits Islands”. *Launceston Examiner*, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1887, p. 3.

<sup>97</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1885, p. 1. This was Brownrigg’s final visit to the islands. His resignation, due to ill health, was announced to the Anglican Synod in May 1887. *The Mercury*, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1887, p. 3.

relationship with the church. They did not yet see themselves as willing or able to undertake church services without a church appointed person. Events of the following decade, however, show that they were also not willing to maintain a relationship with the church if it gave little in return.

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The last decade of the nineteenth century began with idealised hopes and romantic rhetoric from church leaders and concluded with conflict and hostility.

Throughout this decade the Anglican clergy visits to the islands were carried out by the Bishop Montgomery rather than a clergyman from the north of the state.

Montgomery followed the pattern of his predecessors in visiting the largest population centre, which had moved from Badger Island to Cape Barren Island with the establishment of the school. Most visits began with an initial ‘community meeting’ to plan the itinerary. This was followed by Sunday services in the reopened schoolroom until land was acquired and a church building constructed. Services continued to include baptisms, confirmations, celebration of Holy Communion, and the occasional wedding. These were followed by visits to homes on the smaller islands, weather permitting. Montgomery visited lighthouses and a wide range of families so his liturgical statistics include people who were not Aboriginal. Overall about half the baptisms he performed in the 1890s were of Aboriginal people.

In 1891 Montgomery visited and baptised twenty-eight, more than half of whom were Aboriginal people. While Montgomery’s reports do not always indicate which families were involved, there were not sufficient white families for the baptisms to have occurred only among them. In early 1892 Bishop

Montgomery sought a grant of land from the government for a church building and burial ground on Cape Barren Island. This was initially refused.<sup>98</sup>

Montgomery withdrew the request of a burial ground but sought an occupation licence for land on which to build a church.<sup>99</sup>

In early February eighty-one islanders wrote to Montgomery, as their predecessors had written to Sandford:

We the inhabitants of the Furneaux Islands most heartily welcome your lordship to this far away part of your diocese, and we cherish the deep conviction that by your presence and wise counsels, the good work begun and carried on during the past eighteen months will be greatly assisted and blessed.

We are greatly indebted to you and our late Bishop the Right Rev D. Sandford for the advantages we enjoy of regular church services and Sunday School on the Lord's Day, and would assure you that, as we are all, by baptism, members of the Church of England, we desire to remain such, by open profession and practice, and hope that the zeal of others will never inflict upon us those schisms and dissensions which have disturbed the peace of our mother church elsewhere.<sup>100</sup>

The 'zeal of others' and concern about 'schisms and dissensions' is probably a reference to the Methodists who were showing an interest. The islanders' identification with the Church of England was apparently strong, as Montgomery replied to schoolteacher Stephens:

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<sup>98</sup> See footnote 33 in this chapter.

<sup>99</sup> Correspondence Minister of Lands to Bishop Montgomery, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1892, TAHO NS 373/214/47.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., Correspondence, 5<sup>th</sup> February 1892.

Their unity in worship is 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. As Mr Masters observed after seeing the work for himself 'It would have been a crime to have intruded here'.<sup>101</sup>

After more than forty years of albeit only annual visits the Anglican Church had a proprietorial feeling about the islands vis-à-vis other denominations. The next chapter will provide something of a contrast by considering the experience of Aboriginal people in the Methodist Church at Irish Town, also known as Nicholls Rivulet, near Oyster Cove. It is unclear if Montgomery's comments are in connection to that development, or some other reason such as the wholesale rejection by Aboriginal people at Oyster Cove of the services of the local Anglican clergyman, Rev. Freeman which will be discussed in the next chapter. Nevertheless, it is clear that Aboriginal people's engagement with the Christian faith was occurring in the midst of denominational practices and inter-denominational relationships. The Anglican Church had been their 'default' denomination by virtue of its alignment with the colonial government, the work of Robinson and others at Wybalenna, and the visiting clergy to the Furneaux Islands. The few references, such as this one, to the Wesleyans, show the sensitivity to denominational relationships and that Aboriginal people were exercising their choices within this ecumenical context.

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<sup>101</sup> Correspondence, Montgomery to E. Stephens, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1892, TAHO NS 373/214/47.



## Church building

The letter from the islanders seems to have been effective in persuading the Minister for Lands to grant an occupancy licence for a church on Cape Barren Island. Within twelve months a site had been cleared, materials sourced from Launceston, and transported by islanders who constructed the church. In the words of Bishop Montgomery:

On Wednesday Jan 24. 1893 the inhabitants of the township met me at the School room for a last Service in that building. After addressing them upon the blessings and past mercies of God, we recited ‘nunc dimittis’<sup>102</sup> and then walked in procession to the new Church.

On the same day Jan 24 1893, I dedicated the new Church to the uses of a Church belonging to the Church of England – setting it apart from all ordinary and common uses, and proclaiming it to be used henceforth solely as a Church of the Church of England according to her rites and ceremonies and for no other purpose whatsoever and calling it

‘the Church of the Epiphany’<sup>103</sup>

During the same visit Montgomery consecrated a cemetery:

On Thursday Feb 2, 1893, the Feast of the Purification,<sup>104</sup> I dedicate the Cemetery near this church according to the rites of the Church of England, as a Burying Ground for the bodies of the Christian dead.

The community assembled in large numbers and walked in

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<sup>102</sup> Named after the first words of the Canticle of Simeon, in the Gospel of Luke Chapter 2, Verses 29 – 32. It is a regular part of Morning and Evening Prayer in the Book of Common Prayer.

<sup>103</sup> Anglican Church Register of Services, Cape Barren Island, TAHO NS 373/1/11.

<sup>104</sup> The presentation of the child Jesus at the Temple in Jerusalem, Gospel of Luke, Chapter 2, Verses 21 – 38.

procession round the piece of ground which had been fenced in almost a quarter of an acre in extent.<sup>105</sup>

The church was consecrated in the season after Epiphany so this probably contributed to the name. Epiphany begins on January 6<sup>th</sup>, twelve days after Christmas and continues until the Sunday before Ash Wednesday that marks the beginning of the season of Lent, the preparation for Easter. The length of the season after Epiphany is governed by the dating of Easter each year. Epiphany is a season in which the church reflects upon the manifestation of Christ to all people.<sup>106</sup>

The following year Montgomery described the usual practices of prayer, singing from 'Hymns Ancient and Modern' and sometimes from Sankey's hymnal. He summarized his perspective by reporting:

baptized 16, confirmed 11, had two Celebrations of Holy Communion, and 38 communicants. The church stands firm, in spite of all the winds of heaven, but it sorely needs paint. It has never had any yet. The half-castes gave 34s 9d at the services; for this 30s goes to pay the insurance of the church; the remainder has been swallowed up in a monogram for the front of the altar cloth. The debt on the building itself is now reduced to £4. The most pressing need is the painting of the exterior of the church. Will someone help?<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Anglican Church Register of Services, Cape Barren Island, TAHO NS 373/1/11.

<sup>106</sup> In August 1896, Minister of Lands approved 'the rent for the licence to occupy ½ acre of land on Cape Barren Island being reduced from £1 to 1/- per annum', Correspondence, Sec. Lands to Montgomery, 17<sup>th</sup> August 1896, TAHO NS 373/214/47. The church on Cape Barren is one of a small minority of Anglican churches not named after a saint, 'all saints' or Trinity, and is the only 'church of the Epiphany' in Tasmania.

<sup>107</sup> The first marriage in the new church was between 'the daughter of the school-house' and Mr. Henry Briant, from Flinders Island, with 'eight bridesmaids (seven girls being half-castes)', *Church News*, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1894, pp. 124 – 5. Debt was also to be an ongoing issue (see next chapter) for the Methodist Congregation at Irish Town / Nicholls Rivulet where Fanny Cochrane Smith and her family were members.

The middle of this decade was something of a high point in people's participation in the sanctioned services of the church and in giving time to the building. It included the largest number of communicants at Holy Communion with twenty-five, celebration of a wedding,<sup>108</sup> baptism of nine, and confirmation of one who had been baptized by Stephens.<sup>109</sup> Preparations were being made to paint the outside of the church and build proper seats for inside,<sup>110</sup> however the type of seat installed still needed the approval of the Bishop.<sup>111</sup>

## Funerals

There were relatively few deaths during this time, averaging one each year. The funeral services were conducted by the schoolmaster, Mr E. Stephens, followed by his son, Mr C. Stephens. Prior to this, families made their own arrangements for funeral services. The presence of the Book of Common Prayer on a number of islands, and the range of people familiar with its services, suggests people probably used the church services. Burials occurred wherever was convenient for the people at the time, so there are graves on most of the islands, and only some are marked. The consecration of land as a cemetery on Cape Barren Island in 1893 raised a hitherto uncontroversial issue. In the words of E. Stephens to Bishop Montgomery in 1895:

Now is it lawful to bury on Freehold Land, when there is a consecrated Cemetery within reasonable distance? There has never been any need formerly to solve this question. As you know yourself, in years past, burials were performed anywhere, even in back yards,

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<sup>108</sup> Mr William Brown and Miss Emily Everett. *Church News*, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1895, p. 351

<sup>109</sup> Montgomery had baptised ninety children in the previous five years, *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Correspondence 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1900, C. Stephens to Montgomery, TAHO NS 373/214/47.

and we want to know whether one is compelled to bury in the cemetery or not.<sup>112</sup>

Montgomery was clear in his response a few years later that burials in a church cemetery required approval from church authorities.<sup>113</sup> But it left open the question of burials on freehold, or leasehold, land. These burials continued for those living on other islands where it was impracticable to build or transport the coffin to the cemetery on Cape Barren, and even on Cape Barren itself there are graves in various places including at Thunder and Lightning Bay.<sup>114</sup>

In some ways this is symbolic of the broader Christian practices among the islanders. Those closest to the church in terms of geographic and religious location joined the church through their confirmation and participation in services and those who saw themselves as somewhat distant, made their own arrangements using whatever means they chose which sometimes included the Bible and other sources such as the Book of Common Prayer, hymns, pamphlets and other materials they acquired through family history and contemporary visitors. In 1896, Montgomery reflected on the previous five years and gave his observations,

From August 1890 to December 31 1895, there have been about 410 public Sunday services held, and Sunday-school 214 times; Other services on week days 192; total 816. For my own part it is of interest to state that I have baptised in the Bass Strait Islands (including the

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Correspondence, 27<sup>th</sup> December 1899, Bishop Montgomery Letter Book, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1896 – 11 August 1902, TAHO NS 373/1/74.

<sup>114</sup> Personal communication.

lighthouses) 101 children, of these 53 are half castes; and I have married two couples.<sup>115</sup>

The identification with the Anglican Church brought certain expectations and requirements to abide by the church's practices. The Bishop was responsible for the person appointed to lead the local church, in this case, the schoolmaster, Mr E. Stephens, followed by his son, Mr C. Stephens, and for the church building, in acquiring land, approving the materials, construction and consecration, and for the format of Christian worship, in accordance with the Book of Common Prayer, particularly the Morning and Evening Prayers and other Ministrations, including the type of seating. It is difficult to ascertain if the islanders ever engaged in their own Christian practices beyond those of the Book of Common Prayer and as approved by the Bishop.

Some differentiation between Islanders and church emerged as the decade progressed. Islanders increasingly asserted their own rights to leases both for island rookeries and reserve areas of Cape Barren Island. Increasingly the plans of the Bishop and schoolmaster on those other matters conflicted with those of several islanders, and attendance at church declined.

By the end of the decade there was a stark contrast between Montgomery's public and private descriptions. Publicly, in the *Church News*, he wrote extensively of his new 'Bishopscourt' accommodation on Cape Barren Island, about muttonbirds and his travels around Flinders Island. But there are very few references to people on Cape Barren Island. Notwithstanding this, Montgomery reported he had baptized twenty-one children, confirmed one who had been

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<sup>115</sup> *Church News*, 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1896, pp. 445 – 6.

privately baptized, had four celebrations of Holy Communion, and services in houses everywhere, besides the services in the church.<sup>116</sup>

Privately Montgomery seems dispirited. In writing privately and confidentially to the Premier and Minister of Education, he decried the unrealised hopes regarding people's moral condition: "I fear the community as a whole is morally worse than it was ten years ago." 'There is no known sin, I think, that they have not committed within the last two or three years, except murder. Every sort of immorality is common.' Three or four 'steady families' had left for Flinders Island.<sup>117</sup>

In his eyes the school and church were impotent in the face of the unhealthy influence of two particular individuals, Thomas Mansell and John Summers, and the legacy of the 'admixture' of 'races in these people'. Like Robinson and many others before him and since, Montgomery does not appear able to respect a way of being Christian that does not comply with his version of 'English-Christian-faith'. All previous rhetoric from earlier bishops and other church leaders about a moral debt owed to Aboriginal people, now gave way to a more active paternalistic approach.

It is my opinion that Government has done all it ought to have done for them. They show no fortitude but very much the reverse. The time has come to take steady measures to regulate their industry in order to save it, and to treat their petitions as though they had never been sent.<sup>118</sup>

Stephens, likewise, doubted the authenticity of those still attending church:

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<sup>116</sup> *Church News*, October 2, 1899, pp. 1123 – 1125.

<sup>117</sup> Correspondence, Montgomery to Premier and Minister for Education, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1899, TAHO NS 373/214/47.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

‘Attendances at church are still keeping up, but really I cannot help thinking that there is a strong current of hypocrisy prompting them.’<sup>119</sup> With the representatives of the church so clearly refusing to heed the political, economic and educational concerns of local people, more and more islanders withdrew from attendance and bypassed the institution’s protocols. More were writing directly to the government.<sup>120</sup> This may have been part of political relationships among the Islander families themselves where some sought to advance their concerns through a relationship with the church through the Bishop and schoolteacher, and others through advocating directly to members of parliament.

However, surviving records do not sustain such an argument. Thomas Mansell had children baptised in 1891, 1893, 1894, and 1898 and attended church occasionally, but was regarded by Montgomery and Stephens as an unhealthy influence.<sup>121</sup> The numbers of adults attending church declined significantly through most of 1899, with between two and four attending most weeks. The largest congregation for the year, which Thomas Mansell also attended, was on 10<sup>th</sup> September 1899.<sup>122</sup> The most regular and faithful attenders were among the women, Mrs James Maynard, Mrs Peter Mansell, Mrs Tasman Smith, bringing the children and less often their husbands.<sup>123</sup>

The nadir in Montgomery’s assessment of the people was reached in 1900. Very tellingly, given the strong identification of being ‘English’ with being

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<sup>119</sup> Correspondence, C. Stephens to Montgomery, 9<sup>th</sup> October, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1899, Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Correspondence, C. Stephens to Montgomery, 15<sup>th</sup> October 1900, TAHO NS 373/214/47.

<sup>121</sup> T. Mansell was recorded as attending church, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1899, Anglican Church Register of Services Cape Barren Island, TAHO NS 373/1/11. Correspondence, Montgomery to Premier and Minister of Education, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1899, Correspondence re: Cape Barren Island NS 373/214/47.

<sup>122</sup> Anglican Church Register of Services Cape Barren Island, TAHO NS 373/1/11.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

‘Christian’, Montgomery wrote to the Police Commissioner in May and September:

These people are not English in character – the more you know of them the less English and the more native they are in habits of work. They can never be judged as we should judge ourselves, and should therefore be firmly governed as an inferior race ... and reforms must be made gradually’.<sup>124</sup>

In Montgomery’s eyes the islanders were clearly not ‘Christian’, which simultaneously meant they were not ‘English’. They were ‘native’ and ‘inferior’. In doing so, Montgomery replicated the behaviour of those of earlier generations who believed Aboriginal people needed to be ‘firmly governed as an inferior race’ rather than respected and engaged with as equals. The unwillingness of islanders to identify with a church led by such a mindset is seen in the decline in the number of confirmations and Holy Communion throughout that era.<sup>125</sup> The peoples’ disengagement from the church was expressed both in their absence from services and their neglect of the church building. In January 1903 it became ‘utterly unsafe to stay in’ and was abandoned in favour of the schoolhouse.<sup>126</sup>

In 1902 Montgomery was succeeded by Bishop Mercer who appointed Rev. T. G. Copeland to visit the islands. Stephens introduced him to the perceived crisis on the islands by saying:

Nearly all the benefits these people have had, have been derived chiefly through the exertions of representatives of the Church of

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<sup>124</sup> Correspondence, Montgomery to Richardson, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1899; Bishop Montgomery Letter Book 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1896 – 11 August 1902, TAHO NS 373/1/74, pp. 187 – 188. Correspondence, Montgomery to Premier, 17<sup>th</sup> September 1900, Letter Book, p. 341, TAHO NS 373/214/47.

<sup>125</sup> There were no services of Holy Communion in 1897, 1902, 1908, 1909, 1913, 1914, 1917 – 1920, Cape Barren Island Church Register, TAHO NS 373/1/11.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.



England, and as matters are now approaching a crisis it is only fitting that the end should be influenced by the church.<sup>127</sup>

And that conflict among the islanders was split along family lines, Such names as Thomas, Beedon, Maynard, & Everett (who are all real Tasmanian half castes) have not appeared in connection with the Reserve, and they are all very anxious to know what the Govt is doing for them, and also what Mansell & Summers have represented to the Govt and others.

I must add in justice to the true Tas. half castes that Summers & Mansell have been the ringleaders (either directly or indirectly) of nearly all the trouble which has occurred here during the past twelve years to my personal knowledge, and which Bishop Montgomery learnt to his cost.<sup>128</sup>

Even if Stephens' claims are accurate of a split along family lines, it is important to remember that involvement in the church, or Christian faith more broadly, does not necessarily result in people having similar political and social agendas. A variety of Aboriginal experiences and opinions had existed for generations, and probably for millennia.<sup>129</sup>

The change of building in 1903, and perhaps more importantly, the change in Bishop in 1902, seemed to prompt a change of approach in Stephens. In February it was decided that

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<sup>127</sup> Correspondence, C. Stephens to Rev. T. Copeland, 11<sup>th</sup> December 1902, NS 373/214/47.

<sup>128</sup> Correspondence, C. Stephens to Rev. T. Copeland, 11<sup>th</sup> December 1902, NS 373/214/47.

<sup>129</sup> This was also noted by J.E. Lord in his report to parliament in 1908, Lord, J. E. C., 'Report upon the state of the islands, the condition and mode of living of half-castes, the existing mode of regulating the reserves, and suggesting lines for future administration,' *Parliament of Tasmania, Journal and Printed Papers of the Parliament of Tasmania*, 59, No. 57, p. 12.

services are to be held for one year at 3pm at the request of the congregation. If it is found that the attendance is larger than previously, the time will be permanently adopted.<sup>130</sup>

This belated and small-scale respect for people's decisions seems to have had a positive response. After a hiatus of several years, confirmations began again with eleven in January 1905 with the visit of Bishop Bromby, before Stephens left in September.<sup>131</sup> Stephens was replaced by G. W. Knight, whose forte seems to have been singing as choir practices were held every Friday night and Sunday school from 2 – 3pm every Sunday. Knight described these attendances as 'satisfactory'.<sup>132</sup>

Bishop Montgomery's recommendation that the islanders be 'strictly governed' contributed to the development of the Cape Barren Reserve Act. The contrast with the islanders' own aspirations could not have been more stark when in 1911, led by George Everett, seventy-two islanders, echoing Walter Arthur and others petitioners more than sixty years earlier, wrote to their local member of the House of Assembly, Charles Howroyd:

We would suggest that a Committee be appointed among ourselves, and that as we are quite capable of managing our own affairs, and know our requirements for the Reserve, and that any regulations we may make be submitted to Parliament and on approval be made lawful.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Cape Barren Island Church Register, TAHO NS 373/1/11.

<sup>131</sup> Cape Barren Island Church Register, TAHO NS 373/1/11.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Correspondence, 21<sup>st</sup> November 1911, Islanders to Mr Charles Howroyd, in Furneaux Is., Cape Barren Is. correspondence 1902/1928 [microform], Hobart, Royal Society of Tasmania, University of Tasmania, Morris Miller Library. See also *The Mercury*, 29<sup>th</sup> November, 1911, p. 3.

No such 'managing our own affairs' was possible with government, nor in the Anglican Church with its hierarchical governance structure centred on the power of the Bishop to appoint clergy, issue marriage licenses, consecrate buildings and burial grounds, and approve internal church furniture. Those islanders involved in church services continued to be constrained by the denominational structures and institutional culture centred round strict adherence to a Prayer Book and compliance with the wishes of their 'superiors'.

Rather than accede to the Islanders' wishes, the government instituted the Cape Barren Island Reserve Act that came into effect in 1912. In regard to the church, the Act authorised the Minister for Lands to grant any church authority a right to occupy not more than half an acre of land on the reserve for up to three years for any religious purpose. If a building was erected on the land, the Minister could issue a ninety-nine year lease at the rental sum of one pound per annum.<sup>134</sup>

With more people living on the Reserve there was a sharp, but short lived, increase in the numbers of children attending Sunday School which regularly had more than fifty children.<sup>135</sup> However, the church's presence and influence lessened, and its focus moved toward the growing population of non-Aboriginal people on Flinders Island. As Boyce summarises the situation:

For Cape Barren Islanders from the middle years of the first decade, this modest rebuilding of Church of England worship life ceased in 1920, when for the first time in forty years there were no regular

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<sup>134</sup> Cape Barren Island Reserve Act 1912, section 9, [http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/tas/num\\_act/tcbira19123gvn16334/tcbira19123gvn16334.pdf](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/tas/num_act/tcbira19123gvn16334/tcbira19123gvn16334.pdf), accessed 8<sup>th</sup> February 2014. When the Act was amended in 1945, the Minister was permitted to sell the portion of the Reserve occupied by a church authority by private contract, Cape Barren Reserve Act 1945, section 8, [http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/tas/num\\_act/cbira19459gvn14312/](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/tas/num_act/cbira19459gvn14312/) accessed 8<sup>th</sup> February 2014.

<sup>135</sup> Cape Barren Island Church Register, TAHO NS 373/1/11.

Sunday Services held on Cape Barren Island. Services throughout the 1920s and 1930s were irregular. Cape Barren became in this time an outpost of the predominantly white church at Flinders, and visits no doubt depended on the commitment and capacity of the Minister there.<sup>136</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this period the experience of the islanders with the church seems one of missed opportunity. Earlier generations engaged with the Bible, Prayer Book and other Christian materials in their own way with family prayer times and broader gatherings for funerals they conducted themselves. The Islanders appeared to have a genuine desire for a growing relationship with a church denomination and the wider relationships that entailed. The Beeton family identified the needs of their children and took various steps to fulfil them, sometimes well ahead of the church. These choices suggest not only a vibrant Christian faith but a keen desire for subsequent generations to be engaged with it also.

At times the church was mired in its own institutional controversies and general apathy toward the ‘mission’ to the islands. As their interactions with the church moved from annual visits to more regular involvement, the differences between their aspirations and those of the institution became more apparent and led to significant conflict and a breakdown of relationship. With several generations of experience where their Christian faith was not dependent upon a

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<sup>136</sup> Boyce, 2001, p. 77.

denomination, Islanders were able to differentiate themselves from the church to assert their own concerns directly to government.

However, later generations of islanders, including families of Ida West<sup>137</sup> and Molly Mallett<sup>138</sup> show that some continued to be active Christians in the midst of ongoing institutional challenges. And occasional non-Aboriginal individuals, such as Ada Hudson, motivated by Christian faith, continued to interact with Aboriginal people well into the twentieth century.

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<sup>137</sup> West, I., 1987, *Pride Against Prejudice*. Canberra; Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

<sup>138</sup> Mallett, M., 2001, *My Past – Their Future*. Hobart; Blubber Head Press, p. 13.

## Chapter Seven: ‘They think we have got no souls now’

From the closure of the Wybalenna settlement on Flinders Island in 1847 until the end of the nineteenth century the Aboriginal people’s experiences with the Christian faith moved from the government controlled settlement to a local church congregation. This congregation was one in which Aboriginal people were significant Christian leaders and their church building built upon land one of them had donated specifically for that purpose.

It is important to remember the experiences described in this chapter were happening simultaneously with those on the Bass Strait islands discussed in the previous chapter. Occasionally the interaction of these two sites for the various Aboriginal people, the church denominations, and their contrasting situations will be noted.

Through the 1840s there was intensifying conflict among the leading people at Wybalenna on Flinders Island. This included extraordinarily serious actions and allegations, particularly under the superintendence of Dr Jeanneret. Jeanneret had placed Aboriginal leader, Walter Arthur, in gaol<sup>1</sup> and contrived allegations of cruelty toward Aboriginal children by the catechist, Robert Clark.<sup>2</sup> Jeanneret was immediately suspended by the Governor.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Correspondence Walter Arthur to Colonial Secretary, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1847, TAHO CSO 24/7/101. Robinson had also gaoled Walter in early 1838, Plomley, N. J. B., 1987, *Weep In Silence*. Hobart; Blubber Head Press, p. 508.

<sup>2</sup> These may have been in retaliation for Clark’s involvement in the petition to Queen Victoria the previous year, February 1846, TAHO CSO 11/26/378, Plomley, 1987, pp. 148 – 49, and Correspondence Jeanneret to Colonial Secretary, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1847, TAHO CSO 24/7/101, p. 30. The series of ‘depositions’ against Clark are found in TAHO CSO 24/7/101, pp. 294 – 323. The investigation by Jeanneret’s replacement superintendent, Joseph Milligan (Correspondence Colonial Secretary to Jeanneret, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1847 TAHO CSO 24/7/101, p. 5), and then Mr. Friend, determined the imprisonment of Walter Arthur illegal and the allegations against Clark unfounded, Correspondence Milligan to Colonial Secretary, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1847, TAHO CSO 24/7/101, pp. 328 – 330, Correspondence Friend to Colonial Secretary TAHO CSO 24/7/101, pp. 91 – 118. Chief Police Magistrate at George Town to Colonial Secretary, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1847, ‘The explanation given by Mr Clark is satisfactory. Dr Jeanneret has been suspended from his office

The closure of Wybalenna on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1847<sup>4</sup> saw the transfer of the surviving forty-six Aboriginal people to Oyster Cove, a recently sold and repurchased former convict Probation Station in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel.<sup>5</sup> It brought these Aborigines, comprising fourteen adult males, twenty-two adult females, five boys and five girls into closer proximity to colonial society in Hobart and particularly its southern areas, and closer to the range of opportunities and conflicts therein. They were also, at least theoretically, in closer proximity to Christian missionary endeavours. During the ensuing twenty-six years until the station was essentially abandoned in September 1873<sup>6</sup> Aboriginal people were for the most part ignored, and were ignored by, Christian colonists and churches.

Unlike Islander families in eastern Bass Strait who were more difficult to visit, the Aboriginal people at Oyster Cove were close enough to civilised society to receive three visits from the Governor<sup>7</sup> and be the occasional objects of passing missionary curiosity. The Aboriginal people spent their first post-Wybalenna Christmas day at Government House, New Norfolk, eating roast meat, plum pudding, and playing rounders,<sup>8</sup> and later that afternoon attended the theatre.<sup>9</sup> But

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and is not I think to be trusted looking generally at his conduct as regard to Clark and others. Dr Milligan will I trust be able to settle all the matters', CSO 24/7/101.

<sup>3</sup> Correspondence Penny to Colonial Secretary, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1847, TAHO CSO 24/7/101, pp. 37, 41.

<sup>4</sup> Correspondence Milligan to Colonial Secretary, *Ibid.*, pp. 173 – 176. It was essentially to save the government £300 per annum, *Ibid.*, pp. 333, 337 – 350, but once there the abandoned buildings would cost more than £300 to repair, Correspondence Kay to Colonial Secretary, TAHO CSD 1/18/703.

<sup>5</sup> Correspondence Kay to Colonial Secretary, July 1847, TAHO CSO 24/7/101, pp. 350 – 355; Correspondence Colonial Secretary to Milligan, 7<sup>th</sup> August 1847, *Ibid.*, p. 77. 'I have this day shipped on board the schooner 'Sisters' the whole of the Aborigines consisting of 14 adult males, 22 adult females, 5 boys and 5 girls', Correspondence Milligan to Colonial Secretary, 15<sup>th</sup> October 1847, *Ibid.*, pp. 173 – 176. One Hobart newspaper reported forty-seven, adding an extra adult male, *Colonial Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1847, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Correspondence Colonial Secretary to Dandridge, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1873, TAHO CSD 1/33/D450.

<sup>7</sup> *Cornwall Chronicle*, 20<sup>th</sup> January 1849, pp. 316, 317. *Launceston Examiner*, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1855, p. 2. *The Mercury*, 19<sup>th</sup> September 1856, p. 2. *Oyster Cove Visitor's Book*, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 15. For a discussion of the role of the 'Visitor's Book' in later Christian missions, see Attwood, B., 1989, 'Reading Sources in Aboriginal History: Mission Stations Visitors Books,' *La Trobe Journal*, 43, pp. 21 – 28.

<sup>8</sup> Davis, R., & Petrow, S., (eds.), 2004, *Varieties of Vice-Regal Life*. Hobart; Tasmanian Historical Research Association, pp. 74 – 78.

behind the initial polite interest of Governor Denison and the residents of New Norfolk, the Aboriginal children were at that time in the process of being removed from their parents to the Orphan School at New Town.

### **Aboriginal children and the Hobart Orphan School**

Seven of the children—the three youngest boys, Moriarty, Adam and Billy, and four youngest girls, Hannah, Nannie, Martha and Mathinna—were registered at the Orphan School on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1847, where Walter Arthur and Mathinna had been previously. The eldest boy, Charley, was to be placed with a ‘respectable settler or apprenticed’ and Fanny Cochrane and George were to be kept at the Oyster Cove Station under the care of Walter and Mary Ann Arthur.<sup>10</sup>

Of the children at the School, Nannie lived there for eighteen months before dying of ‘inflammation of the lungs’.<sup>11</sup> Martha lived there for two years, from twelve to fourteen years of age before being discharged into the care of her mother.<sup>12</sup> Hannah lived there two and a half years before being discharged into the care of Dr Smith, Surgeon near Oyster Cove, in May 1850.<sup>13</sup> Mathinna lived there for almost four years, from the age of twelve to sixteen before being discharged into the care of Dr Milligan.<sup>14</sup> In 1851, when she was about 16, she returned to Oyster Cove.<sup>15</sup> According to one account, on 1 September 1852 she was one of four Aboriginal people drinking at an inn at North West Bay, had fallen into a

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<sup>9</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1848, pp. 5, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Correspondence Milligan to Colonial Secretary, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1847, TAHO CSO 24/7/101, pp. 185 – 188. Fanny was Mary Ann’s sister. At thirty years of age, Walter and Mary Ann were the youngest married couple at the Station and were later described as the ‘adopted parents’ of Billy (William Lanney), Correspondence 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1855, TAHO CSD 1/18/703. See also Davis, R., & Petrow, S., 2004, p. 74.

<sup>11</sup> TAHO SWD 28/1/1, unpaginated.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, unpaginated. Her mother was Catherine. Plomley, 1966, p. 997.

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Smith attended Oyster Cove at least from 1858 onwards. *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, William Smith, Surgeon, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 31 – 32.

<sup>14</sup> TAHO SWD 28/1/1, unpaginated.

<sup>15</sup> McGoogan, K., 2005, *Lady Franklin’s Revenge*. Melbourne; HarperCollins, p. 213.



puddle drunk and was found dead the following morning.<sup>16</sup> Mathinna is believed to have been buried in the Oyster Cove Aboriginal cemetery.<sup>17</sup> The three boys were younger than the girls and so stayed at the School for longer. Moriarty, was there four and a half years before dying of ‘inflammation of the lungs’.<sup>18</sup> Billy/William and Adam were discharged together on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1853 to Milligan, just over five years after their registration, and subsequently lived with Mary Ann and Walter at Oyster Cove.<sup>19</sup> As mentioned previously, the Orphan School children were required to regularly attend church services at St. John’s Anglican in New Town, as well as daily classes.

## Oyster Cove

At Oyster Cove, like at Wybalenna, the Aboriginal people outnumbered colonists by about five to one. The only colonists living at Oyster Cove in the first few years were Robert Clark, his wife, their five children, and John Russell who had been a servant at Wybalenna.<sup>20</sup> Within months of their arrival, as part of cost saving measures, the roles of Superintendent, Catechist, and Storekeeper were combined on site into one person, Clark,<sup>21</sup> with a salary of £130,<sup>22</sup> although Milligan, based in Hobart, continued giving oversight. Clark’s tenure as ‘Superintendent’ was never secure. He was not authoritarian like others, and the

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<sup>16</sup> TAHO CSD 1/51/1009, and SC 195/31/2798.

<sup>17</sup> McGoogan, 2005, pp. 211-213. Perkins, R., & Langton, M., (eds.), 2008, *First Australians An Illustrated History*. Melbourne; Miegunyah Press, p. 101. The location of the cemetery and identification of graves is unknown.

<sup>18</sup> TAHO SWD 28/1/1, unpaginated.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., unpaginated, TAHO CSD 1/18/703.

<sup>20</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 176.

<sup>21</sup> Correspondence Colonial Secretary to Milligan, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1847, TAHO CSO 24/7/101, pp. 178 – 179.

<sup>22</sup> *Colonial Times*, 21<sup>st</sup> September 1847, p. 3.

Aboriginal people lived as they chose, sometimes at the station, and sometimes away.

With George and Fanny the only children at the station it is unclear if Clark continued the day and Sunday Schools that had been the practice at Wybalenna. Among the already deteriorating buildings was a chapel, but it is not clear if it was used, nor what form of service Clark performed.<sup>23</sup> The condition of the other huts was also very poor. They were open to the sky and substantial work was needed to renovate them. The colder, damp climate and valley location with minimal sunshine in the winter months, along with the thirty dogs,<sup>24</sup> exacerbated people's vulnerability to disease.

There were also challenges surrounding the station. A government notice sought to allay fears of the Aboriginal people among the colonial community.<sup>25</sup> For the leaders of colonial society, the presence and duties of the Catechist were in large part expected to be like that as for the lower classes, a constraining influence on Aboriginal people's base 'native' or 'primitive' desires, and to allay the fears of the upper echelons of society. Without surviving records of any church services or catechetical classes at Oyster Cove during Clark's time it is speculative to draw any definitive conclusions, other than to recognise that Clark did not comply with the expectations that he constrain Aboriginal people.

The surviving documents show Clark caught in an impossible situation of encouraging Aboriginal people's freedom, shown in their developing relationships with others in the neighbourhood, and at the same time trying to allay the fears of influential neighbours and the Governor. Complaints soon appeared in

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<sup>23</sup> Correspondence Superintendent Kay to Colonial Secretary, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1855, TAHO CSD 1/18/703.

<sup>24</sup> Correspondence, Kirwan to Colonial Secretary, Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> *Colonial Times*, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1847, p. 4.

newspapers claiming ‘their dogs have committed depredations upon the sheep in the neighborhood of the station’,<sup>26</sup> and as Clark, responding to anonymous allegations, wrote to Governor Denison, ‘I felt to be an imperative duty on my arrival here to prevent the Aborigines from falling into temptation and ultimately causing trouble to His Excellency’.<sup>27</sup> With a public house close by and few single Aboriginal men on the Station and few single white women around the neighbourhood it was impossible to constrain the alcoholic intoxication and casual sexual relationships that inevitably developed, including the involvement of labourers working at the station.<sup>28</sup> Before long Milligan regained the position of Superintendent, at an annual salary of £300, even though he was hardly ever there. Clark was relegated to the position of storekeeper at a salary of £100, but only after his pleas of destitution and ruin if dismissed, and recognising his long and faithful service to the Aboriginal people.<sup>29</sup>

In October 1848 Clark was reprimanded for not getting timely medical treatment for Maiki,<sup>30</sup> but he was a convenient scapegoat for the absent Superintendent, Milligan, and a largely disinterested government. The only other white person at Oyster Cove, besides Clark and his family, was John Russell, a known alcoholic<sup>31</sup> and known to be providing sly grog to the Aborigines.<sup>32</sup> Plomley, and others at the time, criticised Clark for not enforcing strict discipline, industriousness, and compliance upon the Aboriginal people. However, these impositions are not those imposed on people whom one regards as equals. They

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<sup>26</sup> *The Courier*, 25<sup>th</sup> December 1847, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Correspondence Clark to Colonial Secretary, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1848, TAHO CSO 24/42/1331.

<sup>28</sup> Correspondence Kirwan to Colonial Secretary, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1855, TAHO CSD 1/18/703.

<sup>29</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 176.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>32</sup> One of the laborer’s named was John Russell who was employed at the Station, Dandridge to Colonial Secretary, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1859, TAHO CSD 1/1/126/4656.

are the behaviours ‘superiors’ exert upon people regarded as ‘inferiors’. Clark courted such criticism because he did not regard the Aboriginal people as inferior.

Sadly, a little over two years since arriving at Oyster Cove, Clark’s wife died in late 1849. Clark himself was ill at the same time and died of heart disease a few months later, also at Oyster Cove, on 29<sup>th</sup> March 1850.<sup>33</sup> In the stratified relationships of colonial society, Clark had been much closer to the Aboriginal people than to the upper echelons of white society. When he died he had been living with Aboriginal people for seventeen years, longer and more intensively, than anyone, including from any church, before or since in Tasmania. More than any other Christian teacher he had attempted to learn to speak the pidgin at Wybalenna and attempted to translate biblical stories and Christian faith into Aboriginal peoples’ own languages and conceptual meanings.

At Wybalenna he had worked with Aboriginal women in translating Christian addresses given by Aboriginal men. All the Aboriginal people at Wybalenna who had learned to write in English had done so through Clark teaching, including the petition they wrote to Queen Victoria.<sup>34</sup> Clearly he was not perfect but he was more respectful of Aboriginal people than virtually every other white person relating to them at the time. He made serious efforts in respecting Aboriginal people’s own languages and rights, and the radical theological viewpoint at the time that one could be Christian without being English. Following Clark’s death, religious instruction appears to have ceased. It was the topic of correspondence from an Oyster Cove neighbour, Mr Walter, to the

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<sup>33</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 176. Three of Clark’s orphaned children, William, Sandford and Alexander, were admitted to the Orphan School, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1850, and discharged between July 1851 and November 1852, TAHO SWD 28/1/1, unpaginated. During this time they would have been reunited with several Aboriginal children they had known at Oyster Cove and Wybalenna.

<sup>34</sup> TAHO CSO 11/26/378, Plomley, 1987, pp. 148 – 49.

Governor. The Colonial Secretary replied that services were conducted ‘pretty regularly’, but it is unclear who was responsible for them.<sup>35</sup>

Whether through medicinal uses or relationships with neighbours, the Aboriginal people consumed quantities of alcohol. This raised serious concerns for those people responsible for them.<sup>36</sup> Their responses involved attempts to restrict the sale of alcohol and through linking the temperance movement with a more ‘Christian’ lifestyle. In February 1856 the government amended the Licensing Act to specifically prohibit the sale of alcohol to Aboriginal people at Oyster Cove.<sup>37</sup> This did little to suppress people’s practices, and at the end of 1857 they continued to ‘express a strong desire to have an allowance of beer to drink daily’.<sup>38</sup>

These moves were similar to those of Brownrigg on the Furneaux Islands. As noted in the previous chapter, several people on Cape Barren Island took the ‘pledge’ to abstain from alcohol for the ensuing twelve months. By contrast at Oyster Cove there is only one reference to anyone taking the ‘pledge’, Walter Arthur, in 1858, as a requirement for consideration to receive a land grant.<sup>39</sup>

There were other changes at the station. In 1854 the young Aboriginal woman, Fanny, now about twenty years old, was granted a government pension just prior to her marriage to William Smith on 27<sup>th</sup> October 1854. The pension was in lieu of the cost of her rations if she had remained at the station.

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<sup>35</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 178.

<sup>36</sup> Correspondence Kirwan to Colonial Secretary, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1855, TAHO CSD 1/18/703.

<sup>37</sup> *Colonial Times*, 1<sup>st</sup> February 1856, pp. 2, 3.

<sup>38</sup> *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1857, E. Walpole, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 25.

<sup>39</sup> Correspondence Assistant Colonial Secretary Solly to Dandridge, 13<sup>th</sup> April 1858, TAHO CSD 1/1/126/4656. The isolated context of the islands contrasted the nearness of the Public Houses at Oyster Cove.

By the middle of 1855 government spending was declining due to a combination of the declining numbers of Aboriginal people at the station, the economic challenges at the end of the era of transportation of convicts, and the exodus from Tasmania of adult male workers in search of gold in Victoria. In response, the roles of Superintendent and Storekeeper were again combined into one person resident on the Station. Milligan (Superintendent) and Davis (Storekeeper) were both sacked.<sup>40</sup> It appears that little, if any, effort was put into Christian faith development between the time of Clark's death in 1850 and the appointment of Rev. Edward Freeman, from the nearby Brown's River Parish<sup>41</sup> of the Anglican Church in July 1855. The contrast between Clark and Freeman was significant.

### **A new chaplain-catechist**

The Governor outlined the duties required of Freeman as Visiting Clergyman:

Should visit regularly at least once a month; Endeavour to obtain influence over the minds of the Natives and admonish them against drunkenness and immorality. He may at his option, use the Chapel of the former Convict Establishment as the location for the assembly of such persons of the neighbourhood as may be induced to attend.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Correspondence Colonial Secretary to Milligan, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1855, TAHO CSD 1/18/703. Milligan immediately enlisted the help of Walter Arthur in an attempt to prevent Visiting Magistrate Kirwan being appointed to oversee the Station, Correspondence Arthur to Milligan, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1855, TAHO CSD 1/18/703, but to no avail, Correspondence Colonial Secretary to Milligan, May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1855, TAHO CSD 1/18/703.

<sup>41</sup> Present day Kingston.

<sup>42</sup> Correspondence Colonial Secretary to Freeman, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1855, TAHO CSD 1/18/703. It is worth noting that at this point in time Rev. Freeman was visiting the station by boat from Brown's River, since there was no road to Oyster Cove.

Freeman's appointment was alongside that of J. S. Dandridge to replace Milligan as Superintendent. Freeman was paid £20 a year to cover 'trifling expenses'.<sup>43</sup> In the early days of his appointment he wrote to the Colonial Secretary, 'A Scheme for the Amelioration of the Moral and Religious condition of the Aboriginal people now stationed at Oyster Cove by rewards and punishments.' It included fortnightly visits, individual and class catechisms, explanation of doctrine, and memorisation of the Lord's Prayer and other prayers and hymns. The Lord's Prayer was to be repeated day and night in the hearing of the Superintendent who would issue rewards.<sup>44</sup> This English-only emphasis was reminiscent of Robinson at Wybalenna. But unlike Robinson there was not the slightest variation to the set form of the Book of Common Prayer. This repetition of prayers and the reading of services were to become the bane of people's, and the Superintendent's, lives. During his regular routine Freeman assembled people in the chapel<sup>45</sup> and said the Divine Service from the Book of Common Prayer including reading and explaining passages from the New Testament and encouraging people in repeating the Lord's Prayer. Freeman's primary responsibilities were to the Parish at Brown's River so the services at Oyster Cove were on a weekday rather than Sunday.<sup>46</sup> He offered instruction to people in their huts though sometimes unsuccessfully: 'I am sorry to say could not make myself at all understood by her.'<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Correspondence Colonial Secretary to Freeman, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1855, TAHO CSD 1/18/703, also *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1855, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Correspondence Freeman to Governor, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1855, TAHO CSD 1/18/703.

<sup>45</sup> *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1855, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1855, 31<sup>st</sup> August 1855, 19<sup>th</sup> September 1855, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1855, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1856, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1856, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1856, *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, 14.

<sup>47</sup> Unnamed Aboriginal woman, *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1855, *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Freeman often commented upon people's appearance,<sup>48</sup> the cleanliness or lack thereof of people's huts and clothing.<sup>49</sup> Visiting Magistrate Kirwan, complained of the filthy state of people's houses, and the '... 30 dogs about the place'.<sup>50</sup> However, despite having a reputation as an entrepreneurial timber merchant around Port Cygnet,<sup>51</sup> Freeman did not actively do anything to change the conditions of the timber huts at Oyster Cove.

The Aboriginal people's response to the new clergyman was emphatic. Within months the Aboriginal people avoided him and his services. From the middle of 1856 Freeman more often left comments in the Visitor's Book such as, '... Aborigines all out hunting, except two ...'.<sup>52</sup> In what turned out to be Freeman's final service in January 1858 he noted, '... beside the Aboriginal people twenty-six white persons attended divine service. The best congregation that has yet attended at this place.'<sup>53</sup> Like Cape Barren Island in 1900, Aboriginal people were voting with their feet and not participating in many church services, or even conversations with the clergyman, or he with them. Freeman appears to have done little to change the situation and, as happened on the Furneaux Islands, his attention turned away from the Aboriginal people toward the neighboring white families. During his three years visiting the Station he baptized several

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<sup>48</sup> *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1855, Ibid., p. 6; 24<sup>th</sup> December 1855, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 8.

<sup>49</sup> *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, 31<sup>st</sup> August 1855, 19<sup>th</sup> September 1855, 21<sup>st</sup> November, Ibid., pp. 2, 3, 6; and 29<sup>th</sup> March 1856, Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>50</sup> Correspondence, Kirwan to Colonial Secretary, TAHO CSD 1/18/703.

<sup>51</sup> *The Courier*, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1857, p. 3. Freeman also found himself in economic difficulties. He was known as the 'Trading Parson' and appeared in the Hobart Insolvent Court in 1860. The court was told he was out of debt in 1852, but had been in debt ever since. He engaged in sawing and shingle splitting speculation and defrauded his creditors. There had been nineteen cases of summonses and sixteen warrants of Attorney in a two year period. *Cornwall Chronicle*, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1860, p. 5.

<sup>52</sup> 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 11<sup>th</sup> June, 26<sup>th</sup> August, 18<sup>th</sup> & 31<sup>st</sup> December 1856, *Oyster Cove Visitor's Book*, TAHO CSO 89/1/1.

<sup>53</sup> *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1858, Edward Freeman, Ibid., p. 27.



white children, including Superintendent Dandridge's daughter<sup>54</sup> and children of various labourers and farmers but has minimal references to Aboriginal people participating in church services.<sup>55</sup>

## Hunting Excursions

When they were not at the station for the clergyman's visits, the Aboriginal people were out in the bush. While it would be tempting to explain these 'bush excursions' of the Aboriginal people as a direct avoidance of the church services, other factors were also contributing. The Aboriginal people regularly went away from the station, sometimes while repairs were done to their huts,<sup>56</sup> and other times to gain fresh meat when the meat supplied from Hobart either did not arrive or was of inferior quality.<sup>57</sup> Sometimes the period away extended for several weeks with only two or three present at the station.<sup>58</sup>

Ryan suggests the Aboriginal people performed ceremonies during these trips.<sup>59</sup> While this is possible, given that at least two people, Trugernanner, Dray, and, before his death, Maiki, were at or near their home country, it is not likely because there is not any explicit reference to this occurring. If ceremonies were performed, they would have been significantly different from earlier practices given the small number of people from each clan, usually only one or two, familiar with the dances, songs and stories. It seems likely that these practices,

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<sup>54</sup> 29<sup>th</sup> August 1855, Baptism Register, Anglican Parish, Browns River, TAHO NS 2020/1, No. 258.

<sup>55</sup> See baptisms numbered 286, 307, 318, 419, and 499. This last numbered baptism was the son of Freeman's successor, Francis Trappers, 13<sup>th</sup> December 1867, Baptism Register, Anglican Parish, Browns River, Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, 18<sup>th</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1856, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 12.

<sup>57</sup> *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, 28<sup>th</sup> March, & 27<sup>th</sup> April 1857, J. Kirwan Visiting Magistrate, Ibid., pp. 19, 21. 18<sup>th</sup> July 1857, Edward Freeman, Ibid., p. 23. 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1858, '... Superintendent reports returning 80lbs of beef to the contractor as being foul and unfit ...' E. Walpole, Police Magistrate, Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>58</sup> *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1856, Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>59</sup> Ryan, L., 2012, *Tasmanian Aborigines A History Since 1803*. Sydney; Allen & Unwin, p. 258.

like other aspects of life, were adapted each time they were performed because of the changing number of participants and the changing geographic, social, and religious contexts in which they were occurring. Continuing ceremonies, and their songs, stories, dances and myths, like the development of the *pidgin* at Wybalenna, were responses to the colonial experience and contributed to a more collective, or pan-Aboriginal, identity beyond the previous clan differentiations.

Ryan distinguishes between those Aboriginal people at Oyster Cove who were engaged in making and using stone tools, and others, specifically Walter, Mary Ann, Fanny and Pengernoburric who living a more 'British lifestyle' and who were by then middle-aged.<sup>60</sup> It would be convenient to argue that the older women, such as Trugernanner, Wapperty, and Tarenootairer, hunted, made stone tools, and conducted ceremonies, and thereby continued or rejuvenated as much of their pre-colonial lifestyle, including their religious practices, as they could, and that these four younger ones whose childhoods were entirely, or mostly, formed in the Orphan School or at Wybalenna, adopted a more 'British lifestyle' of gardening, temperance, and church. However, as previous chapters have shown, the actual lives these people lived, and the choices they made, were more complex.

Those who went out into the bush included these four, who were now middle-aged. The ones who remained at the station were those who were sick<sup>61</sup> which usually included older ones, all women. These older women were the primary holders of many aspects of Aboriginal cultural and religious knowledge. But they were not the only ones. As the son of the chief of the 'Ben Lomond'

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<sup>60</sup> Ryan, 2012, p. 259.

<sup>61</sup> *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, July 18<sup>th</sup> 1857, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 23. 24<sup>th</sup> March 1858, Ibid., p. 28. 18<sup>th</sup> November 1858, Ibid., p. 35.

clan, Walter's leadership at Wybalenna continued the role of his father, which included cultural and religious knowledge.

The hunting trips were not the only reason for people's absence from the station. Each of the men was at different times sent, or went, as crew on whaling expeditions. They were sometimes away for several months.<sup>62</sup> It would appear from the Oyster Cove records that it was sickness that prevented particular women from joining the excursions into the bush, and whaling that prevented particular men, rather than a choice for a more 'British lifestyle'.

Furthermore, the 'bush excursions' also included the consumption of alcohol, a clearly identifiable part of 'British lifestyle'. Dr. Smith reported that he 'treated Polly [who was] suffering from exposure and partly the effects of beer whilst out on hunting excursion.'<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, the songs Fanny was still singing in first language in the 1880s could only have been learnt from her mother, Tarenootairer, or other older women, such as Wapperty or Trugernanner. These songs were never regarded as part of a 'British lifestyle', and by continuing to sing these songs throughout her life, Fanny was choosing a decidedly Aboriginal practice, as well as Christian faith. So there were aspects of 'Aboriginal' and 'British' lifestyle interacting and coalescing on both the station and the 'bush', and being Christian was not limited to only one of these locations.

## **Mission curiosity**

In spite of their excursions to the bush, the Aboriginal people continued to be an object of curiosity to locals and visitors alike, including among the churches.

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<sup>62</sup> *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, 31<sup>st</sup> January 1857, J. Kirwan, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 18. Also October 14<sup>th</sup> 1857, Edward Freeman, *Ibid.*, p. 24. 10<sup>th</sup> July 1858, *Ibid.*, p. 29. '[Terminope] Augustus one of the Aborigines has just returned from a whaling voyage', E. Walpole, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1859. *Ibid.*, p. 37. 14<sup>th</sup> January 1860, 'four men are still about whaling', Walpole. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>63</sup> *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1861 W. Smith *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Oyster Cove was a site of ‘pleasure cruises’ for various steam ships visiting Hobart, such as the *Tasmania*,<sup>64</sup> and *Culloden*.<sup>65</sup> Governor Denison made one of his occasional visits in September 1856.<sup>66</sup> Two months later ‘a large number of children belonging to various Sunday Schools in Hobart Town proceeded on board the missionary ship, *John Williams* to visit the station.’<sup>67</sup> The visit was something of a public relations exercise where the local clergy accompanied the visiting missionaries in their missionary ship to visit the closest approximation to a ‘mission’ the locals had, though their interest in the welfare of the Aboriginal people who lived there never led to further visits.

This visit of the *John Williams* identifies the broader context of the boats mentioned in previous chapter for the Anglican Church’s ‘Furneaux Mission’. Such fundraising to purchase boats for evangelical missions to islands populated by ‘natives’ was occurring among different churches at the time. Perhaps it was this visit in 1856 that contributed to the Anglican Bishop, Nixon, seeking donations a few years later for a boat to assist that church’s work in the Furneaux Islands. The response to Nixon’s letter was a donation of just over £400.<sup>68</sup> Whether it was the denominational differences, comparative missionary fervour, the skills of the proposers in gaining subscriptions, the different attraction of the South Sea islands compared with the penal colony of Van Diemen’s Land, or

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<sup>64</sup> *The Courier*, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1853, p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1853, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> *The Mercury*, 19<sup>th</sup> September 1856, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> *Oyster Cove Visitor’s Book*, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 16. £3600 was raised. *Colonial Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1856, p. 2. It had sailed from England in October 1855. *Cornwall Chronicle*, 24<sup>th</sup> October 1855, p. 4. This vessel had been purchased by subscriptions raised by Sunday School children from Methodist, Congregational and other ‘dissenting’ churches in England for the purpose of supporting mission ventures in the Pacific Islands. *The Mercury*, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1856, p. 2. The *John Williams* sailed for the South Sea Islands in 1861. *The Mercury*, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1861, p. 2, supported by £195 donated to the work by churches in Hobart. *The Mercury*, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1861, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> *Church News*, 20<sup>th</sup> March 1866, p. 231.

some other reason, but the contrast in amounts raised for the Furneaux Island and the South Seas activities is stark.

### **Walter Arthur – the decline of a clan leader**

By 1858 the number of Aboriginal people at Oyster Cove had declined to fifteen, ten women and five men.<sup>69</sup> One of the striking features of these numbers is that the ‘Ben Lomond’ clan that had been the second most numerous at Wybalenna now had a sole survivor, Walter Arthur. The large number of the clan at Wybalenna was one of the reasons Walter had followed his father as clan leader, and through his education in reading and writing in English, had grown into a leader of the whole community.

Just prior to the appointment of Freeman and Dandridge in 1855, Walter began a campaign to improve the situation for himself and his wife, Mary Ann. They had initially cared for Fanny and George,<sup>70</sup> and were now looking after William Lanney.<sup>71</sup> Fanny’s marriage to William Smith seven months earlier, and her departure from the station, may have prompted Walter to write to Governor Young seeking permission to also live elsewhere.<sup>72</sup> Frustratingly for Walter and Mary Ann permission was not forthcoming. Nevertheless Walter and Mary Ann were granted permission to occupy part of the station land separate from the main buildings.<sup>73</sup> Walter and William Lanney cleared it, hoping this would one day lead to him becoming owner, which he eventually did. Walter gained sufficient income as Station Boatman and from selling the vegetables to employ a labourer, a white

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<sup>69</sup> *The Mercury*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1882, pp. 1, 2.

<sup>70</sup> Correspondence Milligan to Colonial Secretary, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1847, TAHO CSO 24/7/101, pp. 185 – 188.

<sup>71</sup> Correspondence 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1855, TAHO CSD 1/18/703.

<sup>72</sup> Correspondence Walter Arthur to Governor Young, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1855, Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Land Title 5115.1 Correspondence Colonial Secretary to Dandridge, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1855, TAHO LSD 2/1/3, p. 530.

person, at 18/- per week.<sup>74</sup> This was probably the first such situation of an Aboriginal employer and white employee in the history of Tasmania.

Walter and Mary Ann were sometimes on site when Freeman visited. In these church services Aboriginal participation was limited to the required responses set out in the Book of Common Prayer. It was more like Walter's years at the Orphan School, and in stark contrast to his experience at Wybalenna writing sermons, the *Flinders Island Chronicle*, and participating in the leadership of the Sunday services there. These had all ceased after his apparent conflict with Robinson that resulted in Walter and Mary Ann being exiled to Chalky Island in 1838.<sup>75</sup>

However, in early 1858 the situation at Oyster Cove deteriorated significantly as Walter and Mary Ann both became violent toward each other and other Aboriginal people. In March, Dandridge wrote to the Colonial Secretary about the 'continued misconduct of Walter George Arthur & his wife Mary Ann' and their relapse into 'old habits of drinking, neglecting their duty and exhibiting a violence of conduct impossible to describe' including a 'disgraceful scene of drunken violence towards the other Aborigines'.<sup>76</sup>

Dandridge recommended

that Walter be informed that he will not be allowed to receive anymore pay, or to retain his position as coxswain of the boat, until himself and Mary-Ann have taken the pledge against drinking.

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<sup>74</sup> Correspondence Henry John Porter to Colonial Secretary, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1855, TAHO CSD 1/18/703.

<sup>75</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> March 1838, Plomley, 1987, p. 544.

<sup>76</sup> Correspondence Dandridge to Colonial Secretary, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1858, TAHO CSD 1/1/126/4656.

Walter should also I respectfully submit receive a severe censure from yourself, and a caution for the future.<sup>77</sup>

Walter received his censure about five weeks later. In the conversation Walter expressed his great desire to leave Oyster Cove and live with Mary Ann along the Huon River and cultivate a garden. Assistant Secretary Solly told him

that before his application would be even listened to he must take the pledge for 12 months, & then if at the expiration of the first 3 I received a favourable report of the behaviour of himself, his wife, I would mention his wishes to the Govt though I could not assure him that they would be complied with.<sup>78</sup>

For a month nothing changed<sup>79</sup> but then during May and June the situation improved significantly. Although Walter and Mary Ann had not taken the pledge, Dandridge reported ‘an entire change in their behaviour’<sup>80</sup> and by July Visiting Magistrate Walpole reported: ‘Walter appears to have settled down to industrious habits and has taken the pledge against using strong drinks.’<sup>81</sup> As Dammary notes, most of Walter’s life had been on Aboriginal establishments, each an authoritarian structure with only variations in rigidity.<sup>82</sup> Colonial society itself was authoritarian and there were many who desired to be free from it. Walter’s and Mary Ann’s experience also suggests that those who had some involvement in the church were not immune from the traumatic effects of colonisation, nor the

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<sup>77</sup> Correspondence Dandridge to Colonial Secretary, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1858, TAHO CSD 1/1/126/4656.

<sup>78</sup> Correspondence Assistant Colonial Secretary Solly to Dandridge, 13<sup>th</sup> April 1858, TAHO CSD 1/1/126/4656.

<sup>79</sup> Correspondence Walpole to Colonial Secretary, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1858, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 29.

<sup>80</sup> Correspondence Dandridge to Assistant Colonial Secretary Travers, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1858, TAHO CSD 1/1/126/4656, and *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 28.

<sup>81</sup> *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1858, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 29.

<sup>82</sup> Dammary, S., 2001, *Walter George Arthur A Free Tasmanian?* Clayton; Monash Publications in History, p. 45.

frustrations of being constrained by limitations imposed by others who were more powerful.<sup>83</sup>

### **Christian instruction – decline and reinvention**

As mentioned earlier, Rev Freeman's last visit to Oyster Cove was in January 1858. In April that year Bishop Nixon visited the Station and found everything under Dandridge's careful supervision in 'excellent order'. Nixon celebrated Divine Service<sup>84</sup> but Visiting Magistrate, Walpole, noted there were 'no Aborigines at home'.<sup>85</sup> Walpole's comment is odd, because there is a series of photos of the Aboriginal people, taken by Nixon, dated '1858'.<sup>86</sup>

Following the death of Trugernanner, *The Mercury*, reported she had been baptized by Bishop Nixon.<sup>87</sup> This could only have occurred at the time of the photos. Rev. Freeman baptized several children at Oyster Cove, including Superintendent Dandridge's daughter, noted earlier, as recorded in the Baptism Register of the Brown's River Anglican Parish, but there is no record in that Register of Trugernanner being baptized at Oyster Cove.

Nixon's visit in 1858 was four years after his first visit to the Furneaux Islands. It does seem strange that the Aboriginal people who were more remote received greater attention from the Bishop. In contrast to the Aboriginal people on the Bass Strait Islands who seemed to appreciate the visit of Bishop Nixon, those at Oyster Cove showed no desire to meet him, probably because of Freeman's legacy. This reference in April 1858 is the last mentioned visit by a clergyman,

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<sup>83</sup> Land Title 5115.1 Correspondence Colonial Secretary to Dandridge, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1855, TAHO LSD 2/1/3, p. 530. In June 1857 he had sought land at Molly's Point, TAHO LSD 2/1/3, p. 530.

<sup>84</sup> *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 28.

<sup>85</sup> *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>86</sup> Held by the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, and reproduced in Rae-Ellis, V., 1976, *Trucanini Queen or Traitor?* Hobart, O.B.M, pp. 108, 110.

<sup>87</sup> *The Mercury*, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1876, p. 2.



including any Bishop, to Oyster Cove. The reason becomes clearer through correspondence in 1859.<sup>88</sup>

On May 31<sup>st</sup> 1859 when James Bonwick visited Oyster Cove he was

deeply grieved to find that no means are adopted by Government to provide any religious instruction or amelioration and no efforts made to protect them from the vicious influence of bad white men, nor to keep them from the destructive effects of strong drink. The remnant should at least be prepared for death and eternity.<sup>89</sup>

Bonwick reported a comment from an unnamed Aboriginal person who spoke of the neglect of their spiritual well-being in these words: 'They think we have got no souls now.'<sup>90</sup>

Freeman had stopped visiting Oyster Cove eighteen months earlier in January 1858, when Superintendent Dandridge stopped the pay of £20 a year for expenses.<sup>91</sup> Archdeacon Davies suggested Mr. Smales be appointed as Catechist at a salary of 'not less than £100 per annum'.<sup>92</sup> Smales demanded £150 including a servant to cook his meals and clean his house.<sup>93</sup> Solly, Assistant Colonial Secretary, perhaps somewhat facetiously, replied that in 'regard to a servant it is

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<sup>88</sup> It seems the first Member of Parliament to visit Oyster Cove was J. D. Balfe in September 1859. He described the treatment of the Aboriginal people as 'parsimonious and ungenerous'. He recommended a trebling of the rations provided to the Aboriginal people and an increased remuneration for the Superintendent, *Oyster Cove Visitor's Book*, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 40.

<sup>89</sup> *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 38. 'The Royal Kalendar and Guide to Tasmania from 1859', had a different view, 'Uncleanly, unsober, unvirtuous, unenergetic and irreligious with a past character for treachery, and no record of *one* noble action, the race is fast fading away, and its utter extinction will hardly be regretted', Hull, H. M., 1859, *The Royal Kalendar and Guide to Tasmania from 1859*. Hobart Town; William Fletcher, p. 13.

<sup>90</sup> Correspondence Bonwick to Governor, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1859, TAHO CSD 1/1/136/5015.

<sup>91</sup> Correspondence Freeman to Archdeacon Davies, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1859 Ibid. While Freeman had said at the time of his appointment 'I should without inducement have gladly performed that duty, yet I beg to acknowledge with thanks, His Excellency's kind consideration in allowing me £20 as remuneration for incidental expenses', Correspondence Freeman to Colonial Secretary, TAHO CSD 1/18/703. His gladness was clearly absent two and a half years later.

<sup>92</sup> Correspondence Davies to Colonial Secretary, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1859, TAHO CSD 1/1/136/5015.

<sup>93</sup> Correspondence Smales to Henty Colonial Secretary, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1859, Ibid.

considered the Natives may properly be induced to render what attendance may be required'.<sup>94</sup> Smales responded that no 'gentleman' would place himself in such a dependant situation and that without the £150 he would not take the job.<sup>95</sup>

Soon after Bonwick's visit Walter Arthur left the station on a whaling trip in October 1859 on the *Sussex* for an expected voyage of eighteen months.<sup>96</sup> His job as Boatman meeting the steam ship that supplied the station was now vacant.<sup>97</sup> Seizing the opportunity for a change not only in religious instructor but the whole approach, Dandridge wrote a scathing report on Freeman's activities, and the rigid institutional methodology inflicted on the Aboriginal people:

When I was appointed 4 years ago I was directed after having mustered and inspected the Natives to call them with prayers night and morning; the result of all this was that in a very short time the natives hated the very name of prayer, detested myself and finally bolted into the bush; such I am convinced will again happen if the same system be attempted to be carried out now; again whenever Mr Freeman visited the Station (he being then the Visiting Chaplain) if the Natives or any of them caught a glimpse of him before I did, by the time he arrived the place would be deserted and not one of them would be found or would make their appearance until he was gone; so that frequently he was obliged to go away without performing any

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<sup>94</sup> Correspondence Colonial Secretary to Smales (Snr), 26<sup>th</sup> August 1859, Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Correspondence, Smales to Solly Assistant Colonial Secretary, 28<sup>th</sup> September 1859, Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Augustus, one of the Aboriginal people, had been whaling earlier and returned around the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1859, E. Walpole, *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*. TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 37. For Walter, 'His pay, is the 90<sup>th</sup> share of Sperm oil, upon which he has received an advance of £3 from the Owner, Mrs. Seal, in Correspondence Shipping Master to Solly Assistant Colonial Secretary, 21<sup>st</sup> October 1859, CSD 1/1/126/4656. See also, Walpole, *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1859, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 42. The *Sussex* returned to Hobart in July 1860 with 40 tons sperm oil. *The Mercury*, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1860, p. 2.

<sup>97</sup> Correspondence, Dandridge to Col Sec, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1859, TAHO CSD 1/1/136/5015.

services at all. In my opinion reading any set form of prayer or having any set time for instruction (excepting upon Sundays) is productive with these people of more harm than good; the way in which they may be most benefited is to catch them as opportunity offers, either singly or in groups in their own hut, tell or read to them interesting stories upon miscellaneous subjects, particularly such as bear upon their own former history, or that of Natives of other countries (in whom I find they are always much interested) and during the reading or after the reading of their stories found religious instruction upon them, which may be thus conveyed to them in such a way as shall be both interesting and productive and good to them.<sup>98</sup>

Dandridge was similar to Clark in eschewing the Prayer Book as a means of communicating or practicing the Christian faith, other than Sunday services. As Superintendent he had more authority than Clark and followed his critique with a radically different method and recommended combining the roles of catechist with that of gardener. The gardener could keep the Aboriginal people supplied year round with fresh vegetables, as well as providing the older Aboriginal women with firewood.<sup>99</sup>

It is worth noting the contrast to the Bass Strait Islands where the roles of teacher and catechist were combined, and the roles of clergy often fulfilling oversight roles handling people's pensions, negotiating leases, staking out the reserve, and making reports to parliament about Aboriginal people. As Dandridge noted the duties of Catechist at Oyster Cove were 'of a most opposite character;

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<sup>98</sup> Correspondence Dandridge to Solly, Assistant Colonial Secretary, 12<sup>th</sup> July 1859, TAHO CSD 1/1/136/5015.

<sup>99</sup> Correspondence Dandridge to Colonial Secretary, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1859, TAHO CSD 1/1/136/5015. Correspondence Dandridge to Colonial Treasurer, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1862, TAHO CSD 4/19/200.

on the one hand of the highest order, imparting religious instruction; on the other, performing manual labour; few with capacity for the first would condescend to undertake the latter'.<sup>100</sup> The contrast between Smales demanding a domestic servant and regarding the Aboriginal people as beneath even this role, and Dandridge's recommendation that the Catechist ought to serve the Aboriginal people in practical ways, particularly the elderly women, is stark, to say the least. The combination of his sharp critique of the regimented Daily Office and its proponents, together with the recommendation of a wood-carrying-Catechist serving Aboriginal Elders, marks Dandridge as one of the very few insightful colonial Christians of the era.

Walter Arthur had experience writing Christian sermons and other exhortations and had led singing in the school and chapel at Wybalenna. He was experienced in tending sheep, growing vegetables and working the Oyster Cove station boat. But Walter also had a history of alcoholic intoxication and violence toward other Aboriginal people. The intoxication and violence may have lessened or been absent if his aspirations had been more effectively addressed earlier on. It is unlikely that Dandridge gave any thought to Walter fulfilling this role.<sup>101</sup>

Walter returned from the whaling voyage in January 1861 looking much worse.<sup>102</sup>

His death a few months later on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1861 was 'untimely' to say the least.<sup>103</sup>

No body was ever recovered and there appears to be no record of his funeral.

In rejecting Freeman Dandridge's preferred candidate for catechist was a white man, Francis Trappers, who lived near Oyster Cove. He had experience

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<sup>100</sup> Correspondence Dandridge to Colonial Secretary, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1862, TAHO CSD 4/19/200.

<sup>101</sup> There are some parallels with Lucy Beeton being overlooked for the role of teacher/catechist on the Furneaux Islands. Employing an Aboriginal person does not seem to have been a consideration by those making the decisions.

<sup>102</sup> Walpole, *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 56.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

with Aboriginal people at Oyster Cove and parts of Australia and, importantly for the government, was willing to do the job for less than Smales, at ‘£100 with quarters and rations for himself and family’,<sup>104</sup> and he began in 1859, though the details of what he did are unknown.<sup>105</sup>

With declining numbers of Aboriginal people, the continued poor quality of buildings, and very damp living conditions, in early 1862 Dandridge sought alternative locations for the Aboriginal people and his own family. While he examined potential locations at New Town, Glenorchy, Sandy Bay, Kangaroo Point and Rokeby,<sup>106</sup> other people in the Oyster Cove area were also submitting similar ‘tenders’ for the work, including Mr Worley<sup>107</sup> and Mr Pybus.<sup>108</sup> Under threat of this new competition, Dandridge provided the government with a new estimate of costs, in early May, to move the Aboriginal people and his family to the vicinity of Hobart Town. It included the ‘reduction’ of Trappers as Catechist<sup>109</sup> and his appointment concluded at the end of May.<sup>110</sup>

The lack of a catechist, or Chaplain, from 1862 probably also grew out of the government decisions of the mid-1850s mentioned in the previous chapter to not financially support religious instruction, and from May 1862 there was no government or church sponsored religious activities among the Aboriginal people at Oyster Cove.

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<sup>104</sup> Correspondence Dandridge to Colonial Secretary, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1859, TAHO CSD 1/1/136/5015. Dandridge had considered Trappers for the role of Coxswain for the Station boat when Walter Arthur left on a whaling expedition, but employed John Russell at that time, Correspondence Dandridge to Colonial Secretary, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1859, TAHO CSD 1/1/126/4656.

<sup>105</sup> In late 1861, with the support of Dandridge, Trappers was given a leave of absence during which he applied unsuccessfully for the job of catechist and school master on the Furneaux Islands. Correspondence, Dandridge to Colonial Secretary, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1861, TAHO CSD 1/1/136/5015.

<sup>106</sup> Correspondence Dandridge to Colonial Secretary, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1862, TAHO CSD 4/19/200.

<sup>107</sup> Correspondence Worley to Colonial Secretary, 24<sup>th</sup> April 1862, Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Correspondence Pybus to Col Sec, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1862, Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Correspondence Dandridge to Colonial Secretary, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1862, Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Correspondence Assistant Colonial Secretary to Dandridge, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1862, Ibid.

## Marriages between Aborigines and colonists

Aboriginal people at Oyster Cove were interacting early on with workers and some of their colonial neighbours. Some of this was during their regular hunting ‘excursions’, whaling expeditions, and bartering or selling ration items such as blankets. Some formed close relationships and at least three of the Aboriginal women married white men from the local area. The first was Fanny who married William Smith in 1854.<sup>111</sup> Pengernoburric married an unnamed carpenter in April 1863,<sup>112</sup> and Mary Ann Arthur married Adam Booker<sup>113</sup> in January 1866,<sup>114</sup> after her Aboriginal husband, Walter Arthur died in May 1861. The Superintendent was required to make application to the government to sanction the marriage.<sup>115</sup> Pengernoburric and Mary Ann Arthur continued living at the Oyster Cove Station after their marriages,<sup>116</sup> but Fanny and William did not.

Ten years after her marriage Mary Ann became ill in 1871. She was brought from Oyster Cove to hospital in Hobart with her husband and Mrs.

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<sup>111</sup> Independent Chapel, Marriage Register, TAHO NS 650/1/2, No. 297. Their intended marriage was reported in one Hobart newspaper. See *The Courier*, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1854, p. 2.

<sup>112</sup> Walpole requested the government sanction Pengernoburric / Bessy’s marriage to an unnamed carpenter, *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1863, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 77. Pengernoburric / Bessy died 11<sup>th</sup> Feb 1867, TAHO CSD 4/1/77 B231.

<sup>113</sup> Adam Booker had been working as a gardener at Oyster Cove since 1862. Dandridge to Premier, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1867, TAHO CSD 4/1/77/B231.

<sup>114</sup> The declaration of Banns is recorded in the Register of St. David’s Church Hobart, on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>, TAHO NS 282/9/2, but their marriage is not recorded in the Marriage Register of St. David’s Church, nor is there an entry for a Marriage License nor a marriage record in the register of All Saints Church, South Hobart. The Marriage Register for the Anglican Church at Browns River is not present in the Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office (TAHO).

<sup>115</sup> Henry Daldy sought permission for Mary Ann’s and Adam’s wedding in September 1865, *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1865 TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 92. Correspondence Dandridge to Colonial Secretary, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1865, TAHO CSD 4/1/77 B231. The circumstances for Fanny and William were quite different, being married in Hobart in the house of the Independent clergy, and they never lived at Oyster Cove after they were married.

<sup>116</sup> Correspondence Colonial Secretary to Colonial Treasurer, 16<sup>th</sup> April 1869, CSD 7/1/26 D215. *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 92. ‘The Superintendent complained of Adam Booker having made use of obscene and threatening language on the Station to Mrs. Dandridge,’ Henry Daldy, 13<sup>th</sup> December 1867. *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, Ibid., p. 109. ‘The hut occupied by Adam Booker and Mary Ann was broken open in 1869, and two blankets and some rugs were stolen’. *Oyster Cove Visitors Book*, Ibid., p. 115.

Dandridge.<sup>117</sup> She died there two days later<sup>118</sup> and was buried the following day in St. David's Cemetery.<sup>119</sup> The *Mercury* reported that 'Not a single mourner followed the hearse. The funeral service was conducted by the Rev. Mr. Gellibrand in the presence of the undertaker, and Mr. D. C. Jones'.<sup>120</sup>

### **Fanny and William Smith – independent at last**

As mentioned one person who had left the Oyster Cove Station for a quite different life was Fanny, daughter of Tarenootairrer<sup>121</sup> and Nicermenic.<sup>122</sup> Her siblings were Mary Ann, about ten years older, and Adam, a couple of years younger.<sup>123</sup> A deposition by Jeanneret suggests the name 'Cochrane' was linked with Fanny while at Wybalenna.<sup>124</sup>

At times during her life the identity of Fanny's father was the topic of speculation among some parliamentarians,<sup>125</sup> anthropologists,<sup>126</sup> and newspaper correspondents.<sup>127</sup> It was felt crucial at the time because of the important

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<sup>117</sup> Correspondence Dandridge to Colonial Secretary, TAHO CSD 7/1/33/B450; *The Mercury*, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1871, p. 2.

<sup>118</sup> Correspondence Dandridge to Colonial Secretary, 24<sup>th</sup> July 1871, TAHO CSD 7/1/33 D450.

<sup>119</sup> Burial Register, St. David's Hobart 1871, No. 80 Mary Anne Booker, Abode: Oyster Cove; When Buried: July 27<sup>th</sup>; Age: 50 years; Ship's Name 488; Quality or Profession: *blank*, J. Gellibrand, TAHO NS 282/11/1.

<sup>120</sup> *The Mercury*, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1871, p. 2. Following her death it appears Booker was reluctant to leave Oyster Cove, Various correspondence 12<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> October 1871, CSD 7/1/33 D450. It is unlikely Mary Ann's friends at Oyster Cove, including Trugernanner, or her family, Fanny or Adam, had sufficient time to hear the news, probably from Mrs. Dandridge, and then travel to Hobart for the funeral. It does seem strange that her body was not returned to Oyster Cove where her current husband was living, where her brother was buried and her sister, Fanny, was living nearby.

<sup>121</sup> Plomley, N. J. B., 1966, *Friendly Mission*. Kingsgrove; Halstead Press, p. 985.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 992.

<sup>123</sup> *The Mercury*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1882, p. 2.

<sup>124</sup> TAHO CSO 24/7/101, pp. 294 – 329. Forty years later it was reported 'Cochrane' was Mrs Clark's maiden name and became attached to Fanny during her time with the Clarks at Wybalenna.

<sup>125</sup> *The Mercury*, 25<sup>th</sup> August 1882, p. 3.

<sup>126</sup> Ling Roth, 1898, 'Is Mrs. F. C. Smith a "Last Living Aboriginal of Tasmania"', *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 27, pp. 451-454. Published by: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2842841> Accessed: 25/04/2013.

<sup>127</sup> *The Mercury*, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1882, p. 3. *The Mercury*, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1882, p. 3.

difference in the minds of colonists in what they had constructed as a ‘full-blood’ and a ‘half-caste’ Aborigine. The Tasmanian Government accepted that she had two Aboriginal parents in 1854 in granting her pension, in 1864 in approving the first land grant,<sup>128</sup> in 1882 in increasing her pension,<sup>129</sup> and in 1884 in extending her land grant.<sup>130</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Fanny was part of the group that moved to Oyster Cove in October 1847. She was part of the most intact family arriving at Oyster Cove with both her parents and her two siblings. She was too old for the Orphan School, though she had been there earlier for two months from 9<sup>th</sup> December 1842 to 8<sup>th</sup> February 1843, after which she was discharged back into the care of Robert Clark at Wybalenna.<sup>131</sup>

There is no reference to Fanny in the surviving documentation at Oyster Cove from 1847 – 1854<sup>132</sup> so it is speculative to construct a biographical sketch. If she was temporarily in Hobart, as Plomley suggested,<sup>133</sup> it is likely she continued living with Mary Ann and Walter when she returned to Oyster Cove. Her daily life is likely to have included domestic work with the other young women, and probably some catechetical classes with Robert Clark. She would have been too young to be admitted to the public houses in the neighborhood, including at North West Bay, if she went with the other Aboriginal women on their excursions and liaisons there. Nevertheless, at some point in time in circumstances unknown, Fanny met William Smith, a sawyer, probably from the area around Oyster Cove

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<sup>128</sup> See Reibey speech in parliament. *The Mercury*, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1884, p. 3.

<sup>129</sup> *Parliament of Tasmania, Journals of the House of Assembly, Votes and Proceedings*, Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> October 1882, p. 171.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> November 1884, p. 216.

<sup>131</sup> Orphan School Register, TAHO SWD 28/1/1.

<sup>132</sup> Fanny’s father, Nicermenic, is not listed in the census of 1855<sup>132</sup> and therefore died at some unrecorded time, between 1847 and 1855.

<sup>133</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 858.



given that the only available means of transport from the Station were by foot and boat.

In early 1854 arrangements began for Fanny and William to be married, including approval from parliament for Fanny to receive a pension ‘in lieu of her maintenance at the establishment’.<sup>134</sup> What was unusual was they clearly intended to live away from the station. Fanny was the first Aboriginal adult to be granted such a request.<sup>135</sup> Fanny was one of only a few Aboriginal people provided with a pension by the Tasmanian Government.<sup>136</sup> Fanny’s pension was listed in the government’s publication of pensions.<sup>137</sup> The later Superintendent at Oyster Cove, Dandridge, was responsible for the pensions provided to Trugernanner and Mary Ann in about 1868.<sup>138</sup>

Fanny Cochrane married William Smith on 27<sup>th</sup> October 1854, in the Murray Street home of the Independent Minister, Rev. Miller. The marriage register reads:

Wedding No. 297, October 27<sup>th</sup> Minister’s House, Murray Street,  
Hobart, William Smith and Fanny Cochrane, Of full age, Sawyer,

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<sup>134</sup> *The Mercury*, 8<sup>th</sup> September 1882, p. 3.

<sup>135</sup> Note the contrasting treatment of Walter and Mary Ann Arthur, a married Aboriginal couple who were repeatedly refused permission to leave the station.

<sup>136</sup> Reibey managed two pensions for women on the Bass Strait Islands, Margery Munroe, mother of Polly Bligh and grandmother of Emma Bligh, was from Western Port and received a pension of 1s per day from the government administered by Reibey since January 1862. *Church News*, 19<sup>th</sup> August 1863, pp. 208 & 209. In his 1863 report to parliament, Reibey, also called attention ‘to the fact that a pension was voted to Maria Scott, an old woman, native of Tasmania and now residing on Tin Kettle Island, but she has never received it. I think it desirable that this pension should be paid through the Archdeacon of Launceston, who will take care that it is appropriated as intended’, Reibey, T., 1863, Report of the Ven. Archdeacon Reibey, *Journal of The Legislative Council*, 48, August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1863.

<sup>137</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1860, p. 2. The £24 was equivalent to the annual wages of a servant at Oyster Cove.

<sup>138</sup> Colonial Treasurer to Dandridge, undated, TAHO CSD 4/1/77/B231. This was increased to £60 per annum for Trugernanner, and £30 for Mary Ann, in 1870. Correspondence Colonial Secretary to Dandridge, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1869, TAHO CSD 7/1/33 D450. In parliament in 1882, Mr Burgess, member for East Devon, noted a reference by Mr. Dooley, to an unnamed Aboriginal man with wife and nine children who sought a pension when the debate about Fanny’s pension was occurring. The man’s pension does not appear to have been approved. *The Mercury*, 8<sup>th</sup> September 1882, p. 3.

[both William and Fanny put an 'X' as their signature], William

Smith 'his mark' and Fanny Cochrane 'her mark'. Rev. Miller.

Married in the Minister's house aforesaid according to the Rites and Ceremonies of Independent, by License.

This marriage was solemnized between us William Smith 'his mark' and Fanny Cochrane 'her mark'

In the presence of Joseph Milligan, and John Hales.<sup>139</sup>

Rev. Miller visited Oyster Cove in 1853. This may have contributed to Fanny and William linking with him to conduct their wedding in 1854, though the Anglican Bishop Nixon also participated in this visit.<sup>140</sup> There was no catechist or visiting Chaplain at Oyster Cove until Freeman was appointed in June 1855. The involvement of Miller was likely to have been through Superintendent Milligan. It would not have occurred without his permission.

A newspaper article in *The Mercury* in 1882 described William as living at North West Bay at the time of their marriage.<sup>141</sup> There was a William Smith who was a member of the Anglican Parish at Brown's River (present day, Kingston), and was living at North West Bay, which lies between Brown's River and Oyster Cove. However, two baptisms of children of William and Maria Smith at Brown's River Mill, on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1858 and 24<sup>th</sup> February 1861 by Rev. Edward Freeman, suggest this was a different William Smith to the man Fanny married. There may have been two William Smiths, both Sawyers, in the same area at the same time,

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<sup>139</sup> Independent Chapel, Marriage Register, TAHO NS 650/1/2, No. 297. The Independent Chapel, later known as the Congregational Church, was on the corner of Elizabeth and Brisbane Streets, Hobart. Rev. Miller was Minister there, (*The Courier*, 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1854, p. 3), and Chairman of the Congregational Union, (*Colonial Times*, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1854, p. 2). He was a very active evangelical and attended meetings of the Wesleyan Missionary Society, (*The Mercury*, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1854, p. 2), and several other similar organizations, (*Colonial Times*, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1854, p. 3, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1854, p. 3, *The Courier*, 8<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> March 1854, p. 2).

<sup>140</sup> Aboard the *Tasmania*. *The Courier*, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1853, p. 2.

<sup>141</sup> *The Mercury*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1882, p. 2.

one an Anglican, and the other an Independent. William's denominational membership is unknown. There was widespread conflict in the Anglican parish with the entrepreneurial Rev. Freeman.<sup>142</sup>

The newspaper article in 1882 by 'One who knows' goes on to suggest William and Fanny Smith remained at North West Bay for six or eight months after their marriage and then moved to Hamilton<sup>143</sup> under an engagement to Mr. William Clarke, of Norton Mandeville.<sup>144</sup> Here they remained for two years. From Hamilton they came to live in Hobart, where they opened a board and lodging house in Liverpool-street, two doors above the well-known premises of Perkins and Nephew.<sup>145</sup> Things not going on satisfactorily in this business, they removed again to North West Bay where they remained six months.<sup>146</sup>

If the dates in the newspaper article are accurate, William and Fanny could have been living back at North West Bay by the middle of 1857. If so they may have been part of a petition by fifty-two members of the Anglican Parish at Brown's River, to the Bishop regarding:

... in consequence of the late feeling exhibited by the Rev. E.

Freeman, referred to in the early part of this memorial, the Church at

Kingston will again be almost deserted, and many of Your Lordship's

Memorialists will have either to attend the Wesleyan Chapel, or to

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<sup>142</sup> *The Courier*, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1857, p. 3.

<sup>143</sup> About 75km north-west of Hobart.

<sup>144</sup> William John Turner Clarke, of Norton Mandeville, freehold grazing farm, listed as entitled to vote in House of Assembly Electoral District of Cumberland. *The Mercury*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1882, p. 2. He was one of the largest landholders in the district with 45,000 acres. *The Courier*, 13<sup>th</sup> February 1857, p. 3.

<sup>145</sup> *The Mercury*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1882, p. 2. Perkins and Nephews' Emporium was at 135 – 137 Liverpool Street, on the corner of Watchorn Street, Hobart <http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/36699062?q=Perkins+and+Nephew+Emporium+Hobart&l-availability=y&l-australian=y&c=picture&versionId=47644210> accessed 11/2/2014. This would locate the Smith's board and lodging house in the vicinity of 139 – 143 Liverpool Street, between Watchorn and Harrington Streets, Hobart, noting that some street numbers in Hobart changed from time to time up to the early 1900s.

<sup>146</sup> *The Mercury*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1882, p. 2.

abandon altogether the Public Worship of their Maker, for so long a time as the present incumbent is permitted to retain his pastoral care of the parish...<sup>147</sup>

The 'Memorialists' included a G A Robinson, a William Smith and fifty others<sup>148</sup> but it is unknown if this William was married to Fanny, and if they were part of the Anglican congregation. There was a Wesleyan Methodist Congregation at Brown's River that was part of the Sandy Bay Circuit until it separated in 1860 but membership lists are not known.<sup>149</sup> It is a significant, but unanswered question in ascertaining the background to Fanny's and William's membership in the Methodist Church at Nicholls Rivulet thirty years later.

## **Funeral services-ceremonies**

In 1857 while Fanny and William were living at North West Bay, Fanny's brother, Adam, was living with them. Fanny gave birth to the first of her eleven children on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1857.<sup>150</sup> A little over five weeks later her brother, Adam, became ill, died and was buried at Oyster Cove.<sup>151</sup> Ryan speculates that 'the entire Oyster Cove community arrived next morning, camped nearby and performed ceremonies to ensure that he properly went to the next stage of his life'.<sup>152</sup> What 'properly' means in ceremonial terms and so far from his ancestor's country is not known and not explored. It could be argued that Mary Ann's and Fanny's involvement in the church led to a Christian ceremony of some kind. Their mother, Tarenootairer, could represent the continuing Aboriginal ceremonial

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<sup>147</sup> *The Courier*, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1857, p. 3.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> March 28<sup>th</sup> 1860, Methodist Church Minutes of Quarterly Meeting 1851 – 1885, TAHO NS 499/1/121. Minute Book of the Australasian Wesleyan Missionary Society, TAHO NS 499/117.

<sup>150</sup> *The Mercury*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1882, p. 2.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Ryan, 2012, p. 262.

practice. However, as with other examples, such as the hunting trips, people's actual practices are likely to be more complex.

There were fifteen Aboriginal people at Oyster Cove, including Adam's mother and two sisters. Most were avoiding the visits of Rev Freeman and the Prayer Book services, so it is difficult to determine the kind of funeral ceremony that occurred. A burial at the Oyster Cove cemetery required the permission of Superintendent Dandridge and authority to authorise the location of the grave and gravediggers to undertake the work. Therefore the most likely scenario rests on balancing Dandridge's obligations, his dislike of Freeman, Freeman's knowledge of Adam's death and his availability to perform the Prayer Book service, and Tarenootairer, Mary Ann and Fanny, requesting particular funeral rites to be performed. The choice of funerary rites would rest primarily on these relationships.

Fanny and Adam were living away from the station at that time. She had her first child five weeks earlier and Adam died at her and William's house. Fanny's separation from Anglican practices had perhaps already begun. Mary Ann and Walter were living on the station but were somewhat removed from the main buildings. Given Dandridge's dislike of Freeman and his more respectful behaviour toward the Aboriginal people it is possible that more than one service/ceremony occurred prior to, or after, the burial. Without more details any conclusion is speculative.

Other funerals for Aboriginal people are also of interest. Aboriginal children who died at the Orphan School were buried there and not brought to Oyster Cove. The proximity of St. John's Anglican church meant the funeral service in the Book of Common Prayer was followed. When Pengernoburric died at Oyster

Cove in February 1867,<sup>153</sup> the few remaining Aboriginal people were all out ‘hunting’,<sup>154</sup> and Dandridge arranged the ceremony. Although the final form is unknown it is unlikely to have contained Aboriginal ceremonial elements without any Aboriginal people present. A version of Christian funeral is more likely but the final form is unknown. When Mary Ann died in July 1871 she was buried in the St. David’s church cemetery in Hobart with no one from Oyster Cove present. The funeral was performed by an Anglican clergyman and would have followed the Prayer Book.<sup>155</sup> Walter drowned in the River Derwent in 1861 and his body was never recovered. There is no record of his funeral so the type of ceremony is also unknown. It is clear that there was not a consistent funeral protocol occurring even for the influential people at Oyster Cove. The timing and circumstances of a person’s death, and the availability and relationships of those looking after their bodies were the primary influences in the ceremony that was performed. It is unlikely that the death of nineteen-year-old Adam would have been afforded something akin to a full cultural ceremony but some first language songs and other religious expressions may have been possible.

### **Fanny Cochrane Smith’s pension and land grant**

In 1858 according to ‘One who knows’ William and Fanny Smith moved to Irish Town in the district of Port Cygnet.<sup>156</sup> Later that year, on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1858,

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<sup>153</sup> Bessy Clark, Plomley, 1966, p. 990.

<sup>154</sup> Correspondence Dandridge to Colonial Secretary, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1867, TAHO CSD 4/1/77 B231.

<sup>155</sup> Burial Register, St. David’s Church Hobart 1871, No. 80 Mary Anne Booker, Abode: Oyster Cove; When Buried: July 27<sup>th</sup>; Age: 50 years; Ship’s Name 488; Quality or Profession: *blank*, J. Gellibrand, TAHO NS 282/11/1. *The Mercury*, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1871, p. 2.

<sup>156</sup> *The Mercury*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1882, p. 2. It is unclear where they lived between 1858 and 1883 when William purchased fifty acres of land at Nicholls Rivulet on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1883 for sixty-seven pounds, *Land Titles Office*, Volume XLI, Folio 44.

Tarenootairer, mother of Fanny, Mary Ann and Adam, died at Oyster Cove.<sup>157</sup> In the following ten or so years Fanny and William appear to have focussed on working and raising their family. The church involvement is unclear, but given the significant later involvement in the Methodist Church, it seems more likely that this grew out of earlier and ongoing participation in a local church, probably Methodist. As well as raising their family and working in sawmills, Fanny and William again came to the attention of members of parliament, particularly as they became less able to work. In October Fanny's pension was increased from £24 to £50 per annum.<sup>158</sup> Two years later, Thomas Reibey proposed parliament grant 500 acres of land to Fanny Smith.<sup>159</sup> The Committee of the House of Assembly resolved to grant 300 acres including 'the 100 acres of Land she now occupies, and 200 acres more'.<sup>160</sup>

In 1885 the issue of a further land grant to an Aboriginal person was again raised in the House of Assembly, this time by Mr Hartnoll, who sought '£320 for the benefit of Mary Ann Smith, an aboriginal, or permission to select 320 acres of waste land in the colony'.<sup>161</sup> Mary Ann Smith was the 'daughter of Trollinaloona,

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<sup>157</sup> *Oyster Cove Visitor's Book*, TAHO CSO 89/1/1, p. 35. *The Courier*, 6<sup>th</sup> October 1858, p. 3. Although 'One who knows' claimed she died at the home of Fanny and William. *The Mercury*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1882, p. 2.

<sup>158</sup> *The Mercury*, 8<sup>th</sup> September 1882, page 3. See also *Parliament of Tasmania, Journals of the House of Assembly, Votes and Proceedings*, Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> August 1882, p. 99, Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> September 1882, p. 115, and Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> September 1882, p. 122. *Parliament of Tasmania, Journals of the House of Assembly, Votes and Proceedings*, Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> October 1882, p. 171.

<sup>159</sup> *Parliament of Tasmania, Journals of the House of Assembly, Votes and Proceedings*, Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> October 1884, p. 192. This was thirteen years after the granting of a lifetime lease to Lucy Beeton on Badger Island by Governor Du Cane. *The Mercury*, 7<sup>th</sup> August, 1871, p. 2. *Launceston Examiner*, 8<sup>th</sup> August, 1871, p. 3. *The Mercury*, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1884, p. 3.

<sup>160</sup> *Parliament of Tasmania, Journals of the House of Assembly, Votes and Proceedings*, Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> November 1884, p. 216. In contrast to the explanation for providing the lifetime lease to Lucy Beeton on Badger Island, for her efforts to instruct and civilise the children, no such mention was made to explain the land grant to Fanny, other than her being deemed to be a 'full-blood' Aborigine. Fanny's land grant bounded land that William had purchased in December 1883, *Land Titles Office*, Volume XLI, Folio 44. Also, Fanny and William mortgaged portions of the purchased and granted lands in the 1890s, *Land Titles Office*, Volume XLI, Folio 44. It appears that she and William had been unable to work since the early 1880s and the land sales were to provide income for them to complement the pension of £50 per year.

<sup>161</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 17<sup>th</sup> October 1885, p. 3.

an Aboriginal of Tasmania'. Hartnoll gave a biographical sketch of her, but this is not in the parliamentary records. The application was denied on the basis that Mary Ann Smith was deemed a 'half-caste' and as such was not entitled to a pension or land grant. The Minister for Lands feared 'similar claims would be made by all the half-castes on the Straits islands.'<sup>162</sup>

### **Nicholls Rivulet Methodist Church**

It is unclear how Fanny's and William's participation in the Methodist Church began. The two most likely scenarios are firstly that William was already a member of the Methodist Church, probably at Brown's River, when he and Fanny met and married and they simply continued attending there after their marriage until they moved to Irish Town. The second most likely possibility is that they were both involved in the Anglican Church at North West Bay with the controversial Rev Freeman and decided to leave and join the Methodists as threatened in the letter to the Bishop about Freeman's behaviour. Although the initial circumstances are unclear, it is clear that by the end of the 1880s they were actively involved in the Methodist Home Mission Circuit of Port Cygnet which included congregations at Port Cygnet, Wattle Grove and Irish Town / Nicholls Rivulet. The Port Cygnet Methodist Home Mission Station held its first Quarterly Meeting in June 1889, five years after parliament granted land to Fanny and about eleven years before she granted land to the Circuit. In the time between the formation of the congregation and the construction of the building, the congregation met, possibly in the Smith's home. The quarterly membership

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<sup>162</sup> *Launceston Examiner*, 6<sup>th</sup> November 1885, p. 3. See also *Parliament of Tasmania, Journals of the House of Assembly, Votes and Proceedings*, Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> November 1885, p. 197.



register reports 3 – 5 members at Irish Town with financial contributions of approximately £10.<sup>163</sup>

Ten years later Fanny gained further publicity when with the involvement of Horace Watson, she gave a number of public performances speaking about her life and singing in her first language.<sup>164</sup> On 30<sup>th</sup> October, under the promotional heading of ‘Last of the Mohicans’<sup>165</sup> another benefit for Fanny Smith was held in the Temperance Hall in Hobart. The report, the following day was headed ‘ “The Last of the Aborigines”, An interesting entertainment for the benefit of Mrs. Fanny Cochrane Smith.’ It was reported:

she said she was 60 years of age, had 11 children, who were all still living, and that, for many years past, her husband (who is a white man) had been disabled by paralysis. She speaks three native languages or dialects, and sang two songs in her own particular tongue, which were simple and melodious.<sup>166</sup>

Clearly her lifestyle, including involvement in the church, had not suppressed her first language. It is possible the central place of collective singing in church had strengthened her singing voice and complemented the continuation of her first language songs, or more likely vice versa. One can only wonder if she ever sang her first language songs in church. She had somehow continued speaking and singing in her first language forty years after her mother’s death and more than twenty-eight years after her only remaining sibling had died, and twenty-three years after Trugernanner died. The ‘three native languages or dialects’ are likely

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<sup>163</sup> Port Cygnet Circuit Quarterly Meeting Balance Sheets, TAHO NS 499/1/2120.

<sup>164</sup> *The Mercury*, 13<sup>th</sup> August 1899, p. 3. See also, Watson, B., 2011/12, ‘The Man and the Woman and the Edison Phonograph: Race, History and Technology Through Song’, *Australasian Journal of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*, 1, pp. 1 – 8.

<sup>165</sup> *The Mercury*, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1899, p. 2.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

to be her own from her mother, sister and brother, that of Trugernanner and Dray [Nuenone], and that of Wapperty [North-east]. These were the oldest women at Oyster Cove and among the longest lived, having learnt their language prior to much interaction with colonists.

Whether it was the public performances, a change in the congregation, or more likely the example of a neighbouring Methodist landowner, the turn of the century saw movement toward a building for the Nicholls Rivulet Congregation. There is no documentary evidence of why Fanny donated the land for the church, but in January 1900 Frederick Henry Thomas granted a portion of land to the Port Cygnet Methodist Home Mission Circuit for a church to be built, probably the one at Wattle Grove. The Thomas' land grant was finalised on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1900.<sup>167</sup>

Around the same time Fanny also donated some of her land to the Circuit and it was finalised on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1900.<sup>168</sup> At Nicholls Rivulet the construction of the church commenced immediately. The foundation stone was laid on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1900. It took six months to complete and the first service was held on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> May 1901. So while at that time on Cape Barren Island people were withdrawing from the church, at Nicholls Rivulet Aboriginal people were increasing their engagement and were leading the congregation.

The Certificate of Title Vol. 121, Folio 70, for the three roods and four perches of land records the owners as:

Robert Manning Harvey of Port Cygnet, Storekeeper

Charles Batge of Wattle Grove, Farmer,

Samuel Joseph Cato of Port Cygnet, Orchardist,

William Henry Smith of Irish Town, Farmer,

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<sup>167</sup> Minute Book of Trustees, Port Cygnet Methodist Circuit, TAHO NS 499/2115.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

Fanny Cockrane [sic] Smith of Irish Town, Married Woman,

Joseph Thomas Sears Smith of Irish Town, Farmer,

Tasman Benjamin Smith of Irish Town, Farmer and

Robert Langdon of Gardners Bay, Mining Manager

Dated this 20<sup>th</sup> day of June 1901.<sup>169</sup>

A perusal of the 'Methodist Church Model Deed for Wesleyan Church Properties in Tasmania',<sup>170</sup> reveals an extraordinary element to the context at Nicholls Rivulet. Unsurprisingly for the time there is an in-built assumption that members of a Methodist Board of Trustees will be men.<sup>171</sup> A check of every Grant Deed of every Board of Trustees in Tasmania up to 1905 gives a strong indication of the absence of women as Trustees. It is not possible to say conclusively if Fanny was the only woman who was a member of a Board of Trustees in Tasmania at that time, given the number of names which have recorded only a first initial rather than a first full name, however, most lists of Trustees begin with the title, 'Messrs.' Because some have just the initials of the person, some of these could be women. However, there is no other Trustee listed from the year of the Model Deed, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1888, up to 1905 who is identifiably a woman, other than Fanny Smith. It is therefore likely that Fanny was either the only woman in Tasmania on a Board of Trustees of the Methodist Church, or one of very, very few.

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<sup>169</sup> *Land Titles Office*, Vol 121, No 70.

<sup>170</sup> TAHO NS 3329/1/1.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. In 1854 the Yearly Conference in the United Kingdom created 'The Australian Wesleyan Methodist Connexion' which constituted the Australasian Conference. In 1873 the Australasian Conference constituted four annual Conferences, including the Victoria and Tasmania Conference. 'The Methodist Conferences Act 1876' in the Imperial Parliament confirmed all admissions, appointments and expulsions by the Australasian Conference. In 1884 the Australasian Conference resolved that properties '... should as far as practicable be held upon the same trusts and for this purpose a model deed be prepared which should be made applicable to the circumstances of each colony and the several annual Conferences were authorised to procure Acts of the legislature of the several colonies for the settlement of church properties on the trusts of such model deed.' TAHO, NS 3329/1/1.

The congregation at Nicholls Rivulet had formally existed for twelve years prior to construction of the building. But the inaugural service in this building was an historic occasion, particularly when considering the range of places, styles and languages Aboriginal people had experienced Christian worship services in the preceding century. Fanny's personal experience of Christian worship throughout her lifetime began in a wooden hut at Wybalenna among the 'Ben Lomond' huts, the brick chapel with a mix of Robinson reading the Prayer Book, and Clark's *pidgin*, the St John's Anglican church when she lived at the Orphan School, through to the regimented Prayer Book by Freeman in the dilapidated chapel at Oyster Cove, to various churches with William, to her own home, and finally a chapel built on land she herself had donated, with wood likely to have been sourced by her own family or neighbours. It was likely to have been a momentous day for her and her family. It is only speculative but curious nonetheless to ponder what she might have sung. This was the first time Aboriginal people had had primary responsibility in deciding to have a church building, procuring the materials, constructing it and taking a leading role in the ongoing services.

Fanny and William instilled Christian faith in their children and participated in the congregation to such an extent that one of their sons, William, became a lay preacher and two other sons, Joseph and Tasman, were on the Board of Trustees. As well as property and financial affairs the Board of Trustees was responsible for appointing 'Protestant' people to preach as well as those appointed by the superintendent preacher.<sup>172</sup> Therefore Fanny, William, Joseph and Tasman would have participated in the appointment of William as a lay preacher. This shows something of the strength of Fanny's commitment to the church, and also

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<sup>172</sup> TAHO, NS 3329/1/1.

demonstrates their sons' personal engagement with the faith. William's choice to become actively and publicly involved in preaching identifies him as the first Aboriginal preacher in a church service since Walter Arthur and Thomas Bruny at Wybalenna in the 1830s.<sup>173</sup> At Nicholls Rivulet Aboriginal people exercised greater leadership participation than at Wybalenna or the Bass Strait islands.

In this congregation, an Aboriginal person had donated some of her own legally secure freehold title land on which the church building was built. At Wybalenna, it was a government establishment, and on the islands the gatherings were on 'waste' land, leasehold land, or a government reserve. Fanny's donation of some of her own land for a church is historic, and demonstrates a very personal, strong and lasting legacy that some in the succeeding generations of her family would continue.

Eighteen months after the first service in the building, Fanny's husband, William, who had been an invalid for the previous thirty years, died in December 1902, aged 81.<sup>174</sup> Three years and three months later Fanny also came to the end of her life. The Mercury reported,

THE LAST OF THE TASMANIAN ABORIGINALS. FUNERAL OF  
FANNY SMITH.

The closing scene in respect to the Tasmanian aboriginal race took place at Wattle Grove, Port Cygnet, on Friday, when Mrs. Fanny Cockern [sic] Smith, the last half-caste survivor, passed away. The deceased at the time of her demise was in her seventy-fourth year.

Dr. Bernard Thomas was unremitting in attendance, and did all

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<sup>173</sup> Port Cygnet Methodist Home Mission Circuit Preaching Plan 1894, in author's possession.

<sup>174</sup> The Mercury reported, 'The deceased was buried in the Wesleyan churchyard, the Rev. Mr. Atkinson officiating, this funeral being largely attended, many residents coming from long distances to pay their last respects.' *The Mercury*, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1902, p. 6.

medical skill could do. The immediate cause of her death was pleurisy, followed by an acute attack of pneumonia. Deceased was held in high respect and esteem by all who knew her. She leaves a large grown-up family. Deceased was in receipt of an annuity of fifty pounds per year from the Tasmanian Government. Her funeral took place this afternoon, when about four hundred followed her remains.

The Rev. Thomas officiated at the grave.<sup>175</sup>

Her funeral was also reported in other newspapers around Tasmania<sup>176</sup> and following her death the local clergyman, Rev Roberts, held memorial services at Irish Town and Port Cygnet. It was reported he said:

her character proved that Tasmanian aboriginals were capable of taking on a high degree of civilization. The grace of Christianity in her life was beautifully exemplified. He took his text from Genesis iv. 31.

These were large congregations.<sup>177</sup>

Despite the strong participation of a number of families in the congregation, the Port Cygnet Methodist Home Mission Circuit was often struggling financially. In the first financial report, the Nicholls Rivulet congregation contributed about a quarter the financial contributions of the Circuit, with ten out of thirty-eight pounds. In 1895 they contributed thirteen out of 320 pounds, and in 1900 it was ten and a half out of a total of just over 270 pounds.<sup>178</sup> It was not a wealthy congregation. The Home Mission Society gave an annual grant that contributed one quarter of the income of the Circuit, and from the middle of 1897 the Circuit Minister forfeited one quarter of his stipend each year to help limit the debt. These

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<sup>175</sup> *The Mercury*, 27<sup>th</sup> February 1905, p. 6.

<sup>176</sup> *North Western Advocate and Emu Bay Times*, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1905, p. 2. *Zeehan and Dundas Herald*, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1905, p. 2.

<sup>177</sup> *The Mercury*, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1905, p. 5.

<sup>178</sup> Port Cygnet Circuit Quarterly Meeting Balance Sheets, TAHO NS 499/1/2120.

two contributions comprised half the income of the Circuit. The stipend was £50 per quarter and together with the £70 loan on the minister's parsonage,<sup>179</sup> comprised most of the expense.<sup>180</sup> In 1898 a special effort raised £79 19s 0d, including a donation of 10s from W. Smith, the only donation from Nicholls Rivulet, and cleared most of the deficiency. Successive Ministers, Rev. Beckett, Rev. Atkinson and Rev. Roberts continued to contribute between one quarter and half their stipend to keep the Circuit financially viable.<sup>181</sup>

William Smith, Fanny's and William's eldest son, continued as lay preacher and church steward until 1920, and thus had a longer involvement in a leading role in the church than his mother, Fanny. Unfortunately there are few records available. It would be invaluable to compare William's sermons to those of Walter Arthur, Thomas Bruny and the other Aboriginal men at Wybalenna. By 1909 the congregation's membership was listed as four: William H. Smith, Lena Smith, Flora Stanton and Mary Miller.<sup>182</sup> The membership reached a peak of eight in 1914 – 15, before settling at three members in 1920 and between five and ten during the subsequent twenty years. The Sunday School had five listed scholars through most of the 1920s. By the mid 1930s the Sunday School experienced something of a 'boom' reaching forty-one listed scholars, twice the number as at Cygnet at that time. There were five baptisms in 1934 and from the early 1940s the number of Sunday School scholars averaged between five and ten.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Methodist Church – Church Building and Loan Fund, TAHO NS 499/58, pp. 29, 31.

<sup>180</sup> Port Cygnet Circuit Quarterly Meeting Balance Sheets, TAHO NS 499/1/2120.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> There were forty-three members across the circuit, Port Cygnet Circuit Members Roll 1909, TAHO NS 499/1/515.

<sup>183</sup> TAHO NS 499/1/515.

## Conclusion

While the transfer from Wybalenna to Oyster Cove brought Aboriginal people geographically closer to colonial society and Christian missionary endeavours, Aboriginal people continued to develop their own form of faith with the support of rare respectful colonists and in spite of the narrow regimented forms inflicted on them by government appointed clergy. Few Aboriginal people continued to associate with the church in this context. Nevertheless a number continued their involvement in the Christian faith including changing denominations.

The example of Fanny Cochrane Smith indicates a desire to deepen her Christian faith throughout her life and, where possible, within the communal context of a church. The years described in this chapter saw Fanny's Christian faith evolve in the institutional context of the Hobart Orphan School, the catechetical classes, evening addresses, and controversy of the final years of the Wybalenna settlement. Her additional name of 'Cochrane' appears to have come from relationships with the Clark family who were instrumental in her learning the Christian faith and to read and write in English. Following their deaths at Oyster Cove, Fanny married, changed denominational affiliation and gained greater independence through provision of land and a government pension. Having learnt about the Christian faith in multiple contexts and relationships, she sought to actively continue it through the constraints and opportunities of various contexts and institutional forms. She continued aspects of Aboriginal language, cultural practices and interpretations of Christian faith and encouraged her children to do likewise as they continued Aboriginal – Christian dialogue adapting their practices and identities through successive contexts across generations.



## Conclusion

This thesis has drawn attention to Tasmanian Aboriginal religious life and the varied ways in which Aboriginal people have engaged with the Christian faith, including those who have identified themselves with the Christian faith. Using documentary sources, principally drawn from papers written and collected by George Robinson, as well as church and government archival sources, it has become clearer that Aboriginal people, while named under the collective heading of ‘Aboriginal’ were a religiously diverse population when the British Government established a colony in Van Diemen’s Land in 1803.

All the sources that exist today emerged from within the overarching colonial context. Knowledge of pre-contact Aboriginal religious life, the activities of various colonial Christian people and denominations, the responses of Aboriginal people to the Christian faith presented, have all emerged from contested places, from diverse people with differing agency, with sometimes conflicting aspirations and contrasting interpretations of what was occurring.

Religious life among pre-contact Aboriginal people included common elements such as an emphasis on close kin and clan land, and some similarities in creation stories and the activities of Creator Beings. Likewise religious narratives that connected stars, places and people’s bodies existed among a number of clans. Religious ceremonies involved storytelling and dancing, all of which formed metanarratives through which people shaped and interpreted their world.

Other elements such as people’s multiple names and clan associations with trees suggests a multi-layered and dialogical identity existed which was open to other narratives beyond the local clan. This formed some of the basis for Aboriginal engagement with the Christian faith.

The Christian church itself was also not a homogenous community. Various denominational expressions, and their multifaceted relationships during the nineteenth century grew out of and continued to be affected by the broader evangelical revival of eighteenth-century England. This broad movement and the ambiguous definition of labels such as ‘methodist’ suggest that when considering the interaction of particular Aboriginal people and colonial Christians within their specific colonial contexts, there are likely to be some broad similarities but also much diversity.

These polyvalent responses affected each participant in the dialogue. There were multiple interpretations and degrees of mutual penetration. Aboriginal people who engaged with the Christian faith expressed curiosity, mimicry, adaptation, rejection and more. Their religious world, including its interrelationships, was changing through colonisation, and their responses were part of these changes.

The extended examination of sources from the Aboriginal Settlement of Wybalenna on Flinders Island in the 1830s and 1840s was crucial because of the Aboriginal diversity described and the various sites of engagement with the Christian faith. Aboriginal people were curious about the colonists’ religious world. The few children at the site in the early years suggest Aboriginal adults were interacting with the first catechist, Wilkinson. This contrasts with later Christian missions in other parts of Australia with their emphasis on Aboriginal children. The first attempt to translate portions of the Bible into one local language highlighted the adult conversations, the multiple agendas of participants, and ways the first attempt to translate an exclusively oral language into written form mediated its meaning in new ways for those participants. The intrusion of

conflict and contested power among colonists such as the cessation of the translation was one example of the ‘real-world’ nature of the exercise and of wider factors impinging upon these interactions.

The ‘real-world’ for Aboriginal people was also dynamic as the *pidgin* proto-language evolved from the distinct clan languages. The formation of the schools impacted upon intra and inter-clan relationships. Clan leaders appear to have put forward their own children as teachers, possibly to learn more about Christian faith but also to continue exercising their leadership roles within and between their clans. Interacting with the Christian faith was enmeshed in Aboriginal politics, as it was albeit in different forms, among colonists.

The schools brought ‘writing’ into the lives of Aboriginal people and the experience of Walter Arthur and Thomas Bruny in writing *The Flinders Island Chronicle* showed that practices that were essential to ‘becoming colonial’ were also interpreted, though in some different ways, by Aboriginal people. Aboriginal writing was multifaceted. It involved mimicry and served Robinson’s grandiose self-promotion as their ‘dear father’. But simultaneously it could also enhance Aboriginal first language, socio-political relationships, and religious life.

The popular model for colonial education, Bell and Lancaster, had within it the potential for encouraging Aboriginal voices. The common model for colonial Christian education, the catechism, attempted to restrict or silence those same Aboriginal voices. At Wybalenna the contrasting emphases of encouraging and silencing Aboriginal voices appeared to compete with each other as Robinson sought to impose an English-only Christian faith, while at the same time an increasing number of illiterate male clan leaders spoke at the evening school for ‘mutual instruction’.

To discuss religious concepts and worldviews requires a deal of sophistication and nuance, and even within the apparent rote learning of catechisms there are signs of transfer and adaptation. Robinson and Clark adapted the Shorter Westminster Catechism by eliminating some questions and introducing others specific to the context of Wybalenna. Aboriginal people also were not entirely compliant. Several examples of variant answers and the survival of a few answers in pidgin suggested some ‘marginal’ interpretations were occurring.

The addresses by adult men during the evenings of ‘mutual instruction’ were a rich source interacting and at times contrasting with the written exhortations of the younger Walter and Thomas. These addresses express the emerging and diverse theologies of Aboriginal people and demonstrate their varied responses to, and interpretations of, Christian faith. The crucial involvement of women in translating the older men’s addresses provides a brief but important reminder of the gendered emphases among the sources. The translation from first language male voice into female mediated pidgin voice was then transformed into English written language by the Catechist, Robert Clark, for presentation, and accountability, to the Superintendent Robinson. Each of these steps influenced the final form, nevertheless, the final forms contain varied content and indicate multiple emphases and agendas among Aboriginal speakers.

From Wybalenna the focus moved to other nearby islands in Bass Strait, where islander families comprising Aboriginal and colonial parents developed their Christian faith largely independently except for occasional, and mostly appreciated, visits from Anglican clergy. In the first generation Aboriginal mothers appeared uninterested in learning English or engaging in the Christian

faith. However, their children were taught by their colonial fathers, usually through Bible reading and tracts they received from mission societies in Launceston and Hobart. The baptism and education of children was a primary motivator in linking with the church, particularly the Anglican churches at George Town and St John's in Launceston. Lucy Beeton, on Badger Island, brought the first catechist-teacher to the islands but the increasing involvement of church and state in the islander's lives led to changes and conflicts, particularly in regard to land tenure, school funding and muttonbirding. These entanglements resulted in fewer Islanders attending church in the late nineteenth century. Despite the denominational constraints, some Aboriginal families continued their involvement through successive generations.

The final chapter discussed the 'post-Wybalenna' experience at Oyster Cove and beyond. Aboriginal children were reinstitutionalised in the Orphan School while the adults had more freedom with the Catechist, Clark at Oyster Cove. Following Clark's death Aboriginal people were often in the 'bush' particularly when Rev Freeman visited. His imposition of rote repetition of prayers was rejected. Nevertheless, one of the younger women, Fanny Cochrane, continued her Christian faith and changed denominations from Church of England to Methodist. Fanny received a pension and land from the government and her family joined the Methodist Church at Nicholls Rivulet. Her donation of land enabled the building of a church and her Christian faith led to several sons becoming actively involved in the congregation, including as a lay preacher.

Throughout these chapters Aboriginal people are shown as active and multilayered, particularly in regard to their religious life which some expressed through incorporation of Christian faith into their dialogical identity. The

experiences discussed here continue to resonate in the contemporary Aboriginal community, church, and broader society. It is also clear that a great deal more of the sources, particularly those from Wybalenna regarding daily life and the post mortem reports could be examined and discussed and that such research could make a significant contribution to a number of areas of Aboriginal community, church and public discourse.

### **Contemporary issues**

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, I am involved in a contemporary Aboriginal Christian community at Leprena which is part of a national network of Aboriginal churches, the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress that is part of the Uniting Church in Australia. Tasmanian Aboriginal people continue to be involved in Christian practice and church life.

Some examples of this ongoing ‘dialogue’ are the presence of cultural items in our building and their use in church services. We also conduct church services at sites that are culturally and spiritually important to Elders among us, including midden sites and a number of sites of colonial and contemporary conflicts. But most importantly, our ongoing dialogue itself continues to provide all participants with opportunities to ‘name’ themselves and articulate their ‘multi-layered narrative’ and evolving ‘dialogical identity’ in a safe context of deeper listening.

Our celebration of sacraments, such as Holy Communion, use grass baskets woven by an Elder to hold the symbolic ‘body of Christ’ that is sometimes in the form of a ‘johnny-cake’ prepared by another Elder. We drink the symbolic ‘blood of Christ’ from limpet shells gathered from the beach at Wybalenna. The

words of the 'Great Prayer of Thanksgiving' include reference to *moihernee* and *dromerdeene*, and the gifts of food, fire, law and places with sacred meaning. The Prayer also includes a 're-membering' of the story of Jesus Christ. It is particularly poignant when we celebrate Holy Communion at a midden site and the narratives of the people whose food gathering practices and meals that created the midden and who, at some time past, had a last meal on the site, are brought into close 'dialogue' with the narratives of Jesus' last meal and the church's interpretation of that through the liturgical tradition.

By placing these artefacts and speaking these narratives together, contemporary Aboriginal people engage in an Aboriginal Christian praxis that resonates with that of people from earlier generations.

An example of the variety of opinions among the Aboriginal community emerges in family choices for their children. Some parents request their child be baptised in a church service, others that the baptism occur at a site of cultural importance. Others choose not to have their child baptised, but ask me, a Christian Minister, to lead a Naming Ceremony, also sometimes at a site of cultural importance. Others conduct their own Naming Ceremony, devised and performed by themselves at a site of their own choosing. The variety and multi-layered experiences of earlier generations is manifested in today's community.

This dialogue with the wider Tasmanian Aboriginal community is essential. For some Christian faith will always be enmeshed with colonial dispossession and trauma, and therefore is rejected completely. For others dialogue with the Christian faith is an opportunity to carefully examine their family's past practices, and tentatively adapt narratives and practices for themselves. Sometimes this involves explicit articulation of Christian faith, and

for others the safety of the conversation is sufficient to enable their articulation of their own religious narratives without any reference to Christian faith.

These conversations, narratives and practices contribute to the development of Indigenous Christian theologies. Founders of the UAICC, such as Rev Djiniyini Gondarra from Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, have encouraged dialogue between Aboriginal and Christian traditions.<sup>1</sup> Other Aboriginal Christians, such as the ‘Rainbow Spirit Elders’ group in north Queensland, also engage in a complex dialogue, including encouraging Aboriginal and Christian narratives to interpret each other.<sup>2</sup>

That listening is an important step to greater appreciation for meaning and nuance, but the listening invites engagement, interpretation, and transformation so that a person continues becoming ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Christian’ in more maturing, multi-layered ways. UAICC have developed annual ‘Indigenous Theology Forums’ in which these conversations reflect on practice and dialogue with other Indigenous theologies and church traditions. In Tasmania, by engaging in continual dialogue and reflecting on earlier narratives and practices, Aboriginal Christian people add layers of meaning to their own religious life and their reflections can make a unique contribution to that wider conversation among Aboriginal Christians across the country.

The continuing dialogue with Christian narratives necessarily involves ongoing participation in the church. As clearly noticed in the sources of this thesis, this engagement is not always supportive of Aboriginal Christian practices. Legacies and echoes of past generations continue in contemporary discourse.

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<sup>1</sup> Gondarra, D., 1988, ‘“Father, You Gave Us The Dreaming ...” Aboriginal Theology and the Future’, in Dutney, A., (ed.), *From Here to Where? Australian Christians Owning the Future*. Melbourne; Uniting Church Press.

<sup>2</sup> Rainbow Spirit Elders, 1997, *Rainbow Spirit Theology*. East Melbourne; Harper Collins.



During 2013, when reading some of Bishop Montgomery's letters to the Premier from the late 1890s, I heard an almost exact articulation of the same disrespectful point of view of Aboriginal people being spoken by a Uniting Church leader.

Examples of denominational apathy abound and examples of institutional injustice are almost as plentiful. In the Uniting Church in Tasmania the disregard for a Memorandum of Understanding with UAICC Tasmania and attempts to declare it to be unconstitutional is but one example.

One more hopeful step was the Uniting Church's adoption of a new preamble to its Constitution in 2009. While making it clear that the new preamble would in no way guide how the Constitution and Regulations could be interpreted, it nevertheless acknowledges the presence of God in this land before colonisers arrived and that the same love and grace revealed in Jesus Christ was already here in custom, law and ceremony. It acknowledged the complicity of many in paternalism and racism and silence in distortions and denials of history. In 2014 a national week of prayer and fasting used a phrase from the preamble, 'a destiny together', as its core narrative to continue this dialogue.

The existence of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress encourages Aboriginal leadership and requires Aboriginal decision-making responsibility in its governance. Aboriginal Christian people can exercise a degree of self-determination in articulating Aboriginal Christian theology and liturgical practices, more so than within most other mainstream denominations such as the Anglican and Catholic churches. It is intentionally engaging in post-colonial theology in its training courses for leaders, both lay and ordained.

The Tasmanian context offers something unique, particularly when many assume Indigenous theology can only be properly done in the central desert or

Arnhem Land, among so-called 'traditional' people. The interacting cultural renaissance, language reclamation, Christian traditions, political activism, and trans-generational experiences provide multiple voices and layered narratives that can make valuable contributions to those wider dialogues.

## **Further research**

The focus of this thesis was on the responses by Aboriginal people to the advent of Christianity in colonial Tasmania, as expressed in extant documentary sources. The interaction between Aboriginal people in Tasmania and the church warrant a great deal more research, including especially the Indigenous voice as an active agent in the discourse.

Much scholarship between Aboriginal people and the church has been highly critical of churches and missionaries. This thesis demonstrates the relationships between Aboriginal people and Christians are more complex and that despite inequalities of power in the colonial context, Aboriginal people were still 'agentic', and at times differed from and were in disagreement with church authorities.

The extensive amount of as yet unpublished documents within the 'Robinson Papers' in the Mitchell Library invite transcription and further research. Some of these relate to this thesis topic, such as more specific biographies of each person at Wybalenna, like the brief publication by Dammary about Walter George Arthur (2001).<sup>3</sup> This would assist the recognition of, and appreciation for, the diverse identities and multiple voices in that context and their lives beyond it, including in Port Philip.

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<sup>3</sup> Dammary, S., 2001, *Walter George Arthur A Free Tasmanian?* Clayton; Monash Publications in History.

A related topic would be a detailed consideration of the women's experience at Wybalenna. Brief mention was made in this thesis to the gendered nature of the narratives in the sources, but much more work could be done. More women lived longer at Oyster Cove than men and they invite more attention.

A variation on the biographies could be to examine the experience of a particular family, such as Rolepa, Luggenemenener, and their children, the eldest Walter Arthur, their other son living with John Batman, and their daughter at Wybalenna. Their involvement in the Bible translation, first schools, *Flinders Island Chronicle*, petition and beyond could be informative in appreciating the variety of responses by Aboriginal people across generations.

Other topics from among the Robinson Papers include all the post mortem reports of Aboriginal people who died there. The few references to ongoing pre-contact practices would be beneficial for the wider Aboriginal community. One particularly fascinating example was the performance of a 'traditional' cremation. A broader multi-layered analysis of a wider range of settlement life would be revealing. Some references that piqued my curiosity were references to music, deer and playing cricket.

The first chapter's discussion of surviving documentary records of pre-colonial religious life such as creation stories, alludes to the roles these stories play in contemporary discourses, such as dual-naming of places and tourist ventures such as the *needwonee* project undertaken by the Parks and Wildlife Service in constructing a bark canoe and shelter as well as interpretive boards at Melaleuca in south-west Tasmania.<sup>4</sup> This is also related to other contemporary practices which draw upon these sources, such as shell necklace making,

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<sup>4</sup> Brown, T., & Dickson, K., (eds.), 2013, *Needwonee*. Hobart; Dixie Designs.

language, dance, and legislative changes in permitting some cultural practices in gathering muttonbirds, the return of land titles, and greater engagement in public education. The contemporary interpretation of these colonial sources is also an important contributor to individual and family practices, particularly the religious ceremonies at birth, naming, marriage, funeral and bereavement.

The Aboriginal children baptised in early 1800s, such as David Derwent, Maria Davis, Catherine Van Diemen, Mary Ann, Maria Campbell, etc., would be a valuable research project in examining the more diverse experience among colonial families who were not on the islands or part of Wybalenna. One example is the recent publication by Zoe Lawson regarding George Van Diemen (2013).<sup>5</sup> Aboriginal children, such as Fanny Hardwicke and Robert Macauley, joined Robinson's travels or went to Wybalenna, but others, such as George Van Diemen, went elsewhere. The parliamentary debates in the 1880s referred to Mary Ann Smith, but the biographical sketch given at the time was not documented. A married couple of interest is 'Black' Bill Ponsonby and Catherine Kennedy who were married at St John's Anglican church Launceston in August 1830 at the time of the Black Line. Their story would give a quite different account of Aboriginal experience. Researching these people would be a laborious archival search, but valuable nevertheless.

This thesis limited itself to documentary sources. I had initially thought of concluding with interviews with current Tasmanian Aboriginal people, however the thesis structure changed over time and this was omitted. The contemporary experiences of Tasmanian Aboriginal Christian people, perhaps through an oral

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<sup>5</sup> Lawson, Z., 2013, 'George Vandiemer: A Tasmanian Aborigine in Lancashire, England, (1822-27)' *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 99 (2), pp. 153-169.

history project, would add a range of experiences articulated by Aboriginal Christian people themselves rather than mediated through someone else.

Further articulation of distinct aspects of Tasmanian Aboriginal theology arising from the particular cultural, historical, and colonial contexts, denominational relationships, and experiences at Wybalenna would also be of benefit. I have a personal interest in the ‘addresses’ summarised in Chapter Five, and a separate research project on this could contribute to broader discussions of earlier Aboriginal theology. Such further research could contribute not only to broader Australian Indigenous theological discourse, but international Indigenous and post-colonial theological discussions.

The area of Australian Indigenous theology has not yet developed to a significant degree. Earlier writers such as Djiniyini Gondarra,<sup>6</sup> the ‘Rainbow Spirit Elders’<sup>7</sup> and Betty Pike<sup>8</sup> need further dialogue partners. More recent publications by Graeme Paulson in partnership with Mark Brett, are a promising sign.<sup>9</sup> In my personal experience, most Australian Indigenous theology continues to occur locally and orally rather than in printed forms. The use of multi-media technology, particularly video, could alter the centuries old apparent captivity to paper-text, and the primacy often given to authors over orators in these academic discourses. Different media will alter the dialogue and open opportunities that paper and text do not, particularly in a context of multi-lingual conversations.

In conclusion, from a multi-layered religious world, diverse Aboriginal people actively expanded their complex dialogical identities in the heterogenous

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<sup>6</sup> Gondarra, D., 1988, ‘“Father, You Gave Us The Dreaming ...” Aboriginal Theology and the Future’, in Dutney, A., (ed.), *From Here to Where? Australian Christians Owning the Future*. Melbourne; Uniting Church Press.

<sup>7</sup> Rainbow Spirit Elders, 1997, *Rainbow Spirit Theology*. East Melbourne; Harper Collins.

<sup>8</sup> Pike, B., 2013, *A River Dreaming*. Melbourne; Aboriginal Catholic Ministry.

<sup>9</sup> Paulson, G., & Brett, M., 2012, ‘Five Smooth Stones: Reading the Bible through Aboriginal Eyes,’ in author’s possession. See also, *Colloquium*, November 2013.

contexts of colonial life through interactions with colonial Christians and each other. Their multiple voices shaped themselves and each other and continue to be heard in the dialogues of contemporary Aboriginal Christian people and others. This discourse from the deepest narratives that shape our lives offer the possibility of personal and community transformation through the conversation itself, and the embodied outcomes negotiated through it.

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### **Abbreviations**

CSO Colonial Secretary's Office

TAHO Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office

ML Mitchell Library

### **Archives – Mitchell Library**

ML Robinson Papers, A7044, Vol. 23, CY548

ML Robinson Papers, A7062, CY549

ML Robinson Papers, A7064, Vol. 43, CY550

ML Robinson Papers, A7065 CY550

ML Robinson Papers, A7066, CY551

ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825

ML Walker Papers, B727, CY1408

ML Walker Papers, CY979

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Land Titles Office Vol XLI, Folio 44

Land Titles Office Vol 121, No. 70

### **Archives – Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office**

TAHO CSD 1/1/126/4656

TAHO CSD 1/1/136/5015

TAHO CSD 1/18/703

TAHO CSD 1/33/D450  
TAHO CSD 1/51/1009  
TAHO CSD 1/126/4656  
TAHO CSD 1/136/5015  
TAHO CSD 4/1/77 B231  
TAHO CSD 4/19/200  
TAHO CSD 7/1/26/D215  
TAHO CSD 7/1/33/B450  
TAHO CSD 7/1/33/D450  
TAHO CSO 1/18798  
TAHO CSO 1/269/6468  
TAHO CSO 11/26/378  
TAHO CSO 24/7/101  
TAHO CSO 24/42/1331  
TAHO CSO 24/149/1401  
TAHO CSO 24/167/4898  
TAHO CSO 7578  
TAHO CSO 89/1/1  
TAHO GO 33/68  
TAHO LSD 1/51/636  
TAHO LSD 1/51/642  
TAHO LSD 1/51/644  
TAHO LSD 2/1/3  
TAHO LSD 2/2/924  
TAHO NG 748/1



TAHO NS 282/8/1/1  
TAHO NS 282/9/2  
TAHO NS 282/11/1  
TAHO NS 349/1/1  
TAHO NS 373/1/11  
TAHO NS 373/1/74  
TAHO NS 373/214/47  
TAHO NS373/214/47  
TAHO NS 499/1/121  
TAHO NS 499/1/515  
TAHO NS 499/58  
TAHO NS 499/117  
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## Appendices

- A. Church baptism records of Aboriginal children baptised in Van Diemen's Land
- B. Aboriginal children listed in Hobart Orphan School Register
- C. Bible translation by Wilkinson at Wybalenna 1833
- D. Selection of sermons by Aboriginal people
- E. Transcripts of *Flinders Island Chronicle*

## Appendix A

### Church baptism records of Aboriginal children baptised in Van Diemen's Land<sup>1</sup>

Hobart Town Baptisms 1803 – By Rev Knopwood

When Baptised	When Born	Child Name	Parents	Abode	Quality/Profession	By whom
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#### 1810

43 baptisms (*including...*)

25 <sup>th</sup> June 1810	Jacob	A Native of Van Diemen's Land				R Knopwood *B
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22 <sup>nd</sup> September 1810	George John	A Native Boy 7 years old				R Knopwood *B
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*No other identifying information is given. No indication of Jacob's age.*

#### 1811

41 baptisms (*including...*)

4 <sup>th</sup> January 1811	Ann	A Native woman of V D Land				R Knopwood *B
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4 <sup>th</sup> January 1811	Mary	A Native woman of V D Land				R Knopwood *B
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4 <sup>th</sup> January 1811	Lucy Murray	A Daughter of Ann Le a Native Woman of V D Land				R Knopwood *B
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14 <sup>th</sup> January 1811	Mary Tilchett Farum	A Native of V D Land				R Knopwood *B
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15 <sup>th</sup> July 1811 Aged 6 years	George Weston	A Native Boy V D Land				R Knopwood *B
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23 <sup>rd</sup> September 1811	Sarah May	A Native Girl	Hobart Town			R Knopwood *B
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#### 1812

41 Baptisms (*including...*)

27 <sup>th</sup> August 1812	Arabella	A Native Girl 7 years old of V D Land				R Knopwood
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28 <sup>th</sup> August 1812	Sombruna	A Native of V D Land				R Knopwood
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<sup>1</sup> Hobart, TAHO RGD 32. Launceston, George Town and Campbell Town, TAHO NG 748/1-5.



## 1813

### 40 Baptisms (*including...*)

1 <sup>st</sup> January 1813	Robert McCauley	A Native V D Land	R Knopwood
28 <sup>th</sup> February 1813	Celia Margaret Walpole Bush,	A Native V D Land, 10 years old	R Knopwood
28 <sup>th</sup> February 1813	Charles Henry Walpole Bush,	A Native V D Land, 5 years old	R Knopwood
16 <sup>th</sup> June 1813	Lorennah	A Native of V D Land 8 years old	R Knopwood
26 <sup>th</sup> June 1813	John Clarence	A Native of V D Land	R Knopwood
21 <sup>st</sup> October 1813	James Martin	A Native Boy	R Knopwood
24 <sup>th</sup> December 1813	Van Diemen	A Native Boy	R Knopwood

## 1817

### 71 Baptisms (*including...*)

8 <sup>th</sup> September 1817	About 8 years old, Catherine Van Diemen, A Native Girl V D Land	? Hogan's, Servant Girl R Knopwood
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## 1818

### 85 Baptisms (*including...*)

12 <sup>th</sup> January 1818	9 years old	Christian Marsh	A Native Boy	R Knopwood
9 <sup>th</sup> March 1818	About 18 years	Charles Frederick Van Diemen,	A Native Boy of V D Land, E Lord's boy	R Knopwood
4 <sup>th</sup> May 1818	8 years old	Marie Campbell	A Native Girl V D Land	R Knopwood

## 1819

### 161 Baptisms (*including ...*)

17 <sup>th</sup> February 1819	About 17 years	Thomas	A Native Boy V D Land	R Knopwood
23 <sup>rd</sup> February 1819	7 years old	Mary Dempsey	A Native Girl Van Diemen's Land	R Knopwood
4 April 1819	8 months	Joshua Van Diemen	A Native Boy V D Land	R Knopwood
18 <sup>th</sup> April 1819	About 7 years	George Van Diemen	A Native Boy V D Land Hobart	R Knopwood
18 <sup>th</sup> April 1819	5 years	William Thomas	A Native Boy V D Land	R Knopwood
14 <sup>th</sup> June 1819	7 years old	James Jenkins	A Native Boy V D Land	R Knopwood

14 <sup>th</sup> June 1819	7 years old	Charles Hobart	A Native Boy V D Land	R Knopwood
24 <sup>th</sup> August 1819	15 years	David Derwent	A Native of V D Land	R Knopwood
24 <sup>th</sup> August 1819	20 years	Robert New Norfolk,	A Native of V D Land	R Knopwood

## 1820

105 Baptisms (*including...*)

12 <sup>th</sup> May 1820	About 15 years	Maria Davis	A Native of V D Land	R Knopwood
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## 1833 Parish of Clarence Plains

24 baptisms including...

Baptised 11 <sup>th</sup> March;	Born 13 <sup>th</sup> March 1821;	Rebecca,	A Native Girl of Van Diemen's Land;	R Knopwood AM
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## Launceston

### 1811

43 baptism (*including...*)

18 <sup>th</sup> March 1811	Charles Mountgarrett,	A Native boy V D L	Robert Knopwood
18 <sup>th</sup> March 1811	William Lyttleton Quamby,	A Native boy of V D L	Robert Knopwood

*Same day and preceding baptism ...*

18 <sup>th</sup> March 1811	William	James & Elizabeth Brumby (formerly Annesley)	Robert Knopwood
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*Lyttleton was Magistrate in Launceston.*

## 1814

18 <sup>th</sup> March 1814	Dalrymple	A Native Girl	Robert Knopwood
18 <sup>th</sup> March 1814	Hannah	A Native Girl	Robert Knopwood

## 1820

Fanny Hardwick, A Native Black Child of about eleven Years of Age was Baptized January twelvth(sic) One thousand eight hundred and twenty at Norfolk Plains. By me John Youl Chaplain.

May 25<sup>th</sup> – 2

John, a Native Black Boy, of about Seven Years of Age, was Baptized at Launceston, May twenty fifth, One Thousand eight hundred and twenty. By me John Youl Chaplain.

**1830**

No 309 June 2<sup>nd</sup> DOB “About 1827” Ben No first name of parents “Lomond” (Surname) Kingston Aboriginal W.H.Browne

**1832**

No.521 Dec 25<sup>th</sup> Born 1822 Robert adopted Aboriginal by John Bromley River Tamar Sawyer W.H. Browne

**1835** (*Wesleyan Church*)

11<sup>th</sup> January 1835; Born Unknown Thomas Harman; Aboriginal Natives J. A. Manton

(*this seems to be a repeat entry as the baptism registered in the St. John's baptism register on the same day*)

(St John's Church of England, Register)

No 804 Jan 11<sup>th</sup> DOB Unknown Thomas Harman; (Parents) Native Names unknown; Abode Unknown; This entry is made on the certificate of the Rev Ja Manton Wesleyan Minister.

**1836**

No 859, Baptised Feb 16<sup>th</sup>, Born, About 1822, Nanny Allan, Parents: Native of Kangaroo Island. Abode -, Quality -, W.H. Browne Chaplain

No 1006, Baptised Dec 28<sup>th</sup>, Born About 1830, Sophia, Parents: William Dutton & Sarah ‘an aboriginal’. Launceston, Mariner. W.H.Browne

**George Town**

**1821** 51 baptisms including...

Bpt. 9 <sup>th</sup> October 1821 B. 24 <sup>th</sup> Sept 1816 Charles	Patrick Morrison & Elizabeth (A Native)	George Town, Born at King Is	John Youl
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Bpt. 9 <sup>th</sup> October 1821 B. 12 <sup>th</sup> Aug 1817 George	Patrick Morrison & Elizabeth (A Native)	George Town, Born at King Is	John Youl
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**1823**

July 5<sup>th</sup> 2 G'Town

Margaret daughter an Aborigine of Van Diemens Land Aged 7 years was Christened at George Town July 5<sup>th</sup> 1823 by me John Youl Chaplain

**1824**

Mary Ann an Aborigine about 7 years old was Christened at Launceston November 1<sup>st</sup> 1824 by me John Youl Chaplain

**1826**

No. 10 April 26<sup>th</sup> Dec 5<sup>th</sup> 1825 Fanny Charles & Elizabeth Hardwicke Norfolk Plains, Settler John Youl Chaplain

No. 22 About 6 years of age Susannah an Aborigine An Aborigine of V.D.Land “ “ John Youl

**Campbell Town****1834**

25<sup>th</sup> Nov About 10 years old; John Batman; Aboriginal Native; Benlomond William Bedford

25<sup>th</sup> Nov 23 years of age John Sydney Native, Pidgeon Native William Bedford

**Marriage Register - Launceston**

Aug 3 1830

No. 152 Black Bill otherwise (William Ponsonby) of Kingston and Catherine Kennedy of Kingston were  
Married in this Church by Banns

This sixteenth day of August in the year 1830

By me W.D. Browne LLD Chaplain

This marriage was solemnized between us: William Ponsonby his *x* mark  
: Catherine Kennedy her *x* mark

In the presence of William Appleyard of Launceston

And William Elliott of Launceston

111. The Banns of Marriage were published between Black Bill and Catherine Kennedy Aborigines at Kingston.

1<sup>st</sup> time 18<sup>th</sup> July 1830

2<sup>nd</sup> “ 25<sup>th</sup> “ “

3<sup>rd</sup> “ 1<sup>st</sup> Aug by WD Browne

## Appendix B

### Aboriginal children listed in Hobart Orphan School Register<sup>2</sup>

#### Girls School Register

\* Indicates died at the school

Name of Child	Age	Mother Name	Father Name	Admitted	Discharged	Page	Religion	Remarks
Pungerawallahaborigine				6 Feb 1835	30 Sep 1835	6	P [Protestant]	Removed to Flinders Island
Mowana		aborigine		6 Feb 1835	27 May 1835	6	P	
Walkenny		aborigine		6 Feb 1835	18 Jun 1835	6	P	
Tully		aborigine		6 Feb 1835	17 Jun 1835	6	P	Died of the measles
Tina		aborigine		(6)9 Feb 1835	15 Jun 1835	6	P	Removed to Flinders Island
Mary Ann Thomson	10y	aborigine		28 Feb 1839	10 Dec 1839	12	P	to Flinders Island by Com <sup>n</sup> of
Mary Sherwood	8y	An Aborigine, native of Adelaide,		27 Dec 1841	27 Sept 1843		P	Died in hospital
Fanny	8y	Aborigines from Flinders Is.		9 Dec 1842	8 Feb 1843	19	P	Discharged to Mr Clarke by order of Gov'r
Martha	7y			9 Dec 1842	1 (4) Feb 1844	19	P	Discharged to Dr Milligan
Jessie*	9y			9 Dec 1842	2 Mar 1843	19	P	Died in Hospital
Fanny, Martha and Jessie Aborigines from Flinders Island admitted by Command of Lieutenant Governor.								
Mathina	6y	An Aborigine		14 Jul 1843	1 Feb 1844	21	P	Delivered to Dr Milligan
Mathina	12y	Aborigine		28 Dec 1847	5 Aug 1851	31	P	Delivered over to Dr Milligan
Martha	12y			28 Dec 1847	18 Dec 1849	31	P	Discharged to her mother by order Dr Milligan
Nannie*	10y			28 Dec 1847	25 Apr 1849	31	P	Died of inflammation of the lungs
Hannah	7y			28 Dec 1847	20 May 1850	31	P	Discharged to the service of Dr Smith
Flinders Island by command of the authority of the Lieut Governor								

<sup>2</sup> TAHO SWD 28/1/1.

# Boys Register

Name of Child	Age	Mother Name	Father Name	Admitted	Discharged	Page	Religion	Remarks
Thomas Bunce	7y	An Aborigine		2 Aug 1828	16 Nov 1836	1	P	Removed to Flinders Island
Daniel	10y	Aborigine		17 Aug 1832	30 Sep 1835	3	P	Removed to Flinders Island
Peter	9y			17 Aug 1832	30 Sep 1835	3	P	Removed to Flinders Island
Arthur	11y	Aborigine		30 Nov 1832	26 May 1835	3	P	Removed to Flinders Island
Friday	10y			30 Nov 1832	26 May 1835	3	P	
Duke	6y			30 Nov 1832	4 Feb 1840	3	P	
William	blank	Aborigine		3 Sep 1834	26 Apr 1835	5	P	Removed to Flinders Island
George	blank	Aborigine		3 Sep 1834	26 Apr 1835	5	P	
Frederick*	blank	Aborigine		3 Sep 1834	30 Sep 1835	5	P	Died in Hosp
Samuel	blank	Aborigine		3 Sep 1834	26 Apr 1835	5	P	Removed to Flinders Island
Charles*	blank	Aborigine		3 Sep 1834	26 Nov 1839	5	P	Died in Hospital
Beamanrook	blank	Aborigine		6 Feb 1835	9 Jun 1835	6	P	Sent to Flinders Island
Tommierick	blank			6 Feb 1835	30 Sep 1835	6	P	Sent to Flinders Island
Menow (Mendou)	blank			6 Feb 1835	30 Sep 1835	6	P	
Fireboke*	blank			6 Feb 1835	2 Jun 1835	6	P	Died
Thomas Thompson	4y	Parents unknown,	Half Caste,	9 May 1836,	26 Aug 1847,	8P		Removed to Flinders Island
Teddy	7y	an aborigine		27 Feb 1839	30 Dec 1839	11	P	Removed to Flinders Island
Billy Lannie	8y	Aborigines		28 Dec 1847	13 Jan 1853	23	P	Col. Funds. Discharged to the order of Joseph
Milligan Esq.								
Adam	7y	Aborigine		28 Dec 1847	13 Jan 1853	23	P	
Morriarty*	6y	Aborigine		28 Dec 1847	5 Mar 1852	23	P	Died of inflammation of the lungs
William Clark	10y	Orphans of the late Mr Clark Storekeeper Aborigine						
				20 Apr 1850	2 Nov 1832(52)	27	P	
Sandford Clark	4y			20 Apr 1850	1 Jul 1837 (51)	27	P	Removed to Infant School
Clark Alexander(M)	13y	dead, aborig.	storekeeper	30 Apr 1850	14 Jan 1852	27		

*Another possibility*

*'Tamar Joe' admitted to school 28 June 1836, Plomley believes this is 'Joseph' in Plomley, 1987, p. 847.*



## Appendix C

Bible translation by Wilkinson at Wybalenna 1833

### Genesis 1

Plomley's rendering of Walker's diary<sup>1</sup>

Genisana – First chapter	Genesis 1 Chap.
1 Trota Godna Pomale Hearana Coantana heavens and the	1 In the beginning God created the earth
2 Lewara Crackne the deep	2 and darkness was upon the face of the deep
3 Godna carne Tretetea Tretetea Crackne was light	3 God said let there be light and there was light
4 Godna capie Tretetea narra coopa And God	4 And God saw the light that it was good. divided the light from the darkness
Godna dividena Tretetea lewara	
5 Godna carne coantana mingane Rotharia Grass and	5 God said let the earth bring forth it was so
Rothana tibre	
16 Godna pomale Cathabowa Tretetea greater light to	16 God made two great lights, the greater light to
Lackrana Wakalenna Tewara, Narra Pomale the night.	rule the day, the lesser light to rule the night.
Purbanna	he made the stars also
17 Godna propara nerra weaticata heaven to give	17 God set them in the firmament of light upon the earth
Tringane Wetetea	
21 Godna promale Lackrana Penangana cardea every living	21 God made great whales + every living
Penugana waters brought	creature that moveth which the forth abundantly
25 Godna pomale Paccala, Illa, Pabela, earth and he saw	25 And God made the beast of the earth and he saw
Theepasias, Godna lapra narra coopa that it was good	
26 Godna carne mena pomale Wiba, lika mena man in our	26 And God said let us make image after our own
likeness	
27 Godna pomale Wiba lika mena image	27 So God created man in his own image
31 Godna lapra cardea narra pomale narra had made	31 And God saw everything that he had made
carne narra coopa! coopa!	and behold it was very good

<sup>1</sup> Plomley, N. J. B. 1976, *A Word List of Tasmanian Aboriginal Languages*. Launceston; Foot and Playstead, pp. 41, 42.

My rendering of Walker's diary

10/12 third day in the forenoon I spent some time at the house of Thomas Wilkinson who favoured me with a copy of the translation of the 1 Chap of Genesis which is as follows

V1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth

trøteh Gødneh pømlēh heavenneh cøentanneh

V2 And darkness was over the face of the deep

lyeverreh crækneh

3 God said let there be light and there was light

Gødneh kany trytittyeheh trytittyeheh crackny

4 And God saw the light that it was good

Gødne lapr---- trylittyeheh – nārreh cøøpeh

5 God divided the light from the darkness

Gødneh dyvidneh trytittyeheh bywerreh

11 God said let the earth bring forth grass and it was so

Gødneh kany coentanneh ninginneheh røthinneheh tībreh

16 God made two great lights the greater light to rule the day

Gødneh pømlēh eathēbyweh trylittyeheh lækrenneh wakehlennēh

and the lesser light to rule the night

tyrverreh (moon)

and he made the stars also

marreh pømlēh pullennah

17 God set them in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth

Gødneh prøpre tøgchickettēh tringinneheh trylittyeheh

21 And God made great whales and all living creatures that moveth

Gødneh pømlēh lækrenneh (off page edge) pynungyneheh (fish)

which the waters brought forth abundantly

gadyeh (plenty) pynungyneheh

25 And God made the beast of the earth and saw that it was good

Gødneh pømlēh pækilleh (bullock), illa (bush kangaroo) &c. &c Gødneh lapreh nārreh cøøpeh

26 And God said let us make man in our own image, after our own likeness

Gødneh kany myneh pømlēh wibēh likeh myneh

27 So God created man in his own image

Gødneh pømlēh wibēh likeh nārreh

28 God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good

Gødneh lapreh gadyeh nārreh pømlēh nārreh kany nārreh cøøpeh cøøpeh<sup>2</sup>

-----  
King James Version of Genesis 1 with ~~striketrough~~ the words omitted by Wilkinson

### Genesis 1: 168 of 797 words used

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

<sup>2</sup>~~And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.~~

<sup>3</sup>And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

<sup>4</sup>And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

---

<sup>2</sup> ML Walker Papers, G W Walker 9 Dec 1833, B727, CY1408, p. 313.

<sup>5</sup>And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

<sup>6</sup>And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

<sup>7</sup>And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.

<sup>8</sup>And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

<sup>9</sup>And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.

<sup>10</sup>And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.

<sup>11</sup>And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.

<sup>12</sup>And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

<sup>13</sup>And the evening and the morning were the third day.

<sup>14</sup>And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:

<sup>15</sup>And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.

<sup>16</sup>And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.

<sup>17</sup>And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth,

<sup>18</sup>And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good.

<sup>19</sup>And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup>And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.

<sup>21</sup>And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

<sup>22</sup>And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.

<sup>23</sup>And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup>And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.

<sup>25</sup>And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup>And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

<sup>27</sup>So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

<sup>28</sup> And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

<sup>29</sup> And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

<sup>30</sup> And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.

<sup>31</sup> And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

## Appendix D

Sermons by Aboriginal people, other than Walter Arthur and Thomas Brune

### Noemy

Appendix B No 1

Copies

The addresses delivered by the Abor at their meeting for prayer and mutual instruction at the Aboriginal Settlement Flinders Island on Saturday evening 24<sup>th</sup> Feby 1838

-----  
Noemy a Western Native

He first addressed his own tribe in their own language in the following terms as translated to me by the native girl Bessy Clark a Western

You ought to live peaceably together not steal from each other nor tell lies nor scold each other

He then addressed the entire assembly in the language of the Settlement of which the following is a translation

You men ought not scold one another – clean your houses early in the morning – do not be sulky – put your bad tempers away from you Love God – love Jesus Christ – Do not remain no longer in the bush when you go for firewood doing what is bad

-----  
No 2 The address delivered by the Aborigines at their meeting for prayer and mutual instruction at the Ab<sup>l</sup> Settlement Flinders Is on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> March 1838

Noemy a Western Aboriginal

He addressed his own tribe in their native language as was translated to me by a native girl Bessy Clark He told them they acted improperly in not remaining on the Settlement and that they ought not be roving in the bush He afterwards spoke to the assembly generally in the language of the Sett<sup>l</sup> of which the following is a translation

Women you are still continuing to do what is improper when you go to the bush for firewood God may take away your lives very soon for your wickedness You go about the settlement some of you living like dogs God does not like that – bad people will be sent to hell bad people are the Devils people Gods country is a fine place yes heaven is a good place Jesus Christ the Son of God is there Good men and women are there Jesus Christ came from heaven to save sinners every man is a sinner if you do not become good people you will all go to Hell to the Devils house You will never go to Heaven Gods country<sup>3</sup>

-----  
No 3

Report of the speeches delivered by the Abors at their weekly meetings for prayer and mutual instruction at Flinders I Ab<sup>l</sup> Sett<sup>t</sup> on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> March 1838

<sup>3</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 39 – 40.

Noemy a Western

God made us all both black men + women and white men and women Why do we not all love God God is very good He provides everything for us always Jesus Christ the Son of God loves us and is desirous to make us good men + women The devil can not make you good no never The devil is very bad and black men + women have bad hearts very bad and the Devil makes them worse But God is good and Gods country is a good country Heaven is a happy place put away the Devil Do not love the Devil do not make bad things Hell is the Devils country and a very bad place of great burning – You do too many bad things and you go to hell when you die You go to the Devils country – Jesus Christ is the Son of God What did he do for us He died on the cross to save sinners What shall we do to be saved Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ the world will be burned up by + by<sup>4</sup>

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No 4

Report of the speeches delivered by the Abo: at their meetings for prayer and mutual instruction at the Abn<sup>l</sup> Settlement Flinders Island on Saturday evening 31<sup>st</sup> March 1838

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The natives met this evening at the usual house and Neptune who was not expected from his being confined during the week by Opthalvia(?) would not remain at home he came with a cloth covering his face to shade the light from his eyes and had to sit on the floor between the forms during the service to save his eyes from the light of candles

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Noemy a Western Native

He addressed his own country men in their own language and which was translated to me by the native females Clara and Bessy Clark He told them how he was first married to a little girl that he then did not know any thing about God on his country – He then asked several questions to the people [in] relation to the creation the coming of Jesus Christ into the world God loving the world &c. and then addressed them in the language spoken on the Settlement – We ought to learn about God more than we do – we ought to love God much more than we do – we do not love him enough God is very good to us and his country is a good country – God loves us and if we love him he will not put us away from him – God sent Jesus Christ his son to bring us to his country – there is no hunger there – no thirst there no no sickness there a great number of good ~~things~~ men and women are there – You black men and women are bad you scold too much & some then fight you steal from one another you show that you love the Devil for you do the Devils work God does not like that – You all dead people soon and where will you go to then – Is it to the Devils country there is much burning there many hungry + sick and crying a great deal – Oh it's a bad place why are you not like me I do not scold or fight I don't tell lies I love God a little and love him a big one by + by I pray to God + sing hymns to God every evening in my house and why do not you do so – many of you do not I love God – God loved me first – God so

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<sup>4</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 41.

loved the world that [he gave] his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life<sup>5</sup>

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Report of the addresses delivered by the Ab<sup>ls</sup> of Van Diemens Land at their weekly meeting for prayer and mutual instruction held the 14<sup>th</sup> April 1838

The service commenced by a native youth repeating the confession of the Church of England service and the Lords Prayer in which all the natives present join I then read the second chapter of Matthews Gospel and translated some of the leading facts into the language spoken on the Settlement after which we sang a hymn

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Noemy a western native commenced

He spoke to his own tribe first in their own language which was translated to me by Bessy Clark a western girl You walk about too much why do you so you play to much also you will soon get sick again remain in your houses and learn you dont vissed(?) your book do not be lazy but work and learn to work He then addressed the assembly in the language of the Settlement Black men and black women do not forget God + son Jesus Christ do not forget him You do not love Jesus Christ as you ought but if you love him a little one more you will love him more by + by If you love the Devil you will go to Hell if you love Jesus Christ you will go to Heaven Hell is a bad place Heaven a good place a very good place – He then put the following questions which were answered by the people Who is Jesus Christ? the Son of God What is salvation? Forsake every bad thing Put away the Devil Love Jesus Christ Love God Love to go to Heaven<sup>6</sup>

The Rev T Dove Chaplain of the Settlement at the conclusion of the meeting expressed the high satisfaction and delight he felt at the observations which were made he said “that Noemy was not merely an elegant but an eloquent speaker and that Alexander was a very sensible man

The Commandant who was likewise present stated why Alpha was not so far advanced as the others having been occupied with himself and his sons in the bush from the commencement of the mission<sup>7</sup>

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The addresses delivered by the Aborigines of Van Diemens Land at their weekly meetings for prayer and mutual instruction held on Saturday even<sup>g</sup> 21 April 1838  
*Alexander, Neptune then Noemy*

Noemy a western He addressed his own tribe in their native language interpreted by Clara ‘You talk too much of other people you should not talk bad things of each other when you are walking when you go in the bush you speak bad of each other and of other people in place of talking about God White men hunted you they were bad men You do not like to be here plenty of you die

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<sup>5</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 43 – 44.

<sup>6</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 47 – 48.

<sup>7</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 49 – 50.

He then addressed the assembly generally in the language spoken on the Settlement

In your own country you did not know there was a God all that you knew was to make spears and waddies and to kill one another by + by you came here Mr Clark read to you plenty No waddy no spear in heaven a fine country white men and black men there they are always singing about God In hell you cry you burn you cannot put it away But if you go to heaven you will not die any more – you will be there little boys Angels little girls to you old women there always young forever there you will always sing of God always have him in your mind I pray in my house do you pray do you sing of the bible Heaven a good place a good country of God of Jesus Christ do you love to go to Heaven<sup>8</sup>

There were present at this meeting Mrs and Miss Robinson Mrs Clark Rev T Dove AM Chaplain who expressed himself highly pleased as did also the Commandant

The above is a faithful and correct report translated by me from the languages generally spoken on the Settlement and from notes taken at the time of the delivery of the address

Signed Rob<sup>t</sup> Clark  
Late Catechist<sup>9</sup>

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**Druemerterpunner / Alexander**

No 4

Report of the speeches delivered by the Abo: at their meetings for prayer and mutual instruction at the Abn<sup>l</sup> Settlement Flinders Island on Saturday evening 31<sup>st</sup> March 1838

-----  
The natives met this evening at the usual house and Neptune who was not expected from his being confined during the week by Ophthalmia would not remain at home he came with a cloth covering his face to shade the light from his eyes and had to sit on the floor between the forms during the service to save his eyes from the light of candles

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*Noemy, Neptune spoke first*

Alexander a Big River Native

I tell you men and women you are not good you do not learn the bible you do not learn none of Gods book heres the bible / taking hold of one on the desk / it tells us of Jesus Christ and of heaven Heaven is a good place Hell is a bad place You like to go there do you You like to have plenty plenty[sic] hungry plenty sick no good place that but Gods country a good country Heaven a fine place you like it no hunger there no thirst there no sick no bad people all are good there you like it there learn to be good You are not like me I dont tell lies I dont fight Jesus Christ tells us love one another You scold you tell lies you will not go to Gods country Jesus is there God is there plenty of good men are there you will never die there never be old you will love God always there

<sup>8</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 51 – 52.

<sup>9</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 54.



Questions put to the Abo: by Alexander  
To Rebecca: Where is God? In heaven everywhere  
To Harriet Who is Jesus Christ? The Son of God  
To Jane Who made you? God  
To Flora What did Jesus Christ do for you? He died for our sins according to the scriptures  
To Juliet What will you do to be saved Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ  
The above correctly taken and translated by Rob<sup>t</sup> Clark

Late Catechist

The Rev T Dove the Chaplain of the Settlement was present at these meetings and publicly expressed his pleasure and satisfaction at hearing them and stated that several of the addresses were both eloquent and elegant and their gestures particularly graceful

Signed Rob<sup>t</sup> Clark

Late Catechist

The preceding appears to me to be faithful extracts of the addresses delivered by the Abo: whose names are appended to them

Signed T Dove

Chaplain of Flinders<sup>10</sup>

Alexander a Big River native

Put away your corrobories put away your bad things your wicked doings I say my friends why don't you love God – Mr Clark put a great many questions to you why do you not always pay attention to what he says to you – you play too much at marbles you walk about too much You don't love Jesus Christ enough like me I love God I love Jesus Christ I will go to Heaven when I die – No old men there all young boys there no sickness there God loves you if you are good you go to Heaven a happy place good place good people there<sup>11</sup>

The Rev T Dove Chaplain of the Settlement at the conclusion of the meeting expressed the high satisfaction and delight he felt at the observations which were made he said “that Noemy was not merely an elegant but an eloquent speaker and that Alexander was a very sensible man

The Commandant who was likewise present stated why Alpha was not so far advanced as the others having been occupied with himself and his sons in the bush from the commencement of the mission

[ML GAR Papers A7044 CY548 p49 – 50]

There were present at this meeting Mrs and Miss Robinson Mrs Clark Rev T Dove AM Chaplain who expressed himself highly pleased as did also the Commandant

The above is a faithful and correct report translated by me from the languages generally spoken on the Settlement and from notes taken at the time of the delivery of the address

Signed Rob<sup>t</sup> Clark

Late Catechist<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 45 – 46.

<sup>11</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 48.

<sup>12</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 54.

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**Woorraddy / Alpha**

Report of the addresses delivered by the Ab<sup>ls</sup> of Van Diemens Land at their weekly meeting for prayer and mutual instruction held the 14<sup>th</sup> April 1838

The service commenced by a native youth repeating the confession of the Church of England service and the Lords Prayer in which all the natives present join I then read the second chapter of Matthews Gospel and translated some of the leading facts into the language spoken on the Settlement after which we sang a hymn

*Noemy, Neptune, Alexander, Leonidas, then Alpha*

Alpha

He addressed the meeting in his native language / the Brune Island / interpreted by Wild Mary and by himself afterwards My brothers in our own country a long time ago we were a great many men a great number – but the white men have killed us all – they shot a great many – we are now only a few people here and we ought to be fond of one another we ought to love God God made everything the Salt water the bullock the horse the opossum the kangaroo and wombat Love him and you will go to him by + by<sup>13</sup>

The Rev T Dove Chaplain of the Settlement at the conclusion of the meeting expressed the high satisfaction and delight he felt at the observations which were made he said “that Noemy was not merely an elegant but an eloquent speaker and that Alexander was a very sensible man

The Commandant who was likewise present stated why Alpha was not so far advanced as the others having been occupied with himself and his sons in the bush from the commencement of the mission<sup>14</sup>

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The addresses delivered by the Aborigines of Van Diemens Land at their weekly meetings for prayer and mutual instruction held on Saturday even<sup>g</sup> 21 April 1838

*Alexander, Neptune, Noemy, Napoleon, Leonidas, then Alpha...*

Alpha – a Brune Island Native Interpreted by Sophie – you make your persons too filthy by putting grease and ochre on yourselves – you dirty your clothes you dirty yourselves – put it away you women – Jesus Christ loves you me and every body To Juliet Who made you? God Where is God? Everywhere<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 49 – 50.

<sup>14</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 49 – 50.

<sup>15</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 53 – 54.

There were present at this meeting Mrs and Miss Robinson Mrs Clark Rev T Dove AM Chaplain who expressed himself highly pleased as did also the Commandant

The above is a faithful and correct report translated by me from the languages generally spoken on the Settlement and from notes taken at the time of the delivery of the address

Signed Rob<sup>t</sup> Clark  
Late Catechist<sup>16</sup>

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No 2 The address delivered by the Aborigines at their meeting for prayer and mutual instruction at the Ab<sup>l</sup> Settlement Flinders Is on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> March 1838  
*Noemy and Neptune first, then Leonidas the only other one.*

Leonidas – a Big River Native

Love the Bible it is a good book it is Gods Book why do you not all learn to read Gods book it tells you plenty about God about Jesus Christ you are too lazy to learn

A correct translation taken by me  
Signed/ Rob<sup>t</sup> Clark  
Late Catechist<sup>17</sup>

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Report of the addresses delivered by the Ab<sup>ls</sup> of Van Diemens Land at their weekly meeting for prayer and mutual instruction held the 14<sup>th</sup> April 1838

The service commenced by a native youth repeating the confession of the Church of England service and the Lords Prayer in which all the natives present join I then read the second chapter of Matthews Gospel and translated some of the leading facts into the language spoken on the Settlement after which we sang a hymn

Leonidas a Big River Native

Gentlemen and Ladies you play too much you tell too many lies of each other you put away God God loves you do not let God go from your minds Let Jesus Christ jump up in your hearts then you are good and you are on your road to heaven God made everything the sea the sun the moon the kangaroo the emu the whale the wombat the pacalla(?) / bullock/ the pacoothina /horse/ all God made very good<sup>18</sup>

The Rev T Dove Chaplain of the Settlement at the conclusion of the meeting expressed the high satisfaction and delight he felt at the observations which were made he said “that Noemy was not merely an elegant but an eloquent speaker and that Alexander was a very sensible man

<sup>16</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 54.

<sup>17</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 40.

<sup>18</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 49.

The Commandant who was likewise present stated why Alpha was not so far advanced as the others having been occupied with himself and his sons in the bush from the commencement of the mission<sup>19</sup>

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The addresses delivered by the Aborigines of Van Diemens Land at their weekly meetings for prayer and mutual instruction held on Saturday even<sup>g</sup> 21 April 1838

*Alexander, Neptune, Noemy, Napoleon, then Leonidas...*

Leonidas a Big River Native

Ladies and Gentlemen you look out too much for bad things you are not good at all you have bad hearts You see(?) pray to God to give you good hearts why do you lose(?) him too much You black women you been to play too much white woman don't play at balls and win(?) about like you You do not like God by + by God wont like you Pray to God in your houses pray to him that Jesus Christ may spring up in your hearts You go to heaven a good place that you did not make Heaven God made it God made the trees the salt water the moon the stars the kangaroo the porky the Pacoother the Shup(?) the wallaby – God make everything sing plenty to God in your Librussa(?) pray to him every night to passaway the Devil and sickness Look out for God and he will look out for you and take care of you<sup>20</sup>

There were present at this meeting Mrs and Miss Robinson Mrs Clark Rev T Dove AM Chaplain who expressed himself highly pleased as did also the Commandant

The above is a faithful and correct report translated by me from the languages generally spoken on the Settlement and from notes taken at the time of the delivery of the address

Signed Rob<sup>t</sup> Clark

Late Catechist<sup>21</sup>

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### **Pevay / Napoleon**

The addresses delivered by the Aborigines of Van Diemens Land at their weekly meetings for prayer and mutual instruction held on Saturday even<sup>g</sup> 21 April 1838

*Alexander, Neptune, Noemy, then Napoleon...*

Napoleon a Ben Lomond Native

Blackman Blackwoman why do you forget God Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners He then put the following questions to the natives around him  
To Harriet

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<sup>19</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 49 – 50.

<sup>20</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 53.

<sup>21</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 54.

What shall we do to be saved? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ  
To Clara  
What did Jesus Christ do for us? He died for our sins according to the  
Scriptures  
To Caroline

Where was Jesus Christ born? In Bethlehem<sup>22</sup>  
*Followed by Leonidas, Alpha and Robert (Ben Lomond)*

There were present at this meeting Mrs and Miss Robinson Mrs Clark Rev T  
Dove AM Chaplain who expressed himself highly pleased as did also the  
Commandant  
The above is a faithful and correct report translated by me from the languages  
generally spoken on the Settlement and from notes taken at the time of the  
delivery of the address

Signed Rob<sup>t</sup> Clark  
Late Catechist<sup>23</sup>

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Appendix B No 1  
Copies

The addresses delivered by the Abor at their meeting for prayer and mutual  
instruction at the Aboriginal Settlement Flinders Island on Saturday evening 24<sup>th</sup>  
Feby 1838

Neptune a Western Native  
*In margin "this is an error of the catechist he is from N coast of VDL GAR"*

You man and woman do not be lazy attend your School why do you remain sitting  
at home you learn a great deal of good things at school why do you forget them so  
soon Why do not the old women come to school – I do not stay at home – I come  
to School I pray to God in my house every night – You people why do you have  
to walk about at night it is very bad – I remain in my house why don't you remain  
at home recalled what the parson / the catechist / has told you if you remember it  
you will become good people He has told you about God You learn to love God  
that will make you good people if you are not good the Devil will take you by +  
by

The above is a correct report taken by me  
/signed/ Rob<sup>t</sup> Clark  
Late Catechist<sup>24</sup>

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No 2 The address delivered by the Aborigines at their meeting for prayer and  
mutual instruction at the Ab<sup>l</sup> Settlement Flinders Is on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> March 1838

Neptune a Western Native

<sup>22</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 51 – 52.

<sup>23</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 54.

<sup>24</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 38-39.

He addressed his tribe in their own language which was translated to me by the western woman Clara and Bessy Clark *GAR says Neptune is north coast, but he's being translated by western women, whose language is he speaking?* In your own country you were bad people and a great many of you died God did not love what you were doing – God sent you from your own country Why are you continuing those bad things – after a little time you will all die You ought to love God for God is very good to us all – He then addressed them in the language of the Settlement of which the following is a translation God loves all men He sent Jesus Christ his Son into the world to save us we should always love God – but we do not know God at first God made the white man come to tell us of Jesus Christ the Son of God He came from Heaven to save sinners – God made man first of the dust of the ground and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul – Do not be a bad people love God – God loved us first – you did a great deal of wickedness you did not love God and you soon will know that God does not love wicked people always He loves good people and brings them to Heaven bad people who tell lies and scold and steal they do not love God but go to Hell by + by love Jesus Christ and you will be good people<sup>25</sup>

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### **Drinene / Neptune**

No 3

Report of the speeches delivered by the Abors at their weekly meetings for prayer and mutual instruction at Flinders I Ab<sup>1</sup> Sett<sup>t</sup> on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> March 1838

#### Neptune a Western Native

My brothers and sisters why do you forget God You do not remember him always and you are too fond of doing what is bad Women you go into the bush too often you are like the dogs – God does not love bad black men or black women He cannot love what is bad if you are bad if you are bad you are the Devils people Gods people are good people they love God they love Jesus Christ the Son of God he died for our sins bad men will not walk in Gods country that is a good country no sickness there you do not like God I love God No people who do bad things are there no bad things not all there – learn to read the bible it is a good book it is Gods book Love God for that book Love God for Jesus Christ the Son of God – He came into the world to save sinners A very long time since a great number of people were drowned they were bad people they do too much evil and God put them away By + by God burn up the world Will you like to go to the Devil then If you are bad men and women God will send you to the Devils country But if you love God he will keep you in heaven – His country a very fine place where you will remain forever God will look out for you there and take care of you and you will not fall down from him

The above a correct translation  
/signed/Rob<sup>t</sup> Clark  
Late Catechist<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 40.

<sup>26</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 42.

No 4

Report of the speeches delivered by the Abo: at their meetings for prayer and mutual instruction at the Abn<sup>l</sup> Settlement Flinders Island on Saturday evening 31<sup>st</sup> March 1838

-----  
The natives met this evening at the usual house and Neptune who was not expected from his being confined during the week by Opthalvia(?) would not remain at home he came with a cloth covering his face to shade the light from his eyes and had to sit on the floor between the forms during the service to save his eyes from the light of candles

*Noemy's speech first*

Neptune – a Western Native

What prevents you my friends to love and to know God – You did not know God in your own country - you were evild[sic] me there – the white men hunted you and shot you there are a great many white men bad and a great many black men bad too God sent the white man Parson/Catechist and he has instructed us about God and Jesus Christ the Son of God we now know that Jesus Christ made the trees the salt water the sun and moon and the kangaroo and the emu and every thing God loves every thing that is good and he loves good men and good men love God – God gives us everything The parson/Catechist reads it in the Bible and he tells us there are a great many black men in another country who read Gods book about Jesus Christ the son of God – We all are bad people let us put away the devil for he will bring us to Hell it is a bad place no good there do you like to go there you men and women then why will you not learn to read the Bible and love Jesus Christ You are not like me I learn to read Gods book by + by learn about Jesus Christ not to tell lies nor steal but love God the Bible tells us plenty about Gods country – you old men when you die by + by you love Jesus Christ you will not be old in Heaven you will always be young men – there are no old men there – you will never die there never sick there never hungry and no bad people there no wicked white men there – God and Jesus Christ + angels and good men there – if you do not love God now when you die you travel to the Devils country – look out and learn about God – love God love Jesus Christ always and you will always be happy pray to him every night and he will take care of you<sup>27</sup>

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Report of the addresses delivered by the Ab<sup>ls</sup> of Van Diemens Land at their weekly meeting for prayer and mutual instruction held the 14<sup>th</sup> April 1838

The service commenced by a native youth repeating the confession of the Church of England service and the Lords Prayer in which all the natives present join I then read the second chapter of Matthews Gospel and translated some of the leading facts into the language spoken on the Settlement after which we sang a hymn

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*Noemy first (as usual!)*

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<sup>27</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 44 – 45.

Neptune a western

He addressed the tribe he belongs to in their own language translated to me by Bessy Clark

Every woman should mind her own house and not be going to other peoples homes keep your blankets clean carry plenty of wood to your houses for your fires take care of your clothes and sew them when they are old or torn do not throw them away when you go to the bush a hunting as you used to do You men you ought to work do not be idle Do as much good as you can and God will love you He then addressed them in the language of the Settlement – Gentlemen and Ladies you love God you love Jesus Christ In your own country you did not know Jesus Christ no you were like the kangaroos you went about every place the white man came to your country they kill your countrymen a great many of them you then came to live in this place and good white men came to teach you about God about Jesus Christ you are not bad now the white men does not kill you now not never Put away the Devil he makes every thing bad God makes every thing good Praise God always<sup>28</sup>

The Rev T Dove Chaplain of the Settlement at the conclusion of the meeting expressed the high satisfaction and delight he felt at the observations which were made he said “that Noemy was not merely an elegant but an eloquent speaker and that Alexander was a very sensible man

The Commandant who was likewise present stated why Alpha was not so far advanced as the others having been occupied with himself and his sons in the bush from the commencement of the mission<sup>29</sup>

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The addresses delivered by the Aborigines of Van Diemens Land at their weekly meetings for prayer and mutual instruction held on Saturday even<sup>g</sup> 21 April 1838  
*Alexander first, then Neptune*

Neptune a western

He spoke in his own language to his tribe which was interpreted by the native woman Clara

Do not laugh do not talk whilst I am speaking you should not laugh in this house God does not like it you are a lazy people – don’t love work – I tell you again look out your things wash them and mend them and take care of them

He then addressed the assembly in the language of the Settlement – Do not forget Jesus Christ he came into the world to save sinners You are sinners I am a sinner Look at the Bible down here you love God no Parson/Catechist teach you plenty forget it too soon why do you forget it Remember God and Jesus Christ learn to read quickly What is salvation / answered by the whole assembly / put away wickedness put away the devil Love Jesus Christ and love God and love to go to Heaven<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 48.

<sup>29</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 49 – 50.

<sup>30</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 51.



There were present at this meeting Mrs and Miss Robinson Mrs Clark Rev T Dove AM Chaplain who expressed himself highly pleased as did also the Commandant

The above is a faithful and correct report translated by me from the languages generally spoken on the Settlement and from notes taken at the time of the delivery of the address

Signed Rob<sup>t</sup> Clark  
Late Catechist<sup>31</sup>

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**Malboy / Robert** (*Son of Rolepa / George and Luggenemenener / Tuery, and brother of Walter Arthur*)

The addresses delivered by the Aborigines of Van Diemens Land at their weekly meetings for prayer and mutual instruction held on Saturday even<sup>g</sup> 21 April 1838

*Alexander, Neptune, Noemy, Napoleon, Leonidas, Alpha,*  
Robert a Ben Lomond Native

This man spoke in tolerably good English

Plenty of women here – why do you come here – to learn about God – you know nothing in your own country but to fight plenty you learn plenty of good things from the white man You could not make a house no you make a breakwind You sleep in a break wind not in a warm house The Commandant make a fine house for the black man You cant make glass for a window You wild people all every one When you come here you know nothing you go about naked but you kill kangaroo you no make stone houses you only make a break wind all round There were present at this meeting Mrs and Miss Robinson Mrs Clark Rev T Dove AM Chaplain who expressed himself highly pleased as did also the Commandant

The above is a faithful and correct report translated by me from the languages generally spoken on the Settlement and from notes taken at the time of the delivery of the address

Signed Rob<sup>t</sup> Clark  
Late Catechist<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 54.

<sup>32</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, p. 54.

## Appendix E

The Aboriginal or Flinders Island Chronicle  
Robinson Papers A7074 (Reel CY 825 Mitchell Library) and Plomley, N. J. B.,  
1987, *Weep in Silence*. Hobart; Blubber Head Press, Appendix IV: C,

Aboriginal  
or  
Flinders Island Chronicle  
Under the Sanction of the Commandant

—  
The object of this journal is to promote  
Christianity civilization and Learning amongst  
the Aboriginal Inhabitants at Flinders Island.  
The chronicle professes to be a brief but accurate  
register of events of the colony Moral and religious  
This journal will be published weekly on Saturdays  
the copies to be in ~~Aboriginal~~<sup>Manuscript</sup> and written  
exclusively by the Aborigines the Size half foolscap  
and price two pence.

The Profit arising from the Sale of the journal  
to be equally divided amongst the writers  
which it is hoped may induce Emmulation  
in writing excite a desire for useful knowledge  
and promote Learning generally.

Proof sheets are to be Submitted to the  
commandant for correction before publishing  
Persons out of the colony may Subscribe

Thomas Bruney  
Walter Juba Martin<sup>33</sup>

### Prospectus

I certify that this Copy was written by one of the Aborigines at Flinders Island  
whose signature is herewith attached

Aboriginal	G A Robinson
Settlement	Commandant
Flinders Island	
10 <sup>th</sup> Sept 1836 <sup>34</sup>	

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The Aboriginal  
or  
Flinders Island Chronicle  
Under the Sanction of the Commandant

—  
The object of this journal is to promote  
Christianity Civilization and Learning amongst

<sup>33</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p.1.

<sup>34</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 2.

the Aboriginal Inhabitants at Flinders Island.  
 The chronicle professes to be a brief<sup>but</sup> accurate  
 register of events of the colony Moral and Religious<sup>s</sup>  
 This journal will be published weekly on Saturdays the copies  
 to be in Manuscript and written exclusively by the Aborigines<sup>gines</sup>  
 the Size half foolscap and price two pence.  
 The Profit arising from the Sale of the journal to be  
 equally divided amongst the writers which it is hoped  
 may induce Emmulation in writing excite a desire  
 for useful knowledge and promote Learning generally.  
 Proof sheets are to be Submitted to the commandant  
 for correction before publishing Persons out of the  
 colony may Subscribe  
 Walter Juba Martin Thomas Bruney<sup>35</sup>

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 I certify that this copy was written by one of the Aborigines at Flinders Island  
 Flinders Island G A Robinson  
 10<sup>th</sup> Sept 1836 Commandant<sup>36</sup>

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 The Aboriginal  
 Flinders Island Chronicle  
 Under the Sanction of the Commandant

The object of this journal is to promote Christianity  
 Civilization and Learning amongst the Aborigines Inhabitants<sup>nts</sup>  
 at Flinders Island.  
 The chronicle professes to be a brief<sup>but</sup> accurate register  
 of events of the colony Moral and Religious This  
 Journal will be published weekly on Saturdays the  
 copies to be in Manuscript and written exclusively by the Aborigines  
 the size half foolscap and the price two pence.  
 The Profit arising from the Sale of the Journal  
 to be equally divided amongst the writers it<sup>which</sup> is hoped  
 may induce Emmulation in writing Excite a desire for  
 useful knowledge and promote Learning Generally.  
 Proof sheets are to be Submitted to the commandant  
 for correction before publishing  
 Persons out of the colony may Subscribe  
 Walter Juba Martin  
 Thomas Bruney<sup>37</sup>

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 I certify that this Copy was written by one of the Aborigines at Flinders Island  
 Flinders Island G A Robinson  
 10 Sept 1836 Commandant<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 6.

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The Aboriginal

or

Flinders Island Chronicle

Under the Sanction of the Commandant

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Persons out of the colony may Subscribe

Thomas Brun[sic]<sup>39</sup>

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Prospectus

I certify that this Copy was written by one of the Aboriginals at Flinders Island  
Flinders Island

10 Sept 1836

G A Robinson

Command<sup>t40</sup>

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The Aboriginal

or

Flinders Island Chronicle

Under the Sanction of the Commandant

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<sup>39</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 8.

learning generally.  
Proof sheets are to be Submitted to the command<sup>ant</sup>  
for correction before publishing. Persons out of the  
colony may Subscribe

Thomas Brune<sup>41</sup>

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I certify that this Copy was written by one of the Aborigines at Flinders Island  
Flinders Island G A Robinson  
10 Sept 1836 Commandant<sup>42</sup>

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The Aboriginal  
or  
Flinders Island Chronicle  
Under the Sanction of the Commandant

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civilization and Learning amongst the Aboriginal  
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and promote Learning generally. Proof  
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for correction before publishing. Persons  
out of the colony may Subscribe  
Thomas Bruney<sup>43</sup>

-----  
The Aboriginal or Flinders Island Chronicle under the sanction of the  
Commandant

The object of this journal is to promote Christianity civilisation and learning  
amongst the Aborigines, inhabitants at Flinders Island. The Chronicle professes to  
be a brief but accurate register of events of the colony moral and religious. This  
journal will be published weekly on Saturdays the copies to be in manuscript and  
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The profits arising from the sale of the journal to be equally divided amongst the  
writers which it is hoped may induce emulation in writing, excite a desire for  
useful knowledge, and promote learning generally. Proof sheets are to be

<sup>41</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 11.

submitted to the Commandant for correction before publishing. Persons out of the colony may subscribe.

Walter Juba Martin    Thomas Bruney<sup>44</sup>

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The Aboriginal  
or  
Flinders Island Chronicle  
Under the Sanction of the Commandant  
Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> Sept 1836

N<sup>o</sup> 1

price 2<sup>d</sup>

---

In commencing our Journal agreeable to the Prospectus we cannot look back on the Events Connected with our history this we leave with the Divine blessing to the heart and head that Has been instrumental in uniting us together and providing us with Instruction ~~and~~ guiding us into the habits of civilized life. <sup>and</sup> the enjoyment of security from the oppression of bad men we date our history of events from the Month of October 1835 when our beloved father made his appearance among us dispelling the darkness and cheering us with a dawn of hope freedom and happiness we had been in a deplorable state. we looked for a better day and it has arrived what a contrast between the present and the past A market was established on the Settlement in August last for the sale of articles which we require and to purchase our shins and mariners after the market we were regaled with a dinner of Mutton and pudding. We are learning the use of money. Events of the week. H. M. Colonial Schooner Eliza arrived at Green Island and the [page 14]

Commandant is to proceed in her to Hobart Town we feel even his loss for a day from us and hope he will soon come back again

published at the Cathechists for the writers  
Flinders Island

I certify that this Copy was written by one of the  
Aboriginal Youths at Flinders Island

GAR

Thomas Brune<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Plomley, N. J. B., 1987, *Weep in Silence*. Hobart; Blubber Head Press, Appendix IV: C, p. 1009.

<sup>45</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 13 & 14.

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The Aboriginal  
or  
Flinders Island Chronicle  
Under the Sanction of the Commandant  
Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> Sept 1836

N<sup>o</sup> 1

price 2<sup>d</sup>

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Events of the week.

H. M. C. Schooner Eliza arrived and the com

[page 16]

mandant is to proceed in her to Hobart Town we feel even his loss for a day from us and hope he will Soon come back again

Published for the writers at the Cathechists  
Flinders Island<sup>46</sup>

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The Aboriginal or Flinders Island Chronicle under the sanction of the  
Commandant

No. 1 Saturday 10 September 1836 [=1837] price 2d.

In commencing our Journal agreeable to the prospectus we cannot look back on the events connected with our history; this we leave with the Divine blessing to the heart and head that has been instrumental in uniting us together and providing

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<sup>46</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, pp. 15 & 16.

us with instruction guiding us into the habits of civilised life and the enjoyment of security from the oppression of bad men. We date our history of events from the month of October 1835 when our beloved father made his appearance among us dispelling the darkness and cheering us with a dawn of hope freedom and happiness. We had been in a deplorable state. We looked for a better day and it has arrived. What a contrast between the present and the past. A market was established on the settlement in August last for the sale of articles which we require and to purchase our skins and mariners. After the market we were regaled with a dinner of mutton and pudding. We are learning the use of money. Events of the week. H.M. Colonial schooner Eliza arrived at Green Island and the commandant is to proceed in her to Hobart Town. We feel even his loss for a day from us and hope he will soon come back again.

Published at the catechist's for the writers Flinders Island<sup>47</sup>

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The  
Flinders Island  
Weekly Chronicle  
28<sup>th</sup> September 1837

The Natives people of Van Diemen's Land is gone out hunting and some of their men his got some books out with them and they are singing and reading out in the bush and praying to God every night I suppose and they behave themselves under the Directions of the Commandant The people of Van Diemen's Land which I speak of; My friends which are here now and my people is well off in Flinders Island The men which his now out hunting they will come again on the Settlement in a short time the Settlement boat is gone to the Island to get some geese and the boat is coming back to the Settlement

The Natives people his learning about God and learning to read and learning about Jesus Christ and the way that we should go to heaven when we dies and if we be bad men we will go down into everlasting burning. It is better for us to Look after God and he will take us up to heaven were[sic] we cane [sic] enjoy happiness.

For it is good for us to look out for him now then is time for us to go to hell hereafter always singing in heaven no hunger no thirst we will have everything that is good in heaven, Natives of Van Diemen's Land is health and soberly in Flinders Island were[sic] they dwelt and the people of Van Diemen's Land about have some reason about God in their hearts

And I can tell you my friends that their[sic] is a great God over you and me and when we look to him for blessings and new

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<sup>47</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 1009.



hearts and new Spirits within all these things  
that we must ask for my friends<sup>48</sup>

-----  
Flinders Island  
Weekly Chronicle  
28<sup>th</sup> September 1837

The <sup>Natives</sup> people of Van Diemen's Land is ~~the~~  
gone out hunting and some of them his got some  
books out with them and they are singing out  
in the bush and praying to God every night  
I suppose; and they behave ~~themself~~ themselves  
under the Directions of the Commandant

The people of Van Diemen's Land  
which I speak of; ~~his~~; My friends which are here  
now and my people ~~his~~ well off in Flinders  
Island the men which his now out hunting  
they will come again on the Settlement  
in a short time the Settlement boat is gone  
to the Island to get some ~~geeses~~<sup>geese</sup> and the boat  
~~th~~ is coming back to the Settlement

The Natives people his learning ~~boat~~<sup>about</sup> God  
and learning to read and learning about  
Jesus Christ and the way that we should  
go to heaven when we dies and if we be  
bad men we will go down into  
everlasting burnings.

It is better for us to ~~Look~~<sup>seek after</sup>  
God and he will take us up to heaven  
were[sic] we cane [sic] enjoy ~~the~~ happiness

For it is good for us to look out  
for him now, then, is time for  
us to go <sup>to hell</sup> ~~up with~~ hereafter

Thomas Brune Aboriginal  
Youth<sup>49</sup>

-----  
The Copy which I wrote his forwarded to  
the Natives School and the Natives were hereing[sic]  
of it and the people were carrying wood  
This morning and the Native women  
were carrying grass

The New Holland women  
and a sealers boat man and two children  
and he came to the Commandants Office and  
ask the Commandant for Time for mend

<sup>48</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 17.

<sup>49</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 19.

his boat and he had to sleep at one of the  
prisoners huts and then he had to go away

The people which are in Hobart Town  
They works-at ~~tared~~<sup>trade</sup> manufacturing[sic] Shoemakers  
Carpenters Joiners Blacksmiths Gunsmiths  
These are works which they do in V.  
D. L. They is now which I could  
tell You my black people you could  
not do these things the <sup>native</sup> people of Van  
Diemen's Land <sup>are</sup> ~~his~~ well off in there[sic]  
Situation where they are and I hope  
God will protect them in every place  
were[sic]ever they go

The Brig Tamar hast been here with flour and she hast forwarded  
us the flour to Settlement the sheeps-~~his~~<sup>are</sup>  
well off on these Island they are increasing  
very much we get some to eat and  
white people Distributed to the Natives  
and they have as much as they like The  
Commandant don't like them ~~th~~ to have  
Saltmeat always Mutton ~~his~~ always  
Provided for them the people which  
his in Van Diemen's Land hast got the  
government property<sup>50</sup>

-----  
The  
Flinders Island  
Weekly Chronicle  
2 October 1837

The Native people of Van Diemen's Land is not  
only people of Devil there are ~~the~~ people of God  
is not them the people of God very good yes  
it is my friends very good the School is going to  
be put up for them as the Commandant directed  
them in a short time we will sing in that  
School it is most important and Delight it is to  
learn about God and about is ways and How  
dreadful it is to go on the way to the Devil and  
how can we enjoy the happiness; and if we go on the  
ways of God it is good for us and then we can have  
God for our father the Native people of Van Diemen's  
Land is the people of God and it is good for us  
to look out for him now, and then it is certain  
that <sup>we</sup> cane[sic] have happiness hereafter

The people gose[sic] to the church and the people  
Hears about God the Aboriginal Youths Walter

---

<sup>50</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074, CY825, p. 20.

and Thomas Bruney Assisting Mr Clark in the  
Church of Sundays then Mr Clark tells  
them about God and about Jesus Christ who  
came down from heaven into our world to save  
sinners and then he was crucified and the cross  
was in form of a T and then was buried and on the  
third day he arose from the dead and now  
is interceeding [sic] fro them that come unto God  
but him

We learn these from the Officers  
From Mr Clark from Mr Dickenson and  
Mr Dockercillen(?) and from Commandant and  
from Mr William we should thank these  
Gentlements[sic] for it and love them as You  
would your own self

Thomas Brune Aboriginal Youth<sup>51</sup>

-----  
The Flinders Island  
Weekly chronicle  
the 2 October 1837

Now my Dear friends you know that is but one  
God only. The God who made the sun, and moon, and stars  
and every thing that you can see round about you  
would you like to pray if you would my friends  
that I know some of you which now can read and  
can spell words of four or five siylailb[sic] and you know  
that some of them can read out of the Bible it  
was was to try Because of the Bible which  
is God Book and that is best Book which we  
call the Bible and that of book of books and they  
all understand they all know how to sing hymns  
and some of them can read also  
and now my friends I want to tell you  
one thing what a thing it is to die without haveing  
the love of God in our hearts you seen the  
other day a man die which of hope is gone to Glory  
Because my friend we all got to die you all got  
to die some time or a another perhaps you mite[sic] die  
by and by Don't tell when days shall come  
You can't tell it of myself when I have got to die  
that our hearts may be fixed up God for God  
careth you  
may we learn more and more of God and of his  
Son Jesus Christ  
And now and when we are in school I always see  
Mis Thomas Brune Laughting[sic] and playing away

---

<sup>51</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074 CY825, p. 22.

in the middle of School  
 The Natives of Flinders Island have being some  
 time ago have being makeing[sic] themselves  
 their own garden and sowing their own fruit and  
 made their own fences and also other things which  
 cannot express now  
 and as them want to the Sisters to hunt and  
 also for skins and when before returning from the  
 Sisters we met some of the Native women and  
 their Names were Flora and Louisa  
 You said that God made you and me and the Sea  
 the Mountains and the tree and the salt waters the  
 hearts of them Shall say to my Soul where is  
 now thy God Trimus Wader(?)  
 Walter George Arthur<sup>52</sup>

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The Flinders Island Weekly Chronicle the 2 October 1837

Now my dear 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 seen [sic] round about you. Would you like to pray? If you would my friends that I know some of you which now can read and can spell words of four or five syllables and I know that some of them can read out of the Bible if was to try, because of the Bible which is God Book and that is best book which we call the Bible and that of book of books and they all understand and they all know how to sing hymns and some of them can read also.

And now my friends I want to tell you one thing, what a thing it is to die without having the love of God in our hearts. You seen the other day a man die which I hope is gone to glory. Because my friends we all got to die, you all got to die some time or another, perhaps you might die by and by. I can't tell when days shall come; I can't tell it of myself when I have got to die. O, that our hearts may be fixed up God, for God careth you. And may we learn more and more of God and his son Jesus Christ.

And now and when I am in school I always see Mr Thomas Brune laughing and playing away in the middle of school.

The natives of Flinders Island have been some time of go have being making themselves their own gardens and sowing their own fruit and made their own fences and also other things which cannot express now. Nine of them went to the Sisters to hunt and also for skins, and when were returning from the Sisters we met two of the native women and their names was Flora and Louisa.

You said that God made you and me and the sea and the mountains and the tree and the salt waters. The hearts of them shall say to my soul, where is now thy God.

Walter George Arthur                      Thinks Walter<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7074, CY825, p. 23.

<sup>53</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 1010.

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The  
Flinders Island  
Weekly Chronicle  
6<sup>th</sup> October 1837

---

The people knows that there is but one God and  
over them and the people may put their trust in him  
always. O what a blessing it is if we hear in words  
speaking from heaven God made man he made him  
like unto himself he made him holy and perfect  
and happy and put him into the garden of Eden  
to dress it and keep it

My friends you are not the Children  
of God by Nature we are born to sin and come forth  
the short of the glory of God the people of Van D.  
L. their work is Delight in their working you  
must pray to God with all your hearts and  
with all your soul and with all your Mind  
and with all your strenght[sic]

And now my friends you shall  
see the son of man shall come in his Glory  
and all the holy Angels with him then he sets  
the sheep on his right and the wicked  
on his left which of you think my friends  
think now of yourselves would you be the  
wicked one my friends you would not say now  
you cannot serve two masters and when he takes  
you up before is barr what will you say then you  
would not say nothing at all he knows every thing  
in your thoughts you ought to pray to God to give  
you new hearts and a new right sprits within  
you the Aboriginal male Noemy has got the love  
of God shead[sic] abroad in his heart he tells them about  
you and Jesus Christ and everything that is good for  
them and for every body and now my Dear  
brothers and sisters will you lissen[sic] to these things  
whats told to you and keep it in your hearts  
you knows that God made you and you knows  
that Jesus Christ came into the world to die for sins  
according to the scriptures and you know that  
God made every things

The commandant his magistrate over the  
Flinders Island and that God may prosper him in all  
is[sic] ways and that God may protect him may were[sic]  
ever he goes the people of this Island may pray  
to God and serve him Blesst[sic] the Lord & our souls  
all that is within us blesst[sic] his holy name  
the people with are in Hobart Town they are  
working at Shoemakers, Taylors, blacksmiths and

gunsmiths carpenters, joiners musence(?) patimakers(?)  
Thomas Brune Aboriginal  
Youth & writer & Editor<sup>54</sup>

-----  
The  
Flinders Island Chronicle  
6<sup>th</sup> of October

The people of Flinders Island have been learn about God a little but eagerly(?) must  
and they are learning to read now as fast as they can but they all even a way into the bush and get sick and they stay they will never come hom again no they all say their[sic] is to much work for them to do  
The Native women says to much work to do carring(?) grass you all day that's too much  
carry a little grass  
I hapl~~th~~y learn of God and of his Jesus Christ every day and every night when you are agoing to bed and pray to him that he may bless you in your hearts  
you say our father which are in heaven that you is like the God that made you because of you look what God hast told you in the Bible God wont like you nay God would like you no more he will cast you from his presentes[sic] and if  
and if he did God forbid. May they all love him and that when they die they go to him to be with him for ever.  
And now my dear friends what was it kept you out so long a time my friends Cant you tell what it was kept you out so long a time thanks they were looking out for the sick  
The people who are at the settlement they and the commandant used to give them sing(?) cabbages  
You thank[sic] that you can find those things on the top of the ---ope Flinders and you thank[sic] was you can find tea and sugar upon tea tree and they can they can[sic] find the Rackar Grawning[?] upon the Gum tree as you have heard the Commandant tell you a long time up go [sic ?ago?] God who made sun and moon and  
stars and the all the living creatures that walketh wherein there is life which you would now ruin(?) do God is not like you or me God is a spirit and a spirit has no  
flesh and bones a spirit is an invisible being who is like unto him there is but one God the God who made you and me and that God would call you or me to on and in a moment of time.  
That God who shall judge the [sic](thee or them) in righteousness and in the proceeding of time God looked down from heaven to see if there were any one who was  
nay one that was seeking after God. And there was none no not one they were all gone a astray and they all lost the love in their hearts  
And now my dear friends if there was a Gentlemen down from Hobart Town and ask among people as you Where is God in what

---

<sup>54</sup> ML Robinson Papers, ML7074, CY 825, p. 25.

manner would you answer them you would taught (?laught?) you would you  
 A Now dear my friend learn how to love God because when you die  
 You may go up to God to be with him for ever and Sing glory to God  
 on high and the lamb that was slayn[sic] for us and that -----  
 to read in this book and understanding it because there is no other  
 to God to God[sic] but by learning out of this book because there is no  
 other book better than this Bible  
 Because the Bible came from God and if it came from God it must be  
 a good book and those who learn of that book and understand it is a far  
 better thing than into the bush and hunt for those things which is  
 not up much good

Walter George Arthur  
 Editor and writer<sup>55</sup>

-----

The Flinders Island  
 Weekly Chronicle  
 The sixth of October 1837

The natives who are now in the settlement are learning about God and of  
 his son Jesus Christ they all know who to pray why don't you pray pray while  
 it is time because you mite fall to when you know not from whence you  
 are how can a man tell from whence his  
 The Lord is good to Black Native and he shall judge the Quick and the  
 dead you did not know these things when you were in your native  
 words no I know that you did not know nothings at all but have  
 the Commandant as being so kind as to gather you and now you are  
 learning of God and by and by <sup>and</sup> when you get to learn more and more becau<sup>se</sup>  
 if you don't learn about God and about Jesus Christ God would like  
 you at all he will hid his face from you for ever wont like  
 you any more well then you should try to learn of God when  
 it is time you should try and <sup>ask</sup> yourselves where shall my soul  
 go to when I die why if good it go up God who give it if bad  
 it will sink down and there God as forsaken you will then  
 you should not say eyes when you are asked a question to you  
 how any of <sup>them</sup> people who were cast into the hell for their bad behavior[sic]<sup>56</sup>

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The  
 Flinders Island ~~Weekly~~ Chronicle  
 11<sup>th</sup> Oct 1837

The natives who are on the Settlement having  
 learning of God why don't you try to learn for  
 God is good who is like unto him – What are  
 the chief truths of the Christian religion One we  
 first to acknowledge the only God What is God +

<sup>55</sup> ML Robinson Papers, ML7074, CY 825, p. 27, (page 26 is blank)

<sup>56</sup> ML Robinson Papers, ML7074, CY 825, p. 29.

what are his perfection – God is a spirit infinite  
 and eternal without beginning + without  
 and creator of all things and in unity of this Godhead  
 have but three persons of one substance pome(?)  
 and authority Father Son + Holy Ghost and now  
 my friends God loves you all white + black of  
 the truth I perceive God is no respecter of  
 persons the Lord is to all attentive and he is  
 present in this house now and are from hover(?)  
 he is Lord of all he judged the quick + the  
 dead you did not know anything of him  
 when you were in your own country in your  
 native woods well then you should try to learn  
 of God when it is done you ask yourselves  
 where shall my soul go when I die why if good  
 it will go to God if bad it will go + <sup>will</sup> live with  
 the Devil for ever + ever and there shall  
 be no end and the Lord said come unto me  
 all you that are heavy laden + will give  
 you rest unto your soul and when you like  
 to do this – perhaps you like your prayers said  
 to you but you never knew about prayer before  
 God is the father of prayer – Now my friends  
 you know that God loves nothing that is bad  
 The Settlement was not like which it now is  
 before the Commandant came down no but it is  
 another one altogether now the Comm<sup>dt</sup> came down  
 see how good he is to you not like a long time  
 ago when there was the other people who are gone  
 away long since you know you had not much  
 to eat when the other Comm<sup>dt</sup> was down before  
 You know that God made the world and stars  
 mountain the seas the small trees the big gum  
 trees the tea trees and the sand which is up on  
 the sea shore because you know you would  
 not do good thing except God be with you For  
 God all powerful he died the just for the  
 unjust that he might bring us home to God +  
 when you go to bed pray that he may  
 bless you in all your ways for God don't love  
 people that are wicked and who are sinful No  
 God does not This things my dear friends wh  
 don't you love the God who cause <sup>your</sup> corn  
 field to ~~grow~~ when it is ripe falleth to the ground  
 and then you are done away with + are gone  
 forever and ever and are done away with for here  
 is your portion There were two people one said some  
 words like this God be merciful unto me a  
 sinner and the other stood + prayed + said  
 God I thank thee I am not as other sin-



-ners are

Walter George Arthur Ab<sup>nl</sup> Youth  
Editor + Writer<sup>57</sup>

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The Flinders Island Weekly Chronicle

The brig Tamar arrived on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October 1837

I can't tell yet what brig it is. It arrived on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October but by and by we shall hear all about what things have occurred in the neighbouring islands and now my dear friends what was that kept you out so long; now you, what good, what was you doing in the bush, such a long time ago in the bush and now you see what good have you got by stopping out so long. If you had come home sooner along with Alexander you would had plum pudding. It was a long time ago since you first left the settlement. Thomas Brune sung out and said hullo, here comes four copper bushmen coming in from the bush. It will be a long time before the commandant will let you go again, I am certain of that, and I went outside of the commandant's office and I looked towards Mount Franklin and I behold the men aploughing in a field that in the direction of Mount Franklin on [eight?] of October 1837.

You did know nothing at all about their ploughing the ground or any thing at all. Now you see there is none of the good people alive. No, they are dead and gone, which I hope is all gone to glory and when any of you are dead perhaps you might see them again which have gone before you. If that when I die I should like to see my brothers and sisters which have gone before us to glory. And now I seen this afternoon some of the copper coloured natives have arrived again to this settlement, and I saw two people agoing shooting; and Thomas Brune has got a way of bringing dogs to the commandant's office and the clerk is always making a noise, and I saw Mr Thomas Brune come this morning to get a wheelbarrow and I asked him where he was agoing to, boy, but he would not take any thing at all, he was sulky. I think he was because Mrs Clark sent him for the wheelbarrow that was on the settlement. And I also seen Neptune scrubbing his bed tick at the lumber yard the other evening, and the people was told to go to the saw pit for to get some boards and met the sawyer on the road. Mr Walter asking him how is it that there is no boards cut. He said they shall if you all come this afternoon you can have them then, and now you heard that you that the [commandant] has being always tell you not to sleep on the ground and not sleeping upon the bed berths and where you have heat all round that's the way to the grave. May people out of the colony subscribe.

Walter George Arthur  
Aboriginal youth  
Editor and writer<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> ML Robinson Papers, A7044 CY548, pp. 118 – 120.

<sup>58</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 1011.

The Flinders Island Weekly Chronicle  
the 24<sup>th</sup> of October 1837

And now my dear friends I want to tell you and I saw some women carrying woods upon Sunday so I want to ask Mr Clark if it right to carry wood upon Sunday. I don't think it is right to carrying wood on Sunday. No, I don't think it is right to carry woods on God's day. No, that I am sure it is not right for any one to do such a thing on his day. You should not play or work on that day. You should not do any thing on God day, you not growl, you should not kill the little robin redbreasts or the swallows or the martins for they are God's favourite birds. And also another thing, you should now throw about the soap; they have too much Mr Clark because when I am about the place I always see plenty of soap laying about. I only want to put it down that you all may know that the soap is fine thing to wash yourselves with and yet they don't care for it, no they would sooner put on that there clayey stuff what they have being always used and they like it better than they would have soap to wash they faces. And now you see all your houses are getting finished now and you will be amusing yourselves every day, and then you will be playing at all sorts of games and then you be amusing yourselves every day, and then you will not have to go for wood no more, and grass too. You will like that, yes you will like that, they will I know that well; and on Sunday last week as I was taking a walk round the field, two of us we stood and two was me and Washington, and Washington said to me, why is it that the wheat rise up itself, it don't up by itself jump up, it no but the Great God that would living you and me to an end of a moment of time.

And I seen the native women and what they was doing I cant tell, and I saw a man carrying a ringtail possum. And I also saw the native men at work in the garden and I think they at gathering the thistles that was growing in the garden. There was about 10 or 11 there was and I also saw some of the women awalking around the stockyard, and I also saw a running race between two boys this morning; I seen them run as fast as they would and their names was Teddy and John Franklin, and Franklin meant Teddy begin to fight; and I also saw Charlie Clark kill a redbreast.

Walter George Arthur  
editor and writer<sup>59</sup>

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The Flinders Island Weekly Chronicle  
28<sup>th</sup> October 1837

On the 25<sup>th</sup> October Commandant was given us a lecture upon Pneumatics. The people were drest up as in the same as we was going to church the white people also they were drest up as well as them and the Officers and the militaries and they were all assemble together in the school houses.

Then the commandant took a shilling and feather was put on a ruler and commandant let them down and one fell down as quick as the other and what caused the feather swim so long in the air because the feather is much lighter than this shilling if there was no air at all we could not live and the feather and a shilling would fall down both in the same time.

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<sup>59</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 1011.

The commandant took a glass in his hand and put water in it then afterwards he put on his hand and turned the glass upon the paper and what caused the paper to keep the water in between the glass and the paper because the pressure of the air was under it and that keeps the water up.

The birds swim in the air just in the same way of the fishes swim in the water. You say the same that bird is go wing. Well, just in the same way of the fishes they got fins the birds make use of their wings and the fishes make use of their fins and their tails.

Some times see then large pelicans flying over the settlement with their wings stretched out and what makes them pelicans fly so easily because the air keeps them up.

What is the cause of the success drawing immense wheat my friends dont you see that success draws immense wheat.

And now my friends you must learn all these things and when these things was told you on the 25<sup>th</sup> October you ought to keep these things in your heads and remember it.

And you knows who made all these things.

Thomas Brune

Aboriginal youth  
editor and writer<sup>60</sup>

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The Flinders Island Weekly Chronicle

9<sup>th</sup> November 1837

The natives is making road in the forest in the rear of the commandant's quarters and women also carrying grass this morning and the native men also they were carrying wood they are working all day. The settlement is a fine situation. I say that the people is very well off on the settlement they get every thing and what more can they want. My good friends you must not take one another's things and you must not steal from one another. You know that the commandant don't like it and when you are agrowling the Devil is there it is the Devil that makes you fight. God does not love people who steal.

I saw the native women going to work at making their gowns. They was getting crawfish yesterday on the pig island.

The people is very good but the people are not good in Jesus Christ. I saw Edward come in the Commandant's office and I give him pen and paper and he began to write on the paper.

And he began to laugh at me. I before give paper to Achilles and he began to laugh and I seen the native men playing spears today. Some of the people love to put on red ochre and grease which is very bad work.

Thomas Brune

Aboriginal youth  
Editor and writer<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 1012.

<sup>61</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 1012.

The Flinders Island Weekly Chronicle  
the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 1837

And now you see that all your houses are getting finished they will be done in a very short time.

And when the houses are all finished I hope you will have prayers always and when you can learn to read books and mind what your teachers say to you and you should try to spell in your lessons and try to ask each other you ask the parson when you see him he always goes down and see how you are all getting on there are but three houses at present and they will be very soon done and now you see how kind the commandant is to you you ought to try to learn much because if you do not learn it will be the worse for you my friends but you cannot learn a bit too much no my friends that you cannot.

And the white men are making a fence to the barley field and 2 of the aborigines native boys are eng[??] and the brig arrived at Green Island on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1837 and the native aboriginal Ajax when to hunt after the rats and mice and would sooner he would go after them things than he would take up a book and began to try to learn and read no but he would sooner rather go and hunt for to fill his belly he think that there is not enough to eat at the settlement to fill his belly but if he was to take that fine books which is Gods book and if Ajax would read he would not be so fond of hunt as he is liking.

Walter George Arthur  
Editor and writer<sup>62</sup>

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Sermon May 1838

My friends I want to tell you there is but God over you and me that God who made the heaven and the earth the seas and all that are in the world and if you pray to him you will have eternal life if you dont pray you will have eternal punishment and when Jesus Christ come again into the world and shall set good on his right hand and the wicked on his left and when the last sentence comes upon you if you are bad then you will be in Hell for ever and ever in pain and torment O my friends pray while it is time draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you.

Now my friends would you like to be good if you would be good pray night and day it will bring you to a place of happiness if you like to pray God will hear you when you offer up your prayers and supplications and to make other people pray too as well as yourself.

There will be a great day of judgment when all the people arise up before the great God who made the heaven and the earth when all the people gives an account of all the things that are done in our bodies whether they be good or bad.

Now my friends let us love the Lord they God with all our hearts with all our souls and with all our strength love thy neighbour our selves if we do not we have eternal punishment and there we will be in torment where the fire is not quenched for ever. Dont you think my friends their a God all yes my friends God is over all blessed be his name this morning Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

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<sup>62</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 1013.

And now my friends swear not at all for God knoweth the hearts of men whether they be good or bad there will a day of judgment when all the people whell before him.

Thomas Brune Editor and writer  
at the Commandants Office<sup>63</sup>

(Plomley's Note: This sermon seems quite unreal, a mere copy of the words of G.A. Robinson or Robert Clark. Other sermons are dated 16 December 1837, 1 January and 6, 20 February 1838, and are signed by either Walter George Arthur or Thomas Bruney).<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Plomley 1987, p. 1014.

<sup>64</sup> Plomley, 1987, p. 1014.