

**ABORIGINAL HISTORY
OF THE PRINCESS ALEXANDRA HOSPITAL SITE**

**by
Dr Ros Kidd**

Preface

The Diamantina Health Care Museum Association Inc, formerly the History and Archives Committee of the Princess Alexandra Hospital was awarded a Brisbane City Council Local History Grant to research and write a report on the Aboriginal History of the hospital site.

The group commissioned Dr Ros Kidd, a respected local historian to undertake the project. In early 2000, Dr Kidd presented this report, which will contribute to the ongoing research, interpretations and displays on the site.

Dr Kidd has prepared the following report after extensive research of available literature and archives.

The report recognizes that the land on which the Princess Alexandra Hospital has evolved is traditional country and acknowledges the importance of this recognition to local Aboriginal people.

The site is an important healing place, with connections to traditional culture as well as connections to contemporary healing practised by today's health care professionals.

As a community we have a responsibility to maintain physical, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, cultural and social health, and healing.

This report is a point of reference for the ongoing work of the Diamantina Health Care Museum Association Inc, the hospital and the community at large. Together we will maintain the power of healing in our community.

Preface compiled by Jan Leo, Museum Committee in consultation with Colleen Wall (Arts Queensland) and Robert Anderson (Indigenous Advisory Committee).

21 July 2000

Introduction

Aboriginal people had been moving around and through the south Brisbane area for thousands of years prior to European arrival. Documentation discussed in this brief study demonstrates that this regular and extensive contact continued late into last century, until prohibited by white expansion. The search for evidence of Aboriginal presence on and near the Princess Alexandra Hospital site took into account the fluidity of occupation. It was therefore decided that the catchment area for this research project would radiate for a distance of approximately five kilometres from the site, a very conservative focus given the expanse of group movement.

Therefore, for the purposes of this brief study I have included references within the wider area to be relevant to developing an understanding of the Aboriginal presence on and around the hospital site. This brings in evidence between Oxley creek in the west and Norman creek in the east, sweeping in an arc from the Brisbane River to include Tarragindi, Holland Park, Camp Hill, Woolloongabba, Kangaroo Point, West End and Coorparoo.

Relevant research was collected from; government reports and inquiries, contemporary and archived newspapers, historical and academic studies, published and unpublished journal articles, personal accounts and private memoirs. The State photo collection, held in John Oxley Library was also consulted, as were photo and cuttings filed at the Queensland Historical Society.

To appreciate Aboriginal presence in the early days of white occupation it is necessary to understand; why Aboriginal people came to be in this area, their estimated numbers, what language and tribal group they belonged to, the scope of their territorial obligations, their way of life and their interaction with the natural attributes of their locality. This background is very briefly sketched in, setting the scene and giving a greater sense of the impact and outcomes of the arrival of Europeans. The following sections look at evidence surviving from the convict days, the first decades of free settlement, and finally the increasing marginalisation of Aboriginal people towards the end of the century.

This is a brief record, gleaned only from recorded evidence of the lives of those Aboriginal families whose country included the site upon which the Princess Alexandra Hospital was subsequently established.

1. Setting the scene

In 1825, the lower reaches of the Brisbane River were described as a 'veritable Garden of Eden'.¹ Dense, vine-clad jungles festooned with blue and purple convolvulus adorned both banks and perfumed salt-water lilies floated on the tidal edges. Around the site of the future Brisbane, primeval forests of gums, bloodwood and ironbark clothed the ridges, and the flats nurtured patches of thick pine and figtree. Fish, reptiles, birdlife and mammals abounded.

The river was born as the sea levels rose around 18,000 years ago flooding what had been a coastal plane linking the mainland with Stradbroke and Moreton islands. Archaeological evidence suggests that coastal southeast Queensland supported a vibrant Aboriginal economy for approximately 14,000 years before this cataclysmic event. The creation of Moreton Bay increased population density and pushed some Aboriginal groups to the west. For the last 2,000 years there have been two distinct economies, the coastal/marine and the terrestrial/riverine. The coastal people fished around the bay shores and specialised in fern root production, and for over 1,000 years there have been separate island groups.² Brisbane is within the territory of the coastal people, the new town situated in a pocket between the major Aboriginal north/south highways which crossed the river at Bulimba/Breakfast Creek and at West End/Toowong.³ These highways were much-frequented neutral territorial paths. Indeed, the first white men to struggle along the south bank of the river found, and stole, canoes left on the banks at both these crossing points (see page 5 below).

The Brisbane River and its creeks and tributaries provided a bountiful and beautiful environment. Archibald Meston, an expert in Aboriginal matters, who arrived as a youth in Brisbane in 1870, later depicted this sylvan, pre-European life. The city site was covered by thick scrub, and the botanic gardens area was filled with tulip trees or *Maginnchin*. South Brisbane was clothed in dense bush fed by several small creeks flowing from nearby swamps. Men crossed the river, fishing from bark canoes made from broad sheets of stringy bark or casting their heart-shaped towrow nets to encircle shoals of mullet. Others used vines to climb the trees for possum and koala, which were despatched with stone tomahawks. Women and children dived in lagoons for lily roots, dug yams and collected the edible fern roots. Some sat on the banks weaving their baskets and bags from the pink and green swamp grasses while youngsters frolicked in the shallows.

The primeval forests on both banks of the rivers nurtured staghorns, elkhorns and fragrant orchids while bush turkeys foraged in the shadowed scrub. Flocks of parrots raided the blossoms while pelicans fished the sandbanks. Ducks and swans in their hundreds trawled the waterways.⁴ Kangaroos abounded on the southern bank later named after them.⁵

There is some discussion regarding tribal and language boundaries in the Moreton Bay region. Tom Petrie, who arrived in Moreton Bay as a child in 1937 and lived his life among Aborigines in the area, said the country as far north as North Pine, south to the Logan, and inland to Moggill Creek was owned by the Turrbal or Brisbane tribe. This large language group was divided into different sub-tribes in defined areas with identifiable dialects.⁶ According to J G Steele approximately ten tribes and sub-tribes lived along the Brisbane River from the source to the mouth, the area etched with walking tracks and punctuated by common crossings.⁷

Acclaimed anthropologist Norman Tindale stated that the area south of the Brisbane River was occupied by the Jagara people, whose territory of about 3,400 square kilometres extended south to the Cleveland district, inland to the Dividing Range at Gatton and north to Esk.⁸ In common with the Undambie people north of the river, the Jagara spoke the Turubul language.⁹ Meston named first Southern Protector of Aborigines in 1897 because of his expertise among Aboriginal people, provided a further differentiation. He referred to the south bank people as the Coorpooroo-jaggin speaking a dialect called Yuggara.¹⁰ Steele suggests that since jaggin meant ground it is superfluous as a nomenclature; he also suggests that Coorpooroo was probably a variant of Kulpurum, the Aboriginal name for Norman Creek.¹¹ His map shows the Coorpooroo homelands extending along the south bank between Oxley and Bulimba creeks and south to Mt Gravatt.

For the purposes of this study, therefore, it will be assumed that the people who ranged over what later became the site of the Princess Alexandra Hospital were the Coorpooroo group, with territorial links extending south to the Logan, and with linguistic links as far north as the Pine River. These links were vitalised and confirmed through regular ceremonies, which brought hundreds of Aboriginal people into and through the south Brisbane area for many decades after European occupation, and will be discussed below.

Archibald Meston identified seven separate dialects around Moreton Bay, all differing widely, some with more extensive vocabularies. These were frequently changing, characterised by amazing flexibility and astonishing modification of verbs by suffixes and affixes. The average person, he said, could speak but a fraction of his own language, and a little of the two adjoining dialects. A wife from a separate area learned and spoke the language of her husband, and children were frequently bi-lingual. He described Aboriginal languages as soft and euphonious, and English as discordant by comparison.¹²

According to early white resident Mr B. Mathieson, the river itself was known as Meeangin or Maginchin, an old Aboriginal name for the area along the north bank between the botanic gardens and St Lucia. Coorparoo was an Aboriginal word for ground dove and the Bulimba region was called Tugulawa. West End was Kureelipa, later spelt Kurilpa, meaning place of [water] rats (although William Clark, who lived in south Brisbane from 1849 said Kureelipa was the name for field mouse, which lived there in their thousands¹³). In and around Brisbane a dozen dialects were spoken and he thought northern groups could not understand those south of the river.¹⁴ Petrie stated that the Meeannjin area encompassed the gardens back to Creek Street. And while it was certainly the local name for what became the town of Brisbane it was not the name of the river, which was called Waar-rar. Every reach and bend, he declared, was separately identified in local dialects. Whites Hill, east of Coorparoo, was known to Aborigines as Boolimbah.¹⁵ Rev J D Lang, following a visit to Brisbane in 1845, confirmed the extensive territorial associations. Every rock, river, creek, mountain, hill, or plain has its native name.¹⁶

The first white men to infiltrate the Brisbane area were Thomas Pamphlett, John Finnegan and Richard Parsons who struggled by foot along the south bank of the river from the mouth to Oxley Creek in June 1823. They found the north bank impenetrable, and with Pamphlett in a canoe taken from Oxley creek, they retraced their steps. They were in the Kangaroo Point/Bulimba area, most likely near the Bulimba/Breakfast Creek crossing, when they found a second canoe, and spent a few days resting and gathering fern-roots. It was here that they were confronted by the local people who were generous with their hospitality but adamant that the whites should return the stolen canoes and move on. As Pamphlett tells it:

... we fell in with a party of blacks, who were going to fish with their nets, and on our asking them, they gave us a good meal of fish; but the next day they seemed anxious that we should leave them; and upon our not doing so, as readily as they wished, they made an attempt to seize our canoes.¹⁷

Keeping the canoes out of their (the Aborigines) reach, the whites made their way to the river mouth.

With Finnegan as a guide, Surveyor-general, John Oxley, entered the Brisbane River a few months later seeking an appropriate site for a new convict settlement. His party saw an Aboriginal group on the north bank of the West End/Toowong crossing. In his official report endorsing the Brisbane site, Oxley spoke of the friendliness of the very numerous natives whom he described as superior in their domestic habits to those in southern coastal areas.¹⁸

The following year Oxley was again in the area of the West End/Toowong crossing and saw a very large assemblage of natives on the north bank:

It was evidently a favourite place with them, most probably on account of water being convenient, as among the company was a full proportion of women and children.

Oxley described the men as fine and athletic - some of the strongest and best-made muscular men I have seen in any country.¹⁹ This impression was endorsed by Edmund Lockyer in 1825 - a fine people, stout, clean-skinned and well-made, and by Rev John Dunmore Lang in 1846 - they are tall, strong, athletic, able-bodied men ... far more of them are over 5'8" [173cm] than under. They were, said Oxley, superior physically to any race of civilised white men living at the present time ... We simply conquered them with gunpowder.²⁰

Artefacts attest to Aboriginal presence in the south Brisbane area. Axeheads and stone tools have been located near the Grey/Peel Streets intersection and also in the area near the Captain Cook Bridge.²¹ More axeheads, along with stone scrapers for sharpening spears, cutting hair or skinning game were found in vicinity of Musgrave Park. Scarred trees and human skulls in the same area add other dimensions to territorial occupation. An early resident recounted finding a skull in the Kangaroo Point scrub in 1856 and said others were collected around River Terrace.²² William Clark, who lived in south Brisbane from 1849, wrote that it was a common entertainment in the 1850s for the cabbage tree hatters to form themselves into secret commandos and use long sticks to dislodge burial remains from the tree forks in the south Brisbane/West End area.²³

In general, tribal groups of between 50 and 60 moved often, setting up new camps easily. Each family erected a hut of a little over a metre wide and almost two metres in diameter, enclosing a triangle of three sticks with a covering of tea tree bark, the latter always carried by the women in case none was available. Bark flooring protected sleeping bodies from any dampness. Skins provided warmth or, failing possession of those, families snuggled closely together. Fires burned continuously at the openings for warmth, light and cooking.²⁴

The huts faced westward and pre-set fires in nearby hollow logs were lit at sunset, enveloping families in a cocoon of warm smoke. William Clark recalled the scene:

Lying wrapped in possum skin rugs, with their bingies (stomachs) exposed to the westerly draught driving the heat of the fires over them, they slept like the proverbial top. We old boys of the period still envy them as we bask in the scant comfort of modern registered grates.²⁵

Spears, shields, waddies, nets, dilly bags and water coolamons were placed or hung from surrounding trees and bushes. Only the stone knives were kept on the person, carried in a twine belt or in a small dilly under the arm. Although irregularly scattered, the disparate grouping of huts denoted the variety of tribes.²⁶

Until the fateful incursion of Europeans Aborigines were characterised as a free, healthy and happy race. Swamps, creeks and lagoons were covered with wild fowl and swarming with fish and eels. Food was killed purely to satisfy appetite; the white mans sport of arbitrary slaughter was unknown. The main weapons were the long spears of brigalow (Boonooro) and ironbark (Tanderoo), traded from the tribe in the Rosewood scrub through an exchange of shell ornaments and reed necklaces known as Calgirripin. Archibald Meston was adamant that the vitality of pre-contact Aborigines exceeded that of civilised people and their senses of hearing and seeing were infinitely keener. Riddles and games were popular. Except on special occasions of ceremonies and dances everyone retired to sleep soon after sunset; ill treatment of children was rare.²⁷

Clark agreed with Mestons appraisal, describing Aborigines of the early days as a healthy, virile race where endemic diseases were unknown. Sickness was treated by either heating or cooling; never in seventy years experience had he seen use of any native herb or plant for medicinal purposes. Wounds were packed with moist clay, pains were treated with warmed stones. Measles were cured by continuous bathing in waterholes, quite the opposite to contemporary treatments for white victims, (although an effective regimen to reduce high temperatures.)

Clark described Aboriginal culture as remarkable for its well-ordered and wise communal laws and inviolate tribal customs. They were very agile, being expert swimmers and skilled tree-climbers, scaling nearly perpendicular trunks with the aid of scrub vines. Their tracking skills were legendary. Leadership was not hereditary but based on superior skills in hunting or fighting. A successful hunter shared his food with those who returned empty-handed and left their evening fires unlit as evidence of their failure. After the food was cooked, the unlucky would be given some of the kill.²⁸ Lamenting the lack of enthusiasm for the scant rewards of daily drudgery, land commissioner Stephen Simpson acknowledged in 1844 that the local people prefer the joyous life of the bush,²⁹ whose abundance provided a days food in only two hours labour.³⁰

2. A violent intrusion

In November 1824 the penal colony of Moreton Bay was founded among an estimated population of 5000 Aboriginal people occupying the arc formed by the Pine River, the dividing range and the Logan River.³¹ The various groups were interlinked through marriages, trading and ceremonies, with the region supporting more than 120 bora grounds used for important rituals, especially male initiation.³² Regular gatherings of many hundred families for ceremonies, contests and at the triennial bunya feasts brought southern groups through south Brisbane well after white occupation (see page 18 below).

Although early commandants insisted it was hopeless to attempt escape because of the ferocious surrounding tribes,³³ convicts absconded into the southern bush so frequently that local men were recruited to apprehend and return runaways. In 1826 the commandant reported being on good terms with surrounding Aborigines, whose confidence was encouraged through a daily distribution of sugar and water, which they called, bull. He had rewarded the return of two escaped bushrangers with tomahawks and blankets.³⁴ No Aboriginal women were allowed near the outpost during convict times,³⁵ a major factor, according to Meston, in maintaining harmonious relations.³⁶

Late in 1825 surveyor Edmund Lockyer noted a large group of Aborigines on the south bank opposite the settlement (ie at the Cultural Centre). Until then these locals had only shown themselves in twos and threes, but here was a group of about thirty men, women and children who seemed about to swim across the river. This they eventually did at a point slightly higher up which almost certainly would be the West End/Toowong crossing. Although the whites tried to entice them into the settlement they preferred to view the buildings and the cattle from a distance of around 250 metres. After about an hour they returned to the bush and were not seen again.³⁷

Lockyer's map of 1825 had identified the farming potential of the south bank. In the Yeronga/Fairfield area he noted pretty spot, land good, spring water in a rock, and at West End he wrote good land.³⁸ This fertile area was known to the Coorpooroo people as Kurilpa and was the prime hunting area for the southern tribes for thousands of years, its swamps the domain of thousands of water rats which were caught in nets and roasted.³⁹ From a swamp in the low pocket of the Brisbane State High School site ran a creek, which meandered along and across Dornoch Terrace. Another creek threaded between Glenelg and Ernest streets to empty into the river where the present South Bank development is located. Another creek ran the length of Montague road, emptying both at Jane Street and near the William Jolly Bridge. At this point was a much-frequented sandy beach, a haven for pelicans. Physically bounded on three sides by the river, this fertile wedge was a natural trap into which local tribes regularly ran game as late as the 1850s.⁴⁰

This natural fertility was exploited by the new arrivals. South Brisbane became the colony's market garden and by April 1826 over 34 hectares of land in the Merivale/Peel/Glenelg Streets area was under cultivation. Maize was the main crop, worked by 80 prisoners in leg irons; sugar cane was also trialed. Within a year the farm area had doubled, yielding 12 months supply.⁴¹

In their regular usage of the Kurilpa swamps, Aboriginal people made no differentiation between cultivated crops and nature bounty. Raids on the ripening maize by large parties of men became common, prompting the stationing of a permanent armed guard, the threat of the musket deemed sufficient to disperse the locals. But in May 1827 the ruse failed to work and the guard was speared through the hand. It soon transpired that this more persistent attack was abetted by two escapees who no doubt assured Aborigines that a single musket would not repel a large group with spears. By evening Aborigines were massing on the south bank to such an alarming degree that two constables and three extra soldiers were sent to support three placed after the first attack. Several soldiers tracked the escaped convicts to an Aboriginal camp, sitting near a small fire apart from the main Aboriginal group. Betrayed by barking dogs the soldiers fired and in the mêlée one Aboriginal was shot. His body was located in the bush the next morning, but had already been removed when authorities returned to retrieve it.⁴²

In January 1828 an overseer and a convict detailed to guard the crop wandered away. Their fate was reported ten days later by an absconder who returned with the news that the men had been speared some distance south of the river and he himself had been wounded in the shoulder. An Aboriginal man identified as the murderer was later seen in the town and chained in custody. Within weeks commandant Logan reported the blacks have become exceedingly troublesome raiding the crops, and a guard was again positioned on the field. Forced to defend himself against a group of 50 spear-throwing men he fired a shot, wounding one man. For a week there were no further raids.⁴³

Anxious to minimise the costs of open aggression, crop cultivation at south Brisbane was halted for several months in 1828 on orders from Sydney.⁴⁴ However records for June show clearing for cultivation and burning off proceeding apace on both banks with 200 hectares completed, including a second farm at Kangaroo Point. Convicts continued to abscond, making their way southwards to Port Macquarie, the favoured destination. Many were successful due to the friendly disposition of most of the natives with whom they lived for many weeks, primarily on a diet of stale fish.⁴⁵

Notwithstanding farm clearing along the river, the south bank still mainly comprised the dense primeval forests. However several new tracks now breached the area, one along the bank for timber-felling at Oxley Creek and an eight kilometre track directly south, through what is now Coorparoo and Stones Corner,⁴⁶ to the fresh water holes on the creek at Rocklea. This track also gave access to Cowpers Plains, a thinly wooded area of several thousand hectares proposed for agricultural exploitation.⁴⁷ A tenuous link also extended to Emu Point (Cleveland) to access the quarantine station at Dunwich, frequently used for unloading heavier vessels which would not risk the Brisbane bar. By the early 1830s the white population broached 1100 individuals, most of them convicts.

Of the four tribes near Brisbane, Quaker missionary James Backhouse described the south Brisbane tribe in the mid-1830s as less familiar with the White people, although just as prone to picking the ripening maize. A guardhouse had to be built on the Kangaroo Point farm to safeguard the corn and maize crops from local Aborigines. Watchmen were ordered to fire at them if they are detected stealing, but if possible, not so as to materially hurt them.⁴⁸

By 1837 many of the hard-core prisoners had been shipped to Norfolk Island, leaving only 300 offenders. Land escapes to the south had all but ceased, partly because the remaining short-term prisoners were less desperate and partly due to the great spirit and cleverness exhibited by local men in finding and returning absconders.⁴⁹ It was now said that a good understanding had been reached with local Aborigines. They come amongst us with confidence, Commandant Cotton reported, even the tribes on the banks of the river beyond the settlement, which had formerly been extremely hostile.

At this time, apart from the farms at Kangaroo Point and south Brisbane, the only permanent structure south of the river was the ferryman's hut, built near a (white) camping ground where the ferry crossed (now Victoria bridge),⁵⁰ and there was a boiling down works at Kangaroo Point. The killing and punishment of Aborigines by armed troops following attacks on whites had dampened open aggression. Squatters and labourers were now moving safely to the two sheep stations at Limestone (Ipswich) and Eight Mile Plains, to the cattle property at Cowper's Plains and the saw-pits on Canoe (Oxley) creek,⁵¹ all of which took travellers through south Brisbane. The Cowper's Plains road intersected the squatters' highway which ran from the newly opened Darling Downs to the port at Cleveland.

Even so, the white toehold remained tenuous. It was said that the dense surrounding bush still swarmed with Aborigines,⁵² calculated to number 1500 within a fifty-mile (eighty-kilometre) radius of the town.⁵³ While commandant Gorman reported in 1840 that excellent relations existed with Aborigines for forty miles around,⁵⁴ it was common knowledge that the blacks were still dangerous beyond this enclave.⁵⁵ Charles Melton, who lived in Brisbane since the 1850s, was not alone in his conviction that many of the crimes

committed by Aborigines in the early days were acts of retribution for outrages previously perpetrated by white men, particularly the abuse of Aboriginal women.⁵⁶

From the earliest days whites acknowledged Aboriginal occupation by recording names and meanings and often adopting local names for aspects and localities. Steele gives the following in the near south:⁵⁷ Woolloongabba, actually Woolloon-capemm (whirling water) (although see page 14 for a different interpretation), Highgate Hill was Beenung-urrung (frilled lizard), Whites Hill was Bulimba (peewee), Mount Gravatt was Kaggar-mabul or Caggara-mahbill (echidna resort), Hemmant was Kuwirmandadu (place of curlews), and Yeronga (sandy). Somerville House was originally named Cumbookieqa meaning crayfish there and Yeerongpilly meant rain coming.⁵⁸

Annie Mackenzie, whose early days were spent in south Brisbane early this century, wrote that Moolabin creek, which fed into the water holes at Rocklea, was named after the plenty fish which thrived there, and Bloggo, which later became Boggo, meant two leaning trees.⁵⁹ Maida Simmons, whose grandmother lived at Fairfield at the turn of the century, says the two trees stood at the corner of Wilkins Street and the Bloggo area covered Fairfield, Yeronga, Yeerongpilly and Moorooka from Clarence corner. The name was changed to Boggo because of the boggy terrain along the track, renamed Annerley Road in 1905.⁶⁰

3. A free town

When Moreton Bay was declared a free settlement in March 1842 Dr Stephen Simpson was appointed commissioner of Crown Lands, a position which included the protectorship of Aborigines.⁶¹ Captain John Coley arrived later that same year, and in evidence to the 1861 Native Police Inquiry stated that Aborigines from several nearby tribes frequented the town in the early days. They were especially attracted to his house, the first private dwelling in Brisbane, and many spoke quite good English.⁶² Several worked as menials and domestics but, as Simpson reported, with little advantage to their moral condition. He said they were good humoured, intelligent and with few wants; the labour needed to access the attractions of the white lifestyle dearly purchased at the expense of that merry, jovial life they lead in the Wilds.⁶³

Raids continued on the readily available produce of local farms and gardens. Tom Petrie spoke of a short-term prisoner whose job it was to guard his father's garden across the river from Kangaroo Point. From a small hut in a tree he could make sure no one swam across or came by canoe to steal corn or sweet potatoes. The Aborigines, Petrie said, were very daring in those days, and were only deterred by the noise of the flint pistol which was fired whenever they appeared on the opposite bank.⁶⁴ William Clark remembered parties of Aborigines swimming across from Kangaroo Point, twenty or thirty at a time to avoid sharks: Entering the water, they began to tread it with their feet; each swimmer placed a spear between his legs, holding it with both hands above his head, and leaning forward on the spear, rotating it in the way a man would scull a boat. They crossed rapidly, in an almost upright position. They could remain for a long time under water, and swim for long distances.⁶⁵

Another method was to use a small log as a float and carry their dillys on their heads.⁶⁶ On one occasion an Aboriginal was fatally shot while stealing corn on a Breakfast Creek farm. Relatives took the body across the river to the southern bush where complex ceremonies were performed and the bones ultimately returned to his country on the Logan River.⁶⁷

By the mid -1840s, the new settlement comprised three insignificant and rival towns beside the river - Brisbane, South Brisbane and the rival enclave of Kangaroo Point. A second ferry serviced Kangaroo Point and a municipal plan at that time shows the two pockets of real estate with larger blocks surveyed around the river at West End. A different map shows the official town limits south of the river demarcated along Boundary and Vulture streets, Wellington road and the river.⁶⁸

Even so, the Aboriginal presence remained prominent. The Coorpooroo tribe still occupied the watercourse campsites, and large numbers of people from Ipswich and the Moreton Bay coast moved periodically into south Brisbane. Here they occupied longstanding camping areas, which were well known to elderly white residents who spoke of people frequenting Toohey Mountain, Tennyson and the riverbank at Yeronga.⁶⁹

The main camping area was around Woolloongabba which, on special occasions, held up to 500 people, ranged along the ridges at Vulture Street (east of Stanley Street) and along the high ground of Hawthorne street/Mater Hospital. Woolloongabba was the favourite fighting ground for southern tribes and from this its name derived, according to William Clark, Woola meaning talk, Woolloon meaning fighting talk, and gabba meaning place, therefore, a place of fight talk. The low narrow flat between the ridges was neutral territory, reserved for the organised fights themselves.⁷⁰ In the late 1850s people regularly swam over from Milton and St Lucia to join in corroborees.⁷¹ Another regular camping area, near Shafston at Kangaroo Point, had its fighting ground under the Story Bridge. Ray Kerkhove also mentions villages at Stones Corner, Greenslopes, and Dutton Park. Apart from Kurilpa, favoured hunting-gathering grounds were at Norman creek north of Stanley Street, Woolloongabba south of Hawthorne street, Moolabin creek Rocklea, Yeerongpilly, Sinclair Hill, East Brisbane and Stone's Corner.⁷²

A network of pathways linked the various sites. Clearly defined, they were about a metre wide and kept well cleared with intruding branches bent back into the foliage. Near regular camping grounds they widened considerably. According to William Clark the Brisbane tribes used to make a system of tomahawk notches

on the trees when they moved camp as a sign to stragglers and others of the direction they were travelling.⁷³ One well-used pathway from the sandy beach (end of Montague Road) ran parallel to Grey and Stanley streets back to Woolloongabba; another from the same beach led back into the Kurilpa jungle. New corroborees were shared with other tribes and messengers, wearing a white cockatoo feather on both sides of their heads to denote their status, could safely move along paths into hostile areas to pass on this, or other, information.⁷⁴

Bora rings were maintained at Tarragindi, Hamlet Street Annerley and at Moorooka, where there was also a corroboree ring at the end of Newman road.⁷⁵ Another favoured south Brisbane corroboree ground was located at the pineapple paddock in Baynes Street (Highgate Hill).⁷⁶ Aboriginal elder William MacKenzie remembered a bora ground at Musgrave Park near the corner of Russell and Cordelia Streets which was still used in the 1870s for ceremonial and initiation purposes. Its Sacred Path looped along Cordelia Street and its Sacred (smaller) ring was near St Andrews Anglican Church. Paddy Jerome, another Brisbane elder, said that as white expansion progressed Musgrave Park survived as the last special gathering area for all the neighbouring tribes.⁷⁷

Maida Simmons recorded that a bora ring was known to have existed on the site of the Railway Hotel at Woolloongabba, and Ray Kerkhove gives the location of the larger ring as between Reid and Hubert streets and the smaller ring on the hill near the Anglican Church in Hawthorne Street.⁷⁸ This would probably be the same bora ring described by William Clark, although he positioned the primary ring on the hill at Merton road. According to Clark this was the largest and most frequented local bora ground. Here, in a circular scoop-out on the hilltop, Aboriginal youths or kippers were inducted into manhood. Clark and his mates tried to watch one of these ceremonies but elders stood guard around the base of the hill, and, although they knew Clark and his friends, they whirled bull roars to warn off the uninitiated. These bulls were made of hard dry kangaroo skin tied to bugaroo or native string, making a deafening roar when whirled round and round.

The sacred rings were a short distance from each other, connected by a passageway: on this passageway were placed, one on each side, two uprooted wattle trees, the stems left being about seven or eight feet long. The taproot was removed, and the radial roots cut to an equal length, and bound round with the red inner bark of the ironbark tree. These roots, when brought together, formed a crude circular basket. The kippar, passing along the passageway, was expected to leap from the ground in a ball-like shape, while blacks holding the shafts clashed the roots together. It was a feat of agility.

The young initiates were specially dressed and painted, and wore beads and amulets. At a separate camp near the rings they would sit in a circle while the turwans or elders stood behind them, instructed them quietly in tribal and hunting secrets. As young men many foods were now denied them including new honey and fish roes. On occasion the boys would be sent into the swamps to catch frogs to eat; they were also allowed to feed on the geebung, a native fruit with a delicious soft yellow pulp.⁷⁹

Corroborees were also a major occasion for inter-tribal gatherings and Clark said it was common for between two and three hundred performers to take part in these dramatisations of key incidents. Days were spent gathering pigments, including pipe clay and the soft red rock which was ground and mixed with the coochie or fat from possums and porcupines and the wax of the cubba or new honey. The effect was sensational:

The black when fully adorned was so strangely metamorphosed that his friends did not know him. He had white stripes down the legs, and the body was fantastically marked with red, the toning of the red round his eyes with the dark grounding of his skin gave him a weird appearance.

After many days of rehearsals, large fires were lit on the designated evening, lighting up the bush for a considerable distance around. Rhythmic chanting was accompanied by the women seated in the rear beating sticks upon a drum of tightly folded skins placed on their knees or slapping their thighs. Men danced in the

firelit arena and as the chanting increased in tempo and volume, white spectators were impressed with a feeling of awe, and they began to gain an idea it was the recounting of some real adventure of native life.⁸⁰

But many whites did not share Clark's appreciation of the richness of the Aboriginal culture, and were increasingly uneasy with what they saw as improper behaviour. Newspapers carried indignant complaints from Kangaroo Point residents stating their women were affronted by Aboriginal nudity in the streets, and a stick throwing contest, also at Kangaroo Point, was said to inhibit the movements of Sunday pedestrians. Anger was expressed on one occasion through rifle shots.⁸¹

The *Moreton Bay Courier* of 1846 described an all-in brawl among a large group of Aboriginal men and women at Kangaroo Point, sparked by an assault on one of the women. Two men were badly injured and were carried away by the women. Usually, the writer lamented, fights between tribes were carefully orchestrated and executed with much caution.⁸² Charles Melton, writing under the pseudonym Nut Quad, recalled seeing a similar knife fight near Shafston Avenue when he was eleven. The two men involved were about 25 years old and fine, stalwart men, each holding a sharpened shear blade with which, initially, they pin-pricked each other, but soon inflicted long cuts from shoulder blade to hip bone. During 15 minutes of deadly struggle the men became covered in blood. The fight ceased when one man fell to the ground. The other limped off to Barkers Pocket on Norman creek (across from Coorparoo Secondary College) where about 150 others were camped. The young Melton helped the defeated man to his feet and he hobbled off in the same direction. He later heard that the wounds had been dressed with goanna oil overlaid with clean white ashes of the swamp oak and powdered baked earth from the camp fire. A few months later, when the camp had moved to Woolloongabba, he again saw the men, apparently completely recovered from their terrible injuries.⁸³

Clark described these deadly contests as duellos. They were a common method of settling personal grievances and caused the most excitement in the camps. As with all encounters, there were set procedures. The knives were inspected to ensure only the regulation length of about 2.5 centimetres was exposed, the remainder tightly bound with bugaroo, a native cord made of soft tree bark compacted with a plaster of tree gum. In the old days sharpened shells were used, but by the 1850s sheath knives or broken shear blades were preferred. Cuts had to be along the flesh only, avoiding vital parts. Frequent spitting and cursing was allowed, the latter invariably aimed at invoking some personal defect of the opponent. The fight ceased when the first man fell, weakened through loss of blood; however the wounds quickly healed under the influence of impacted wet clay. As a boy, Clark witnessed several of these Aboriginal duellos at the old One-Mile Swamp (Woolloongabba) at south Brisbane.⁸⁴

In contrast, formal contests were more like tournaments and resulting in few injuries, according to Simpson.⁸⁵ Known as pullen-pullens, they were held regularly. These were times for contests of skilful highly ritualised fighting. At the Woolloongabba site opposing sides would range themselves along the ridges, armed with spears, while the turwans or head men stood in front to harangue each other and those behind shouted and stamped their feet. In their hundreds, this would create a very impressive noise. At the height of the excitement the elders would fall to the rear and the lines of fighters would move to the base of the ridges:

Soon hundreds of hurtling spears were crossing and recrossing each other in the air. They were very expert in warding off spears. I have seen a native catch several spears on his countan or shield, while leaping up from the ground to let others pass under his feet.

The countans were made of softwood from the mountain scrubs. It dried as light as cork but was so tough spears seldom split it. These fights ended when someone fell wounded, his side retreating to the camp with the dogs bringing up the rear, and the victors making a theatrical pretense of pursuit.⁸⁶

By far the most important and largest gathering was for the triennial bunya festival, when the ripening nuts in the Blackall Range brought thousands of people from miles around. Brisbane elder Paddy Jerome said

southern tribes used to meet at Musgrave Park to delegate to selected individuals the right to gather nuts for their tribe.⁸⁷

Tribes around Brisbane would have attended the grand coroboree at the Logan River late in 1844, said to have attracted people for more than 160 kilometres around, which culminated in a meeting or council to plan resistance strategies, according to the correspondent to *The Sydney Morning Herald*. A few months later he wrote of another huge gathering, near Brisbane, which tribes from Wide Bay and the coastal islands also attended. Over 200 men contested with spears and boomerangs over several days. Late in 1846 he reported that large numbers of Aborigines from all areas were gathering near Brisbane for another pullen-pullen.⁸⁸

Early in 1850 a big pullen-pullen was held at Yorkes Hollow (Exhibition Grounds) and was attended by hundreds of people from miles around.⁸⁹ This is probably the occasion which Petrie described involving 700 Aborigines which entailed a major kippa-making ceremony, corroboree, and a staged fight which ranged on and off for several days. Of relevance here are the frequent breaks for hunting and food gathering, during which the Logan, Stradbroke and Moreton Island people went to the big scrub at West End, crossing in canoes or simply swimming.⁹⁰

Residents recalled that the south Brisbane area in those days was still served by abundant waterholes, swamps and creeks, providing ample food in lily roots, fish, crustaceans, turtles, water fowl, possums and birds. The Dutton Park area was thickly timbered with steep gullies and Stanley Street was then a track cut by a two-metre deep creek which serviced a chain of eight waterholes.⁹¹ Clarence Corner (the Mater Hospital corner) was known as the One Mile Waterhole, Woolloongabba was the One Mile Swamp, Yeerongpilly the Four Mile Swamp, and the Ekibin/Tarragindi area was known as Sandy Creek. Coorparoo (the place of the mosquito) was fed by salt-marsh swamps and creeks. It was said that according to Aboriginal legend a red dragon lived on Mount Gravatt; when the Coorparoo School was opened in 1875 this became its emblem.⁹²

In William Clark's youth Aborigines often camped around the ridges around One Mile Swamp. He said in the early morning it was not unusual for 400 to 500 men, women and children to travel through south Brisbane on their way to town. Another early resident also recalled Aborigines travelling through the bush in their hundreds at night. Using lighted fire-sticks to guide them, they made their way along the pathway, which later became Ipswich road travelling towards Annerley.⁹³

Young Clark and his friends shared their childhood with the Aboriginal youngsters, we were splendid chums, he remembered. Often the young kippas would challenge the white boys to box, pulling out, as was the custom, when blood flowed. At other times they would maroochy or swim in the waterholes. A most popular corella or large long waterhole near the (Gabba) cricket ground was a favourite with both black and white; another favoured spot was the sandy beach at Kangaroo Point.⁹⁴ Contests with reed spears were also popular, their flattened points doing little harm. Diving competitions to see who could stay longest underwater were invariably won by the Aboriginal lads. Maroochyding, or imitating the black swan, was another favourite game.⁹⁵

Tom Petrie's father often used to swim across to Kangaroo Point, invariably joined by Aboriginal friends. They would fish together for bream and flathead, or just laze in the sun on the sandy beach. Tom swam frequently himself, and as a boy was rescued by Aboriginal men after he was attacked by jelly fish and in danger of drowning.⁹⁶ He also mentioned two white men gathering wood round the mouth of Norman creek who were surprised by a group of Aborigines and ran off in fright,⁹⁷ an incident described elsewhere in much more disturbing detail. Apparently in their panic one man shot the other while they were clambering into their boat. To mask his guilt he claimed the death was the ultimate outcome of threatening actions by Milbong Jemmy, (the Aboriginal rendering Yilbung meaning one eye). A reward of £10 (around \$800 today) was posted for the arrest of any member of Yilbung's tribe, who owned the Bulimba area. Tricked by

sawyers who offered him food, the unsuspecting Yilbung was attacked and shot through the head as he struggled.⁹⁸

According to one old-timer, the 1850s and 1860s were often referred to as the black and white days.⁹⁹ Aborigines were regular visitors to many white homes and businesses. According to Clark they carted water from the reedy swamps to the white houses, taking it in buckets balanced on their heads.¹⁰⁰ From the same swamps they collected the reeds used for housing thatch which they bartered for food, clothing and other goods.¹⁰¹ Fish and game and wild honey gathered from the eucalyptus trees at Sinclair Street Woolloongabba were also traded,¹⁰² as were ornamental ferns and animal pelts. The proceeds could then be used to provide for family or to fulfil tribal obligations.

In the late 1850s Aborigines continued to use their camps at the One-Mile Swamp, Norman creek, or on the site of the present Fairfield railway station, which was then on the edge of the dense jungle scrubs around the river at Hill End. There was another camp at the foot of Highgate Hill, and here Charles Melton wrote of seeing people wearing clothing which was distributed annually with blankets from Gaol Hill (now Brisbane Post Office).¹⁰³

Residents of those days recalled Aborigines wandered in friendly groups to the south Brisbane settlement.¹⁰⁴ Charles Melton remembered an Aboriginal named Nelson who bought goods from the store near the Russell street ferry, returning with tobacco, cigars, bread, boots, whips, rum etc to share with the south Brisbane blacks. Although the spree was apparently financed by silver stolen from a man at Moggill creek, it can be assumed it was common for local Aborigines to frequent the stores. Described as a rather good looking young man who spoke English well, Nelson had been driving bullocks for a station owner outside Jimboomba and it was here that he was finally apprehended, only to escape in the Boggo scrub (now Fairfield), never to be recaptured.¹⁰⁵

The south Brisbane tribe in those days numbered around 400, and their head man was Molrubin, whose wife was Gulpin; Molrubin was later killed in a family feud. Molrubin had been one of Clark's blackboy chums in his idyllic youth; others recalled in 1909 were Munipi, Mulkcrum, Menemene, Dulipi, Crippy and Wooran (the left-handed one).¹⁰⁶ As adults, many were frequent patrons of local hotels. Clark listed Crippy and Dulipi among the many quaint personalities, along with Muropi, Hopping Tommie, Mr All round-my-hat, the Duke of York and Old Glory, the latter a well-loved legend who had led the rescue when the Sovereign foundered in the south passage off Stradbroke Island in 1847.¹⁰⁷ Petrie also mentioned Billy Bing, whose sense of comic timing regularly reduced local squatters to gleeful tears.¹⁰⁸

During the late 1840s regular rowing contests were held between the south Brisbane and north Brisbane Aborigines and also between blacks and whites. These were run from the sandy beach (end of Montague road) to what is now Gardens Point and were written up in great detail in the sports pages. The *Moreton Bay Courier* of 29 January 1848 mentioned Gulpin and Wallaby Joe beating Jack and Moonbeam in the 7th race. The next race, between Aboriginal-manned four-oared canoes, was judged the race of the day. Amid much cheering from the crowd, the Amity Point team won the prize of two pounds ten shillings (about \$200 today)¹⁰⁹. The 1860 regatta celebrating the first anniversary of separation as a colony included another all-Aboriginal contest, this time between six-oared craft. However, in a revealing indication of attitudinal change, the prizes were flour and tobacco for first, sugar for second and tobacco for third.¹¹⁰ Rowing had become the chief inter-racial sport, with Aboriginal teams the overwhelming winners. Eventually they were barred, on the grounds that as employees of the Customs department, the crewmen were professionals and therefore disqualified from competition.¹¹¹

Many whites did not share their pastimes so generously with the local Aborigines. Mrs McConnel, another south Brisbane resident who arrived in 1849, spoke of the building of the first southside Presbyterian Church (in Grey Street¹¹²):

Before it was enclosed the natives or blacks as they are called, were much attracted by it. When they saw people going in and singing etc they said Goorai! Budgery Corobery! and when the sermon began one or two men gesticulated like the minister, upsetting him a good deal ...The disturbance was prevented from happening again.¹¹³

Humour and ridicule worked both ways. Clark recalled that round the camp fires at night fun and laughter prevailed as these inimitable mimics amused themselves until midnight at the expense of unsuspecting whites.¹¹⁴ It seems this was a new and rich source of entertainment; Archibald Meston had stated that in the wild most families went to sleep soon after sunset.

James Porter, who also arrived in the immigration boom of the late 1840s, recalled how very numerous were the Aborigines living in the districts around Brisbane. He said the Logan tribes from the south always camped around Shafston Street and Norman Creek. In the town itself were many Aborigines of both sexes almost in a state of nudity wherever you might turn, taking advantage of white foodstuffs during the leaner winter months.¹¹⁵

Charles Melton recalled that Aborigines were particularly troublesome on West End farms during the 1850s, frequently stealing sweet potatoes and pumpkins.¹¹⁶ John Davidson, who owned a farm covering the Melbourne/Edmonstone/Boundary Streets area, complained that local people raided his orchards so consistently that he was sure they were trying to drive him away. One man even entered his house at night, coming down the chimney to steal flour and sugar. The low-lying land at Hill End was then known as Coombes Swamp and was owned by a Mr Wilkes, who employed Aboriginal workers to cut the reeds sold for house thatch.¹¹⁷ Another man who ran a store at south Brisbane lost goods worth thirty pounds (nearly \$2500 today) to thieves. A local Aboriginal man traced and found the goods, which had been stolen by white labourers working for the Survey department.¹¹⁸

The early 1850s heralded the first shipments of Chinese labourers, and from Clark's writings it is apparent that some animosity arose between the newchums and the original occupants. On one occasion as a group of young initiates were trooping in from their camp in the One-Mile Swamp they were invited to share a Chinese meal under a bark lean-to, which was collapsed upon them as they settled to eat. The youngsters escaped, but soon all the blacks in the settlement mustered up and a pitched battle ensued. The Aborigines kept retreating towards a pocket in the saltwater creek, which crossed Stanley Street, and the Chinese thought they had them cornered:

Just as they were meditating an onslaught the blacks hopped over the creek and through the mangroves like a lot of wallabies. On the high bank of the creek opposite the black gins had collected heaps of stones, which the blacks showered down on the Chinamen in the creek below.

Clark said the clashes became so frequent that officials insisted the Chinese travelled directly to the Darling Downs.¹¹⁹

Another source of complaint in the 1860s concerned south Brisbane's water supply which depended on a small stream flowing from the swamp near the corner of Wellington road and Mowbray terrace (east of the Gabba cricket ground).¹²⁰ The main water hole was still unfenced and from its inception the *Moreton Bay Courier* campaigned to have the area quarantined for white use. On one occasion it was described as a clayey hole in which cattle, dogs, and blackfellows wallow and bathe at pleasure.¹²¹

4. Paradise lost

Although, by the mid-1850s, the Aboriginal people might have lost control of south Brisbane area that they had nurtured and visited since time immemorial, they remained a dominant presence. The encroaching white settlers held only a couple of pockets on the southern river banks. One early pioneer who arrived in 1854 wrote that Stanley Street was still dense scrub, the Gabba was just the One-Mile Swamp, and a dense, sweet, wattle-scented grove extended the whole way round what is now River Terrace.¹²² Another old-timer remembered hunting in the bush beyond the south Brisbane cemetery (Dutton Park) to lose himself in the silent scrubs. At that time (1853) there were 425 white residents at south Brisbane with a further 127 spread through Woolloongabba and West End, and 269 at Kangaroo Point with another 89 nearby. Corn was still grown west of Melbourne Street and Norman creek held abundant fish even in its upper reaches in the Burnett swamp (near Cornwall and Juliette Streets). Patches of convolvulus, so remarked on 30 years earlier by the first white spectators, still survived in secluded pockets. Also surviving as of old were groups of Aborigines wielding their towrow nets to harvest a couple of hundred fish in a few minutes.¹²³

In fact Aborigines continued to frequent Brisbane in large numbers during this period, camping and hunting in the nearby bush.¹²⁴ Inter-tribal clashes persisted. One such incident was recorded in 1853 at Burnett's swamp. This was a major confrontation between the Amity Point and Logan tribes who were currently at south Brisbane and the northern tribes of Bribie Island and Toorbul Point, also there in great numbers. It started as a knife fight between a Logan man and the father of a girl he had taken from the northern tribes, and an observer wrote that it ended with a grand *mêlée*, in which the spears and boomerangs flew about with great rapidity; and, in the course of which the blacks displayed great tact in the use of their small shields.

It is apparent that this was a carefully organised contest rather than an unexpected brawl; the men were highly decorated for the occasion and the women voiced their concern:

The warriors were all hideously bedaubed with red and yellow ochres, their hair frizzled out and ornamented with parrots and other feathers. During the fight, the old women of the tribe, decorated in a somewhat similar manner, stood round a fire, chanting, or intoning, in a most monotonous manner.

Greatly outnumbered, the Logan and Amity Point people retired after some time, and it was then discovered one of the Bribie men had been killed by a spear through the chest. All of this occurred within three miles of Brisbane.¹²⁵

In the 1870s and 1880s Aboriginal people continued to be prominent in the south Brisbane physical and social landscape. Before the Dutton Park school was built children walking from Fairfield to the south Brisbane school remembered people camped on the ridge where the jail was later built. One morning one of the Aboriginal women told them to take another route, warning that the men of the tribe resented their intrusion.¹²⁶

Historian Clem Lack wrote that in the early 1880s it was not unusual for gathering of up to 300 people, from as far away as Ipswich, to hold corroborees on the banks of the Norman Creek at Holland Park. Whites making their way along Logan road by foot or on horseback were often accosted by Aborigines who leapt from the bushes to demand tobacco.¹²⁷ Charles Melton recalled that at the many isolated homes in the dense bush of the southern suburbs it was not uncommon for residents to be alarmed by half a dozen stalwart blacks coming to their doors and demanding flour, tea, sugar, tobacco and rum.¹²⁸

Many white children of those times grew up with fond attachments to Aboriginal nannies, housemaids, cooks and cleaners. Writing of her early married years at Bulimba (part of the country belonging to the Coorpooroo tribe), Mrs McConnell said she employed several Aboriginal women when her children were young. She remembered Kitty, whose husband Piggie Nerang was unworthy of her, in Mrs McConnell's estimation, and another fine woman named Polly whose husband assaulted her and knocked her teeth out. Demonstrating the attitudes of the day, Mrs McConnell made persistent attempts to bring her servants little

children under white control. She mentioned trying to influence Kitty's daughter Topsy and Lolas daughter Clara, but without success:

I tried to separate, in a measure, these children from their tribes. I arranged a room for them where their clothes were kept, and where they had a tepid bath every morning, for although I had provided warm beds I could not wean them from going off to the camp to sleep by the camp fire.

Although she introduced them to rudimentary reading and sewing, and the recital of simple poems and hymns, she could not shake their cultural ties. When the tribe went on their nomadic excursions nothing would induce them to leave the little girls behind, so on their return all was to do over again. They are certainly very fond of their children.

Like many whites of this era, Mrs McConnell was well aware how committed Aboriginal people were to their own territory. She described another Aboriginal woman, Long Kitty, who on occasions would look proudly over the country and say, stretching out her arms, all this Ayarman (land) belonging to me. At least, in those days, it was not difficult to admit the truth of dispossession. It did seem hard to have it all taken from them, conceded Mrs McConnell, adding, but it had to be.¹²⁹ In fact Aboriginal land had been taken from them, as Gideon Lang had deplored ten years earlier, with utter disregard of their interest, rights, and even subsistence, as if they had been wild dogs or kangaroos.¹³⁰

During the last decades of the nineteenth century Aborigines were increasingly marginalised on their own lands. Although they were allowed into Brisbane town during the day, they had, since the early 1850s, been the targets of a curfew, which was enforced after 4pm and on Sundays. Rev Henry Stobart, who arrived in 1853, remarked that the blacks seem to leave this town at one regular hour each day, and one of the boundary posts was at Cumbequepa (Somerville House) south Brisbane.¹³¹ The major demarcation south of the river operated along Vulture and Boundary streets. Charles Melton wrote that police were empowered by regulation to drive them out of town at nightfall, but because police were so greatly outnumbered by Aborigines in the town the regulation was difficult to enforce.¹³² By 1877 it would appear the curfew was more efficiently applied. Recalling the forced expulsion of all Aboriginal men and women at sundown, one traveller wrote: After 4pm the mounted troopers used to ride about cracking stock-whips to notify the Aborigines to get out.¹³³ Those whose lands lay south of the river would have retreated beyond the town boundaries to the camping areas of Woolloongabba, Dutton Park, Fairfield, Annerley and the Coorparoo watercourses.

By 1895, according to Archibald Meston, only three or four Coorpooroo elders remained on their land of the magnificent clan, which had boasted 400 to 500 people only 50 years earlier. In 1897 Queensland passed a law which gave the government complete control over all Aboriginal lives.¹³⁴ During the next seventy years more than half the Aboriginal population - men, women and children - were cleared from towns and cities and confined on missions and government settlements. From these institutions many were contracted out to employment. In 1899 an Aboriginal Girls Home was established in a house at Hill End, in the vicinity of Victoria and Kurilpa streets. Any girl or woman travelling through Brisbane, visiting for medical attention or merely between domestic service stints was forced to stay there.

During this century Aboriginal men and women, controlled by the government, have worked around Brisbane and elsewhere in the state as labourers, drivers, domestics, cleaners and nursing aides. It is almost certain that several of these individuals were employed at the Princess Alexandra hospital. Others lucky enough to have remained with their families free from government control may have received education and training sufficient to take skilled positions. It is entirely possible that in this way descendants of the Coorpooroo tribe may have maintained links to their ancestral lands during the last 100 years.

Conclusion

This brief study of contemporary and recent writings has charted the dispossession of the Coorpooroo people who cherished, and were sustained by, the sweep of land from Oxley to Bulimba creeks, country within which the Princess Alexandra Hospital is located.

Before European intrusion they had followed an idyllic lifestyle eloquently immortalised for us by early residents who were moved to record an appreciation which at times bordered on envy. Tentative contact in the town and around south Brisbane was carefully nurtured and generally amicable. The first decades of free settlement were remembered as the black and white days, a sharing of skills and needs which embraced the bartering of game, pelts and furs, and also of labour as wood choppers, water carters, farm workers and domestics. Sport on the river itself was, initially, a shared passion. Also, and chronicled with unmistakable affection, was the wonderful inclusiveness of the games and adventures of boyhood, where the inquisitiveness and exuberance of youth was so much the richer for the absolute indifference to colour.

The Coorpooroo people had from time immemorial used all of this area, and regularly shared noted camping, hunting and ceremonial sites with hundreds of neighbouring tribes for major events. Initial reticence was converted to wary confidence, the regular movements through the area continuing for decades after white occupation had alienated significant Aboriginal sites. Residents recall the presence of more than 400 Coorpooroo people in the 1850s, and 300 were still using the Norman Creek campsites in the 1880s. Pullen-pullens and corroborees were regularly held with all the traditional preparations and procedures. Friendly groups of Aborigines frequented the streets, and characters in the local pubs kept regulars entertained.

Perhaps it was the debased rowing prizes of 1860 which most clearly signalled the new contempt, the cash bonus from the black and white camaraderie now degenerated into flour, sugar and tobacco, surely never offered to white winners. The water-holes which had sustained Aboriginal hunting and leisure, and where Clark had revelled with Molrubin and his mates a decade earlier, were now said to be contaminated by Aboriginal use which had continued for millennia. The sunset curfew and the civilised determination to take Aboriginal toddlers from their families both exemplified and reinforced a willingness to see the original inhabitants as unwanted and incompetent. Marginalisation and the stripping of human dignity and basic rights were cemented in the law of 1897. The scars remain painful, the long-term damage appallingly public.

This is, inevitably, a white account of Aboriginal use of the area. There are two major avenues, which could be pursued to include an Aboriginal account of this history. A careful accumulation of oral testimony would add both richness and authenticity to this recorded evidence. There will be people today, whose grandparents and great-grandparents still live in family stories and anecdotes, which are passed through the generations. Time and sensitive communication could breathe life into this rich store of memories.

In addition, such a vast establishment as the Princess Alexandra Hospital, which has encompassed so many forms of employment over so many years, almost inevitably would have counted Aboriginal workers and staff within its ranks, whether in construction, maintenance, cleaning, cooking or nursing. Many, possibly, may have lived locally. Their forebears might have also, perhaps always, lived in this area. This would be illuminate a continuum, and is worth further research.

1 A convict transported from Redcliffe in 1825, quoted by an old Brisbaneite in the *Brisbane Courier*, 22.3.1930.

2 Hall, H.J., 20,000 years of human impact on the Brisbane river and environs, in Davie P, Stock E and Choy D (eds) *The Brisbane river, a source-book for the future*, Australian Littoral Society Inc, 1990.

3 Steele, JG, Foundations of Brisbane, in *Brisbane Retrospect: eight aspects of Brisbane history*, proceedings of John Oxley Library seminar, State Library, 1976:6.

4 Meston, A, 100 Years - Black Man to White Settlement, *The Daily Mail*, 1.12.23.

5 Meston, A, Moreton Bay and Islands, in *Handbook of Excursions*, Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, Pole, Outridge & Co, Brisbane, 1895:20.

6 Petrie, C, *Tom Petries Reminiscences of Early Queensland*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1992:117. (Originally published in 1904).

7 Steel, J G, *The Brisbane River: an illustrated history*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1975:12.

8 Tindale, N, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*, ANU, Canberra 1974:169.

9 I have maintained the variety of spellings given in primary texts.

10 *Hand book of Excursions*, op cit: 21.

11 Steele, J G, *Aboriginal Pathways, Southeast Queensland and the Richmond River*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1983:131.

12 Meston, A, Old Moreton Bay Tribes: their lost languages, *Brisbane Courier*, 1.12.23.

13 Undated galley proofs for Queensland Sketcher in the *Courier Mail*, cuttings file, Queensland Historical Society (QHS).

14 Mathieson, B M, *Beginnings of Brisbane: commemorative of Brisbane's centenary, 1923*, John Mills Himself, Brisbane: 1923:35, 41, 71.

15 *The Queenslander*, 31.8.1901 and 28.9.1901.

16 *Cooksland in north-eastern Australia: the future cotton field of Great Britain; its characteristics and capabilities for European colonization. With a disquisition on the origin, manners and customs of the Aborigines*, Johnson Reprint Corporation, New York, 1970:444.

17 Narrative of Thomas Pamphlett as taken down by John Uniacke. Reproduced in Steele, J G, *The Explorers of the Moreton Bay district 1770-1830*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1972:71.

18 *ibid*, p 123.

19 *ibid*, p 147.

20 Quoted in Meston, A, *Geographic History of Queensland*, Government Printer, 1895:77,78.

21 Kerkhove, R, West End to Woolloongabba: the early and Aboriginal history of a district, FAIRA, 1985:3.

22 Bartley, N, *Opals and Agates*, Gordon and Gotch, Brisbane, 1892:91.

23 Undated galley proofs, cuttings files, QHS, op cit.

24 Eipper, Rev Christopher, Statement of the Origin, Condition, and Prospects, of the German Mission to the Aborigines at Moreton Bay, 1841, reproduced in Steele, J G, *Brisbane Town in Convict Days 1824-1842*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1975:283.

25 Undated galley proofs, cutting files, QHS, op cit.

26 Statement of the Origin, Condition....., op cit.

27 *Geographic History of Queensland*, op cit:81-88.

28 Undated galley proofs, cuttings file, QHS, op cit.

29 Simpson, S, Report on the State of the Aborigines for the year ending Dec 1844, reprinted in *The Simpson Letterbook*, transcribed by G Langevad, Cultural and Historical Records of Queensland,

No 1:16.

- 30 Rev John Gregor, 1846, quoted in 20,000 years of human impact, op cit: 175.
31 Meston, A, Lost Tribes of Moreton Bay, *The Brisbane Courier*, 14.7.23.
32 20,000 years of human impact, op cit: 176.
33 Governor Brisbane, 1825, quoted in Cilento, R, and Lack, C, *Triumph in the Tropics*, Smith and
Paterson Pty Ltd, Brisbane, 1959:182.
34 14.3.1826 - Captain Bishop to Colonial Secretary, reproduced in *Brisbane Town in Convict Days*,
op cit:57.
35 14.5.1861 - evidence of Captain John Coley to *Select Committee Inquiry into the Native Police*
Force, Queensland Legislative Assembly, p 18.
36 Meston, A, Old Moreton Bay Tribes: Their numbers, weapons and dialects, *The Brisbane Courier*,
10.11.23.
37 10.9.1825, extract from Lockyers Journal, reproduced in *The Explorers of the Moreton Bay*
district, op cit:186.
38 Johnson, W Ross, *Brisbane: the first 30 years*, Boolarong, Brisbane, 1988:23.
39 Clark, undated galley proofs, QHS, op cit.
40 Kerkhove, R, The Musgrave Park Project, FAIRA, undated:110.
41 *Brisbane Town in Convict Days*, op cit: 58, 73.
42 30.5.1827 - Ensign Innes to colonial secretary, quoted in *ibid*: 70.
43 28.1.1828 - Captain Logan to colonial secretary, quoted *ibid*: 91.
44 *Brisbane: the first 30 years*, op cit: 42.
45 30.6.1828 - Allan Cunningham, rough notes, in *Brisbane Town in Convict Days*, op cit: 94.
46 Endicott, M, *Coorparoo Stones Corner Retrospect*, Augustinian Historical Commission, 1979:7.
47 24.7.1828 - Allan Cunningham to Governor Darling, in *The Explorers of the Moreton Bay district*,
op cit: 255.
48 24.5.1836 - Report of Visits to the Penal settlement at Moreton Bay, and to the Missionary Station
at Lake Macquarie, in *Brisbane Town in Convict Days*, op cit:213.
49 5.11.1837 - governor Bourke to Lord Glenelg, reproduced in Johnson, W R, *A Documentary*
History of Queensland, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1988:47.
50 31.7.1869 - Old Tom, *The Brisbane Courier*.
51 Governor Bourke to Lord Glenelg, in *A Documentary History of Queensland*, op cit: 50.
52 *Tom Petries Reminiscences of Early Queensland*, op cit:2.
53 *Geographic History of Queensland*, op cit: 86.
54 Quoted in Colliver, F S, and Woolston, F P, *Aboriginals in the Brisbane area*, in *Brisbane*
Retrospect, op cit: 58.
55 Bartley, N, *Australian Pioneers and Reminiscences together with portraits of some of the founders*
of Australia, Gordon and Gotch, 1896:247.
56 *Brisbane Courier*, 2.7.21.
57 *Aboriginal Pathways*, op cit: 133,134.
58 *Beginnings of Brisbane*, op cit: 71.
59 Mackenzie, A, *Memories along the Boggo track*, Boolarong Publications, Brisbane, 1992:2.
60 Simmons, M, *Southside early days*, paper presented to the Queensland Women's Historical
Association, 8.10.70 [John Oxley Library mss 994.31]
61 Dr Simpson was later one of the founders of the Brisbane Hospital.
62 *Inquiry into the Native Police*, op cit: 18.
63 Annual Report on the State of the Aborigines in the Moreton Bay district for the year ending
December 1843, *The Simpson Letterbook*, op cit: 12.

64 *Tom Petries Reminiscences*, op cit: 233.
65 William Clark, galley proofs, cuttings file, Queensland Historical Society, op cit.
66 *Tom Petries Reminiscences*, op cit: 159.
67 22.3.1845 - Brisbane News in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, transcribed in Brisbane History Group,
Sources No 3, 1989:85.
68 Reproduced in *Brisbane: the first 30 years*, op cit: 82.
69 *Memories along the Boggo track*, op cit: 1.
70 Undated galley proofs, cuttings file, QHS, op cit.
71 *The Courier-Mail*, 4.2.1985.
72 West End to Woolloongabba, op cit: 4, 5, 75, 76.
73 Undated galley proofs, cuttings file, QHS, op cit.
74 *ibid.*
75 *Memories along the Boggo track*, op cit: 1.
76 Slaughter, L, Norman creek (Brisbane) and surroundings, *Journal of the Historical Society of*
Queensland, Vol V, No 1, 1953:857.
77 *The Musgrave Park Project*, op cit: 107,108.
78 *West End to Woolloongabba*, op cit:5.
79 Undated galley proofs, cuttings file, QHS, op cit.
80 *ibid.*
81 Fisher, R, From depredation to degradation in *Brisbane: The Aboriginal presence 1824-1860*,
Brisbane History Group papers no.11, 1992:39,42,46.
82 *Moreton Bay Courier*, 25.7.1846.
83 *Brisbane Courier*, 20.4.1907.
84 Undated galley proofs, cuttings file, QHS, op cit.
85 31.5.47 - Special Report on the Aborigines, in *The Simpson Letterbook* , op cit:26.
86 Undated galley proofs, cuttings file, QHS, op cit.
87 *The Musgrave Park Project*, op cit:108.
88 *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8.11.1844, 13.3.1845 and 30.11.1846.
89 *Moreton Bay Courier*, 2.2.1850.
90 *Tom Petries Reminiscences*, op cit: 162.
91 *Memories along the Boggo track*, op cit: 5,11.
92 *Southside early days*, op cit.
93 Charles Melton, quoted in *The Musgrave Park Project*, op cit: 72.
94 *Southside early days*, op cit.
95 Undated galley proofs, cuttings file, QHS, op cit.
96 *Tom Petries Reminiscences*, op cit: 277.
97 *ibid.*: 169.
98 Slaughter, E, Norman creek (Brisbane) and surroundings, *Journal of the Historical Society of*
Queensland, Vol V, No 1, 1953:849.
99 *Brisbane Courier*, 27.11.23.
100 *Telegraph*, 7.10.1907.
101 *The Courier Mail*, 4.2.85.
102 *Sunday Mail*, 20.1.29.
103 *Brisbane Courier*, 15.5.07.
104 *Daily Mail*, 16.3.1919.
105 *Brisbane Courier*, 2.7.21.
106 Undated galley proof, cuttings file, QHS, op cit.

-
- 107 *The Queenslander*, 7.8.09.
108 *Tom Petries Reminiscences*, op cit: 277,278.
109 *The Musgrave Park Project*, op cit: 63.
110 *Brisbane Courier*, 27.11.23.
111 Morrison, A., Brisbane one hundred years ago, *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, Vol VII, No 1, 1962/63:86.
112 *Brisbane Courier*, Do You Know Your Brisbane, undated, probably 1920s.
113 McConnel, Mrs, *Memories of Days Long Gone By*, private publication, John Oxley Library, 1905:26.
114 Undated galley proofs, cuttings file, QHS, op cit.
115 Porter, J, *Early Recollections of an Old Hand in Queensland*, OM 68-18, John Oxley Library.
116 *Brisbane Courier*, 2.7.21.
117 *West End to Woolloongabba*, op cit: 2,13.
118 *Brisbane Courier*, 31.7.24.
119 Undated galley proof, cuttings file, QHS, op cit.
120 Norman Creek (Brisbane) and surroundings, op cit: 857.
121 Brisbane one hundred years ago, op cit: 80.
122 *Australian Pioneers and Reminiscences*, op cit: 249,250.
123 Melton, C, When Woolloongabba was wattle-scented, *Historical Society of Queensland Journal*, 1918:341-347.
124 H Sheridan, evidence to the 1861 *Inquiry into the Native Police*, op cit: 27.
125 Quoted in *Aboriginal Pathways*, op cit: 133.
126 *Memories along the Boggo track*, op cit: 11.
127 *The Courier-Mail*, 26.8.50.
128 *Brisbane Courier*, 4.1.1905.
129 *Memories of Days Long Gone by*, op cit: 43.
130 Lang, G, *The Aborigines of Australia*, quoted in *A Documentary History of Queensland*, op cit: 73.
131 Love, W, Henry Stobart and the Brisbane Aborigines in 1853, *Newsletter of the Anthropological Society of Queensland*, No 152, 1984.
132 *Brisbane Courier*, 2.7.21.
133 Lentz, C F O, *Memoirs and Some History*, John Oxley Library typescript 457.
134 *The Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*.