

Section C: Historic Site Case Studies

Chapter 5: Parramatta Park and Old Government House

5.1 Brief Historical Background of Parramatta

James A. Michener, one of the most successful popularisers of history, always began his massive tomes with the beginning of time. Like Michener or his model Genesis, we could start a history of Parramatta with the lines 'In the beginning'. This would mean that a history of the area would start with geology - how the Parramatta landform that played host to the organisms, human and otherwise that wriggled across it, was formed. For example, one might begin with the geological events surrounding the stabilisation of sea levels and the formation of the Parramatta River in its present state approximately 6,500 years ago (Kohen *et al.*, 1999:5). Alternatively, one could go back as far as 10,000 years ago to the earliest 'firm evidence' of Aboriginal occupation at Darling Mills Creek, or perhaps 4,000 years ago, or between 1,000 and 2,000 years ago. These dates represent the various changes in stone tool technologies which Aboriginal people adopted (*ibid.*). Almost invariably histories written about the Parramatta area have traditionally chosen 1788 as their starting point and failed to acknowledge an Aboriginal presence beyond this date. This Euro-centric view of the Parramatta region is present in accounts written for audiences of all age levels. For example the National Trust produced an 'education kit' for schools in 1981 that ignored a history of the region that pre-dated the arrival of a handful of Europeans by millennia¹⁷. In doing so, the National Trust denied a part of Parramatta's history that was, in its own way, as rich and varied as any story of early white settlers, or maybe more so. This is indicative of the view that Aboriginal history was really 'prehistory' and that Aboriginal people were often presented quite offensively - less as people than as

¹⁷ The argument has been used that histories written for children tend to be simplified and thus it is more 'excusable' for Indigenous history to be absent in these accounts in order to aid a child's understanding. Education programmes currently conducted by the National Trust at Old Government House would suggest that children are more than capable of absorbing a complex, multi-layered history. These programs are also evidence of the changes that have occurred in the representation of indigenous history in Australia in the past two decades.

features of nature, like the flora and fauna¹⁸. It also reflected the view that they were considered by European settlers as a 'dying race' - a stone aged people who would soon succumb to evolution (Byrne, 1996). 'Real' history in Australia is often seen as beginning in 1788 with the arrival of the First Fleet or occasionally a date like 1770 with the then Lieutenant James Cook's travels to Australia. Williamson and Harrison particularly note the influence of Cook stating that he is '*widely celebrated in Anglo-Australian histories as the originator, the first settler of a nation of settlers.*' (2002:3). Other histories will on occasion go back to the Dutch or perhaps the Portuguese. Nevertheless the key to all of these starting points is that they begin with Europeans and 'our' (meaning the dominant cultural influence) history. Such an approach is not only inaccurate, it presumes that one history is somehow better or of more value than another. This Euro-centric approach also ignores the fact that the greatest proportion of human history linked to the Australian continent has been an Aboriginal history. By contrast the European component of Australia's human history since 1788 amounts to 0.5% (Reynolds and Dennett, 2002:1). With specific reference to the history of Parramatta, it has only been in recent years, through the work of scholars such as Kohen (e.g. Brook and Kohen, 1991; Kohen, 1993; Kohen *et al.*, 1999) and Flynn (e.g. Flynn, 1995a, 1995b) that this inequality has begun to be re-addressed. Accounts of the Aboriginal history (which incorporates both so-called 'prehistoric' and historic aspects) of the area are now being introduced. The focus of this chapter is on the period of interaction between Aboriginal people in the Parramatta area and the Europeans.

The traditional custodians¹⁹ of the Parramatta area were the Burramatta clan of the Darug tribe (Flynn, 1995a; Kohen *et al.*, 1999:6). The word Burramatta is derived from two words, 'burra' meaning food, or more specifically in the case of Parramatta it is believed to mean eel and 'matta' meaning a place with water or a creek. The two words combined probably mean something akin to 'place of the eels' (Kohen *et al.*, 1999:6-8) or, according to Flynn (1995b:9) '*the place where the eels sit down*'. Interpretation of William Dawes

¹⁸ In 1928, the pool of remembrance at the Australian War Memorial was opened. It featured a series of stone figureheads, each of them depicting the male and female form of some Australian native creature. Visitors walked past the kangaroo, emu, and the cockatoo among others. At the end, or at the top of the line, perhaps as a compliment are figureheads of an Australian Aboriginal male and female. The ultimate statement, carved in stone of just how some Australians saw some other Australians. See section 2.3 and figures 2.6 and 2.7 for more information.

¹⁹ Rather than the use of the term 'owner', custodian will be used in this chapter because of the lack of identification shown with the term 'owner' by indigenous interviewees, and in the video, *Dispossessed*.

notebooks suggests that the Burramattagal (people of Burramatta) spoke a coastal dialect of the Darug language²⁰ (Kohen *et al.*, 1999:7). It is therefore reasonable to assume that they had some form of economic association with the coastal clans (*ibid.*). In terms of day to day living, the Burramattagal would have dwelt in the rock shelters around Darling Mills Creek or in bark huts closer to the Parramatta River (*ibid.* p.8).

Flynn (1995a:4) notes that the Burramattagal's '*disappearance very soon after the beginning of European settlement at Parramatta in 1788 is mysterious*'. Flynn suggests that the most probable reason for their disappearance was the 1789 smallpox epidemic²¹ and early frontier conflict (*ibid.*). Kohen, *et al.* (1999:19) also add that other diseases such as syphilis, influenza and measles would have been just as lethal to the Burramattagal. Flynn notes however that although all the Burramattagal may have perished as a result of these events, the possibility remains that survivors may have been absorbed into other nearby clans such as those from Duck River, Prospect, Blacktown/Doonside or Kissing Point/Ryde areas (Flynn, 1995a).

According to Kohen *et al.* (1999:3), the early contact history of the area is compatible with a wider pattern. They write '*At Parramatta a series of events unfolded which mirror the wider contact history across Australia. There were friendly contacts followed by displacement of the traditional owners and open hostilities, with attempts on both sides to establish symbiotic relationships*' (*ibid.*). Ballooderry, for example, bartered fish with the officers and settlers at Parramatta. This relationship continued until convicts sank his canoe, Ballooderry then speared a convict in retaliation (despite being warned by Phillip not to do so) near what is now Kissing Point. This in turn led to the Governor outlawing him (*ibid.* p.106). Flynn (1995a:4) writes that Ballooderry's '*angry defiance of Phillip at*

²⁰ It is interesting to note two seemingly contradictory perspectives regarding language. Grassby and Hill refer to the Sydney peoples strong ability with languages, noting that they picked up English quickly, singing English songs (1998:70) and that that as '*good linguists they would have picked up the language and ethnic differences*' (1998:75) between the French who had landed at La Perouse in January 1788 and the English. Kohen *et al.* (1999:14) however, believed that it was unlikely that the Kameygal or Bediagal initially distinguished between the two languages. The hostile actions of the French therefore may have been transplanted onto the British and affected relations between the groups. Debates such as these are frequent when dealing with Indigenous history.

²¹ Kohen *et al.* (1995:19) note the possibility that the smallpox virus may have been deliberately introduced as it had been in other countries previously by either the English or the French as a means of '*reducing the threat from native peoples*'. Indeed Tench referred to the first fleet carrying samples of the disease. The video *Dispossessed* (which is discussed later in the chapter) strongly reinforces this view. It is unlikely however that any proof will ever be established to conclusively say whether or not this was the case.

Government House, Parramatta was a dramatic and tragic episode in the history of Aboriginal-European relations in the early colony'. Jervis²² (1933:14) marks this event as being the '*end of the visits by the natives*' to Parramatta.

Although the Burramattagal suffered intensely as a result of European settlement/invasion, there were still reasonable numbers of Aboriginal people in the Parramatta area to provide resistance to the European invaders. Pemulwuy, a member of the Bediagal clan of the Darug language group (Kohen *et al.*, 1999:28), was the key figure in this conflict. Flynn (1995a:5) wrote that '*his dramatic challenge to the colonial authorities on the streets of Parramatta in a "high noon" confrontation in 1797 is of particular importance*'. Collins (cited in Kohen *et al.*, 1999:35) believed that Pemulwuy was responsible for most of the attacks in the Parramatta area. Pemulwuy succeeded in avoiding injury and even managed to escape once after being captured and thus earned a reputation of invincibility amongst the Darug (ibid. p.37). Governor King ultimately issued a proclamation outlawing Pemulwuy and offered a reward for his capture²³. Pemulwuy was killed in 1802 and his head shipped to England (ibid. pp.39-40). According to Flynn (1995a:5), Pemulwuy was replaced by a man called Mosquito in leading attacks on the Parramatta settlement. Mosquito '*led a series of attacks on settlers in the Parramatta area until his capture and incarceration in the Parramatta Gaol in June 1805*' (ibid.).

Shortly before Mosquito's capture, Parramatta was the setting for two '*Aboriginal-European conferences*' (Flynn, 1995b:10) whose significance have been largely overlooked by a history that focuses on the non-indigenous occupants of Australia. Flynn (1995a:5) writes that '*On 3 May 1805 Parramatta became a place of reconciliation following the initiation of peace negotiations with Rev. Samuel Marsden by the Aboriginal people of the district - described as "a conference ... with a view of opening the way to reconciliation"*'. It is important to note that the term 'reconciliation' as it was used in 1805 quite likely refers to a very different meaning of reconciliation than the process that is referred to today by groups such as Reconciliation Australia. Nevertheless, these can be

²² Rather unusually, considering the date of publication, Jervis gives some mention to the interaction with local Aboriginal people in his account of the history of Parramatta, briefly mentioning the native school and Macquarie's feasts. No mention is made of Pemulwuy and the conflict of the 1790s however.

²³ According to Mann (cited in Kohen *et al.*, 1999:40), it is possible that Governor King actually stipulated that Pemulwuy should be killed and his head brought to King George though the Governor's own letter to King George avoids any mention of this.

seen as events of considerable historic importance, and could be further documented in any future histories of Parramatta and indeed examined in any account of Indigenous/non-indigenous relations in Australia.

The Macquarie era brought more changes for Aboriginal people around the Parramatta area and beyond. Macquarie established the Parramatta Native Institution in 1814 and held an Annual Conference at Parramatta in December each year, gathering Aboriginal people initially from the Sydney area - though it grew to have a much wider geographic scope (Kohen *et al.*, 1999:4). Flynn (1995b:10) writes of the event:

'Although somewhat tokenistic, the government-sponsored feasts implied a recognition of clan structure and were viewed openly by Macquarie as a kind of compensation for land loss. They were accompanied by Aboriginal ceremonies and corroborees which helped maintain tradition and a sense of continuity with a past which had been shaken by invasion, disease and hardship.'

Macquarie's policies towards Aboriginal people were multi-faceted. Kohen *et al.* (1999:77) interpret both the annual conference and the establishment of the Native Institution as a means of civilising Aboriginal people and allowing Macquarie control over them. *'If the children were in the Native Institution, then their relatives were unlikely to cause problems, and if they did, Macquarie had a "chief" for each clan with whom he could negotiate.'* (ibid.). Macquarie is also credited with granting land to Aboriginal people and within a few years of his governorship the first documented marriage between an Aboriginal woman, Maria, and a European, Robert Lock occurred at St John's Church, Parramatta (ibid. p.4 & p.111). The motivation behind these actions is not always clear. However, it is likely that they were among the first signs of subsequent policies linked to missions, reserves and ultimately assimilation. At the end of the Macquarie era there were only a few dozen Aboriginal people in the Parramatta area - none of them were recorded as being part of the original Parramatta clans. (ibid. p.97). This and the change of governorship meant that *'After Macquarie left, the importance of Parramatta as a focus of Aboriginal-European interaction gradually declined.'* (Kohen, 2000:17).

There is a great deal more to the shared history of the Parramatta area than has been related here. There are many more events and individuals who made significant contributions to the lives of both Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in Parramatta. The reports by Flynn (1995a) and by Kohen *et al.* (1999) are invaluable sources on the history of the area. Hopefully, in the future they will be made accessible to the general public in the form of books or other publications. The abundance of primary sources available in the Mitchell Library and elsewhere are also important aids with which to reconstruct a history of the area. The brief historical background related here is merely that - background to help aid a discussion of the representation of shared history within the Parramatta area. Kohen *et al.*'s 1999 100+ page report is testimony to the fact that this is but a brief window into the neglected Parramatta of the past.

5.2 Brief Historical Background of Parramatta Park



Figure 5.1: Old Government House within the grounds of Parramatta Park

Flynn (1995b:8) identifies 1988 as a turning point for conceptions of history within Australia. After the Australian Bicentennial he believes a re-examination of our national identity in particular sparked debate '*over the place of Aboriginal people and their heritage in the broader culture*' (ibid.). In a movement that Flynn compares to our former repudiation of our convict past and then the restoration of that history, Flynn sees

Aboriginal history as being re-embraced (ibid.). He argues that pre-1988 histories, in particular local ones, were and are often guilty of either ignoring the Aboriginal presence altogether or treating it tokenistically at best (op. cit.)

In their historic landscape study, published in 1987, Burton and McDonald identified five major historical periods that they saw as *'having significant influence on the landscape character and development of the [Parramatta] park area'* (Burton and McDonald, 1987:12). These were:

I	Pre 1788	Pre European Occupation
II	1789-1858	Agricultural pursuits, Vice Regal Residence, Farm and Domain
III	1858-1917	Public park under Parramatta Park Trust
IV	1917-1975	Parramatta National Park under Parramatta Park Trust
V	1975-Present	Parramatta Park under Parramatta City Council as Trustee ²⁴

Figure 5.2: Five major historical periods at Parramatta Park

(as identified by Burton and McDonald, 1987).

The only real Aboriginal influence on the park noted by Burton and McDonald was that the Aborigines were probably responsible for the park-like nature of the lands through traditional burning practises (ibid.) - a view supported by Flynn (1995b:9). Nevertheless, the various periods identified do help establish a chronological perspective of how Parramatta Park evolved.

Kohen *et al.* (1999:6) wrote that *'archaeological evidence confirms that Parramatta Park was used by Aboriginal people extensively prior to European occupation'*. They argue that

²⁴ These periods were identified in 1987. Currently the Park is managed by the Parramatta Park Trust and not by Parramatta City Council

this reflects both a '*cultural and spiritual association with the land, and particularly with the river.*' (ibid.). Even though this chapter will not dwell on this period of the history (the focus here being on the shared history of the park), it is important to establish that the place was of special significance to the Burramattagal. Traditionally, Parramatta Park and Old Government House have been places strongly (and often exclusively) associated with Australia's English heritage. It is interesting to note however, that the sites that were chosen by European settlers for their scenic and strategic qualities were often those previously favoured by local Aboriginal people. Interviewee 6 believed that Old Government House would have been a significant site for the local Aboriginal people because it was on a hill and afforded an excellent view of the surrounding country-side. This can be confirmed by archaeological evidence of stone artefacts which have been found in the area (Attenbrow, 1994; Kohen *et al.*, 1999:6). Certain universal aspects of human nature are evident in this commonality of preference for 'location, location, location'. The significance of this point appears to be self-evident. Heritage sites valued by the non-indigenous 'newcomers' are also likely to have been valued in a similar fashion by the Indigenous population, in some instances, although not always, for the same or similar reasons. History and heritage of this kind when recorded and taught with integrity, can only bring us together. It is the essence of real reconciliation. Historical apartheid is akin to racial or cultural apartheid.

The building we now know as Old Government House sits within Parramatta Park. The house and park however were not always known by these names. The traditional custodians of the area, the Burramattagal took their clan name from the place (Kohen *et al.*, 1999:7). Governor Phillip initially named the area Rose Hill late in 1788 but this was changed to Parramatta in 1791 (an anglicised version of Burramatta). The renaming of Rose Hill to Parramatta was an unusual step and is itself indicative of an early awareness of Parramatta's shared history. Indeed Aboriginal place names were often recorded on maps and formed the basis of many place names in the Sydney region.

Proudfoot (1971:2) notes that Old Government House '*and its site draw direct associations with every governor from Phillip to FitzRoy.*'. Each Governor took a different approach to the house and its surrounds. During the governorships of Phillip, Hunter and King, farming in the Parramatta area proved vital to the survival of the colony (ibid.). As Flynn (1995b:9)

writes: *'to the Europeans it seemed like a garden of Eden whose fertile soil saved the colony from starvation'*.

Evidence of the level of violence in and around Parramatta between Aborigines and Europeans however indicates that it was less than a real paradise. There was significant conflict between settlers and Aborigines and during the 1790s in particular, Parramatta was the focus of much of the frontier conflict (Flynn, 1995b:9). The focus of each Governor's policy and their own personal interests shaped the history of both Parramatta Park and Old Government House. Policy, therefore that was ongoing and idiosyncratic, had an impact on both the site and on the lives and the experience in relation to it, of the original owners - the Burramattagal.

Initially, the area was both the Governor's residence and a place for grazing the Government cattle (Burton and McDonald, 1987:3). At the end of 1788, a small redoubt was constructed within the area now known as Parramatta Park (Burton and McDonald, 1987:4). The nature of the fortification confirms the sentiments contained in the title of Ann McGrath's book *Contested Ground*. As Kohen *et al.* (1999:16) write:

'The penetration and occupation of the Parramatta area was a true invasion, undertaken with military planning and support. The principal aim was to secure fertile land on which to plant crops to feed the English convicts and soldiers who came to New South Wales in 1788. There was little regard for the Burramattagal of the area, who were soon to be displaced by the English settlers who took possession of their land. There was no communication between the two races at the time, no consultation or treaty and no talk of sharing or compensation.'

As the number of settlers at Rose Hill increased, the life-style of the Burramattagal changed dramatically. Popular camping grounds such as the Crescent²⁵ that fell within the Governor's domain had to be abandoned (ibid.). Similarly the freedom to burn the country as part of the normal cycle of hunting/gathering and farming in the Aboriginal way, fishing and even cutting bark for canoes was curtailed because the Europeans assumed exclusive

²⁵ The area known as the Crescent can still be seen at Parramatta Park today (see figure 5.3)

ownership of all land and resources. (ibid.). Hunter (cited in Kohen *et al.*, 1999:21) in 1793 wrote that Maugoran, a Burramattagal elder had told Phillip *'that he was very angry at the number of settlers at Rose Hill.'* In response to this Phillip reinforced the military detachment at Rose Hill (ibid.). There is evidence that Phillip received numerous visits from the Aboriginal people of Parramatta and that under his policy of retaining a *'friendly intercourse... with the natives'* (Hunter, cited in Kohen *et al.*, 1999:23) they were largely *'well received'*.



Figure 5.3: 'The Crescent' at Parramatta Park

Kohen *et al.* (1999:18) cite David Collins, a member of the First Fleet, who believed that it was the settlers who sparked conflict at Parramatta, the Burramattagal only spearing in retaliation as a form of 'payback' - a perfectly appropriate way to react under Burramattagal law. The continued conflict as a result of this was to spread with the European occupation of the Hawkesbury region. The move to acquire land along the Hawkesbury followed when the crop yields from Parramatta fell short of the needs of the growing colony²⁶ (ibid. p.23). Parramatta was the centre therefore of a clash of cultures, a clash of laws and a clash of arms. Nevertheless by 1810, Burton and McDonald (1987:6) suggest that the Government farm had *'diminished in importance... due to Governor King's policy for the settlement to be self sufficient'*.

²⁶ Burton and McDonald (1987:4) also note that repeated cropping at Parramatta lead to a loss of soil fertility and a move towards grazing began - which would have required the requisition of even more land and caused greater impact on the Burramattagal.

With the exception of the early beginnings of Parramatta, much of the history written about Old Government House focuses on the Macquarie era. The visual remains of the history that we see today may influence this²⁷. Burton and McDonald (1987:6) write that it was *'from the era of the Macquarie's that the Parramatta Domain first took on the semblance of a designed park-like environment'* similar to Parramatta Park today. The Macquarie period is a good one to focus on in order to examine the shared history of Parramatta. Kohen *et al.* (1999:4) write that *'During the time of Governor Macquarie, Aboriginal visitors to Government House were frequent.'* Additionally, not much is known from an Aboriginal perspective about the Parramatta area post Macquarie.

From the late 1840s onwards, Burton and McDonald (1987) see the main theme in relation to Parramatta Park as the continual alienation of public land. Growing population pressure in the Parramatta area lead residents to campaign for access to the Governor's Domain. However, as soon as the public was given access to the area there was a *'gradual diminishment of accessible land area initially made available to the public'* (ibid. p.6). Burton and McDonald (1987:7) list a summary of the chronological order of the alienation of this land for different purposes as:

- Racecourse
- Western Railway Extension
- Cumberland Oval
- Girls Industrial School
- Bowling Green, Tennis Court and Club House
- Old Kings Oval
- Parramatta High School
- War Memorial and Swimming Pool
- Golf Course and Club House
- RSL Club and Bowling Greens
- Old Government House and designated grounds
- Parramatta Leagues Club and Car Park
- Parramatta Stadium
- Western Railway Line Expansion

²⁷ The lower level of Old Government House is restored to the Macquarie era and much of the interpretation there focuses on this period, see The National Trust of Australia (NSW) (2002)

As for Government House after the Macquarie's there was little change. Governor Brisbane built an observatory close by and Governor's Darling and Bourke both used the house frequently although all their administrative duties were centred at Sydney (Proudfoot, 1971:3). During Governor Gipp's time, the Legislative Council no longer approved funds for the upkeep of the house and although it was revived by Governor FitzRoy, this ceased suddenly when his wife was killed in a carriage accident in front of the house (ibid.)²⁸. Occasionally, the building was leased out by its trustees, until 1909 when the building was acquired by the Kings School and renovated (Friends of Old Government House, 2002). In 1965, the building was deeded to the National Trust (ibid.) and it was opened to the public as an historic site in 1970 (Proudfoot, 1971:3).

Parramatta Park has been subject to several management phases. Interviewee One (an employee at the park) noted that the park had at one stage been funded by the Parramatta Council (though still under the control of the Parramatta Park Trust). The park has also been a part of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and was even referred to for a time as Parramatta National Park (Rapp, 1980). Currently, the park is '*managed independently by a Park Trust under the provisions of the Parramatta Park Act 2001*' (Parramatta Park Trust, 2003). Today the park is afforded a degree of recognition as a site of historical heritage. More predominantly however, it seems to be valued and acknowledged as a recreational space. As Interviewee One said '*very few of our visitors would actually realise that Parramatta Park is a cultural landscape*'. The park attracts over one million visitors per year – both regular cyclists, walkers, picnickers and roller-bladers and visitors to special events held there (ibid.). Old Government House is the most conspicuous indicator of the Parks historical significance. Many of the other historical markers are barely visible, only being noticeable to those who are already informed of their significance or are trained in their recognition. As Interviewee One noted there are '*marks and reminders of sites of significance that do tell the history... (but) ... even though they are there, they may as well be invisible (to the general public) and that is particularly the case with the Aboriginal sites*'

²⁸ Chance often plays a part in history. The tragic death of Governor Fitzroy's wife saw a bereaved husband prefer Government House, Sydney. Had it not been for a carriage accident, Parramatta might have featured more prominently in the early administrative life of New South Wales. The site of the accident and the stump of the tree are marked as part of the political and personal story of Parramatta Park.

5.3 Heritage Interpretation in Parramatta

Flynn (1995b:8) writes that traditionally, local histories have contributed to the general invisibility of Aboriginal people in Australia's post-contact history. In their 1987 report on the historic landscape of Parramatta Park, Burton and McDonald (1987) do not identify any items or places of Indigenous heritage significance. As Flynn (1995b:8) notes, the report may simply be a product of its time with pre 1988 writings often excluding the '*Aboriginal dimension*', whether this be through '*ignorance or distaste*'. What is interesting to note in Burton and McDonald's report is the emphasis placed upon landscape elements. Burton and McDonald are critical of previous approaches, particularly that presented in the *1983 Plan of Management* for the park. They see the approach taken in the 1983 plan as not giving '*sufficient weight to the significance of the park as a whole being an historic place; the plan of management tends to isolate particular elements for recognition as historic items but does not make a clear statement that the overall character of the park is also of historic significance*' (Burton and McDonald, 1987:77).

Burton and McDonald's comments here seem reminiscent of the move in recent years towards the concept of cultural landscapes in heritage interpretation. Interpreting sites as cultural landscapes is arguably a more holistic approach (Walker, 2001:33) to heritage interpretation. By contrast in the past heritage was often viewed as little more than historic artefacts (Russell, 1997:73). It could be argued, that perceiving the land as a cultural landscape is a necessary pre-cursor to the current shift in heritage interpretation, which seeks to acknowledge Australia's shared history. The Australian landscape is in fact a palimpsest. As Cowlishaw (1999:14) writes, '*the palimpsest may be a more apt metaphor for the cultural processes which have occurred... in Australia.*'. A palimpsest is a term often limited to Ancient history and usually refers to a tablet upon which multiple texts have been inscribed over time. The early texts may have been inscribed before being at least partially erased. It can also occur when the earlier texts have faded and the stone surfaced has been reused. The motive for this was often economic. In the case of later palimpsests, '*another motive may have been directed by the desire of Church officials to "convert" pagan Greek script by overlaying it with the word of God.*' (The Electronic Labyrinth, 2002). Different cultures at Parramatta have placed themselves one on top of

the other, creating a multi-layered historical landscape, each layer interacting with those around it and yet they still remain distinct. The recognition of the various layers since 1988, and thus the incorporation of the Indigenous layer into recent histories of the area, has led to the identification of places of Indigenous heritage significance such as the scar trees within Parramatta Park. In Parramatta a range of factors have helped to create this recognition of Indigenous heritage. As Flynn (1995b:8) writes:

'The rise of the Parramatta Central Business District, a more heritage-orientated municipal council, the formation of the Aboriginal Darug Land Council and the westward shift of Sydney's population centre have contributed to a new view of the history of Parramatta and its hinterland which, in the half century after 1788, rivalled Sydney in importance and hosted the second vice regal residence.'

(Flynn, 1995b:8).

Interviewee One also noted the trend in the last six or seven years of a gradual increase in the amount of public history in Parramatta which included an Indigenous presence. In particular, Interviewee One noted the importance of the Parramatta Heritage Centre's permanent exhibition Parramatta: People and Place which incorporated Indigenous perspectives. Interviewee One also noted other markers of an increased acceptance of Parramatta's shared history such as the Riverside Walk (see Figure 5.4) which is an 800 metre long path running beside the river from the Rivercat Wharf to the Parramatta Heritage Centre (Hinkson, 2001:127-128). Through the artwork of Jamie Eastwood, the walk interprets the history of the area from pre-1788 to the present from an Aboriginal perspective (ibid.). Interviewee One also noted the banners of Aboriginal art that adorn a park fronting Church Street. Other indications of the growing acceptance of a shared history can be seen around Parramatta. Melinda Hinkson's (2001) book, *Aboriginal Sydney*, is an excellent guide to some of these places such as the artwork designed by Indigenous Artist Joe Hirst which particularly targeted truck drivers (Hinkson, 2001:131). One site not noted in Hinkson's work, however, is that of the Rivercat Wharf itself which incorporates a range of signage (see Figure 5.5) and artwork aimed at revealing Parramatta's shared history.



Figure 5.4: The Riverside Walk

Viewed in this context perhaps the interpretation programs established at Parramatta Park and Old Government House are part of a dynamic move to raise the profile of shared history and are illustrations of how one project can spark ongoing work. The following section will examine the nature of these interpretation programs and what they have to contribute to the movement towards a shared history, both locally and nationally.



Figure 5.5: Signage at the Ferry Wharf

5.4 Heritage Interpretation at Old Government House and Parramatta Park

The interpretation of the history and heritage present at Parramatta Park and Old Government House has the potential to challenge inaccurate preconceptions of the beginnings of Australia as a British colony. Re-enactments of the early days of the British colony held as part of festivities like the 1988 Bicentenary, tended to focus on pomp and ceremony. They emphasised aspects like the Red Coats and the planting of the flag. Little is publicly portrayed about the difficulties like the food shortages faced in the first few months that would have led to the establishment of a settlement at Parramatta. Despite the park being listed on the Register of the National Estate, on the State Heritage Register and classified by the National Trust (Parramatta Park Trust, 2003), there is little awareness by the general public of the significant role Parramatta played in helping to maintain the British Colony. The degree of awareness of Parramatta's Aboriginal history seems even more minimal. Yet as Jervis (1933:93) writes, *'Some of the darkest pages in our history are those on which the record of the earliest years of this settlement are written'*. In the early days of British settlement at Parramatta, Aboriginal people were poorly treated. They were evicted from their land and lost access to their traditional sources of food, water and other materials along with the ability to maintain their country in their accustomed manner. They were often discriminated against - simultaneously lying inside and outside the law at the convenience of both Governors and settlers alike.

Until relatively recently (largely the late 1990s), little was done to interpret the history of Parramatta Park or Old Government House from an Aboriginal perspective. In 1993 Val Attenbrow, on behalf of the Australian Museum Business Services, was commissioned to complete a report on the management and interpretation of Aboriginal sites within the park (Attenbrow, 1994:1). Along with the 1999 report by Kohen *et al.*, this report formed the base for the interpretation programs at the park. These recently established programs have shown a number of different ways within Old Government House and Parramatta Park that a shared perspective of the area's history can be portrayed. The National Trust runs a guided Aboriginal Interpretation Program that utilises Old Government House as its starting point. Parramatta Park Trust developed a video titled *Dispossessed*, to give an Aboriginal Perspective of the history. Parramatta Park Trust also has an extensive display at the Burramatta Visitor's Centre that aims to convey the multiple layers of history present

at the Park. Analysis in a few years time of visitor experiences within the park and Old Government House may help to establish the effectiveness of these relatively recent heritage interpretation projects that have been initiated.



Figure 5.6: Map of Parramatta Park

(Parramatta Park Trust, 2003)

5.5 An Aboriginal Interpretation of Old Government House

The Aboriginal Interpretation program developed at Old Government House was the direct result of a \$10,000 grant from the Australian Heritage Commission (The National Trust of Australia (NSW), 2000a:2). The project was developed in consultation with '*members of the local Darug community, an Aboriginal officer from the Aboriginal Heritage Unit at the Australian Museum, historians, a representative from Parramatta Park and the education officer and senior curator from the National Trust.*' (ibid.). The 1999 report *Uninvited Guests* by Kohen *et al.* was commissioned to provide the historical background for the project. Interviewee Six, an Aboriginal Education Officer who was also a Darug descendant, was employed to develop both a junior high school and adult program. The schools program was trialled in May 2000 over seven sessions with five participating high schools - over 240 students in total (from years 7-9), whilst the adult program was trialled with 50 visitors spread over 13 tours (op. cit.).

The project aimed to increase awareness amongst school students, the general public and indeed Old Government House Staff and volunteers as to Aboriginal perspectives on the history of the area (The National Trust of Australia (NSW), 2000a:4). Beyond this, the Reference Group which steered the project also orientated the project to appeal to schools through its links to the Stage 4 History syllabus. This is an important feature of the project. By nature, heritage interpretation projects are rarely self-funding and, indeed, the reference group for the project has expressed concern for the future of the project beyond its trial period for these reasons (National Trust Aboriginal Interpretation Reference Group, 1999b). By marketing the interpretation program to target school groups through the Stage 4 and 5 History Syllabus, the project had the chance of continual financial support through the contribution of a small fee from the attendance of students on school excursions.

The school program utilised three Aboriginal guides, splitting the school groups into separate groups and rotating the students around to the different presenters. Interviewee Six described the set up as follows:

'Guide X was down by the creek and he had the artefacts so he was sort of really talking pre history and showed the scar trees and so on. Guide Y was sort of halfway up the hill to the house and he had the breastplate and it was his job to talk about ... Pemulwuy and any conflict that happened and also in terms of the Native Institution. .. then they'd all come together into the room and I'd tidy it up a bit'

The National Trust's summary of the evaluation of the program suggested that most teachers rated the program as a three on a scale of one to five, with one representing very good and five representing poor (The National Trust of Australia (NSW), 2000). In contrast to this, 39 of the 50 adult participants on the public tours rated the program as a one or two. Interviewee Six discussing the success of the adult program stated *'I just think that you actually gave them something to engage with – something different – it's challenging'*. Suggestions from teachers in the school groups to improve the experience of the school program included incorporating empathy exercises with regards to the concept of dispossession and better utilising Old Government House to contrast European culture with pre-contact Indigenous culture. The use of colour prints of historic paintings from the Parramatta area as *'visual primary sources'* and the *'personal presentation of the Darug guides'* were praised (ibid.). Both Interviewees Two and Six noted instances of seeing these prints of historic pictures in a different light as a result of their work on the program. Whilst previously they had merely noted these scenes portrayed Aboriginal people, the cultural activities that they documented such as pay back ceremonies or the presence of shell middens had not been fully understood. A range of resources like these can aid our understanding of the post-contact history. The program also extensively used primary sources such as proclamations taken from the Macquarie era.

It is interesting to note that there were some suggestions that the program would be better if it incorporated segments where students learned songs or dances, or how to make traditional tools. The National Trust dismissed these suggestions as *'not appropriate to the delivery of the program and the program objectives'* (National Trust Aboriginal Interpretation Reference Group, 1999a). As suggested at the first meeting of the reference group, one of the most important aims of the program was to reinforce the idea that *'Aboriginal culture in Western Sydney was dynamic and continuing, not something of the*

past.’ (ibid.) Interviewee Eight, a senior history teacher at a selective high school (who holds a particular interest in Indigenous Studies), saw these types of heritage interpretation programs as crucial in re-addressing misconceptions about Aboriginal culture. When Aboriginal culture is studied it is often as a romantic perception of a traditional society. For many students, as Interviewee Eight stated:

‘Aboriginal heritage is Didgeridoo 101, in other words they received the traditional portrait of the Aborigines as either a ‘stone age people’, or as hunter-gatherers or victims. There is little information or insight offered in to the richness, variety and the adaptability of Aboriginal society’.

Interviewee Six highlighted the problems associated with this, stating:

‘One of the things when schools actually get Aboriginal speakers in, they want you to talk about ‘traditional’, they want you to talk about ‘culture’. You know what is ‘traditional’ and what is ‘culture’? Does that mean that I have to ... come in bare breasted and make sure my skin is well and truly sun tanned?’.

Overall, the interviewees agreed that the trial programs were successful and they wished to see the program continue. Interviewees felt that the program was educating school children and the general public about the otherwise unknown Indigenous history of the site. This had the potential to help reconciliation both at a local scale and in the wider context of setting a precedent of including Aboriginal voices in the interpretation of other historic sites. Members of the reference group established to oversee the project were also keen to ensure the projects continuation beyond the trial period (National Trust Aboriginal Interpretation Reference Group, 2000b).

5.6 Dispossessed – The Story of the Burramatta Clan of the Darug (Video)

The story of the development of the *Dispossessed* video by the Parramatta Park Trust, is a story which highlights one of the major difficulties faced by many shared history projects –

funding. Yet, despite all the difficulties faced trying to get the project off the ground, the quality of the end product is admirable and indeed Parramatta Park Trust received a commendation in the education corporate/government category in the 2003 Energy Australia National Trust Heritage Awards for the video (Parramatta Advertiser, 2003:26). *Dispossessed* was written, directed and produced by David O'Brien and presented by Julie Nimmo and Colin Gale with the help of volunteer 'actors' from the National Trust. The video was produced for Parramatta Park Trust and was funded jointly by the Trust and the NSW Centenary of Federation Committee (Aboriginal History Grants Scheme) (O'Brien, 2002). Although the project was successful in gaining funding, it is often difficult to identify where the next grant may be obtained when many other projects are unsuccessful in competing for the limited money available. Interviewee One noted the successful exhibition 'Between Two Worlds', that the National Archives ran, possibly in 1988. The exhibition presented a range of stories of the Stolen Generation, and was somewhat groundbreaking for its time. Interviewee One stated *'I think that exhibition was a formative thing for many people who work in interpretation... a lot of my friends felt the same way. But the funding...for that project came out of the Bicentenary. The funding for my project (the video) came out of the Centenary of Federation.'*

Funds for these sort of projects often depend on a special event or milestone that is about to occur as these events often have a corresponding grants scheme. It is a struggle to find *'the next lump of money that isn't dedicated'* (Interviewee One). The importance of funding it seems, cannot be over estimated even where the funds are relatively small. Many projects are able to build on the work of those before them. The video, for example, built upon the work already done through the National Trust's report – *Uninvited Guests*. Interviewee Two believed that *Dispossessed* *'came out of a recommendation of the steering committee for the [Aboriginal Interpretation] project'*. The steering committee noted that *'the Australian Museum talking heads sort of testimonies are one of the most popular parts of the exhibits'* (Interviewee Two) and wanted to capitalise on this popularity in the interpretation of the Indigenous history at Parramatta Park and Old Government House. Not only did the Aboriginal Interpretation project spark an idea for another way to present the park's shared history, it also meant that a lot of the preliminary work in terms of the historical research had been done and that as a result, getting the video off the ground was a simpler project.

The Centenary of Federation (Aboriginal History Grants Scheme) set aside \$10,000 for the video. Parramatta Park Trust covered the costs above this. Interviewee One noted the significance of this contribution. *'The video went way over budget but my manager, Jillian Comber, was very committed to the park and she managed to find enough money from other areas of the park's budget to keep the video on track'* (Interviewee One). It is a credit to the Parramatta Park Trust that the project got off the ground considering their limited funds. It also gives an indication of the importance they placed on attempting to convey the Aboriginal perspective of the history of the area. Interviewee One stated that *'Basically, we're running the park on about four hundred thousand dollars a year recurrent funding from Government. There is a strong mandate from Treasury that the park becomes self-funding and we are being remarkably successful but it is very difficult to ensure cost recovery with such a sensitive complex cultural resource. It's just tiny.'* There seems to have been a gradual decrease in funding dedicated to the park as it went through various changes in management and it seems unlikely that the economic rationalists perspective that the park should be self-funding, will ever eventuate. A further difficulty in obtaining funds is that although grants like the Centenary of Federation Fund provide money to establish projects, there are very few grant schemes to fund ongoing projects. Unlike the National Trust, Parramatta Park Trust has no ongoing interpretation budget (Interviewee One). So although the video could be produced, funding for things such as the ongoing costs of the maintaining the Burramatta Visitors Centre at the park (where the video could be aired) was not available. Only recently has the Burramatta Visitors Centre been re-opened and even then only on weekends where a volunteer is available. Interviewee One described the situation as *'at the moment our budgets are just so circumscribed that what money comes in for heritage we just put in to preserving the buildings.'*

The video is divided into a number of sub sections. These are titled

- Before Invasion
- Invasion
- A Burramatta Sister and Brother
- Struggle and Survival

What is evident throughout the video is the effort made to link the past to the present, to illustrate a living Darug culture. As stated in the video, *'What is now parkland was the home and heartland for a clan of the Darug people. We Darug of the 21st Century are reclaiming our culture and language from the brutality of history'* (O'Brien, 2002). Re-enacted flashbacks are consistently brought back to the here and now as the presenters discuss the importance of the park today or how Darug culture has been impacted on as a result of the past. The video puts side-by-side European (often utilising primary sources such as extracts from the diaries of First Fleet members) and Darug perspectives (handed down through oral history and deduced from documentary accounts from Europeans). For example, the idea is put forward that to the Darug, the European idea of 'owning' the land was a foreign concept, Terra Nullius is described as a *'convenient escape clause'* (ibid.). The Macquarie period is referred to by one presenter as the forerunner of assimilation policies in Australia. *'Whether he intended it or not, Lachlan Macquarie was turning my people into puppets. He needed to control us, to pull our strings. Little attempt was made by him, or those that followed him, to understand who we were or where we came from.'*(op. cit.).

In most cases, the video allows the viewer to see both sides of the history. Although judgemental, it is clear that the perspectives presented are just that, perspectives and that there are many of them. Occasionally, the video borders on presenting opinion as fact. This is an interesting issue. The nature of Aboriginal history is such that most post-contact history is either derived from records written by Europeans or through oral history handed down through several generations. Sometimes oral history is disregarded because it is seen as 'unreliable'. Oral history, or opinions on the past that have been passed down, do have a valuable place in the telling of history. The nature of the source of the opinion however should be acknowledged so that just as with other sources consulted by historians, its validity can be weighed by the reader or, in this case, the viewer. The treatment of the issue of smallpox in the video presents a heavily biased interpretation in favour of the proposition that small pox was deliberately introduced. Though this is a valid opinion, the uncertainty of the evidence could have been better acknowledged.

The National Trust hopes to use the video to supplement guided tours or, in cases where guides are not available, to act as a substitute for the Aboriginal Interpretation program

(Interviewee Two). Parramatta Park Trust hoped to have the video regularly screening in the Burrumatta Visitor Centre (Interviewee One). Unfortunately, due to issues in funding for the Visitors Centre this does not appear to have eventuated. Interviewee Two thought it would be good for the video to be available in schools and libraries. However, this too would require additional funding.

5.7 Heritage Interpretation at Parramatta Park

Interviewee One, an employee of the Parramatta Park Trust, has been involved with heritage interpretation projects within the park. Interviewee One tended to stress a notion of heritage interpretation that followed the idea of a palimpsest - that the park itself was a multi-layered historic landscape. *'I think what we have done at Parramatta Park comes more out of our commitment to communicating history in all its levels... we're not very keen to take the history back to any one particular phase, we like to look at it as a cultural landscape'* (Interviewee One). Interviewee One felt that this contrasted with the style of interpretation which has been practised at Old Government House which largely focussed on taking interpretation back to the one layer – the Macquarie period. This style of interpretation is noted on the Friends of Old Government House web site. *'The ground floor has been interpreted to the Macquarie era whilst upstairs is more eclectic, representing a little of all the Governors who used the house.'* (Friends of Old Government House, 2002)

The Parramatta Park Trust website refers to the park as a *'cultural landscape containing evidence of Aboriginal occupation and colonial settlement'* (Parramatta Park Trust, 2003). The website refers to a variety of layers, for example it notes the importance of 10 hectares of remnant Cumberland Plain vegetation which gives it an environmental layer of significance. The idea of the whole park as a cultural landscape is also fitting with the Darug interpretation of the park as presented in *Dispossessed*. *'The Landscape of Parramatta Park is a living document of Darug history'* (O'Brien, 2002). Interviewee One believed in the merits of interpreting the historic layers of the park through the landscape by utilising guides to provide on-site interpretation. This method proved particularly effective in the adult 'Aboriginal Interpretation' tours and during Heritage Week 2002, a

tour run by Parramatta Park Trust for Heritage Week was also very successful. As Interviewee One noted, it also had the added benefit of protecting the parks Aboriginal heritage. *'Particularly with the Aboriginal stuff – we don't want to make it too explicit (e.g. by signing it) because we don't want it to be vandalised or damaged... it's tricky... my argument would be very strongly for on-site interpretation'*. The people and place exhibition at the Parramatta Heritage Centre contains a sign with a quote from a Darug descendant indicating the same concerns. *'If you put a sign on them 'scar tree' you'd find they would be vandalised next week with an axe'*. Parramatta Park does contain *'interpretative signage throughout the park'* to identify *'the key historical and natural features within the landscape'* (Parramatta Park Trust, 2003). However, little mention is made on this signage of the Aboriginal layers of the park and indeed, many of the signs indicating the European layers of the park's history have been vandalised (see Figure 5.7).



Figure 5.7: Vandalised sign

Although the use of guides to conduct the interpretation of the park is a very successful method of interpretation, it relies heavily either on volunteers or on an ongoing interpretation budget something that, unfortunately, Parramatta Park lacks. The Burrumatta Visitors Centre does include an excellent interpretative display that utilises a multi-layered

interpretation of the park. The display utilises perspex overlays that slide over the top of one another to indicate significant sites during the different historical periods. Three phases of significance or ‘overlays’ (prior to the establishment of the park) are identified –

1. Darug Lands
2. Agriculture and Land Usage
3. The Governor’s Domain

This layering provides for a complex interpretation of the park and an interpretation that allows many voices and perspectives to emerge. The centre does this by stressing the theme of a meeting place. Once entering the visitor centre you are greeted with this idea through signage. *‘This is the country of the Darug. It is a place where the river meets the harbour, the salt water mixes with fresh, shale meets sandstone, culture meets culture and generations of people have met to relax and celebrate’* (Signage at Burramatta Visitor Centre). Perhaps, more prominently than any other, the centre emphasises the Darug connection. This is evident in the more prominent words above the previously mentioned sign *‘NALAWA DARUGANORA – Sit down on Darug Land’* (see Figure 5.8).



Figure 5.8: Signage at the Burramatta Visitor Centre

The visitor centre does provide an excellent interpretative display and in particular provides a Darug perspective of the site, a perspective that is missing for the majority of visitors entering the park, who will never encounter a guide or attend the odd organised tour at Heritage Week. Once again the issue resurfaces of a lack of funding for heritage

interpretation which means that the visitor centre is staffed by volunteers and thus operates on an irregular basis.

5.8 Conclusions

The heritage interpretation programs established at Old Government House and Parramatta Park are all examples of innovative ways in which to present the shared history of the area. Interviewee Two noted that one of the issues in presenting Aboriginal perspectives of heritage places is that *'often people's perceptions are that there is no Aboriginal history unless you can see it'*. The nature of Parramatta Park and Old Government House is that the significance of the area to Indigenous people is not obviously 'signed' for the non-Indigenous visitor. Of course, there are signs in the landscape that indicate Parramatta Park is a site of Indigenous significance. However, these signs are not always in a language accessible to the general public. Without training, few people would identify scarred trees as sites of Aboriginal influence, or would read the landscape in a way that they would perceive its value to Darug people. For educational purposes, therefore, the programs established at Parramatta Park and Old Government House are crucial in re-addressing Australia's history by including Indigenous perspectives. The programs teach the participants how to look at these places in different ways and how to see what was previously hidden to them. They are able to see *'the survival of a cultivated Indigenous landscape with overlays of colonisation.'* (The National Trust of Australia (NSW), 2000a:3) and to understand the palimpsest that lays hidden.

The Aboriginal Interpretation of Old Government House program in particular, proved to be a corner stone for the direction of future interpretation programs at the National Trust. Indeed, the Trust plans to *'use the methodology employed in this Aboriginal Interpretation of Old Government House to develop public and school programs at regional country properties at either Dundullimal Homestead in Dubbo or Cooma Cottage in Yass'* (The National Trust of Australia (NSW), 2000a:14). Beyond this, the Australian Council of National Trusts have implemented a series of steps to ensure the incorporation of Aboriginal perspectives at all Trust properties. An Aboriginal representative has been

appointed to the board of the NSW branch of the National Trust and the Trust has formulated an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Policy (Australian Council of National Trusts, 2002). This policy aims to include the scope of what the Trust had previously focussed on in terms of heritage conservation and management. It also highlights the importance of undertaking cooperative heritage projects with Indigenous communities, ensuring adequate consultation with Indigenous peoples on heritage issues, and particularly relevant to the program at Old Government House is the trusts recognition of its responsibility to *'aim to educate the wider community about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and about Indigenous perspectives on National Trust properties and other historical and natural places.'* (ibid.).

The combination of the Aboriginal Interpretation of Old Government House and the video *Dispossessed*, are two proven examples of successfully established methods of interpreting the shared history of the area (in terms of their inclusion of Indigenous perspectives at a site which is so heavily dominated by non-indigenous historical interpretation). Placed in the wider context of Parramatta, it also appears that both the video and the interpretation tour are part of a larger movement to genuinely try to increase the recognition of Parramatta's shared history. For example, Parramatta City Council has now sponsored the Sydney Indigenous Film Festival for the last five years (Nilar, 2002). The problem remains however of ensuring the continuation of these interpretation programs. Most participants in the adult tours of Old Government House were particularly concerned that the educational benefits of the program to the community should continue beyond the trial period. As noted in the summary of the evaluation of the program, *'Most participants said they would recommend the tour to others and were anxious to find out if this was an ongoing initiative. Informally, many expressed support for an Aboriginal interpretation of a site that had been previously presented only for its European history'* (The National Trust of Australia (NSW), 2000c).

In the case of the Aboriginal Interpretation of Old Government House, setbacks to the continuation of the program largely revolved around the availability of Darug guides to conduct the program. As noted in the minutes of the third meeting of the reference group *'there seemed to be a perceived lack of available Darug volunteers. [it was] suggested the*

option of training non-Aboriginal guides to deliver the program after the trial [be considered] '(National Trust Aboriginal Interpretation Reference Group, 2000a).

Interviewee Six, who had acted as a Darug guide for the program, highlighted some of the problems associated with the issue of the availability of Darug guides. Neither the demand or funding was available to warrant a full time position for a Darug guide and this restricted the availability of the guides who had participated in the trial program. They had their own obligations with full time employment and family commitments. The recommendation that came out of the evaluation of the program with regards to its continuation was to concentrate the period available for schools into 3 weeks of term 2 every year with the guides paid and the program delivered on a cost recovery basis (The National Trust of Australia (NSW), 2000c:14). Adult tours could be linked into different themes at appropriate times e.g. Heritage Week and would be run in Spring and Autumn on a monthly basis (ibid.). This type of approach needed guides who would be readily available for casual employment at these times.

To address this problem, Interviewee Six suggested that the regular body of volunteer guides at Old Government House be trained to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives on their tours. As Interviewee Six related from her experiences in conducting the tour, *'I think I thought my role originally was purely to give the Aboriginal perspective and I found that that was really quite impossible – you had to do a shared – you had to do both because one hinged on the other'*. Similarly, the guides at Old Government House would not be telling the whole history without acknowledging Aboriginal perspectives. The key here is to acknowledge other perspectives but not to appropriate them or claim them as your own. Interviewee Six noted the tendency for some of the guides who were particularly attached to Old Government House to initially feel threatened by the Aboriginal Interpretation program. *'As I say to people one of the first things that some of the guides say is "What are you going to say about the house" and there is this real aggression and I say I'm not going to say anything about the house, you have to tell me about the house'* (Interviewee Six). The point is that we can acknowledge others perspectives without appropriation.

Interviewee Five also noted the potential of the role that volunteer guides at Old Government House play in the expression of the shared history of the site.

'It is very dependant on the guides - no matter how much I train them if they have a bit of an issue with that they will skip over it really quickly... I think with any teaching when there is a passion the information is relayed really well. But sometimes there is resistance. Not so much at Experiment Farm but more at Old Government House... [some people feel that it] challenges the notion of the absolute power of the colony'

(Interviewee Five).

Clearly, it takes time, training and sensitivity to begin the process of initiating changes to the accepted interpretation of Old Government House. As Interviewee Six noted, many of the guides who attended the Aboriginal Interpretation to gain insights into this 'other side' of the site reacted sensitively to the shared history and are enthusiastic to incorporate elements of the interpretation into their own tours. However, some issues still remain using non-indigenous guides to tell the Indigenous story.

Interviewee Six discussed the demarcation of heritage into 'Aboriginal' and 'non-Aboriginal' divisions *'You want to come and do an Aboriginal Tour, OK, John will do that. You want to do a European tour? Someone else will do that. But at the same time we don't want to be displacing Aboriginal people and that's one of the problems I think ...'* Reinforcing divisions between Indigenous and non-indigenous heritage only seemed to make it harder to support a shared heritage perspective. Sites such as Old Government House and Parramatta Park cannot be clearly divided into 'Aboriginal' and 'non Aboriginal sections'. The history, the layers and the significances intertwine and blend. Interviewee Six argued that the history needed to be shared but that we needed to find a way of sharing the history without marginalizing Aboriginal people.

Interviewee Two, who coordinated the programs with the National Trust, also recognised the importance of the issue of marginalisation. She noted that the program is funded in the National Trust's budget and so although funding wasn't an issue, the availability of guides was. *'I had schools ringing me earlier in the year to go on it... but I couldn't get a confirmation on whether we could do it and they got frustrated and didn't get back to us.'*

(Interviewee Two). Interviewee Two saw a major issues as the sanctioning of other guides by appropriate members of the Darug community. This ensured the rights to information and its transmission would continue to lie with Darug people. Alternatively, if suitable guides could not be found to conduct the program, Interviewee Two thought that the video *Dispossessed* could be shown to groups by guides either at the beginning or end of tours and this would ensure Darug voices were heard.

Dispossessed could be shown in a room of Old Government House quite easily. Similarly, it could be shown continuously, as was initially hoped, in the Burramatta Visitor Centre at Parramatta Park. The video's potential to educate the community on the shared history of the area is currently limited because of a lack of funds dedicated to the opening of the Visitors Centre. As mentioned previously, the centre has always had to rely on volunteer staff and is opened irregularly. In contrast to the National Trust, which has a budget for education programs, Parramatta Park Trust has no such luxuries. What it has achieved to date, has been established through various grants, the importance of which cannot be underestimated in getting these projects up and running. As Interviewee One stated:

'little bits of seed money make a big difference – I can't stress this enough if any policy maker ever gets to hear your report - little bits of money really do seed bigger projects. We couldn't have started from ground zero and just made a video. If the National Trust report hadn't been available I couldn't have gone out and done such high quality research in time. The video just couldn't have happened without lots of little bits of seed money and all of that this time came from the Centenary of Federation.'

(Interviewee One).

The problem becomes that although grants are reasonably available for the establishment of projects, there is little help available to ensure their continuation. Despite this, Parramatta Park Trust dedicated all the resources they could to ensuring the creation of projects like the video. As Interviewee One stated, *'we are determined to do something rather than being paralysed by the idea of not being able to do it perfectly which is a big problem in heritage interpretation because the critics can be ruthless'*

Nevertheless, for the real potential of the video as an educational tool to be fulfilled, some funding will need to be generated. Interviewee One had hoped to make the tape accessible to schools and libraries. However, even the funding for copying and distributing the tape is limited. Perhaps, in cooperation with bodies such as the Board of Studies and the Department of Education, some funding could be dedicated to this project to enable the video to be used as a resource to help implement aspects of the curriculum which are required to cover shared history and heritage.

Until such funding eventuates, how does the Parramatta Park Trust go about acknowledging the shared history of the site? The Visitors Centre which contains displays relevant to the park's Darug history is largely closed and therefore a facility in which the video can be viewed is not readily available. One possibility on a limited budget would be to incorporate more signage. However, in conjunction with signage comes the issues of vandalism – both of signs and of the areas they identify. Signage is also a rather impersonal way to relay a history which relies on showing personal attachments to place, something the guided tour achieves well. Interviewees were presented with the idea of the dual naming of the park to immediately portray both its Indigenous and non-Indigenous significance to any visitor. Most interviewees were supportive of this idea. However, it was noted that with the Aboriginal name being Burramatta, an explanation would probably be required to go along with it so people don't just say '*oh they can't spell*' (Interviewee Two). There are many such possibilities to draw attention to the site's Indigenous history such as public art or an Indigenous monument which were other suggestions by interviewees.

Perhaps, the most encouraging aspect of the programs run at both Old Government House and Parramatta Park is that regardless of their continuation in the future, they have had a visible impact in some sections of the community. Many groups of school students have been educated to view a place in a different way. Many more adults have also participated in this program. Others have seen the video at Heritage Week activities. All these participants are likely to discuss what they have seen with others and the shared history of the site is gradually being distributed to a wider audience. One such example was the recent excursion conducted by Baulkham Hills High School for its year seven history

students to the park. This excursion was not conducted by a Darug guide but was conducted by Interviewee Eight, a senior history teacher at the school.

The excursion arose because of this gradual filtering of information and experience of the site from other participants and as a result, a new group of students have seen the place in a different light. As Interviewee Eight noted, *'the idea however of a heritage 'field trip' that did address both Indigenous and non-indigenous cultures was in 2003 a first at our school.'* Interviewee Eight noted that *'it is my professional view that few schools, other than those who actually teach Aboriginal Studies, ever address the heritage field trip as a truly shared heritage experience.'* If examples like Parramatta Park and Old Government House can be publicised as potential case studies for the required heritage field trip, perhaps with the publishing of a teachers guide to help²⁹ conduct an excursion, knowledge of the shared history of the area will be spread even further afield. It is important to note that such a book should merely be an aid to on-site interpretation. As Interviewee Eight stated

'The great Australian historian Manning Clark once said that a historian should have 'good boots'. The idea that sites of significance, places where history happened is all around them, gives students the opportunity to develop a multidisciplinary notion of learning. History and heritage are more than books and lectures. The place brings the past and the spirit of the past alive.'

It is the actual site which tells the story. As Mark McKenna states in his book, *Looking for Blackfellas' Point*, *'I felt the past was there but there was no way of reaching it, as if I had to learn a new language before I could understand what happened.. if I was to understand my own place in.. Australia'* (McKenna, 2002:5). Interpretation of the landscape at Parramatta Park and Old Government House does reveal the history which is sometimes hidden in an inaccessible language, to all who take the time to listen.

²⁹ Interviewee Eight suggested the publication of a Teacher's Guide such as that accompanied by the new text, *The Aborigines* by Reynolds and Dennett would make this trip accessible to more teachers.

Chapter 6: The Meeting Place Precinct – Botany Bay

National Park

6.1 Captain Cook and Australian History

Captain Cook is often incorrectly labelled as the man who ‘discovered’ Australia. This is an inaccurate perception. Archaeological evidence suggests Aboriginal people have been in Australia for at least 60,000 years and possibly as long as 120,000 years (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, n.d.). Oral history from some Aboriginal groups suggests that Aboriginal people have been present in Australia since time began. So the notion that Cook ‘discovered’ Australia is certainly incorrect. Indeed, Cook was not even the first European to ‘discover’ Australia as Dutch and Portuguese sailors had landed on our shores many years prior to Cook (McIntyre, 1982). Cook does however deserve credit as one of the world’s finest navigators. Cook was the first to accurately chart a substantial part of the coastline and to fix the continent in relation to known waters (Kurnell.com, 2003). His explorations have also been given significance because, due to a variety of circumstances, they were followed up within a few years by a British expedition to settle the ‘new’ continent. For these reasons, Cook is considered a major figure in Australia's modern history. Numerous places in Australasia, particularly on the east Australian coast and also in New Zealand, have been named after him or his vessel (the Endeavour) and many of the names he gave to parts of the Australian east coast in 1770 are still used today.

There has been much research in Australia as to the nature of the Australian fascination with Captain Cook. One of the most recent publications dealing with the ramifications of this, and how it relates to our interpretation of place in Australia, is the group of collected papers from 2002 entitled *After Captain Cook: The Archaeology of the Recent Indigenous Past in Australia* edited by Harrison and Williamson. Harrison and Williamson describe Cook as one of ‘*the most powerful figures of settler Australia's colonial mythology*’, and go on to assert that he is ‘*widely celebrated in Anglo-Australian histories as the originator, the first settler of a nation of settlers. Cook also represents the single most important instrument of the Empire, a perfect tool of the colonial project*’ (Harrison and Williamson,

2002:3). The endurance of Cook as a figure in Australian historical memory is difficult to understate. In 1933, an Australian eager to capitalise on non-indigenous Australians willingness to claim Cook as our ‘founding father’ even organised to buy and transport Cook’s boyhood home to Australia (Healy, 1997). It still stands today, reconstructed in Fitzroy Gardens in Melbourne, Victoria (see Figure 6.1). Healy (1997:1) describes the non-indigenous fascination with Cook as Cook becoming more than a historical figure – Cook, in fact, has become *‘an enduring icon, a huge network of narratives, images and ceremonies that seek to articulate a common reference for Australian historical culture: in the beginning was Cook’*.



Figure 6.1: Captain Cook’s Cottage, Fitzroy Gardens, Melbourne

The anthropologist, Deborah Bird Rose, has collected a series of stories relating to various Aboriginal peoples perspectives of Cook, particularly in the Victoria River district in the Northern Territory. In these accounts, the historical figure of Cook has been re-interpreted to provide an Aboriginal perspective of Australian history. One example of the stories collected by Rose is given below:

‘ “We have been shot. Captain Cook came knocking [killing] people for land and for gold.” Many white people will find these words quaint. They know that Captain Cook did not venture anywhere near the Northern Territory of Australia, as Aboriginal storytellers assert. Nor was he conspicuous in his brutality; compared to subsequent events, his actions

were humane. Aboriginal historians locate the facts of many of their recent history in the person of Captain Cook. In Hobbles' account, Captain Cook, and Europeans generally, had an insatiable desire for land and minerals.'

(Rose, 1992:2).

Healy expands on these Victoria River stories to relate other Indigenous Australians' perspectives of Cook. He highlights one example from 1970 – the Bicentenary of Cook's voyage to Australia – where *'Aboriginal people attempted to remember Captain Cook not as a founding father but a harbinger of dispossession and death'* (Healy, 1997b:1). Aboriginal people in Victoria utilized Cook's Cottage (see Figure 6.1) as a starting point for marches to illustrate a very different perspective of Australian history (ibid.).

So the figure of Cook, in much the same way as he is given responsibility by many non-indigenous Australians as being the 'founder' of modern Australia, is also given the responsibility by many Indigenous Australians for the series of events which unfolded as a result of the colonization of Australia. Because he is seen by many Indigenous people as the 'first' of the white men, he is *'credited with initiating and establishing the law that governs relations between Aboriginal and "white" people'* (Rose, 2001:62).

6.2 Brief Historical Background of the Botany Bay Area

Botany Bay is arguably most famous because Captain James Cook (though at the time he was a Lieutenant) visited there on his voyage to Australia in 1770. The history of the Bay area is far richer and more complex than a narrative that revolves exclusively around the visit of Cook's ship the Endeavour. Walker (1969:9) writes that it is difficult to assert historically when the first occupants of the area would have arrived as the tales of the origins of these people are *'shrouded in the impenetrable mists of the dreamtime'*. Radiocarbon dating of archaeological sites in the 1960s, revealed evidence to suggest that the wider region had been occupied at least 7000-8000 years ago (ibid.). This date is subject to speculation. Sea levels have changed considerably in the area around Botany Bay and sites that may provide an older date could potentially be beneath the current

shoreline (Dickson, 1981). In 1969, Walker wrote that the original inhabitants were, according to his sources at the Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies, the Iora people with the Dharawal tribe living close by, however, the Dharawal's actual territory was south of Port Hacking. Walker (1969:11) notes however that Ian Sim, an '*authority on the Aborigines of Port Jackson-Botany Bay regions*', believed that the Iora were not actually a tribe but that Iora was actually the word for 'man' in one of the Sydney Aboriginal dialects. The consensus today appears to be that the traditional owners of the area are the Dharawal (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2002:20).

Much of what is known about the lifestyle of the Dharawal people comes from the observations of members of the crew of the Endeavour when they were anchored in Botany Bay in April 1770. Archaeological evidence also gives us indications of occupation sites, dietary habits and the kinds of stone tool technology that the Dharawal people utilised in the past. The picture that has been developed of a pre-contact Dharawal lifestyle at Kurnell and the surrounding areas is similar to the general picture often given of Aborigines in South East Australia. Salt (2000:12) for example, describes so-called 'traditional' Aborigines as both '*one with and part of (their) natural environment*'. Aborigines are described as living in harmony with the environment, hunting and gathering only what is needed and ensuring that respect for their country is passed down the generations through the teaching of traditional lore and customs to the youth.



(Image from NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service - Copyright NPWS).

Figure 6.2: Map of Botany Bay National Park (Southern Section)

(The Meeting Place Precinct is on the northern tip of the southern side around the Monument Track and Discovery Centre)

In the Kurnell region, a sub group of the Dharawal – the Gweagal – occupied the area (Salt, 2000:13). Beryl Timbery-Beller, an elder of the Gweagal people also suggested that there was a separate family group within the Gweagal called ‘Cunnel’ that were a local family group that inhabited the area (ibid.). Indeed, many people believe that the name Kurnell was acquired from the Aboriginal name of the area. Professor Beaglehole, an authority on Cook, states that the Indigenous name for Kurnell was actually Kundell. However, one of the first European settlers of the areas name was Connell and another possibility is that in the post-contact period Aborigines may have simply used the word ‘Cunnel’ to indicate that they were camped on Connell’s property (Walker, 1969:45). In short, it is probably not possible to give a definitive answer as to the origins of the name Kurnell.

The coastal location of Kurnell and its abundance of seafood resources meant that the Gweagal were probably less nomadic than other inland Aboriginal groups. The Gweagal also utilised a range of plant and animal foods. Salt (2000:14) writes that one feature of particular importance to the Gweagal was the white clay pits on the peninsula for which they were the guardians. The clay, amongst other things, was used in ceremonies, corroborees, as a medicine and to line the bottom of canoes to allow a fire for cooking in the base (ibid.). White clay is still valued by Dharawal people today.

Cook landed in Botany Bay (the Indigenous name for which is Kamay) on the 28th April 1770 (Salt, 2000). One of the stories that the Dharawal people strongly associate with is the story of Cook's landing. Cook's journal reveals the following perspective:

'I thought that they beckon'd us to come ashore; but on this we were mistaken, for as soon as we put the boat in they again came to oppose us upon which I fir'd a musquet between the two which had no other effect than to make them retire back to where their bundles of darts lay and one of them took up the stone and threw at us which caused my firing a second musquet load with a small shott, and altho' some of the shott struck the man yet it had no effect other than to make him lay hold of a shield or target to defend himself, immediately after this we landed which we had no sooner done than they throw'd two darts at us which obliged me to fire a third shott soon after which they both made off.'

(Cook's journal quoted in Salt, 2000:18).

Oral history passed down through generations of Dharawal people provides a different emphasis, stressing the heroic nature of the two men who have become known as the 'two warriors':

'When they saw a big white bird sailing into the Bay, that's what was handed down to me, they saw this big white bird coming, these two Aborigines went down as a warning party to let them get the children and hide them. They stood their ground and the others were in the

bushes – a back up to protect the family groups. On the rock stood two warriors, and there were about thirty marines. Two against thirty!’

(Beryl Timbery-Beller quoted in Salt, 2000:18).

These differing conceptions of Cook’s voyage and the particular example of the story of the two warriors quoted above will be referred to again later in the chapter. In the meantime, what is important to note is that there are both obvious and subtle differences between most Indigenous and non-indigenous interpretations of Cook and there are also similarities. Both Indigenous and non-indigenous groups for example have placed emphasis on Cook’s role in establishing a European colony in Australia – what the outcomes of this establishment was however, can be viewed in different ways or with a different emphasis – something like the popular debate of settlement versus invasion. Though generalisations are useful here, it is also important to note that there are exceptions to these views. Many non-indigenous Australians for example, and particularly Kurnell and Sutherland Shire residents, are happy to view Kurnell as the *‘birthplace of modern Australia’*³⁰ (Salt, 2000) because of Cook’s stop over there and the eventual plans to create a convict settlement at Botany Bay in 1788 as a result of his observations whilst at the Bay. These individuals see Cook as the prime instigator of the Australian nation. As Walker writes however, *‘although spoken sometimes as “the birthplace of Australia”, Kurnell could be more aptly described as the spot where conception took place.’* (Walker, 1969:71). The British colony was not after all established at Botany Bay but at Sydney, which was deemed far more suitable. Differing views about the role of Cook in Australian history, and therefore the status of the Botany Bay National Park which now preserves some of the significant areas which he visited, are evident. Interviews conducted during this case study for example revealed the whole range of opinions from the site being an extremely important heritage site to it being overrated in the history of modern Australia. Cook’s voyage was certainly influential in having a colony established in Australia but historiography for example, has credited Sir Joseph Banks, a self-funded Botanist aboard the Endeavour, with being a leader in the later push in England to establish a colony at

³⁰ In Daphne Salt’s book, *Kurnell* published in 2000 and in websites like Kurnell.com and in other literature the word modern is almost always asserted – thus giving some acknowledgement of the Indigenous nations that functioned within Australia before white settlement. Prior to this, Kurnell had been labelled simply *‘the birthplace of Australia’* (Walker 1969:71).

Botany Bay where convicts could be taken to ease the overcrowded conditions of Britain's hulks and gaols (Frost, 1994:3). There are an extensive number of theories put forward as to why Australia was settled and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to go into them all now. It should be noted though, that Cook's role in establishing the 'modern Australian nation' is certainly a subject of debate amongst contemporary scholars. Despite this, Cook has remained an enduring founding figure in the eyes of the majority of the Australian population.

After Cook's voyage, the Gweagal would have had approximately 18 years of relative freedom from the disturbances caused by Europeans. It is probable that stories of Cook's visiting ship would have been passed on to other Aboriginal groups in the greater Sydney region (Walker, 1969:16). In 1788, an influx of ships then arrived. The Gweagal, using past experiences as a guide, may have thought that these ships too would just be visiting which in a way, for the Gweagal, proved true. The First Fleet initially did stop in Botany Bay but found it not as hospitable as described in Cook's journals – a safe harbour and a secure source of fresh water were apparently inadequate or absent³¹(ibid.). Some clearing of the land did occur before the move on to Sydney Harbour (op. cit.). As the First Fleet left the Bay, two more ships entered the Bay as part of the French voyage lead by La Perouse (op. cit.. p.17). In 1789 Captain John Hunter³² spent 10 days in the Botany Bay area producing maps and charts (op. cit. p.18). Six years later in 1795, Bass and Flinders also explored the Bay area in their small boat the '*Tom Thumb*' (op. cit.). During this lapse of time, it is most likely that the Gweagal would have heard from neighbouring groups of the impact of what was now a permanent settlement of these newcomers in Sydney was having upon the Indigenous occupants of the area. Botany Bay itself however was still largely untouched by the British occupation. As Walker (1969:19) writes '*the broad waters of the Bay and Georges River proved an effective barrier to extension of settlement southward in the early days of the colony and even discouraged escaped convicts fleeing in that direction. (Moreover, a considerable population of prospective hostile natives may have acted as a deterrent to the later) Hence not even military excursions to recapture runaway felons found it necessary to penetrate into the South Botany Bay regions*'. Those settlers who did visit the area tended to arrive by boat, and such visits were usually to

³¹ It is possible that Cook's voyage coincided with wetter conditions and more fresh water was available at the Bay.

³² Hunter later became governor from 1795 to 1800

either raid shell middens for the creation of lime for the colony or for the plentiful supply of timber (ibid.). Life would therefore have been relatively undisrupted for the Gweagal had it not been for one of the other impacts of British colonisation – the spread of diseases - which failed to show respect for geographic boundaries.

In 1815, James Birnie was given a ‘promise’ of 700 acres of land and 150 acres of saltwater marshes at what is now known as Kurnell. This was ‘*the first official land grant in the pre-Sutherland Shire*’³³ (Salt, 2000:25). Birnie named his land ‘Alpha Farm’³⁴, a name which is still in use today at Botany Bay National Park for a farm house (though from a later era) which stands on the area of this initial grant (Walker, 1969:19). Birnie chose this name to indicate that it was the beginning of farms in the area (Salt, 2000:25). John Connell received the next land grant in 1816. Birnie’s original grant occupies the area which is largely taken up by Botany Bay National Park whereas Connell’s land appears to have been in the area now occupied by the township of Kurnell. The exact boundaries were not surveyed until 1827 and only became formalised after they were recorded (Walker, 1969:21). The land appears to have been utilised largely for the cutting of timber and also the harvesting of grass to be supplied as cattle feed for Sydney, which was suffering from drought conditions (ibid.). Birnie and Connell both had Sydney residences and had appointed managers and other staff to run these ‘country’ properties (op. cit.)³⁵. Connell appeared to be more active than Birnie. In 1828, when Birnie, then aged 66, was declared insane, Connell happily purchased Birnie’s land grant from Birnie’s trustees (Salt, 2000:26). When Connell died in 1849, his land was passed on to his grandsons (ibid.). In 1861, the land (along with several other parcels that the grandsons had acquired) was sold at auction to a Thomas Holt. It is with the arrival of Thomas Holt at Kurnell that the Gweagal again surface in the official historical narrative. Salt (2000:29) notes that Holt employed a Gweagal man, William Rowley, as his foreman and several other Aboriginal workers were also employed with ‘*a view to economics*’. Holt seemed to have a policy of

³³ Walker (1969:19) expands on the land grants to reveal that Gregory Blaxland was actually first awarded land in the Kurnell area for his achievements in crossing the Blue Mountains together with Wentworth and Lawson (and reportedly they were also provided with a bit of help from local Aborigines). Blaxland chose to settle at Brush Farm instead, in what is now the Ryde/Eastwood area. Blaxland’s land at Kurnell was later sold to Connell, the second European settler after Birnie.

³⁴ Walker (1969:20) notes that to the amusement of Birnie’s friends, this name was misinterpreted by a clerk who wrote the official name of the land grant down as ‘Half A Farm’. Birnie was not impressed and continued to use the name as he originally had proposed for it.

³⁵ Walker (1969:23) writes that the unfortunate accident with Birnie’s officially property name was in this sense accurate as he was very much ‘half a farmer’.

employing Aborigines and any other available form of cheap labour. Holt tried his hand at oyster farming at which he was reasonably successful and sheep and cattle farming ventures that both failed³⁶. He also sold the rights for timber on his land (ibid. pp.30-31). In 1870 Holt erected (at his own expense) the obelisk dedicated to Cook (see Figure 6.3), a fellow Yorkshireman, up from Cook's landing place, to mark the 100th anniversary of his landing (Walker, 1969:32). Holt appears to have been a man who developed strong associations with the Kurnell area and its history. When he returned to England in 1883 to retire, he named his house 'Waratah' in a kind of act of remembrance of his time in NSW (ibid. p.33).

Much of the 20th Century at Kurnell has been a battle between the two poles of conservation and development. Perhaps, the most controversial issue of all in this debate has been the destruction of the Kurnell sand dunes. The dunes were renowned for their towering height, a natural wonder. Children from Kurnell loved to play on them and they have even been the location for a number of movie sets (Salt, 2000:35). The dunes had also been campsites and burial grounds for the Gweagal (ibid. p.30). Salt (2000:34-35) writes that since the Government refused a reserve of 2000 acres to be established in 1933, *'in excess of 70 million tonnes of sand (has been) carted away. The once pristine dunescape... has been reduced to a few remnant dunes and deep water-filled pits, many of which are now being filled with demolition waste'*. Some concerns over the dunes may now have been eased with the addition of the Kurnell Sand Dunes on the State Heritage Register (O'Rourke, 2003b). Koalas were another aspect of Kurnell's natural environment that have suffered over the years, to the extent that a once thriving population was extinguished. In 1899, the Government resumed 250 acres of land to create the Captain Cook Landing Place Reserve for the use of the public (Salt, 2000:43). Hunting became commonplace in the reserve as did fishing, camping, and at times there were regular groups of squatters (ibid. pp.47-58). Conservation of the area's natural features was not a focus early in the history of the reserve. Indeed, the Minister of Lands, Joseph Carruthers'

³⁶ As a result of Holt's pastoral efforts, the grass at Kurnell began to disappear and the process of the destruction of the Kurnell Sand Dunes, still controversial today, had begun (Salt 2000:30-31). Holt also planted imported Buffalo grass to try and help his animals along. Planting seeds by hand and also letting his sheep distribute it via bags around their necks from which it dropped, Holt covered extensive areas. The mature plants however failed to produce any fertile seed. The only way in which the grass could propagate was through the slow process of gradually spreading out as it grew. Walker (1969:31) writes that *'probably the least recognised memorial to Thomas Holt is the bountiful crop of Buffalo grass today found throughout the length and breadth of the Shire.'*

tally of animals killed on his hunting trips at Kurnell in the year of 1883 alone was 256 birds and animals (ibid. p.48). A koala sanctuary was proposed in 1945 but was rejected (ibid.). Captain Cook's Landing Place Reserve was fast developing the status of a favoured recreational reserve – a status which endures today. In 1966, the area was handed over to the newly created NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and in the following years, acres were added to increase the size of the park. Since 1966 there have been various attempts by the NPWS to manage both the cultural and natural heritage of the park to preserve it for future generations.

6.3 The Current Status of Heritage Interpretation at Botany Bay National Park

One of the first attempts to convey the historic importance of the area in terms of its connection with Captain Cook's voyage occurred in 1822. The Philosophical Society of Australasia obtained the services of an elderly Aboriginal man who had apparently witnessed Cook's landing at Botany Bay. Upon indicating the location of the landing place, the executive of the Philosophical Society fixed a brass plate to the nearest available rock - a cliff near the site - to commemorate 50 years since Cook's arrival (Salt, 2000:40). In 1870, as referred to previously, Holt's obelisk to Cook was erected (see Figure 6.3). In 1881, as part of a royal visit, Prince Albert and his son, Prince George (the future King) planted four trees (ibid. pp.41-42). This is an indication of the many ceremonial plantings, which would commemorate various events at Botany Bay. The resumption of the land to form the 'Captain Cook Landing Place Reserve' in 1899 was also a firm statement of its historical significance to Australia's non-indigenous community. A series of monuments erected in the 1900s to various members of Cook's crew (Sutherland, Solander, Banks and Isaac Smith) as well as two plaques marking 'Cook's Stream' and 'Cook's Well' (places where the Endeavour crew were able to get fresh water) also continued to stress the non-indigenous significance of the site.

The *1972 Plan of Management* for the area which was then referred to as 'Captain Cook's Landing Place Historic Site' (today it is referred to as 'The Meeting Place Precinct') indicated that the primary purpose of interpretation at the site should be to convey the historical importance of the site to Europeans by revealing information about Cook's

journey and also the visit of the First Fleet to Botany Bay (The National Parks and Wildlife Service NSW, 1972:17-8). The only mention of interpreting Aboriginal culture is listed as the second last aim of interpretation at the site. Furthermore, interpretation illustrating the Aboriginal significance of the site is confined to the prehistoric era (ibid.). No mention is made of acknowledging the contemporary significance of the site to Aboriginal people.



Figure 6.3: Holt's Obelisk to Cook

In terms of the visible methods of interpretation available at the park (such as signage and the exhibition at the Discovery Centre) little has been done to express the significance of the site to Indigenous people today. There are a few instances where the Aboriginal people who occupied the country at the time of Cook's arrival are mentioned as part of the history of the area. Largely references to the Gweagal or Dharawal people are confined to the interpretive display in the Discovery Centre. There are also references to the Indigenous occupants on signage on the Banks/Solander Track and a minor reference on the Monument Track.

What has become known as the Monument Track, which is essentially a path linking the monuments to the men of Cook's crew and the spots they visited (see Figure 6.4), provides no interpretation for visitors other than that contained on the plaques which were erected at the time the monuments themselves were built. As most of the monuments date from the early to mid 1900s, it is not surprising that no mention is given to the Indigenous people who were the first occupants of the area. Perhaps, if additional signage had been added, the Monument Track would also reflect Indigenous involvement in the parks history and/or Indigenous perspectives. As it is, the track includes no expanded forms of interpretation. The one time Indigenous people are mentioned is in an extract from Cook's journal which sits in the form of a bronze plaque in the ground down the slope from Holt's obelisk to Cook. This reference includes the story previously cited in this chapter of the resistance Cook encountered from the 'two warriors' who stood their ground on the beach before Cook landed. The view previously quoted of Berryl Timbery-Beller is not included at the Monument Track. Figure 6.4 displays a sign that marks the beginning of the Monument Track. Although station 6 indicates that 'The Aboriginal inhabitants' will be discussed, nothing is currently present at that location today to give visitors any information of this nature. At least the sign itself acknowledges, albeit briefly, that the events that Cook's voyage sparked '*changed forever the destiny of Aboriginal people and the native plants and animals*'. The *Master Plan* acknowledged the lack of Indigenous perspectives as a weakness in the current interpretation of the Monument Track stating '*For every event described on the plaques, a reaction occurred at the Indigenous level, which needs acknowledgement*' (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003c:35).

The Banks - Solander Track is another location within the park that incorporates the odd piece of historical information that refers to Aboriginal people. This track is designed to reveal information about the native plants that are a feature of the park. The track is relatively short and includes signs at regular intervals, which give information about particular plants. Occasionally these signs will also indicate the uses that Aboriginal people had found for these plants (see Figure 6.5). Therefore, the track is not influential in ensuring that Aboriginal perspectives of contemporary historical events are considered. It is one way in which the park is currently including aspects of Aboriginal culture in the interpretation of the park to the general public. It could be considered negatively in the sense that this interpretation places Aboriginal people firmly within the natural domain and

visitor who comes to the park. Walks usually need to be pre-booked for example, and are only run at particular times. This means that information that is only relayed on Discovery Walks and not elsewhere (such as on signage within the park) cannot be accessed by the impromptu visitor.



Figure 6.5: Signs on the Banks - Solander Track

(Note the two different examples, one incorporating Aboriginal plant use, the other not.)

The Discovery Centre is the main place at which interpretation of the parks heritage is evident to date. The museum section within the Discovery Centre is divided into two main displays – one providing information on Cook’s voyage and the other focusing on the environment at Kurnell and associated issues. Reference is made to the area’s original inhabitants in both displays.



Figure 6.6: Display of stone and shell tools at Discovery Centre

The *Master Plan* acknowledges several weaknesses in both displays. The exhibition is dated, having been on permanent display for over ten years (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003c:33). The Cook section predominately gives information about Cook and his men. Entitled ‘Eight days that changed the world’, it includes maps, diary entries and artwork focusing on the non-indigenous story. A few references are made to Indigenous people. These include a display of Aboriginal stone tools (see Figure 6.6) and a series of panels entitled ‘owners and invaders’ which attempts to indicate what Indigenous people may have felt when Cook arrived. This information is all largely deduced from Cook’s journals and not from Indigenous perspectives. A series of cartoons are also included in this section to try to highlight an alternative view of Cook’s voyage and white settlement in general (for an example see Figure 6.7). Whilst these cartoons may be effective in getting a non-indigenous person to understand an alternative perspective of

settlement, they do not reveal with any complexity the Aboriginal experience of Cook's voyage. No real mention is made of contemporary Indigenous associations with the site (or non-indigenous for that matter though it is inferred that the site is of historical significance and should therefore be a place to visit and to reflect upon its past). A series of photographs looking at contemporary Australia are at the end of the exhibition. Though these photos do feature photographs of contemporary Indigenous people, they do not show them at Botany Bay but protesting in Sydney (see Figure 6.8). The Indigenous associations with the site as displayed through the museum are therefore largely placed in the prehistoric era. Displays of stone and shell tools reaffirming this. The only real display of contemporary associations with the site is a photograph at the entrance to the Discovery Centre (see Figure 6.9) and also the display of the Aboriginal flag at both the front of the Discovery Centre and on Commemoration Flat.

The second display which focuses on the environmental history of the park also tends to relegate Aboriginal history to the prehistoric era. A mural depicting the traditional lifestyle of hunting and gathering is the central focus, in front of which various tools are mounted for display (see Figure 6.10). A sample cross section of a midden is also displayed on the wall. The aim of this appears to be to contrast 'environmentally sound' Indigenous land management with the polluting practices of the contemporary era. It must be remembered however that the display is over ten years old and as such is a product of its time.



Figure 6.7: Example of a cartoon from the Discovery Centre museum display



Figure 6.8: Photographic display of contemporary Australia



Figure 6.9: Photograph at entrance to Discovery Centre



Figure 6.10: Mural of traditional life and tool display

6.4 The Meeting Place Precinct Master Plan

In the lead up to Australia Day, the 26th January 2003, the plans for the Meeting Place Precinct as outlined in the *Draft Master Plan* which had been completed for the area, were announced (O'Rourke, 2003). The Premier, Bob Carr stated that *'It is important for generations to come – for both black and white – that we preserve this historical site'* (ibid.). It is interesting that this time - 'Australia Day' - which marks the anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet at Sydney, was chosen, a date that is not directly linked with Cook's voyage to Australia and one which represents the non-indigenous colonisation of Australia (though for some Indigenous people 'Australia Day' is also seen as a symbol of Indigenous survival). A broad range of groups, from Sutherland Shire Council to the various Kurnell planning committees, welcomed the plan.

The concept of the 'Meeting Place' was outlined prior to the *Master Plan* in the 2002 *Botany Bay National Park Plan of Management*. In stating the 'core values' of the park, the *Plan of Management* indicated that of particular value was *'The symbolism which derives from these initial and later meetings between cultures and the potential to develop on the theme of the "meeting place" to explore current social issues such as reconciliation'* (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2002:3). *The Meeting Place Precinct Master Plan* was developed to work in conjunction with the *Plan of Management* and to begin to implement some of the guidelines as indicated for the park in the original management plan. A group of consultants were contracted to conduct community consultation and develop the draft plan. After the *Draft Master Plan* release in January 2003, a period of further public comment was invited before the final plan was developed.

The Meeting Place Precinct Master Plan (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003c:43) outlines the three stages of consultation in its development. Initial consultation ran from September 2002 until January 2003. This stage included identifying then holding meetings with organisations and individual stakeholders from the broader as well as the Indigenous community. From January until March 2003 and the close of public submissions commenting on the plan, various forms of public consultation were conducted. There was a public exhibition of the plan, public meetings (which will be

referred to in a separate section below), visitor surveys at the park, stakeholder meetings of Indigenous groups and the distribution of leaflets in the Indigenous community along with media releases targeting both the Indigenous and non-indigenous communities. The final stage of consultation was labelled 'ongoing consultation' (ibid.). This includes the continual consultation of the community on planned developments and also consultation in an attempt to include both Indigenous and non-indigenous stories of the park in future interpretation. The plan stressed that the aim of the targeted Aboriginal consultation was to *'enable a high level of Aboriginal community ownership, support and understanding of the project (and to) provide a forum for the input and the instigation of ideas for the Master Plan (and to) ensure that the community considers the design and interpretive strategies appropriate'* (ibid. p.49). The plan also indicated that the Aboriginal consultation was conducted on two levels, firstly with those individuals who have cultural and historical associations with the site and secondly with individuals and organisations from the broader Indigenous community who might lend support to the project. As part of the ongoing consultation, the plan suggested that an Aboriginal Research and Liaison Officer be employed for the project (ibid. p.51). It was also proposed that an Indigenous youth forum be held to gain feedback from younger generations and allow youth participation in the project. Social Mapping (a process of recording oral histories being developed by staff at NPWS Cultural Heritage Division) of both Indigenous and non-indigenous stories of the site was also recommended.

The consultation process revealed a number of significant opinions as to what should be the key focus in upgrading the Meeting Place Precinct. There was a consensus that the site needed to be upgraded and that the history of the area needed to be told in a way which was inclusive of original perspectives (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003c:53). Local residents were particularly concerned with the practical use of the site with the provision of amenities such as extra toilets, a kiosk and benches being a priority. The issue of revegetating the front entrance of the park caused some controversy as it was felt it would affect residents views (this will be expanded on below in section 6.5 'public meetings') and may also increase the risk of bush fire. Some concerns were also raised about funding for ongoing maintenance and implementation of the project. Various tourism agencies consulted have highlighted the potential of the park as a major tourist destination but noted that this would not happen without an upgrade of facilities, signage and transport

to the park. These agencies, but in particular Sutherland Shire Tourism, also suggested that the life of the original inhabitants of the area and the effects of dispossession of Indigenous people should be the key focus at the site (ibid. p.54). Conversely, members of the Sutherland Shire Historical Society felt that the focus of interpretation at the site needed to be Cook. The Historical Society thought that how Cook attempted to befriend the Aborigines should be included. In this regard they did acknowledge that some degree of 'shared history' needed to be portrayed. Their focus, however, appeared to be on portraying the 'lighter side' of events rather than the devastating impact that colonisation was to ultimately have. Other groups such as the NSW Department of Education Environmental Education Centre on the site took the more 'central ground' believing that *'the fact that the site is the beginning point for a major component of Australia's history (without diminishing the previous occupation by Indigenous People)'* should be highlighted *'using reconciliation as a main theme'* (ibid. p.55). A point of interest proposed by NSW Fisheries was that in promoting the park to different cultures (beyond merely an Indigenous non-indigenous binary) multi-lingual signage should be incorporated to make the park accessible to all Australians. Their point was that reconciliation is not confined to 'black and white' but needs to incorporate the whole range of cultures present in Australia.

The Indigenous consultation revealed that Aboriginal perspectives of the landscape and history of the area should be a focus of interpretation within the Meeting Place Precinct (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003c:57). Corresponding to these views, it was suggested that the revegetation of the site with indigenous plant species and the opening up of 'Cook's Stream' which had been dammed at some stage and thus no longer flowed to the bay, were high priorities. Like the local Kurnell community, the Indigenous community believed that park amenities should be improved but added that if a kiosk was added, it could be given an Indigenous name. With regards to heritage interpretation at the site, the Indigenous community were keen for the repatriation of Indigenous artefacts taken by Cook that are currently held at Cambridge University. The park needed to be portrayed as being on Aboriginal land and the story of the two warriors should be given prominence in historical interpretation. The continual links of Aboriginal people to the park today needed to be stressed and it was suggested that a statue of the two warriors be included in the monument walk. Other Indigenous stories relating to the region should also be told.

However, issues regarding the ownership of stories would need to be addressed prior to any collection of these stories taking place (ibid. p.58).

6.5 The Public Meetings

As part of the consultation process, a number of public meetings were held to get feedback on the *Draft Master Plan*. The first of these meetings were held over the weekend of the 8th and 9th of February 2003. Both days were advertised as barbeques. The days were distinguished by having Saturday extending a '*particular invitation to Kurnell residents*' and Sunday extending '*a particular invitation to the Aboriginal community*' with transport assistance available from La Perouse if it was required (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003a). The flyer advertising the event also gave an indication of what the key recommendations of the draft plan were and mentioned that initial consultation had been carried out with key stakeholder groups in order to construct the draft and what was now being sought was broader public feedback (ibid.). The key recommendations of the plan that were listed on the flyer were as follows:

- *A redeveloped Visitor and Cultural Centre on the site of the current Discovery Centre*
- *Restoration of Cook's Stream, which was a source of freshwater for Aboriginal people and Cook's crew.*
- *Reintroduction of a ferry service between La Perouse and Kurnell, allowing visitors the unique experience of arrival to the site by water, just as Cook did more than 200 years ago and as Aboriginal people had done for many years before then.*
- *An Indigenous 'Keeping Place' for the keeping of significant Indigenous artefacts and material*
- *A new interpretive gallery and café as part of the historic Alpha Farm site*
- *A new walking trail including interpretation of the Aboriginal history and stories of the area and the history of European exploration and discovery of the site.*

- *Revegetation of some areas to provide visitors with an insight as to what the landscape may have been like before Cook arrived.*

(NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003a).

The focus of these key recommendations is clearly on incorporating Aboriginal perspectives into the site whilst strengthening the interpretation to better reveal its non-indigenous significance. The Saturday meeting was however dominated by two largely unrelated issues. Firstly, the last of the key recommendations had generated a lot of discontent amongst Kurnell residents – that is the revegetation of the site. Secondly, the recommendation of NPWS that the Saturday and Sunday meetings be ‘separate’ Indigenous and non-indigenous forums caused a lot of controversy.

The latter issue was particularly delicate. The staff at Botany Bay National Park were clearly aware that, as Interviewee 11 (an employee at the park) stated, *‘the Indigenous community have had some experience of projects not really going anywhere or projects that don’t engage with the issues that they want to deal with’*. The staff at the park therefore wanted to go out of their way to engage with the Indigenous community. The problem of projects failing to be inclusive or truly representative of Aboriginal people’s views was also evident when conducting the social research for this chapter. There was a general reluctance from members of the local Indigenous community to be involved in this research project because of what they saw as disrespectful and inappropriate behaviour by some researchers in the past, along with disputable research outcomes from previous research that had been conducted in the area. A weakness in this chapter, therefore, is that no social research has been conducted with the local Indigenous stakeholders. The chapter does make efforts however to draw upon the *Master Plan* in which Indigenous consultation did occur and similarly to draw upon informal feedback gained from Indigenous people in conversations at the public meetings. Appropriate consultation, involvement beyond token levels and cultural sensitivity are clearly major issues that need to be engaged with to try to overcome these issues if the plan to upgrade the Meeting Place Precinct is to proceed with considerable Indigenous input.

At the Sunday meeting, the staff at NPWS clearly wanted to create a forum where Indigenous people felt comfortable to attend and to speak their minds. They were also aware that for many Indigenous people such a forum was not your conventional non-indigenous style of meeting. The geography of the room on Saturday for example was set up as a series of rows of chairs, the audience attentive to various speakers who stood at the front. Approximately 70 people were in attendance. The geography of the room on Sunday was a small, intimate circle of chairs, with no one person being singled out to stand and determine the agenda. The size of Sunday's meeting was considerably less than Saturday's and was therefore more personal or intimate. This difference was however controversial. Many of the non-indigenous attendees on Saturday indicated that they felt that the process was akin to '*segregation*' and that it was insulting and that the Indigenous community should be able to speak their minds in front of them. These issues were also complicated because, as Interviewee 9 (who was involved with the consultation process) noted, '*they (Indigenous people) didn't really want a huge involvement at this stage because they weren't really sure where it was going and it was like they've kind of moved on*'. Being consistent with the inclusive project that they desired, NPWS wanted to ensure full Indigenous involvement. Indigenous people possibly wanted to avoid putting an extensive amount of time into a project until they were sure that there would be flow-on benefits for their community. At a forum on Aboriginal Heritage held by the National Trust (NSW) in 2002, the Aboriginal Board member, John Lester from the University of Newcastle noted that issues such as the interpretation of history and heritage were often a lower priority for Indigenous people and were subject to less involvement by Indigenous people because there were far more pressing social issues requiring attention by Indigenous communities. Interviewee 9 felt that the staff at NPWS were so focussed on getting the consultants to undertake extensive Indigenous consultation that to some extent they neglected the local non-indigenous community who were both a larger group and a group who were particularly eager to be involved in the project. Balancing consultation with the needs and desires of various interest groups and a desire for the project to be truly inclusive can reveal itself to be quite a challenge.

The issue of the revegetation of the site that arose at the Saturday barbeque appeared to be contained to a number of vocal Kurnell residents who lived opposite the park on Captain Cook Drive. A letter posted by Julie Ingles on the Kurnell.com website gives a summation

of the arguments these residents had against the plans to revegetate the entrance to the park. Ingles writes:

'our excitement at the announcement of the planned upgrade... soon turned to concern...we have recently completed a large renovation... with the knowledge that our resale value would be assured with our lovely views and outlook. I realise that you can never actually purchase views, but no one would have ever thought that you could be "built out" in a National Park.... On reading the draft plan it seems that all consideration is being given to the visitors and none to the residents'

(Ingles, 2003).



Figure 6.11: The area at the centre of the revegetation controversy

Interviewee 9 spoke of the need for the staff at Botany Bay and NPWS in general to establish good relationships with the local people. She felt that *'there was a big mistrust of National Parks ... (and) that's a real problem... a lot of them couldn't get beyond that and this trees issue... because they were using that as a way to say Parks hates us so of course they're going to plant trees'* (Interviewee 9). Interviewee 9 noted that the majority of

submissions on the *Draft Master Plan* came from within the local community and that with the exception of the revegetation issue, the local community were strong supporters of the plan and had rallied for improvements within the park for some time. In many ways, however, there was a kind of tension within the local community. People acknowledged the historical significance of the park and felt that it ought to be a place that all Australians and International Tourists should desire to visit. Yet there was an awareness that Kurnell could potentially be as big a tourist attraction as La Perouse – where it is difficult to find a parking spot on the weekend due to the large visitation numbers.

A third issue that became apparent at the Saturday (non-indigenous) barbeque was an issue regarding the nature of historic interpretation. The room appeared to be divided over a number of issues that were to surface again and again in discussion of the *Draft Master Plan*. Questions about how history should be presented at the park and the proportion devoted to Indigenous history were at the centre of these issues. Some attendees at the barbeque firmly believed that the site needed to have a museum and that the complete history of Captain Cook – including all his voyages (many were totally unrelated to Australia) ought to be interpreted there. The *Draft Master Plan* argued that with the exception of an interpretive gallery and displays in the cultural centre, the landscape itself should act as a kind of museum – using specific historic sites to interpret events and letting the focus be the impact Cook's voyage had in Australia. This had the particular advantage of avoiding the costs of building and staffing a museum for which funds were not readily available. In conjunction with the museum issue was how the history of the site would be portrayed – regardless of whether it was in a museum or a small interpretive gallery. Interviewee 7 (a volunteer bush regenerator at the park) was particularly vocal at the meeting arguing that the portrayal of the history at the Meeting Place needed to give the '*facts*' and not the '*fluff*' that you often see in museums. He wanted to see all the details of Cook's journey along with details about Indigenous life, '*not the myths*', and was against more post modern methods of interpretation which tended to use imagination to try to put the audience in the place of people at the time. This wasn't '*real*' history. There were also issues about the proportion of space that should be devoted to telling the Indigenous history of the site. Some of those present felt strongly that there should be a 50-50 split in the interpretation whilst others felt that the Cook story needed more prominence. There was however no vocal opposition to telling Indigenous perspectives of the history. Indeed

there was a lot of support for including the Indigenous view; opinions on this only differed as to the amount of space that should be dedicated to this purpose.

At the Sunday meeting and barbeque, there was very little initial representation from the Indigenous community. Conversation therefore centred around similar issues to the Saturday meeting and barbeque. The issue of the 'separate' days targeting the Indigenous and non-indigenous communities was not raised. As the meeting went on, a number of family groups from La Perouse arrived. These attendees at the meeting were very supportive of the need for Indigenous stories related to Cook's landing to be told. They were also keen that in tandem with this, issues of intellectual property rights and the ownership of stories needed to be addressed.

A third stakeholder meeting was also held on the 20th March for relevant government, corporate and industry bodies. Groups represented at this meeting included Tourism Sydney, Sutherland Shire Council, Caltex and Planning NSW amongst others. This group gave considerable constructive feedback about implementing sections of the plan and highlighted possibilities for inter-agency involvement.

6.6 The Recommendations

The *Master Plan* made numerous overall recommendations for the site. Of interest was that its primary focus appeared to be on the interpretation of the site and the 'Meeting Place' concept. Before any of the technical and architectural developments are discussed, the plan indicates that the consultation process affirmed that the *Master Plan* '*serves to highlight the key theme of Reconciliation... across all Australians of differing cultural backgrounds ... As such, the Interpretation Plan has been developed in an attempt to offer parallel histories of Indigenous and Non-indigenous use of the site and serves to express the first contact between people from vastly different worlds*' (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003c:65).

Several large projects were recommended as part of the plan such as fixing the amenities, re-directing traffic routes and upgrading pedestrian access. The recommendations outlined

here, however, will focus on those relevant to a portrayal of shared history at the site. One major recommendation included trying to revegetate the site (and in conjunction with this dig out Cook's Stream so it flows to the Bay) so that it looks as it would have when Cook visited in 1770. It was felt that this would both beautify the park and make it seem as though one were entering a significant site and also help return some historical integrity (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003c:66). One of the larger projects - the re-establishment of a Ferry Service between Kurnell and La Perouse – was also justified in part because it would give the visitor the experience of approaching the park by water as both Cook and the Gweagal would have in the past.

The Monument Track was to be revamped and for the purposes of the *Master Plan* was re-labelled the 'Midden to Monument Walk' (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003c:70) with the idea that it would be renamed after appropriate community consultation at a later stage. The walk would commence at the Aboriginal midden at Alpha Farm and continue along parts of the existing Monument Track. At each monument and at other relevant points, interpretation would be given to show both Indigenous and non-indigenous perspectives of the site. Further discussion of the Midden to Monument Walk is undertaken below. An interpretive gallery would be constructed at the back of Alpha Farm to tie in with the interpretation given on the Midden to Monument Walk. The existing Discovery Centre building would also be altered to contain a cultural centre and keeping place³⁸ for Indigenous artefacts as well as a general visitor's centre and function rooms that would be available for community use. It was proposed that the existing Environmental Education Centre also be incorporated into this building.

6.7 The 'Midden to Monument' Walk

A series of eleven 'nodal points' are identified in the *Master Plan* at which interpretation would take place on the proposed 'Midden to Monument Walk'. These are listed in chart form on pages 79-81 of the *Master Plan*. Each point is identified by its location on the revised walking track and is allotted one or more themes. Within these major themes are

³⁸ A 'Keeping Place' refers to a place in which indigenous people can appropriately store cultural materials to ensure their conservation, but also, unlike a traditional museum, materials can be accessed for purposes such as their use in education etc. and are under the supervision of the community to which they belong.

sub-themes that will form the focus of the interpretation at that point. The possible historical content that can be relayed to stress the themes and sub-themes is indicated along with a general indication as to how the interpretation would take place. For example, the first 'nodal point' is listed as '*Aboriginal Midden and Alpha Farm*' (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003c:79). The major theme to be dealt with here is '*pre and post-contact*' and within this larger theme the sub-themes of '*cultural and social relationships*' along with '*the new built environment and cultural landscape*' are to be the focus (ibid.). The content which will be used to draw out these themes centres around a discussion of the midden and Aboriginal land use contrasting with European land use as shown by Birnie's Farm and Alpha Farm. This first nodal point provides a good example of how themes that are relevant to both Indigenous and non-indigenous cultures can be used to highlight the differing aspects of the history of the site.

Another example of a nodal point that succeeds at this, is at the Solander Monument. As well as giving an overview of Solander's life and his botanical investigations at Botany Bay, this point is being used to explore '*dual ways of representing flora and fauna*' (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003c:80). The varying uses, values and names that Aboriginal people had for the indigenous plants and animals of the Kurnell area can be contrasted with the names given to them by Banks, Solander and others who came after them. The type of relationship that Indigenous Australians had and have with the land today could also be discussed. The themes become a way to contrast different cultures and to learn about their differences and similarities. It is suggested that each theme be related with a combination of audio and signage. The details of this are yet to be worked out. The *Master Plan* provides the basic concept rather than the exact details of the walk.

The basic principle behind this interpretation appears to be based on portraying the idea that Aboriginal people were active players in the history of Australia in this era of first contact. As Interviewee 10 (who was also involved in the consultation process) stated, '*it's action and reaction as well. So for every action – for everything that occurred at first contact then an equal reaction was occurring... and that's not just to say that Indigenous people are always reacting. They were creating events as well that caused reaction from Cook and his groups*'. So, in terms of getting Aboriginal perspectives into the interpretation at Botany Bay National Park, the plan for the 'Midden to Monument' walk

certainly appears to have a lot of potential. Interviewee 11 (a park employee) raised one concern about the balance of the interpretation on the walk which is particularly relevant. She noted that most of the proposed interpretive nodes are based at existing monuments with only one or two additional nodes. This effectively means that Indigenous perspectives are included in the walk but they are largely '*only a response to the existing non-indigenous monument. So maybe it is a bit imbalanced as there are only one or two nodal points driven from an Indigenous perspective*' (Interviewee 11). The two nodal points where the interpretation is not driven by existing monuments are nodal points 10 and 11 which cover the cultural and natural landscapes (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003c:81). Nodal Point 11, the final point of the walk, is unique in that it exclusively deals with an Indigenous perspective – there is no non-indigenous content to be addressed. The suggested content given in the plan is '*Aboriginal concepts of Spirituality*', though the exact details of what would be included under this broad notion is not indicated (ibid.).

Another unique feature of the 'Midden to Monument' Walk is the Interpretation of the monuments themselves. The interpretive plan given in the *Master Plan* indicates that the walk will attempt to illustrate how the monuments illustrate changes in the way the non-indigenous community in Australia has chosen to memorialise and remember the past. The spread of the erection of monuments at the park from 1870 to 1970 allows a reasonably significant period over which the construction of the Australian past can be discussed (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003c:79-81). This also has the potential to incorporate changing Indigenous perspectives of the past along with current debates such as those being led by Henry Reynolds and Keith Windschuttle about the nature of Australian history. This information does not have to be revealed in a manner which indicates one interpretation should overrule another either – it is possible for the information to be relayed in a way which enables the visitor to determine their own opinion on Australian history. The proposed Interpretive Gallery, which will join the beginning and end of the 'Midden to Monument' Walk, could contain such a display.

There is one particular issue, which was somewhat contentious surrounding the proposal for the walk. This was the issue of the inclusion of an Indigenous monument in the walk – in particular a statue of the 'Two Warriors' previously referred to in this chapter. The

Master Plan acknowledged that one of the outcomes of the Indigenous consultation was a suggestion from the Aboriginal community that a statue of the two warriors be included in the trail (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003c:58). The story of the two warriors was seen as pivotal to the Aboriginal community as they felt it would help reconciliation by creating an understanding that *‘Aboriginal people did challenge European occupation from the very beginning (and that)... Aboriginal occupation of the region continues today’* (ibid.). The draft version of the *Master Plan* however countered the suggestion that an Aboriginal statue should be incorporated into the ‘Midden to Monument’ Walk. The draft plan acknowledged that members from both the Indigenous and non-indigenous communities had called for an Indigenous monument to be added to the track but recommended against this suggestion for two reasons, which are quoted below.

- *The placement of additional monuments in the landscape has the potential to negatively affect the site and existing monuments, and must be considered with great caution...*
- *In terms of perceived ‘equalisation’ of histories via monuments to Aboriginal resistance, it must be considered that ‘Aboriginal’ monuments would be part of a European tradition, and unacceptable to the integrity of the site. This is also true of the placement of any object attempting to signify ‘Aboriginality’ through non-traditional means – they must be considered with great caution, but works of art could be placed within the Interpretive Gallery as temporary exhibitions’*

(NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003b:47).

Both the draft and final versions of the *Master Plan* acknowledged what it called the *‘gesture of goodwill’* of the community groups who advocated the addition of an Aboriginal monument but suggested that the focus of interpretation be on the inclusion of Aboriginal stories at each of the interpretive nodes via signage and audio (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003b; 2003c:47). The suggestion that a statue not be incorporated when the proposal had support from the Indigenous community is problematic. Of perhaps the greatest concern is the suggestion that a monument is not an

appropriately ‘Aboriginal’ way of portraying history and heritage. Although considerably ‘toned down’ in the final version of the plan (through the omission of the second dot point as quoted in the paragraph above) the plan still implies that there are distinctly Aboriginal ways to present heritage, a way that is firmly tied to assumptions of Aboriginality being firmly based in the natural (rather than the historic) world. *‘It is recommended that stories with an Aboriginal focus be delivered via audio and signage in the interpretative nodes. This will provide a means whereby Aboriginal people can record their stories and have quotations placed strategically around the site, **within the context of as natural a landscape as is possible to provide at this time.**’* (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003c:76 emphasis added).

The key point here is that cultural change is a natural process in all cultural and religious groups. Aboriginal people can adopt ways of representing themselves and their history without it being seen as a collapse of their culture. Interviewee 10 acknowledged this position and the complexity of the issue of an Aboriginal monument. Interviewee 11 also noted that the *Master Plan* was a working document and that there was certainly *‘potential for this type of representation if there was a strong push from the community’*. Perhaps more valid is the point made in the draft plan of trying to ‘equalise’ histories. Merely ensuring ‘equal’ representation today does not get to the heart of the problem of the absence of Indigenous people from the Australian narrative. It merely covers over the past without making an attempt to understand the reasons behind why the absence was created in the first place. The solution needs to be more complex than simply equalising representation.

Overall, the ‘Midden to Monument’ Walk seems like a positive move to increase Aboriginal perspectives of the park and its history. It should be noted however that the actual content of the interpretation will depend heavily on future consultation and the creation of an understanding with the Indigenous community over ownership of stories along with the building of effective relationships with all those participating in any historical study. The question of the inclusion of an Indigenous monument will also involve further consultation or require the impetus of the Indigenous community. Interviewee 10 noted that if an Aboriginal monument was to be erected, it was essential that it be under Aboriginal control.

6.8 Dual Naming

Walker (1969:45) notes that the orders given by the Surveyor-General in 1827 to his assistant for carrying out his survey of the Cronulla area included a specific reference to *'preserve names currently in use by the Aborigines, for both places and physical features where possible'*. Walker credits the obedience of the Assistant Surveyor General, who carried out the work around the Cronulla area, with the survival of many of the Aboriginal names. Walker cites examples such as Cronulla, Jannali, Lilli-Pilli and Illawong to indicate that the origin of many Sutherland Shire place names are in fact Aboriginal. As discussed earlier in this chapter, it is possible that Kurnell or 'Cunel' was the local Aboriginal name for the area, however there are arguments to support the idea that the Aboriginal people credited with giving this name were simply indicating that they were camping on Connell's (one of the early settlers) land.

The resumption of the land at Kurnell in 1899 and the specific act of naming the place the 'Captain Cook Landing Place Reserve' firmly placed the reserve into the category of an important, non-indigenous historic site. Ignoring the previous names given to the site stamped the authority of this particular version of history onto the 'landing place'. The *2002 Plan of Management* for Botany Bay National Park has sought to redress the (largely) one sided nature of history presented at the park. One of the strategies for doing this, which the *Plan of Management* recommended, is the renaming of the park to include two names – an Indigenous and non-indigenous name. The plan proposed that the park would be renamed 'Kamay-Botany Bay National Park', 'Kamay' being an Indigenous word for Botany Bay (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2002:28). 'Kamay' was adopted by consensus amongst local Indigenous communities at meetings discussing the dual naming idea (ibid.). The *Plan of Management* indicates that once the plan is adopted the park henceforth will *'be known as Kamay Botany Bay National Park'* (op. cit.) The Minister for the Environment in 2002, Bob Debus, signed off on the plan in May 2002, yet to date the park is still officially known as 'Botany Bay National Park'. Interviewee 11 felt that it would be timely to coincide the launch of stage one of the *Master Plan* with the official implementation of a dual name for Botany Bay National Park noting, however, that despite the approval of the dual naming proposal in 2002, the lapse of time since then

could allow those who opposed the dual name to reignite their arguments. Whether or not the dual naming of the park will happen in conjunction with the implementation of the *Master Plan* remains to be seen.

The interviewees, other than Interviewee 11, held a range of opinions in relation to the dual naming of the park. Interviewee 7 felt that it was appropriate and that it would help 'equalise' the interpretation of the history of the area. Just as he felt that an equal area of space should be devoted to Indigenous and non-indigenous interpretation in the proposed interpretive gallery, he felt that the park could have two names to show the two perspectives of history – Indigenous and non-indigenous. Interviewee 9 provided a contrast to this, stating a personal belief that dual naming was merely trying to please everyone and that perhaps names should be either Indigenous or non-indigenous and not both. Interviewee 9 felt that the renaming of Ayers Rock to Uluru rather than having a dual name³⁹ was an important stance. It appears correct that Uluru should have one Indigenous name because its prime significance is linked to Indigenous people. Botany Bay National Park, however, she felt ought to have a name that represented Cook's voyage, stating '*I don't know that an Indigenous name for the site is appropriate because the Indigenous history there is important but it was more about what happened at the event of Cook's landing*'. Interviewee 9 was aware that her perspective might be considered controversial. Although not sharing the same perspective on the dual naming issue, Interviewee 10 also pointed for the need to recognise a '*hierarchy within the site*'. That is, there were different layers of history present and whilst all should be acknowledged, some were more dominant or had more impact on the Australian nation and should therefore be the major focus of interpretation. Interviewee 11 noted that the naming might have been delayed because of the processes that need to be undertaken such as registering with the Geographical Names Board. The process of dual naming may become easier however with the NSW

³⁹ In his 2003 Macquarie University Alumni lecture, David Blair noted that Uluru was actually gazetted in 2002 with the dual name of Uluru/Ayers Rock. When the 'renaming' originally took place in 1992 it was gazetted as Ayers Rock/Uluru. The 2002 gazettal reversed the order, possibly mirroring the social trend of seeing Uluru as the significant or 'proper' name. As indicated by Interviewee 9 here, many Australians are not aware that Uluru has a dual name, but feel that 'Ayers Rock' is a name that it was once given which is no longer particularly appropriate to use. Indeed Blair noticed this trend stating that 'Uluru' was progressively displacing the name 'Ayers Rock'. Whether one name falling by the wayside is a trend that is bound to happen in Australia when two names are given to a site remains to be seen. As dual naming is gaining more support from state governments such as NSW perhaps in the future it will be revealed how Australians will treat dual names.

Government having adopted a policy of dual naming of geographical features (Blair, 2003).

These arguments represent almost a kind of philosophical divide that became evident about how we should approach history within Australia. Should there be an attempt to 'equalise' history and thus provide an equal amount of space and time devoted to Indigenous and non-indigenous history (and in this case equalise the past through a shared name) or should we acknowledge both Indigenous and non-indigenous history and not worry about the relative proportions or the dominance placed on one or another but try to judge the historical evidence in order to determine which history should have prominence? There are strengths and weaknesses to both approaches. Firstly, the equalisation of history provides a good starting point. Indigenous history in Australia has been overlooked and it could be argued that only by 'equalising' history will its previous absence be recognised. However, the past should not be altered to try to provide a 'forced' interpretation of a past where Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians were equally involved in the history of an area just because equal representation is desired in the contemporary era. Part of the history that is trying to be interpreted for the public is that often, Indigenous Australians were excluded from aspects of public life. The absence of Indigenous Australians from parts of local histories, for example, can be utilised to comment on why this absence occurred.

Does this then, bring us back to the idea that the historical record needs to be weighed to assess who played the greater role and at what times they were involved? Perhaps, but it needs to be remembered that there is a problem with relying on historical evidence. To allow the historian or heritage interpreter to assert which history should rightfully dominate in a hierarchy of histories is dangerous as the Australian historical record has flaws. Those historical records that do refer to Indigenous Australians largely give a non-indigenous perspective of events. Though oral history is being more widely accepted as reputable historical evidence, more oral histories need to be undertaken in order to give a more widespread picture of Indigenous perspectives on specific aspects of the Australian past. Historians and heritage interpreters need to be aware of these kinds of problems before engaging with the issue of what stories they wish to bring to the public eye.

6.9 Recent Controversy over the Master Plan

Since writing the first version of this chapter (largely in the second half of 2003), the proposed changes to be implemented at Botany Bay National Park, Kurnell have been the subject of a number of media reports and as a result concern has grown over the changes amongst different community groups. This surge of interest over the park appears to have been triggered by a parliamentary statement made on the 9th March 2004 in the NSW Legislative Assembly by the member for Cronulla, Mr Malcolm Kerr (NSW Hansard, 2004). It should be noted that Kerr's statement occurred after the release of the final version of the *Master Plan* in April 2003 and yet some of the concerns he raises (such as the fear of a blanket removal of all non-indigenous vegetation from the park, rather than gradually replacing them with Indigenous species at the end of their life spans) had been addressed in the final version of the plan after these concerns were raised in the various public meetings during the consultation process.

Kerr's statement merely served to rekindle unsubstantiated anxieties about the *Master Plan*. For example, he speculated that the absence of a specific reference as to what would happen to one of the cannons from Cook's Ship the Endeavour, currently housed in the Discovery Centre, when the new Cultural Centre would be built, was because the cannon was in danger of being '*carried off in the dark of the night to join the hundreds of other items that have been moved*' (NSW Hansard, 2004). With his closing words, Kerr implies that the *Master Plan* is merely an attempt to deny historical truths and in particular to deny the European, Cook centred perspective of the past. Kerr makes comparisons with the proposal several years ago for the Sutherland Shire logo (the head of Captain Cook) to be replaced with a dolphin as it was suggested that Cook was an outdated symbol of invasion and a dolphin would be a more inclusive and environmentally focussed symbol for the shire to have. Kerr quotes an article from the *Daily Telegraph* at the time for his final words, stating '*History cannot be censored in order to placate groups it may offend. Denial of history does not change its course, only the ability of the individual to establish the truth.*' (ibid.). Kerr clearly thinks the *Master Plan* is skewed towards Indigenous interpretations of the past at the expense of the traditional, Cook centred view. This chapter has argued that the *Master Plan* should be seen as trying to implement a well balanced

view of the past which is inclusive of all social groups, aiming not to exclude any aspect of the Cook story already told at the park but to include additional Indigenous perspectives. Any reading of the plan can find multiple references to support this argument and the fears that comments such as Kerr's statement incites are unfounded and could be viewed as part of the ongoing 'History Wars' over the interpretation of the Australian past.

Regardless of the validity of Kerr's statement, it raised concerns. On 22nd March, the Daily Telegraph published an article entitled 'Kurnell's European Symbols Facing Axe' quoting Kerr as stating the proposed changes were an example of *'political correctness'* and *'I think they are downgrading Cook, and that there should be a bit of equity in relation to history.. Let's have more credit for Cook's achievements in the place that's the birthplace of modern Australian culture'* (Skelsey, 2004). The article focused on the removal of *'a large anchor, towering pine trees and flagpoles... from the landing place of Captain James Cook because they represented 'European Dominance''* (ibid.). The article is correct in that the removal of the anchor and flag poles (but not the pine trees) are discussed in the plan. However, the spin placed upon the removal in the article suggests that the reasoning behind this is to reduce the prominence of the Cook story. Ironically, the removal of the anchor and flagpoles were recommended to bring clarity to the Cook story. As the plan states, *'the anchor is particularly confusing, as there is no information given about its origin'* (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003c:7). The anchor can give the appearance of European dominance of the site, however its removal was proposed because it is anachronistic and not part of any 'historical truth' relevant to the Cook story. As noted by Interviewee 11, the anchor was not even a replica of one from the Endeavour but merely situated at the front of the park as an indication of the maritime significance of the site. Similarly, the proposed removal of the flagpoles (to be replaced with smaller, less dominating flag poles) was to avoid confusion at the historic site. Many visitors to the site wandered to the flag poles because of their dominance in the landscape, expecting to arrive at Cook's landing spot only to find that it was situated further to the west (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003c:67). It was felt that Cook's landing place should be the *'main focus'* and thus the poles should be shorter, still maintaining an area for ceremonial occasions, but one that did not draw attention away from the importance of the landing place as a site of considerable historic importance (ibid.). The pine trees are stated by the *Master Plan* as creating a message of *'European domination'* (ibid. p.7). However, this is

not rejected as something to be avoided in the interpretative plan but rather embraced. Commemorative plantings of both Indigenous and non-indigenous trees within the park are to be catalogued so that visitors can find out when, why and by whom they were planted. As the plan states, *'This is an important interpretative component of the park in terms of how Europeans have viewed the Australian landscape over time'* (ibid. p.68). In response to Kerr's claims as reported in the Skelsey article, National Parks and Wildlife Service Southern Sydney Manager Mike Patrick *'denied the authority was trying to downgrade Cook's story'* (Skelsey, 2004). *'It's not about redressing balance between Aboriginal or European cultural heritage, it's about providing more information about all those values'* (ibid.).



Figure 6.12: The anchor at the centre of the controversy

The controversy has continued with the political group, the Australia First Party, going so far as to holding a protest rally on the 15th May 2004. The party's web site provided a statement about the rally sub titled *'Hands Off Captain Cook! No Ethnic Cleansing at Botany Bay National Park! Leave our European Heritage Intact'* (The Australia First Party, 2004). The Australia First Party is of the belief that *'The European heritage of Australia is at every point – under attack'* (ibid.). Their statement in support of the rally stated that removing European symbols from the park (however, as discussed above, this is

not the objective of the NPWS and the only removal is in fact the anchor situated at the front of the park which has no historical link to Cook whatsoever) is not about correcting the interpretation of the past. Rather, they suggest:

'It is an effort to portray European settlers as "just another wave of immigration", to be put on par with so-called asylum seekers, refugees or "boat-people". We say that European settlement created and sustained a nation. The new scheme to terminate that nationality and identity... The National Parks and Wildlife Authority is now in the business of creating politically correct ideology to make the changes in our nation's character appear proper and historically legitimate. All patriotic Australians will resist this grubby conspiracy.'

(The Australia First Party, 2004).

Attending the protest on 15th May to observe the event, it was clear that the protestors felt that if the *Master Plan* was allowed to be implemented, it would not be long before all remnants of European heritage at the park were obliterated including the monuments. There is clearly no evidence to support that this is advocated in the plan and until proven otherwise must remain part of the Australia First Party's 'conspiracy theory' about the real motivation behind the *Master Plan*. The rally was attended by approximately ten people.



Figure 6.13: Protestor at the Australia First Party rally

6.10 Conclusions

There are already several potential obstacles to the undertaking of the recommendations outlined in the *Master Plan*. The issue of funding is just one example. Though awarded 1-2 million dollars of funding initially, the full plan is expected to take 5-8 million dollars to carry out the whole project as listed in the *Master Plan*. This has dictated to some extent the order in which the plan will be carried out as it is necessary to undertake some projects initially which will depict an obvious visible improvement to the park in order to attract further funds for the project. Investors usually like to see exactly what their money is going towards rather than vague projects like the collection of oral histories or community consultation. Interviewee 11 noted that with some pushing, the collection of stories for research has been incorporated into stage one of the plan. It was a question of trying to achieve a balance between physical improvements to the park and the foundations of the research for the interpretation projects to be implemented in later stages.

Interviewee 9 thought that a potential problem was conflict between the NPWS dual roles of promoting and conserving natural and cultural heritage. Interviewee 9 saw many of the staff at NPWS as divided between ‘environmental’ and ‘cultural’ camps and that if a compromise could not be reached it would be difficult for projects like the Meeting Place Precinct to get off the ground if some staff felt that their real purpose ought to be getting rid of cultural relics in parks and returning them to natural landscapes. Interviewee 9 also felt that it was essential that mechanisms be incorporated into the interpretation of the park that would allow people to add their own stories and for the interpretation to evolve. Without this, the interpretation would easily become static and in say, ten years time its relevance could be questioned much like the current interpretation at the site. The interpretation and any ideas of the site targeting reconciliation also need to incorporate all cultural groups. Effective relationships are needed with all parts of the community – local Kurnell residents, the Indigenous community, and individuals and organisations who use the park. This can only be effective when no group is excluded in any way – whether it be through ignoring them as a potential audience in the interpretation or excluding them in the consultation process. One basic way to ensure this could be multi-lingual signage at the park. Interviewee 9 noted that Kurnell residents need to be educated as to the whole range

of people from different cultural groups who use the park. Kurnell is within Sutherland Shire which has '*one of the lowest proportions of non-English-speaking people in the country*' (Verghis, 2003:34). In this sense, if the predominant 'Anglo' version of the 'foundation' of Australia can be reinterpreted at the park, there is perhaps an even greater potential for shared history to happen in communities where the blend of cultures is more prominent. The recent activity by groups such as the Australia First Party has shown that there will always be a certain amount of opposition to this happening.

The area traditionally known as Cook's Landing Place affords an ideal opportunity to test our ability to acknowledge all layers and dimensions of heritage within one site. For many people, the power of Cook's reputation and the iconography that has grown up around him is so pervasive that, if non-indigenous Australians can manage to celebrate Cook without ignoring other valuable and vital aspects of heritage such as the perspective of Indigenous Australians to Cook's landing, then the practicability of a multi-layered approach to heritage interpretation will have been clearly demonstrated. All interviewees in this study noted the potential of the site for education about Australia's shared history. For some, it was this potential which led to their involvement in the project – they had visions of just what could be achieved at a site which symbolised for many Australians the beginning of the nation that we know today. The progress on the recommendations of the Meeting Place Precinct *Master Plan* will be eagerly watched. As Interviewee 9 noted, the site has the potential to help tackle questions that are being asked of what it means to be Australian. How can we define our nationality at the dawn of a new millennium? As Larissa Behrendt (2003:67), in her book *Achieving Social Justice* notes, national myths and the '*general acceptance of those myths as reality can affect those people who fall outside or challenge those myths*'. These national myths have the potential to influence laws, institutions and ideologies in Australia (ibid.). Confronting Australia's shared history and redefining our nationality has the potential to reshape the way Indigenous Australians and other cultural groups are seen by the law and Australian institutions. This need not be done through the so-called 'politics of guilt' either. As Baldwin, quoted in Behrendt (2003:56), writes:

'To accept one's past – one's history – is not the same thing as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it. An invented past can never be used; it cracks and crumbles under the pressures of life like clay in a season of drought.'

Chapter 7: Myall Creek

7.1 Brief Historical Background of the Myall Creek Massacre



Figure 7.1: Myall Creek Station today

The Myall⁴⁰ Creek Massacre is the best known and documented account of a massacre targeting Aboriginal people in Australia's history because the conviction and hanging of seven white men brought the case considerable publicity (Division of Law *Macquarie University*, 2003). It is often stated that the Myall Creek Massacre was the first occasion that a white person was convicted and hung for the murder of an Aborigine. However, an overview of the case by the Division of Law at Macquarie University suggests this is not in fact the case (ibid.). Nevertheless, there were very few cases where whites were found guilty of such a crime and a smaller number of these cases where execution was the resultant penalty. Markus (1994:46-47) believes that there were only four cases where *'Europeans were executed for the murder of Aborigines during the period of frontier conflict.'* The first of these cases was in 1820 where an escaped convict killed an Aborigine who had recaptured him. Markus notes that the convict had a bad reputation and had escaped an earlier conviction of assault on a technicality (ibid.). The convict was also

⁴⁰ Stanner (1991) notes the word 'Myalls' means bush natives *'On the outskirts of the settlement there were a few groups of "myalls" (bush natives...'* so it is therefore possible that the name Myall Creek may have been intended to recognise the presence of Aborigines. However other meanings for Myall have also been identified such as a species of Acacia that grew in abundance along the creek at the station (Reece 1974:35).

executed in a week when there were eleven other executions. The fact that there were several other executions to distract the public along with the reputation of the man (no one would pay much attention when he was committing other crimes against settlers), may account for why Myall Creek is often thought to be the first case of conviction and execution. According to Markus, Myall Creek was the second instance of conviction and execution as the punishment (op. cit.).

The non-indigenous history of Myall Creek began in earnest around 1837, when the 'Myall Creek Station' was established by Henry Dangar (Stubbins and Smith, 2001:2). Stubbins and Smith (ibid.) cite Milliss, who suggests that at this time there were no Aboriginal people living in the area. Originally, the Weraeraï tribe (often spelt Wirrayaraay – a sub group of the Gamilaraay) would have inhabited the area, however, it is thought that by this time the area '*may well have been swept clean of its traditional owners*' (op cit.). Nevertheless, the many accounts of the massacre available variously suggest that the group of Aborigines involved were Weraeraï (Reece, 1974) or Kwiambal (Atkinson and Aveling, 1987).

There are a number of figures who played key roles in the events at Myall Creek. Although owned by Dangar, the station was managed by William Hobbs (Stubbins and Smith, 2001:2). Hobbs in turn had a staff of three convicts: Charles Kilmeister - the stockman, George Anderson - the hut keeper and Andrew Burrowes - who looked after the horses (ibid.). Despite the fact that there were no Aborigines in the immediate area, '*there was a constant fear of Aborigines – real or imagined*' (op cit.). These fears may have been enflamed by the fact that there was still much conflict in the region at the Gwydir River, which had resulted in the deaths of livestock, non-indigenous 'settlers' and the '*large scale killings of Aboriginal people*' (op cit.). The atmosphere therefore was particularly tense. The late Len Payne, a resident of Bingara, and historian of Myall Creek, is said to have collected oral histories that document a number of killings and massacres of Aboriginal people around this time (Harrison, 1978:18). During this time, Major Nunn of the Mounted Police also appeared to have conducted a punitive expedition lasting some fifty three days in the area (Waldersee, 1979). Officially documented as '*enquiring into attacks by Aborigines on outstations*', Nunn had nearly 20 volunteers accompany him. However, reports on his activities were considerably vague as to the extent of Aboriginal fatalities

(ibid. p.71). Stubbins and Smith (2001:2) indicate the possibility that in one incident, Nunn's party may have been responsible for the deaths of up to three hundred Aborigines at Waterloo Creek. A culture of violence and fear dominated the area.

The culture of fear that had developed in the vicinity of Myall Creek was echoed around the frontiers throughout the country. Only two days before the Myall Creek Massacre, over eighty colonists from the Port Phillip region petitioned Governor Gipps to protect them against '*untutored savages*' (Waldersee, 1979:71). Gipps, however, was becoming increasingly aware of the rights of Aborigines with pressure from humanitarians back in England who had set up an enquiry into '*the treatment of native peoples in various parts of the empire*' (ibid. p.72). Gipps had received a report from this enquiry detailing the proposed appointment of '*Protectors of Aborigines*' in 1838 (op cit.). Indeed, Waldersee notes that, '*up to a point, therefore, the timing of the massacre (given this background) could be said to have brought the miscreants to their doom*', as without this shift in attitude towards the Aborigines, the Government may not have acted so decisively against the accused.

The culture of violence and fear was evident at McIntyre's - a station close to what is now Bingara (the nearest town to Myall Creek Station today). In May 1838, a group of approximately fifty Aboriginal people were warned to move on from McIntyre's Station by a hut keeper who feared for their safety. At the invitation of Kilmeister (the stockman at Myall Creek), they moved onto the Myall Creek Station and for the next two to three weeks, the station hands at Myall Creek and the Aborigines appeared to be on quite friendly terms (Milliss cited in Stubbins and Smith, 2001:2). The stockmen and station hands at Myall Creek gave most of the Aborigines, European names to identify them and developed particularly close relationships with 'Daddy' (a large, elderly white haired man who was apparently a karadjee - a kind of physical and spiritual doctor), 'Joey' (who had in his proud possession a Scotch cap), 'King Sandy', 'Ipeta' (an Aboriginal woman who became Anderson's bed-mate) and 'Charlie' (a 3 year old boy who developed good English skills and was doted upon by the men) (Reece, 1974:36).

The Myall Creek Massacre occurred on the 10th June 1838. Most of the male Aborigines staying at Myall Creek went out to help cut bark at a neighbouring station. It was there that

they learnt of a party of armed stockmen who were patrolling the area and were sent back to warn the others but arrived too late (Reece, 1974:37). Hobbs (the Myall Creek Station superintendent) and Burrows (who kept the horses) were also absent from the station. Stubbins and Smith (2001:3) note that it is likely the armed group were aware of the men's absence and were using it to their advantage. The armed group consisted of ten or twelve stockmen. Upon arriving at Myall Creek, they herded the remaining Aboriginal people into the workmen's hut, tying their hands with rope. Two boys aged about eight or nine managed to escape (ibid.). Kilmeister and Anderson were present, and Kilmeister apparently joined the stockmen. This is despite him having had amiable relationships with the Aboriginal party. Anderson refused to be party to the activities and was later to give evidence in court against the stockmen (op. cit.). Anderson also managed to save another young boy by pushing him back into the hut when the party left taking the Aborigines up over a hill. His efforts to save Ipetta and Charlie failed (ibid. p.4). Anderson witnessed the men leading the Aboriginal party over the hill and heard two shots. He was not, however, an eyewitness when the Aborigines were beheaded and hacked to death just out of sight of the huts. Two Aboriginal men, Davey and Billy, who were regarded as more civilised than the tribal mob who had camped at the station had also been spared⁴¹. Davey investigated the murder site to establish what had happened⁴². Upon their return, the Aboriginal men who had been visiting the neighbouring station were told what had occurred. According to Reece (1974:39), the group expressed the strong desire to bury the bodies of their people then and there, but were discouraged in case they should be ambushed by the attackers. They were encouraged to flee, taking the survivors.

The next day, the murderers returned to the site and organised for the bodies to be burnt the following morning. They then set out to follow those who had fled, catching most of them and murdering not only the escaped group but others from MacIntyre's Station. Reports from a missionary present suggest thirty or forty Aborigines were killed, some in a very

⁴¹ Atkinson and Aveling (1987:60-61) also note the sparing of Davey and Billy, along with the presence of a black African in the party of murderers. They suggest that the massacre therefore was not racially motivated. Rather, the men distinguished between 'assimilated' and 'Aborigines whose allegiance was to their own kind...(and)... competed with the invaders for the lands resources'.

⁴² Despite witnessing the aftermath, Davey, being of Aboriginal descent could not testify. Markus (1994:44) notes that '*during the first 50 years of the British presence in Australia the taking of an oath (in court) was based on religious conviction; the belief in the afterlife supposedly guaranteed the truthfulness of testimony. This excluded all but the handful of Aborigines who were converted to Christianity.*' Aboriginal testimony was not admissible in NSW until the 1870s (ibid. p.45).

gruesome manner (Stubbins and Smith, 2001:5). Hobbs, having heard news of the massacre, returned to the station, and found the pile of bodies as they had failed to burn because the wood used for the fire was damp. Hobbs also had Anderson's testimony of events, though according to Stubbins and Smith (ibid.), Hobbs accepted Kilmeister's denial that he participated in the massacre. It appears that Hobbs had every intention of reporting the incident, however Kilmeister's repeated denials of involvement seemed to confuse him as to what he should do and whether innocents would be punished (ibid. p.6). Ultimately another landholder went to report the event, having to travel all the way to Sydney to alert Governor Gipps as the local police magistrate was not to be found. Edward Denny Day was instructed by Gipps to conduct an inquiry into the incident and to apprehend those suspected of involvement (op. cit.). Day's investigation lasted several weeks and he ultimately identified ten suspects, including Kilmeister (Stubbins and Smith, 2001:7).

There was considerable publicity over the trial of the men, most of it favourable to them (Stubbins and Smith, 2001:8). Waldersee (1979:72) writes that the Herald put forward the argument that as Aborigines did not improve the land but merely occupied it like animals, the land was not worked as God had intended it to be and so *'the Myall Creek Murderers were therefore really protecting the property of the white man, carrying out a task that was really the governments responsibility'*. Interestingly the men were trialled only for the murder of killing one Aboriginal male ('Daddy', whom Anderson had identified as being part of the group who were killed) and one 'other' (Stubbins and Smith, 2001:8). Unfortunately, evidence at the site had been further destroyed before the investigation, leaving few remains and those that were found were identified as a child and not an elderly man. Chief Justice Dowling ruled that no one could be convicted unless a body was found (ibid. p.9). The jury declared the men not guilty. However, the prosecution indicated *'he wished to prepare another indictments'* and so a second hearing, unpopular though it was, was granted (op. cit.).

It was at the second trial (where only seven of the original ten accused were tried) that the men were found guilty. Given the atmosphere of the times, the conviction is remarkable. Indeed, Condie (2000:3) notes the perspective of many of the jurors on Aborigines was decidedly negative – a statement purported to be from one member of the initial jury said *'I look on the blacks as a set of monkeys and the earlier they are exterminated off the face of*

the Earth the better. I know full well they were guilty of the murder but I for one would never see a white man suffer for shooting a black.' However it should be noted that the men were not found guilty of a 'massacre' but rather the murder of an Aboriginal child. This is because the remains of a child's skull seemed to be the only firm evidence available, the testimony of Anderson and Hobbs being largely dismissed, and no Aboriginal testimony was allowed (Stubbins and Smith, 2001:10). The seven men were executed on the 18th December 1838. Ironically, instead of discouraging massacres, all the convictions appear to have achieved was to drive them further underground (Condie, 2000:9), creating a hidden aspect of the Australian past which is still largely unacknowledged today. As McDonald (2000) writes:

'While the trial and sentences demonstrated some attempt to bring about justice, an editorial in the Sydney Herald at the time expressed a common attitude that was to prevail for decades: "Shoot them dead, if you can". The convictions and executions did not stop the slaughter. Massacres occurred across New South Wales and other parts of Australia until well into the 20th century. But there were no more convictions as a code of silence grew up around the brutal treatment of Aboriginal people.'

Harrison (1978:24) believes that *'without doubt ... a large proportion of the population held strong views against the execution of the Myall Creek murderers.'* He cites the general belief that the Aborigines were considered primitive and savage-like and almost sub-human. The Myall Creek trials did not appear to change these dominant attitudes of the time, nor stem the murders, perhaps because, as Markus (1994:49) suggests, the executions failed to set a precedent in future trials. Markus was unable to establish a precise date for the next case in which a white man was convicted of the murder of an Aborigine, however one likely case was almost forty years after Myall Creek. The man involved however was merely sentenced to three years imprisonment (ibid.). Markus (op. cit.) concludes that the Myall Creek trials are often incorrectly hailed as evidence that the law had treated Aborigines justly, when what they should be interpreted as is *'the great exception... of the colonists' unwillingness to treat the murder of Aborigines as a crime.'*

7.2 Creating the Memorial

The history of the creation of a memorial to the Myall Creek Massacre is often thought to be confined to the period of the late 1990s and early 2000s, inspired by the reconciliation process. In fact, this period marks the time when efforts to create a memorial achieved popular support. The history of advocacy for the creation of a memorial extends much further back in time. In 1965, the *Bingara Advocate* ran a story titled *Memorial to be erected at Myall Creek*, which told of Len Payne, a white resident, who ‘desired to erect a memorial which would take the form of a symbolic gate on the site of the massacre.’ (Jesuit Publications, 2003). The article received condemnation in the form of a letter to the *Advocate* stating that ‘The whole idea was ill-conceived, unconsidered, mischievous and an insult to the Bingara people.’ (Stubbins and Smith, 2001:11). Len Payne attempted to refute this argument. However, his letter was refused publication. Arguably, as a consequence of the bad press the proposal had received, the Apex Club voted not to support the erection of a memorial at the site (ibid.).

Although the opportunity to build a memorial was not granted, Len Payne never gave up hope that some day a memorial would be built. Despite the absence of a symbolic marker of the event at the site, commemoration of the event was still possible and during the 1980s Payne, together with Jim Miller and several Armidale residents, visited the site to lay a wreath on the 10th of June each year (Stubbins and Smith, 2001:11). Payne died in the mid 1990s; however it was his vision and perseverance that paved the way forward for the erection of the memorial in 2000 (ibid.).



Figure 7.2: Len Payne, holding a hinge from the stockyard gate on Myall Creek Station

(Photo courtesy of Collins, 1994).

In 1998, a descendant of one of the massacre survivors, Sue Blacklock, initiated a ‘once off’ reconciliation conference at Myall Creek and it was at this event that a group decision was made to erect a permanent memorial (Stubbins and Smith, 2001:11-12). A committee was formed to oversee the project and meetings were held approximately every six weeks (ibid. p.12). From the outset, perhaps because the effects of negative criticism against the previous attempt to erect a memorial had been so detrimental, the committee established a firm rationale for the need of a memorial. The grounds for erecting the memorial as tabled at the meeting are listed below.

‘If we and our descendants are to live in peace in Australia then we have to tell and acknowledge the truth of our history. It is not that all our history is bad, but the bad must be acknowledged along with the good, if we are to have any integrity. There is a code of silence surrounding the massacres.

We want Australia to be an inclusive society, where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal are honoured and respect each other. This cannot happen until the history includes the stories of how Aboriginal people as well as non-Aboriginal people experienced the history.

We owe it to those who died defending their country and families, or died as innocent victims of vengeance, to create a memorial which reminds us of their part in our common history.

It is important to acknowledge the people who acted for justice in the story: Mr Hobbs, the manager of Myall Creek Station, Edward Denny Day, the officer who investigated the crime and others. The fact is that for the first time, the perpetrators of such crime in this country were brought to justice.

We are not pointing the finger at the people of Myall Creek or Bingara. The massacres were all over the country.’

(Stubbins and Smith, 2001:12).

It is important to acknowledge that at the next major meeting, descendants of the Myall Creek people were consulted as to how the project should then continue (Stubbins and

Smith, 2001:12). They were given the option of continuing the project themselves, or of involving both Indigenous and non-indigenous people. There was unanimous support for it being a jointly managed project (ibid.), and from that time, the memorial project began to increasingly take onboard aspects of shared history and reconciliation. The statement that the memorial *'is also for the purpose of reconciling Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people'* was added to the list of grounds for erecting the memorial in June 1999 (ibid. p.13). Several grants, including a 'Local Symbols of Reconciliation Grant' helped the project along the way (ibid.). There were however still several hurdles to overcome.

In October 1998 the Uniting Church⁴³ organised a memorial ceremony to be held over a weekend in June (McDonald, 2000). Though the weekend contained aspects of ceremony and remembrance that have become a feature of subsequent memorial weekends that have been held, it was notable that *'there (was) no permission for the erection of a permanent memorial for those killed ... and (no) permission to enter the private property where it is believed the massacre took place'*. However, it was felt that participants had *'made a step in the right direction'* (Walking Together, 1999). A temporary cairn was erected for the weekend ceremonies at a site close to the place where it was believed the massacre had occurred (ibid.).

After funding had been achieved, a site had been found for the memorial (on a knoll overlooking the site believed to be the massacre site) and support for the memorial had been expressed by the Bingarra Council and other organisations, the opening for the memorial was planned for June 10, 2000 (Stubbins and Smith, 2001:13). The details of the memorial (such as the wording of the plaques) were worked out in group meetings. The memorial was to consist of a winding trail on which small boulders were placed at regular intervals with plaques revealing (in both the Gamilaraay language and English) the history behind and of the massacre (see Figure 7.3 for a photograph of one of the plaques and the wording of the plaques in the box on the following pages). The final stone is a large granite boulder (see Figure 7.4) surrounded by crushed white granite and is a memorial, both in the traditional sense of remembering the dead, and for coming to terms with the past. The actual physical task of finding and positioning the large final boulder proved testing,

⁴³ The Rev John Brown held the position for seven years of co-ordinating nationally the work of reconciliation on behalf of the Uniting Church. He was also a member of the memorial committee and as such has ensured the continual involvement of the Uniting Church in the memorial ceremonies.

however finally things were in place for the opening. Smith notes that what was most important about the history of the creation of the memorial was not so much the obstacles and physical process but the coming together of *'a group of strangers from all around this area, all united in a common ideal of truth, justice and reconciliation'* and the bonds that formed within the group as the project developed (Stubbins and Smith, 2001:14).



Figure 7.3: Example of one of the smaller rocks with plaques that line the memorial trail

The Wording of the Plaques at the Myall Creek Memorial

(NB wording of plaques is given first in Gamilaraay language and then in English)

Plaque 1: Giirr ngurrmbaa, walaaybaa nhalay Wirrayaraaygu Gamilaraaygu.

From time immemorial, the Wirrayaraay tribe of the Gamilaraay lived here, caring for the land and harvesting the animals, fish, root crops, grains and fruits in a seasonal cycle. The identity of the Wirrayaraay derived from their spiritual relationship with the land.

Plaque 2: Yilambu Wandagu dhaay dhimba milambaraay gaanhi.

In the 1830s European squatters began to send their servants into the district to establish cattle and sheep stations, occupying the land and using its grass and water resources to feed their stock.

Plaque 3: Yilaa Mari Wanda bumalalanhi; balunhi burrulaa Mari gulbirr Wanda.

Conflict soon arose as the Europeans forced the Wirrayaraay off their ancestral lands, drove them away from creeks and waterholes and seized Aboriginal women. The Wirrayaraay retaliated by spearing stock and attacking the stations and their personnel. Revenge killings began.

Plaque 4: Burrulaa Mari gandjibalu, bawurragu bumaay.

Towards the end of 1837 parties of European stockmen and station hands, encouraged by a punitive expedition of Mounted Police sent from Sydney, embarked on a bloody rampage throughout the region, hunting down and killing any Aboriginal people they could find. Hundreds of Aboriginal people were slain.

Plaque 5: Wirray bumalalanhi gulbirr Mari Wanda; ganunga maliyaa ginyi.

In May 1838 a band of Wirrayaraay people took refuge from this onslaught at Myall Creek station below, at the invitation of one of the station hands. For the next few weeks they lived in peace around the station huts, and convivial relations were developed between them and the four-man staff.

Plaque 6: 10 Djun 1838-ya burrulaa Wirrayaraay yinarr, gaay, wayama balunhi; giir bilaarrdhalibaa nhama mari.

On 10 June 1838, a gang of stockmen led by a squatter rode into Myall Creek Station and brutally murdered about twenty-eight unarmed women, children and old men. The younger Wirrayaraay men were away cutting bark on a neighbouring station

(Stubbins and Smith, 2001).

The Wording of the Plaques Cont.

Plaque 7: Nhama gagil Wanda gaabamandu bumaay. Yilaa Wandagu burrulaa Mari bumaldanhi.

Eleven of the twelve men who carried out the massacre were arrested, tried and acquitted. In a second trial seven of them were found guilty and executed. The squatter involved was never brought to trial. This was the first time that white men had been executed for murdering Aboriginal people. However this did not end the massacres. They continued throughout the continent, often unreported, until the 1920s.

The Final Plaque: In memory of the Wirrayaraay people who were murdered on the slopes of this ridge in an unprovoked but premeditated act in the late afternoon of 10 June, 1838.

Erected on 10 June 2000 by a group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in an act of reconciliation, and in acknowledgement of the truth of our shared history.

We remember them. Ngiyani winangay ganunga.

(Stubbins and Smith, 2001).



Figure 7.4: The large boulder that is the final memorial

(Flanked by Indigenous and Non-indigenous Students at the 2003 Memorial Ceremony)

7.3 The Opening Ceremony

The Opening Ceremony for the memorial was held on the 10th June 2000, a year which was marked by other celebrations held in the spirit of reconciliation and aiming to recognise the impact the course of Australian history has had on Aboriginal people. Events such as the Bridge Walks were held around capital cities as part of the Corroboree 2000 festival. Those attending the opening ceremony of the memorial were invited to bring rocks from their own towns or homes to place around the monument (The Myall Creek Memorial Committee, 2000:2). A Welcome to Country (as was beginning to be customary in the late 1990s and early 2000s) was first conducted near the Myall Creek Memorial Hall. Speeches were given to relate the history of creating the memorial and what it was designed to achieve before the group walked up the hill to the car park at the memorial site. *'Dancers with music sticks beating a mourning rhythm'* accompanied the procession and the crowd were *'invited to recall the half-mile march of those who were massacred'* as they walked (ibid.). Each part of the ceremony had a carefully constructed purpose to create links to the past, to the extent that even the act of walking to the site became part of the process of remembering. From the outset therefore, the memorial ceremonies became steeped in ritual, ceremony and tradition.

These ceremonies, rituals and traditions were continued upon arrival at the car park. For example, an Aboriginal smoking ceremony (see Figure 7.5 which depicts a photograph of the smoking ceremony at the 2003 event) was held at the entrance to the walkway (The Myall Creek Memorial Committee, 2000:2). Coloured candles were also used to create symbolism in the ceremony. Red candles symbolised the blood shed at the site and green/white symbolised hope, healing and a new life (ibid.). Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students from local schools were invited to take part in the ceremony so that candles could be lit jointly by Indigenous and non-indigenous youth in a symbolic act of 'coming together'. A similar spirit of involvement was created by inviting all those who attended the ceremony to bring a rock or stone from their home to place at the site.



Figure 7.5: The Smoking Ceremony at the 2003 memorial gathering

The Opening Ceremony was perhaps most notable however because it brought together ‘*in an emotional personal reconciliation three descendants of the murderers with several descendants of those who were massacred*’ (Brown, 2003). The descendants on both sides held official roles in the ceremony and provided perhaps the most powerful symbol of acknowledging, yet moving on from, the painful events of the past when they spoke and came together in the ceremony. Following is an extract from this section of the ceremony:

***Beulah Adams and Des Blake:** We are descendants of, and represent, all those who carried out murder and mayhem on the slopes below*

***Sue Blacklock and Myall Munro:** We are descendants of those who survived the massacres.*

***Sue, Lyall, Beulah, Des:** We acknowledge this our shared history,
We seek reconciliation between our peoples,
and healing of the wounds of the past.*

***All:** (as the four embrace): This is the history of every one of us;
We are all heirs and survivors, beneficiaries and
victims of its injustices and misunderstandings.
We too want reconciliation and healing.*

(The Myall Creek Memorial Committee, 2000).

Although I was not personally present at the Opening Ceremony in 2000, it is clear from reading the program and watching video footage of the event that the rituals and ceremonies established at the Opening Ceremony have set the style and tone of the subsequent memorial gatherings.

7.4 Personal Experiences, Visitor Experiences and the Role of the Memorial

In academic research, it is often normal practice to attempt to distance oneself from the events that are being observed in order to comment effectively as an ‘independent’, and therefore somehow more objective witness. It is also considered the norm to avoid writing in first person singular tense. In this section of this chapter I have at times deliberately abandoned both practices, the reason for which will be outlined below.

Since the Opening Ceremony in 2000, an annual Memorial Ceremony has been held on the Saturday of the long weekend in June. For the purposes of research for this thesis my partner and I attended the 2003 Memorial Ceremony. My initial intentions were to basically be a passive observer of the event. However, at the Memorial Ceremony, the thought occurred to me that the Myall Creek Memorial was in many ways different to the

other historic and heritage sites I had visited whilst engaging in this research. At the other sites there was still a need to engage with the site, to spend time there and try to come to a personal understanding of the presence of the place. However at Myall Creek, it seemed as though the site was almost deliberately designed to encourage Australians to experience a kind of personal pilgrimage into the Australian past and our national identity. A Radio National program *Perspective* featured a piece by the Rev. John Brown in June 2003 which reinforces this perspective. In the program he stated '*Because of its notoriety, this massacre is representative of all the massacres that occurred across Australia.*' (Brown, 2003). Brown went on to explain that this was the reasoning behind the invitation for all those who attended the dedication (opening) ceremony to bring a stone or rock to contribute to the memorial. '*They symbolize the fact that this memorial commemorates the shared history of all of us*' (ibid.). The words contained in the opening ceremony program to be uttered by all attending the ceremony after the descendants from both sides had embraced (cited in the section on the opening ceremony above) also reinforce this view. Myall Creek is portraying a history for all Australians. Brown also reinforced this image by trying to encourage listeners of the Perspectives program to visit the memorial, regardless of whether it was an official ceremonial occasion. '*The memorial is worth a visit at any time for all people travelling in Northern New South Wales.*' (op. cit.). He has also suggested that '*Because of its representative nature, the Memorial should be recognized as a site of national heritage significance*' (op. cit.). This theme was echoed at the 2004 memorial ceremony that I attended and where a representative from the Department of Environment and Heritage came to speak to the Annual Meeting of the Myall Creek Memorial Committee after the ceremony. He spoke about the new heritage listing system established in January 2004 by the Federal Government. A meeting of the Myall Creek Memorial Committee and any interested parties was held at the end of August 2004 to further discuss the possibility of applying for the listing of Myall Creek on the new National Heritage List.

A discussion section posted on the Myall Creek Memorial Committee web site features a letter from Ted Stubbins in mid 2002 discussing what direction the Memorial Committee should now take having achieved the establishment of the memorial. Stubbins writes that the committees initial objectives were to develop a '*fitting memorial*' for those who were killed or suffered as a result of the events at Myall Creek and to show '*solidarity with the*

Aboriginal quest for truth and justice' (Stubbins, 2002). In establishing the memorial the committee also hoped to *'cause the people of the New England North West to confront the largely unspoken and unacknowledged history of atrocities and injustices... (to ideally) ... lead to better relations between Aboriginal and other Australians in this area'* (ibid.). The third point that Stubbins raises however is of particular relevance to the process of establishing the memorial as a national monument in the eyes of all Australians - somewhere that they should visit at least once in their life time as part of their own personal pilgrimage in coming to terms with and acknowledging aspects of the past. Stubbins writes that the committee felt that *'in recognition of the massacre being a uniquely well documented signal event in Australian history'*, they should *'develop a high and continuing profile for the memorial. The memorial would serve as a national acknowledgement and as a means of educating succeeding generations'* (op. cit.). Stubbins felt that they had succeeded in developing an appropriate memorial and that the annual ceremonies were gradually reaching out to and educating the people of the New England and North West Regions. He believed, however, that the majority of visitors from outside the New England/North West Regions were people who had a prior interest in reconciliation. He writes:

'In order to achieve its potential as an agent of national acknowledgement and education, the memorial needs to attract large numbers of Australians, many of whom have little or no knowledge of the history of contact between Aboriginal people and new comers. There needs to be a continuing effort to promote the memorial so that it attracts large visitor numbers. For instance, it should be on the itinerary of the average person who sets out on his/her round Australian trip... Just as the Stockman's Hall of Fame is a permanent iconic reminder of aspects of Australia's colonial pastoral past, the Myall Creek Memorial needs to have an indelible niche in the national consciousness.'

(Stubbins, 2002).

How the Memorial Committee could go about increasing public awareness of the memorial was the focus of further discussions on the web site and at committee meetings. The preparation of a professional report and plan of action was one suggestion (Stubbins,

2002). A grand vision of working with an Aboriginal Land organisation to try to acquire the Myall Creek Station was also put forward (Riddell, 2002). A descendant of one of the murderers at Myall Creek, Des Blake, was fairly pessimistic of the potential for the memorial to be a site of such well known national significance, stating that for this to occur realistically:

'the attraction has to be situated near a town... (with)... good facilities. At this time Bingara doesn't meet these requirements... It needs to be on a tourist route... I don't believe the highway...is a main tourist route...(and) the attraction needs to be something the average Australian is interested in. Unfortunately I do not believe that enough people would be interested to make any further major development a feasible project. The main visitors would probably be schools or people who are really interested in Reconciliation. Present facilities are probably adequate for this.'

(Blake, 2002).

Whether furthering the status of the site is achievable or not, at a Committee Meeting in October 2002 resolutions were put forward to try to increase awareness of the site. It was suggested that corporate sponsorship of the site be sought, tour operators such as Oz Experience would be contacted with details of the site and a resolution was made that:

'The central focus of future activity should be on education. Myall Creek Memorial is representative of all massacre sites. In Australia we are inclined to bury and forget what we ought to remember. This is a place for truth-telling. This is the massacre which of all massacres stands out. This is an event which changed the history of Australia, because for the first time people were brought to justice for the massacre. This is where the education about our shared history should take place.'

(The Myall Creek Memorial Committee, 2002).

Since 2002, therefore, the Committee has been resolved in trying to portray Myall Creek as a site of national significance, as a site for all Australians to visit. As a visitor to the site, is this the feeling one comes away with? Speaking from my own personal experience, I would have to say yes. I have now attended two ceremonies, one in 2003 and the other in 2004. I felt at both ceremonies that both the occasion and the memorial are itself able to touch on aspects of the Australian past that are important for all Australians to not only know of but to understand and engage with. As Des Blake discussed in his letter, I am an individual with a prior interest in both history and reconciliation – a prime candidate for a potential Myall Creek Memorial visitor. So, if we are to establish why people come to the site, where they are coming from and what their experiences of the Memorial Ceremony is like, it seemed the best way of deducing this information was from a short visitor survey of those attending the event. I carried out such a survey at the Memorial Ceremony on Saturday 12th June 2004. A copy of the survey is reproduced over the following two pages as Figure 7.6.

Myall Creek Memorial Ceremony Survey



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Project Name: From Prehistory to History - Incorporating
Aboriginal Histories in Heritage Interpretation

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You are invited to complete the following (anonymous) short survey. The survey is being undertaken to get an overview of the places visitors to the Myall Creek Memorial Ceremony are coming from and the reasons why they are attending the ceremony. The survey is part of a larger study investigating 'shared' history and heritage (in particular history and heritage that is inclusive of both Indigenous and non Indigenous voices) in Australia. The study is being undertaken by Bronwyn Batten (nee Lawton), as a component of a Doctoral degree in Indigenous Studies under the supervision of Dr James Kohen, Department of Biological Sciences, Macquarie University (02) 9850 8138.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee (Human Research). If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Ethics Review Committee through its Secretary (telephone 9850 7854). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Figure 7.6: The Visitor Survey

1. Where did you come from (e.g. what town/state/country do you normally reside in) to attend the Myall Creek Memorial Ceremony in 2004?

2. What were the **main influences** which made you decide to attend the Myall Creek Memorial Ceremony in 2004? (tick which ever box/es apply and feel free to add any additional comments on the lines given or over the page):

- ☐ I am participating in a role in the ceremony.
 - ☐ A friend or relative is participating in the ceremony.
 - ☐ I am representing my place of employment or organisation
 - ☐ I feel that it is an important part of the reconciliation process to acknowledge the darker aspects of the Australian past.
 - ☐ I feel I need to develop a better understanding of Australia's history, and thought my attendance at the ceremony might help me to achieve this.
 - ☐ I think it is an important event for the local community, bringing both Indigenous and non-indigenous people together and so I wanted to show support.
 - ☐ I have a direct link to an ancestor who was involved in the events at Myall Creek in 1838 so I feel it is a part of my personal history.
 - ☐ Other (please feel free to expand on your reasons in the lines below)
-
-
-
-

3. (Optional) How did you feel after attending the 2004 Myall Creek Memorial Ceremony? _____

Thank you for your contribution to this research. Please place all completed surveys in the box provided.

Figure 7.6 : The Visitor Survey cont.

Of the approximately 150 or so that attended the memorial service on the 12th June, 40 completed the survey, a little below a third of all who attended. A brief statistical analysis of questions one and two is given over the page before a more in depth discussion of the results and further analysis of the written responses obtained from questions two (where respondents outlined an ‘other’ reason for attending the ceremony or expanded upon their reasons for attending) and question three (where respondents indicated how they felt after attending the ceremony).

Myall Creek Memorial Ceremony Survey Analysis

Total Number of Respondents: 40

Question One:

Breakdown of where respondents came from to attend ceremony:

Regional NSW (28 or 70%)

Tamworth (2 or 5%)
Bingara (3 or 7.5%)
Between Bingara and Wialda (1)
Moree (8 or 20%)
Inverell (6 or 15%)
Moama 2731 (1)
Narrabri (1)
Wialda (1)
Lennox Head (1)
Boggabilla (1)
Moama (1)
Glen Innes (1)
Werris Creek 2341 (1)

Sydney NSW (3 or 7.5%)

Strathfield (1)
Homebush (1)
Oatlands (1)

ACT (1 or 2.5%)

Canberra, ACT (1)

QLD (2 or 5%)

Inala (Brisbane), QLD (1)
Warwick, QLD (1)

Total Giving Nil Response (6 or 15%)

Question Two: NB/ many respondents ticked multiple boxes that applied to them

Breakdown of boxes ticked:

I am participating in a role in the ceremony (8 or 20%)

A friend or relative is participating in the ceremony (8 or 20%)

I am representing my place of employment or organisation (10 or 25%)

I feel that it is an important part of the reconciliation process to acknowledge the darker aspects of the Australian past (33 or 82.5%)

I feel I need to develop a better understanding of Australia's history, and thought my attendance at the ceremony might help to achieve this (18 or 45%)

I think it is an important event for the local community, bringing together both Indigenous and non-indigenous people together and so I wanted to show my support. (33 or 82.5%)

I have a direct link to an ancestor who was involved in the events at Myall Creek in 1838 so I feel it is part of my personal history. (6 or 15%)

Other (6 or 15%) (see written discussion)

The results of question one revealed that the majority of those attending the ceremony came from Regional NSW. Furthermore, well over half of these attendees were from the New England or North West Regions. For the main part therefore, it could be argued that the event is still largely attracting a regional and not a national attendance. Three states/territories were represented (NSW, ACT, QLD), however ACT and QLD only had 3 people attending in total, so it would be difficult to even argue that the event was attractive to the Eastern states. A reasonably high proportion (15%) of respondents did not give a residing town in response to this question. It is possible that the respondents merely did not wish to disclose this information. However, after analysing the layout of the survey, it is perhaps more probable that they simply did not realise that this was the first question, jumping straight to question two. This could possibly have been avoided by simply changing the order of the questions around, having question one after the 'tick a box' question two. Results may have been altered with the inclusion of the residing towns of those who did not respond to this question. An additional factor influencing those attending is also the publicity the event received. In 2003 for example, several reconciliation email lists advertised the upcoming event. This did not appear to be the case in 2004. Indeed, a notice to the committee members advising of the Annual Meeting after the ceremony apparently did not go out until a week or two before the event. This may have influenced the numbers attending⁴⁴ and therefore the spread of where people were travelling from. Any future surveys could possibly target this area by asking respondents to identify where or how they heard about the event.

The results of question two showed the two responses were equally as popular:- that attending the event is important for reconciliation, and that attending the event is important to help build community relations. The fact that this second response was so popular may be a result of the number of attendees from the local region, but is also a clear indication that the event is still largely one of regional rather than national importance. The high number of respondents ticking the reconciliation box may also be reflective of the idea that Des Blake suggested (as discussed earlier in this chapter) that those attending the event are likely to have a strong interest in reconciliation and that in some ways, as one respondent

⁴⁴ One respondent from Lennox Head noted that they felt '*disappointed that the numbers attending were slowly dwindling*'. This could be the result of a lack of publicity. The event does have the advantage that it is known to be held on the Saturday of the long weekend in June, however publicity can be an important reminder for those who attended previous ceremonies, provide the incentive for people to come along, or inform those previously not aware of the events existence.

from between Bingara and Warialda suggested in question three, the event is *'preaching to the converted'*.

A smaller number of respondents (varying from 20% to 25%) were attending the event as they were participating, watching a friend or relative participate or representing a place of employment or organisation. Given the high proportion of respondents who ticked the 'reconciliation' and 'important to local community' boxes it is likely that the majority of these respondents also ticked one or both of these boxes and therefore held a belief that the event was important to attend regardless of their responsibilities on the day. Similarly, the majority of those that had a direct link with the event through their ancestors would probably have felt that the event was important for both reconciliation and to the local community and were not attending purely because of the bonds felt by their links to the past. Under half of the respondents (45%), indicated that they wanted to attend the event to gain a better understanding about Australian history. Conversely, this could indicate that over half of the respondents felt that they had a reasonable understanding of Australian history and were attending the event for other reasons, e.g. to contribute to the reconciliation process.

Six respondents gave 'other' answers as either alternatives to or to supplement other reasons given for attending the event. Three were of particular interest. One respondent from Inverell indicated that they had never attended the event before but felt that it was something that they should do and further something they should bring their children to. This respondent noted that *'we will be back next year'*, adding to the idea that the event becomes a kind of pilgrimage for some attendees. This idea was also backed by another respondent from Tamworth who noted that they had *'attended this gathering since 1998'* with their partner and it was something that they would continue to try to do. The third respondent of interest under this 'other' section also indicated that it was important to continue to frequent the event, however the reasoning was due to the cultural ties felt *'As a Murri from QLD Bidjiri it is part of protocol to participate in events like this'*.

A reasonably high proportion (30%) of respondents also expanded upon the reasons why they had ticked particular boxes in response to question two. The information gleaned from these expanded responses can be divided into several categories. Many of these

explanations focussed on a desire to express a personal response for the need for reconciliation. For example, one respondent from Warwick, QLD wrote *'I need to come here today to stand as a person speaking against the evils done to the gentle owners of this land. I stand with those healing the wrong and bless their efforts.'* Another respondent from Moama expanded on the reconciliation theme in a different way, stating *'Most white people have little appreciation of Australian history, especially our association with the original occupants of this country. This type of function helps us to appreciate what has to be done to obtain acceptance'*. Other respondents noted that they regularly attended or expanded on the organisations or work places that they were representing (e.g. World Vision) or why they felt a personal link with the event (e.g. they had lived locally all their life or details of the ancestors they had descended from who were involved in the event). The respondent from Moama also noted that they were holidaying in Bingara and had been told of the ceremony at the Tourist Information Centre so had decided to attend. This is an indication that some form of publicity, even if it was word of mouth, existed for the 2004 event.

Question three, an optional written response describing how respondents felt after attending the ceremony, received 35 responses (87.5% of all respondents). Largely, these responses focused on being emotionally moved by the ceremony and feeling a renewed enthusiasm for reconciliation. One exception was a respondent from Lennox Head who noted that they were *'Sad that the numbers attending are slowly decreasing'*. Similarly, one respondent from between Bingara and Warialda noted at the end of their response that *'This Myall Creek Ceremony is important – yet preaching to the converted is how useful?'*. An interesting feature of many responses were the number who noted that they felt the event gave them an almost spiritual experience, or that they have continued or would continue to come back each year, in a kind of annual reconciliation pilgrimage to Myall Creek. The full range of comments are included for review below, as the personal comments of the respondents have their own greater power than that of any summary of the 'results' can really provide.

Responses Received to Question Three

'Renewed in friendship, spirit. Enjoyed the company of many wonderful people. Remembering a very significant part of our history' (Respondent from Bingara)

'Glad to have been able to come – thanks to all who organised it' (Respondent from Warwick, QLD)

'The ceremony was very well organised and well attended. I came away very impressed and sympathetic to the cause of Indigenous people' (Respondent from Moama)

'It is a very moving place. Always feel a sense of 'spirituality' after being at the 'Rock'' (Respondent from Warialda)

'Sad that the numbers attending are slowly decreasing' (Respondent from Lennox Head)

'It is always positive to be part of this group although there are not too many local people apart from the participants. Our reconciliation group is represented here each year (from Inverell)' (Respondent did not give residing town)

'There must be something I can do to assist. I have a fair amount of involvement with the Aboriginal community in Moama especially the children through the Uniting Church 'Kuca' Club.' (Respondent from Moama)

'Moved with an emotional connection to the past and present' (Respondent from Glen Innes)

'A stronger link to the land and its Aboriginal people. It was in a sense a 'Holy-Walk' of sadness yet hope, especially when the students from their respective high schools said their responses to each other' (Respondent from Oatlands)

'Good to see wide cross section of community – Anglo-Celts and Asian present to participate' (Respondent did not give residing town)

'I feel encouraged to see so many people from far off places (e.g. South of Sydney). It shows message is spreading to acknowledge our shared history including the dark side and

to work for reconciliation based in truth. I am a Catholic priest - I am a member of the committee from its inception – I used to come here with a small group on the anniversary even before the memorial was planned.’ (Respondent from Werris Creek)

‘I felt sorry and sad that the event happened but hope in that by recognising it it brings us closer together – towards reconciliation.’ (Respondent from Inverell)

‘Sorry for the Aboriginal people who were killed in the massacre and learnt a lot about Aboriginal history’ (Respondent from Inverell)

‘Each year, I feel more aware of past injustices and more determined to work for reconciliation and social justice for Aboriginal and other peoples. While this year was not attended by as many people as previously, there was a sincere sense of unity and ‘strength of presence’ (Respondent did not give residing town)

‘Full of inspiration to further publicity of the memorial event’ (Respondent from Tamworth)

‘Great because I have been something like this before and glad to meet people from my tribe. It was very well done. Thank you’ (Respondent from Inala, QLD)

‘Enthralled. Great to meet Joe (local Elder), Aden Ridgeway, Beulah Adams and other descendants of the perpetrators. Our true history must be compulsory teaching in all schools’ (Respondent did not give residing town)

‘Proud of my people’ (Respondent did not give residing town)

‘Moved, sad but a great feeling being part of the ceremony here today’ (Respondent from Inverell)

‘There is much to be done and events such as Myall Creek are encouraging steps’ (Respondent from Homebush)

‘I feel glad that I came – it is a public statement of support for reconciliation. It makes me glad to see so many Aboriginal people here for this ceremony each year. To see the direct

descendants of those who perpetrated the massacre is a wonderful thing too (Respondent from Narrabri)

'Good. Very glad I finally got here. Site is peaceful and a credit to all involved in setting it up. Go the people!' (Respondent did not give residing town)

'This is an important moment each year to re tell the shared history and engage others in the significance, including the lack of education offered by our education system to discover the truth.' (Respondent from Canberra)

'A sense of closeness to Aboriginal people – a common bond in reconciliation' (Respondent from Inverell)

'Saddened but pleased that history is now being spread, especially amongst school children. Pleased the memorial is going to get bigger like Long Reach. We have raised with the Premier getting it to be like a sacred place and getting politicians support. Hundreds of people come here each year to see the site. Word has spread about the true history which is good' (Respondent from Moree)

'I felt that the people and friends of my school should recognise, learn and understand the true Aboriginal history of our country' (Respondent from Inverell)

'As always a religious/spiritual experience. Thank you' (Respondent from Moree)

'This is my 4th visit. Two on Commemoration Day and twice with family/friends. Happy to be part of this ceremony of reconciliation.' (Respondent from Moree)

'Pleased with the number and variety of people here.' (Respondent from Moree)

'That progress cannot be advanced until we all take part' (Respondent from Moree)

'This is my third visit. I need to continue to come each year to refresh my commitment to reconciliation.' (Respondent from Moree)

'I felt that I wanted everyone else at school, my friends, everyone, to know the true history of Australia.' (Respondent from Inverell)

'I felt as following ceremonies here, moved – impassioned, disappointed – thrilled, many contradicting passions. Anger and despair at our government (federal), at the general populace indifference, frightened that we do not seem to learn from our mistakes and saddened that although we are all here as one (supposedly) there is a reticence about communication. This Myall Creek Ceremony is important – yet preaching to the converted is how useful?' (Respondent from between Bingara and Warialda)

'Hopeful and moved after 2003- expect the same this year' (Respondent from Bingara)

'The ceremony leaves me always with mixed feelings. I am glad to see youth involved. It is good to see the continuing support of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike in a spirit of warm friendship and happy sociality typical of rural communities at their best.'
(Respondent from Tamworth)

In summary, my individual experience of both the memorial and the annual memorial ceremony was that it was designed to try to inspire a spiritual, almost personal pilgrimage or journey of understanding of the Australian past and its role in the present. This was also the experience of many of those who responded to the survey at the 2004 event. Further, it can be argued that the Myall Creek Memorial Committee have deliberately set out to create this kind of experience and will be continuing to promote the memorial and the associated ceremony held each June Long Weekend to increase its status from regional to national recognition and importance. Currently, for example, the backpacker tour company, 'Oz Experience', visits the site. Proposed publicity of the site could target many more such tourist companies, to place Myall Creek firmly on the 'must see' lists of tourists both from within Australia and overseas. A brief overview of plans discussed at the 2004 Annual Meeting also mentioned the possibility of contacting companies such as Oz Experience who utilise the site as part of a 'tourist package' to contribute funding to the site in order to help the committee deal with ongoing maintenance costs, particularly of the public facilities (toilet etc.) that are provided. This will ensure that the basic costs of providing the memorial and associated facilities are met annually and in short, that the memorial as is remains economically viable. Plans to further develop and promote the memorial (e.g. as discussed earlier the idea to work in conjunction with a Land Council to acquire the currently privately owned Myall Creek Station or establishing a keeping place) would need considerably more funding than is achieved currently with donations and small grants. The potential for the site to be listed on the new National Heritage List could help with maintenance costs and perhaps provide avenues for upgrading the site to reflect any officially recognised 'national significance'. Whether this will happen however remains to be seen.

7.5 Conclusions

The Myall Creek Memorial and the annual memorial ceremony held at the site raise a number of interesting issues regarding the presentation of the shared past. One of the central themes raised is the issue of the memorial's status. In particular, will the memorial ever reach a stage of development where it has achieved nationwide recognition as a significant historic site and become a 'must see' destination? If its status is increased, how

can the integrity of the site be preserved in order that it remains a site of 'historic pilgrimage'? Is it, for example, a site that satisfies morbid curiosities rather than an engagement with the past?

Perhaps even before these issues are addressed, the question should be asked whether it is indeed desirable for the site to be marketed as a site that is representative of the history of massacres in general in Australia. Both sides can easily be argued for. Clearly there are benefits in bringing to the Australian public a broad understanding of the past. There is the potential to aid the reconciliation process as visitors to the site can see how the history of Myall Creek can be applied in other states and territories across Australia. By focussing the story at Myall Creek as being a story which was repeated in many places across Australia some of the individuality and intricacies of the Myall Creek story are easily lost. These intricacies in themselves can provide important lessons about the past. For example, Campbell (1978) notes some exceptions to the dominant trend of Indigenous/non-indigenous relations in the New England/Northern regions at the time of the Myall Creek massacre, adding to the complexity of the historical picture. He writes that there were:

'exceptions to this dark and bloody situation (the Myall Creek Massacre). On Glenmore Station, near Inverell, Robert Muir was satisfactorily and peacefully sharing the land with the Natives. The experience of the Everett brothers deserved particular attention. The Everetts came to New England in 1838 – during the violent era on the tableland. The local Aborigines helped them choose a fine tract of land, Ollera, north-west of Guyra... The Everetts learned the local Aboriginal dialect, and mutual trust, respect and honesty prevailed between the representatives of the two races on Ollera as they do today (1969). The Everetts were employing Aborigines as stockmen and house servants with great success and satisfaction at a time when other settlers viewed the "no hoper savages" with contempt and hatred.... They overcame the incompatibility of values and ways of life by deep interest, broad sympathy and respect for the humanity of the natives.'

(Campbell, 1978:9).

A discussion of the reaction to the initial acquittal of those charged for the massacre and then later to the conviction of those charged at the second trial could also be expanded on at the site in order to broaden an understanding of both of the event itself and the social values at the time. It is important to stress that in many ways, the outcome at Myall Creek (the conviction and hanging of seven white men) was the exception rather than the rule. Much of the population were far from in favour of the hanging of a white man for crimes committed against Aboriginal people. It is also important to note the culture of silence that developed as a result of the convictions of some of those involved in the Myall Creek Massacre. Massacres arguably did not cease or decrease across the nation as a result of the convictions but rather were driven further underground so that often the only evidence that remains of these events is almost regarded as ‘folklore’. Revealing this side of the history of the massacre would also help aid understanding of why scepticism about the existence of massacres as part of Australian history has developed.

Finally, the issue of whether or not the Myall Creek Memorial is a good model for other potential memorials at historic sites across Australia should be explored. The establishment of the Myall Creek Memorial Committee with both Indigenous and non-indigenous representation from the outset is arguably an important precedent for others interested in establishing similar memorials or interpretation programs to follow. Where a site involves the history of multiple groups, the best outcome is to have representation, or at the very least approval of the principles of portraying the many levels of a sites history, from all relevant stakeholders. The Myall Creek Memorial Committee has taken the idea of representation one step further, however, by insisting that the make up of their committee consist of fifty percent Indigenous and fifty percent non-indigenous members (Rev. John Brown, 2004 - personal comment at the Annual Myall Creek Memorial Committee Meeting)⁴⁵. The Myall Creek Memorial Committee has also successfully demonstrated an ability to acquire funding for not only the construction of their vision but the maintenance of it. They have successfully applied for a number of grants, most significantly being the initial Local Symbols of Reconciliation Grant which helped establish the memorial by providing \$40,000 of funding over four years (NSW Council for Reconciliation, 2004). Indeed, the NSW Council for Reconciliation Inc. is promoting the Myall Creek Memorial

⁴⁵ This issue of ‘equalisation’ of history will be discussed further in the final Discussion and Conclusions Chapter of this thesis.

as an example of just what can be achieved in these sorts of local community projects. Arguably, the key to the success of the Myall Creek Memorial and also what will be the dominant factor in the continual success of the project is the time and energy devoted to the project by a small group of enthusiastic volunteers. This fact has also been noted by those involved in the committee. For example, a posting on the discussion board regarding the future of the memorial stated that *'It sounds as if the most important factor will be the level of energy and commitment you have now. Has the process taken its toll on you all? Does your need for R and R and personal refocusing outweigh the desire to press forward with the opportunities opening up to you now?'* (Avery, 2003) How long the current body of dedicated volunteers are able to remain committed to the cause and whether or not 'new blood' can be injected regularly enough into the committee to avoid the 'burn out' of volunteers may well be the key to the future directions the Myall Creek Memorial may take.

Section D: Discussion and Conclusions

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusions

8.1 Overview of the Thesis

This thesis has investigated the ways in which Aboriginal history can effectively be incorporated into the interpretation of contemporary or post-contact history at heritage sites. Firstly, in Section A of the thesis, important background information was introduced relating to the development of Australian historical narratives and heritage interpretation, particularly as it related to the interpretation of the Aboriginal past in Australia. Given this background, Section B moved on to discuss general issues in heritage interpretation today. The structure of this section of the thesis was designed to give a broad overview of the status of post-contact heritage interpretation at a range of heritage sites - from monuments and museums to public art. A number of examples were utilised in each of the chapters within this section in order to give the reader an insight into the variety of ways post-contact Aboriginal history is beginning to be incorporated into heritage interpretation programs in Australia. At times, it also provided insights into where interpretive programs were lacking or the ways in which programs could potentially be improved. Section B was concluded with a chapter discussing other issues affecting heritage interpretation. This 'Other Issues' chapter engaged with some particularly current issues such as the introduction of Dual Naming and the effect of Environmental Impact Assessment on heritage interpretation. Not only are these issues important for those involved in the field of heritage interpretation to engage with in order to understand the potential influence on their work but an analysis of these issues provided important background to the next section of the thesis – Section C – which gave an in depth analysis of heritage interpretation programs at three separate historic sites around Australia. Each of the sites utilised as case studies in Section C incorporated a basic engagement with issues previously raised in the 'Other Issues' chapter. Botany Bay National Park for example, had indicated in their *Plan of Management* that the park had a dual name, however they were

yet to implement this on the ground. Both Myall Creek and the Meeting Place Precinct at Botany Bay National Park incorporated a track or trail (another of the other issues that was the focus of Chapter Four) as part of their interpretive concept.

This final chapter of the thesis aims to draw together common principles regarding effective and inclusive heritage interpretation that have emerged as a result of an analysis of the examples and case studies discussed in Sections B and C. It is hoped that awareness of these principles along with the problems encountered in establishing interpretive programs that reflect Australia's shared past will provide insights, particularly for those working in the field of interpretation, as to how heritage interpreters in Australia can adopt a more inclusive approach. That is, an approach that allows for multiple voices both from and about the past to be heard.

This chapter argues that there can never be one set way of interpreting the shared past and indeed if there were, heritage interpretation would certainly become stale very quickly. Innovation, finding unique ways to present the past, is particularly important. If all interpretive programs were based on the same formula, visitors to heritage sites would soon become very bored. The examples presented in this thesis are not therefore designed for heritage interpreters to merely copy and represent in a slightly altered form at other heritage sites. Rather, they are presented as examples of the variety of ways programs can be established in order that those involved in interpretation can use them as a springboard to their own innovative ideas. The role of this final chapter of the thesis is therefore to bring together the information learnt about effective interpretation programs from each of the examples and case studies. Similarly, this thesis has aimed to present the problems and issues faced in establishing interpretive programs. It is not enough for interpreters to have innovative ideas alone. An awareness of the kinds of processes needed to implement these projects and the pitfalls that may be faced along the way is vital to the successful implementation of interpretive projects. The lessons learnt regarding the establishment of interpretive programs from the range of examples and case studies presented in this thesis will also be synthesised in this final section. Finally, an analysis of the status of heritage interpretation relating to the presentation of the post-contact past in Australia will be given, along with consideration of the need for further research in related areas.

8.2 What is Shared History in Practice?

From the outset, this thesis has utilised the principle of ‘shared history’ - as outlined by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation - as a starting point in discussions of heritage interpretation. Each of the examples used in Chapters Two (Monuments and Memorials) and Three (Museums), and the historic site case studies in Chapters Five to Seven (Parramatta Park and Old Government House, The Meeting Place Precinct and Myall Creek) has called into question exactly what ‘shared history’ is in practice. Can the examples raised in the thesis effectively be labelled as interpretive programs that are utilising the concept of shared history and if so, how can shared history as it relates to heritage interpretation be defined? Indeed, is it possible to present a truly ‘shared history’ in an interpretation program? From the outset, this thesis has steered away from providing a concrete list of what constitutes shared history in relation to heritage interpretation, arguing that shared history is by nature a fluid concept. It needs to incorporate pluralities – multiple opinions and perspectives of the past. Its very nature therefore prohibits a prescriptive definition of what can or cannot pass as ‘shared history’ on the ground.

An examination of the various case studies and examples cited in this thesis reveal a number of principles that can be seen as key indicators of heritage interpretation programs that are effectively utilising the concept of shared history. Again, it is important to note that the existence of these principles in interpretative programs is not prescriptive. It cannot simply be stated that if all these principles are present at an historic or heritage site, the site is effectively presenting the shared past. However, it is *most likely* that this would be the case. The principles are designed to be utilised as guidelines for heritage interpreters, but should not be considered a strict ‘rule book’ for interpretive practice. Innovation is a key factor in interpretation and should always be held in high esteem by interpreters. Interpretation would be in danger of becoming stale and in many ways, irrelevant to the general public if it involved a ‘tick a box’ practice of ensuring specific attributes are included in all interpretive programs. The following section should therefore be read with an understanding that *these principles are broad, non-prescriptive considerations that interpreters can implement in a variety of ways* (as the case studies and examples have shown). They are designed for interpreters to have at the ‘back of their minds’, a way of

thinking about how the way interpreters choose to portray Australia's past, impacts upon the present.

The four basic principles that emerged as a result of an analysis of the examples and case studies raised in this thesis are that interpretation should aim to be *inclusive, integrative, interesting and informative*. It could be argued that these are broad, sweeping terms that can themselves be interpreted in many ways and therefore are of limited use for interpreters, as they do not provide something 'concrete' to grasp. As argued above 'shared history' is a fluid concept and interpretation needs to be innovative. There is no 'one correct way' in which each of these principles can or should be incorporated into interpretation programs. Indeed, *it is essential that each of these principles be used in tandem with the principle of innovation*. However, what can be done to help facilitate understanding of these terms is to examine how others have implemented them in practice, not to mirror existing interpretive programs but to emphasise the variety of ways and indeed the potentially endless ways that these principles can be implemented.

The first principle to be discussed in this section is that of *inclusive* interpretation. This principle is the basic foundation point of presenting a history of the past that is truly 'shared'. In order for interpretation to be inclusive, it needs to consider all relevant stakeholders in the history and heritage of sites. This may mean (as was seen in the case of Botany Bay National Park, Parramatta Park and Old Government House, Reconciliation Place and the Myall Creek Memorial) setting up a process of consultation with relevant community members. It may mean the establishment of a panel or committee, e.g. The Myall Creek Memorial Committee, which is committed to maintaining the representation of both Indigenous and non-indigenous voices. Essential to the success of inclusiveness in these approaches however is ensuring that consultation truly listens to community desires and is flexible and adaptive enough to alter established plans if they do not match these community desires. This was evident at Reconciliation Place where the planning process was really only partially adaptive. The proposed design of the controversial Stolen Generations Sliver was changed in response to community concerns. However, the process was not adaptive to the extent that they would consider abandoning the 'sliver' model. The community's desires still had to be shaped to fit in to the 'sliver' format rather than the natural garden expressed by many as the favourable memorial.

An alternative or an approach that can be used in addition to consultation and committees to achieve a degree of inclusiveness, is the employment of both Indigenous and non-indigenous guides. For example, the National Trust at Old Government House includes both Indigenous and non-indigenous guided tours. It would be an interesting innovation to see a heritage interpretation program which simultaneously utilised Indigenous and non-indigenous guides in the one, rather than separate interpretative programs. The Museum of Sydney gives a good example of collaboration in the work of Indigenous and non-indigenous representations of the past in the installation in the forecourt – Edge of the Trees. However, a similar occurrence in a guided setting was absent from all of the examples and case studies utilised in this thesis. In a case where funds are limited inclusive interpretation may simply mean ensuring the inclusion of Indigenous and non-indigenous voices in signage (with the appropriate consent of those involved in the collection of stories, histories and opinions on the past to be utilised in this way). For example, the current displays in the Discovery Centre at Botany Bay National Park, although trying to explain the Aboriginal history of the park, do so from a largely non-indigenous perspective. Cartoons present the past in the way a non-indigenous person in the place of an Aboriginal person present at Cooks landing would perceive the event. Though a useful tool in capturing the attention of a non-indigenous audience, these cartoons fail to reveal the past from an Indigenous perspective. A few snippets of oral history from local Aboriginal people are included in the display, however it would be good to see a far more balanced, and inclusive approach.

Of particularly importance when discussing inclusion, is the need to incorporate multiple voices both *from* and *about* the past. That is, the presentation of the shared past needs to be seen to involve not only multiple perspectives on past events (and therefore should access a range of sources such as oral histories and documentary sources to include both Indigenous and non-indigenous voices) but multiple perspectives on the role and importance of history today. For example, Warriu Park in Wyndham, Western Australia, adds interpretation regarding the role of the past with signage stating that '*Aboriginal spirits will always survive in this timeless and beautiful land*'. The purpose of the statues and park for Aboriginal people is to be a reminder of their continual presence. Whereas, to a non-indigenous visitor, the role of the park to them is to present a picture of a traditional

Aboriginal family. Why the presentation of the past is important to different groups and the role of the past today is an important aspect to present at sites of shared history.

The second principle, of *integrative* interpretation, is in some ways similar to the principle of inclusive interpretation – integrating a variety of voices into interpretative programs. Integration, however, also contains a connotation of creating one voice from many. It is this aspect of the principle that needs further exploration as it touches on a controversial aspect of defining the nature of shared history.

In discussing Prime Minister John Howard's perspective of history, Sculthorpe (2001:74) cites the Indigenous historian, Tony Birch, who states that what Howard really believes in is '*A history "for all of us"... one history for one Australia*'. Birch (cited in Sculthorpe, 2001:74) writes however that this history is a '*history of exclusion which could deny the right to claim and remember the past in a particular way for many groups in Australian society*'. Howard's 'one version' of the past excludes the idea of a pluralist approach to Australian history. Yet it could certainly be argued to be an integrative approach in the traditional sense of the word, combining parts to make a single interpretation. How well those parts and how many parts are combined however is questionable. In creating shared histories, divergent views of the past will almost always be apparent. If these views cannot neatly fit into the one narrative, they should not automatically be excluded. Integration, in the sense that it is used as a principle for the effective interpretation of shared history in this thesis, should not be a neat, artificial construct of unity of perspectives from and about the past. It does involve combining perspectives but combining them to create a pluralist interpretation of the past, that is, creating 'one' history but a history that is able to acknowledge multiple perspectives. It acknowledges that there is indeed, 'one past' but that there are multiples ways in which that past can be seen. There is one physical reality, but society has placed, and continues to place, many interpretations upon it. Integration, in the sense that it is used in this thesis, attempts to provide a cohesive or logical interpretation of these divergent perspectives, explaining both their similarities and difference, and where possible, explaining how these divergent perspectives arose whilst avoiding an approach which tries to determine the one 'true' interpretation of the past. As soon as one interpretation of the past has a higher value placed upon it than other divergent

views, it fails to provide an integrative approach, transforming instead into an exclusionist one.

The third principle, of *interesting* interpretation, can be considered in a variety of ways. Firstly, interpreters need to consider their audience. Who is it that interpreters are trying to interest? In the case of sites of shared historic importance, it is likely that the audience will consist of both Indigenous and non-indigenous people. Often, interpretative programs incorporating Aboriginal history assume that the audience is purely non-indigenous and needs to be ‘educated’ in Indigenous ways⁴⁶. Museums like Tiagarra in Devonport, Tasmania, are an example of this. Signage rarely includes local Indigenous language, traditional cultural practices are explained in a manner which fails to link them to contemporary Aboriginal culture and what reference there is to the Palawa (Tasmanian Aboriginal people) today is extremely dated. Conversely, the Auntie Ida West Healing Garden at Wybalenna on Flinders Island, Tasmania, tends to ignore a potential non-indigenous audience through its failure to interpret who Ida West was and the importance of her achievements, thus losing potential visitor interest. Both Tiagarra and Wybalenna therefore risk alienating one section of their potential audience by failing to adequately capture their needs. Another important consideration when discussing the potential interests of various audiences is the ability of a site to capture the interest of children. With its impressive interactive displays, the Johnny Mullagh Museum and Cricket Centre is just one example of how to maintain the interest and attention of children at historic and heritage sites.

Another example of how *interesting* interpretation is vital to the success of interpretative programs, stressing the shared importance of historic sites and heritage places, is the ability of an interpretive program to be updated, or change. It is unlikely that an individual would regularly visit an historic or heritage site whose interpretive program remained the same for several years. Sites whose programs remain static would constantly need to try and market themselves to new audience groups in order to achieve reasonable visitor numbers. Not only would this mean that they are targeting an ever diminishing pool of visitors, the

⁴⁶ This aspect of the principle that interpretation should be interesting highlights the overlapping nature of many of the four principles. Here the need for interesting interpretation is overlapping the need for inclusive interpretation (interpretation which includes both indigenous and non-indigenous perspectives will also hold interest for both groups).

site itself is failing to acknowledge that history is dynamic. Interpretations of the past constantly change. Effective examples of projects conveying a sense of the 'living past' previously discussed in this thesis include the Welcome Wall at the Australian Maritime Museum at Darling Harbour which enabled the regular addition of names and tales to contribute to the story of migration in Australia. The example of the Explorer's Monument in Fremantle, Western Australia also showed an innovative way in which the history that a monument is presenting can be challenged with the addition of an alternative version of the past on a separate plaque. The ability to adapt to changing interpretations of the past is vital when dealing with shared history. Shared history is by nature, a pluralist history. It must incorporate many perspectives of the past, perspectives which may also change with time. Many local historical society museums such as the Emta Museum on Flinders Island, being volunteer run, would find it a particular challenge to regularly change displays or interpretive signage. In this sense, access to funding can be a major issue in allowing for change. For example, the displays within the Discovery Centre at Botany Bay National Park along with the few relevant signs on the Banks Solander Walk give a dated interpretation of the role of Aboriginal people in the past. These displays have remained essentially the same for over ten years. However, it is only with the funding provided with the launch of the Draft *Master Plan* that the potential for an updated interpretation program arrived.

In considering whether an interpretative program is maintaining an audience's *interest*, the method of interpretation must also be considered. For example, signage can easily become dated with visitors failing to stop and read signs that are essentially the same year in year out. However, signs have the advantage of being able to convey all of the time a sites history and the importance of heritage places. Conversely, guided interpretation can easily be changed on a regular basis to provide new insights to places of shared historic importance. However, guides cannot be available to all visitors at all times. For example, at Parramatta Park and Old Government House, the National Trust guided Aboriginal Interpretation program is only available to booked school groups or on very rare occasions to the general public. The availability of guides at the Museum of Sydney, though far more available than at Parramatta Park and Old Government House, is also limited. Often museums, such as the Melbourne Museum, will offer guided tours on the hour. Whilst capturing a significant number of visitors there will always be those visitors that don't

arrive at appropriate times to join in or choose not to partake of a guided experience. The ongoing use of a guide is also likely to be more costly than the use of signage, beyond an initial set up fee. However, interpreters, particularly those working for larger organisations with access to more funding, should consider budgeting for the regular updating of signage as well as maintenance of signs which are often the targets of vandalism, as illustrated at Parramatta Park. The key point here is that interpreters need to consider the pros and cons of their particular interpretative methods in order to help create strategies to maintain visitor interest.

The fourth principle, of *informative* interpretation, refers simply to the need to enable visitors to leave historic or heritage sites feeling that they have learnt about the past. Interpretation should have a didactic element. Interpretation that focuses on revealing the shared past should particularly focus on educating visitors on the multiple perspectives both from and about these sites. Interpretation should particularly focus on those stories and perspectives that would otherwise have remained unseen to the visitor without the aid of interpretive tools such as signage. Informative interpretation also refers to the need to incorporate a healthy balance of factual, chronological and thematic presentations of the past. It recognises that visitors to heritage sites will learn in different ways. Some visitors prefer a factual or chronological account of the past whilst others understand the past much better by seeing the relevant issues drawn together in a series of themes that are presented through the interpretation. Different visitors can be adequately informed about the history and value of sites in a variety of ways. Targeting a range of learning styles is therefore a valuable approach for interpreters to utilise. This can be simply approaching the material in multiple ways such as in the displays in the Bunjilaka Gallery in the Melbourne Museum (straight forward interpretative signage of artefacts, a range of audio visual presentations, photographs and art) which cater to a range of alternative learning styles or it could be a matter of supplementing traditional signage with guided interpretation. Alternatively, where budgets are restricted, signage could attempt to be more 'well rounded' - containing both visual and written interpretations of the past incorporating examples of facts relevant to the events and providing an indication of the chronology of events as well as targeting a thematic understanding of the past.

It is important to note in this discussion regarding these principles that *the first two principles (inclusive and integrative interpretation) are integral to the interpretation of the shared past. The second two principles (interesting and informative interpretation) are not unique to sites of shared historic importance. However, they are essential principles for effective interpretation. The four principles when combined therefore, become not just principles for interpreting the shared past, but principles for the EFFECTIVE interpretation of sites of shared historical importance.* In order to be effective, *all these principles must also be implemented in innovative, non-prescriptive ways.*

8.3 Approaching Controversial or Sensitive Issues

When dealing with the shared past in Australia, often the stories related through interpretative programs will be controversial or sensitive in nature. Stories related to massacre sites like Myall Creek and the removal of Aboriginal children (such as in the case of the Stolen Generations Sliver at Reconciliation Place) are just two examples amongst many. The interpretation of these sites can be confronting for both Indigenous and non-indigenous people and should be approached with this in mind. Similarly, the current controversy over the interpretation of the Aboriginal past in Australia and the politically charged atmosphere which regularly sees allegations of ‘black armband history’, ‘systemic bias’, ‘political correctness’ and the like, means that interpretation programs can easily become the target of public controversy, as was the case with the displays in the National Museum of Australia. At the other extreme, interpretation programs can lack meaning or relevance to the present because they fail to engage with contemporary issues⁴⁷, such as the displays at the Museum in the Tiagarra Cultural Centre at Devonport, which had the potential to engage visitors with aspects of contemporary life for Palawa people, yet remained firmly entrenched in a traditional, largely prehistoric interpretation of Tasmania’s past. There is a need therefore for interpretive programs to be willing to engage with the

⁴⁷ Often failing to engage with current issues reflects an attempt to avoid controversy and political division on issues such as native title and land rights, poor health and housing conditions of Aboriginal people etc. However, it can also simply be a reflection of the lack of funds available to update existing interpretative programs or a reflection of interpreters who are stuck in the mindset of interpreting the Aboriginal past as the prehistoric past rather than following Aboriginal history through to its current developments.

relationship of the past to the present, but to do so in a sensitive manner, acknowledging diversity of opinions on controversial issues, presenting the past in a pluralist way, through interpretation that stresses multiple rather than one singularly correct interpretation.

Huxtable (2000:13), referring to David Uzzell's work on 'hot' interpretation,⁴⁸ notes that it is a type of interpretation that can '*make some people uncomfortable*' and that it is a presentation of the past that consists of '*both the good and the bad, of the great and the infamous*'. It is, by necessity, interpretation that will provoke emotion in the visitor. Indeed, it is arguably impossible to confront sensitive or controversial issues without provoking emotion. Huxtable quotes Uzzell on this point, who states:

'To provoke an emotional response is human. We are deceiving ourselves if we think that when we stand in front of a case of medals, or guns or photographs of mutilated bodies we are looking at the past. We are also looking at the present and the future. If interpretation is to be a source of social good then it must recognise the continuity of history and alert us to the future through the past.'

(Uzzell, quoted in Huxtable, 2000:13).

Huxtable (2000) believes that this notion of provoking emotion goes back to the original principles set down by Tilden on interpretation and that in essence, it goes to the heart of what interpretation really is. That is, interpretation is, as Tilden first noted, '*not instruction, but provocation*', not information (though it must incorporate it), but rather '*revelation based on information*' and finally, interpretation must '*relate what is being described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor*' (Tilden, quoted in Huxtable, 2000:12). Appealing to a visitor's emotions by revealing the variety of ways in which others have experienced the past, does not mean that visitors should be persuaded to one particular view. Indeed, provoking an emotional response arguably leads to the encouragement of '*people to think for themselves*' rather than the promotion of one set interpretive view or social objective (Aldridge, quoted in Huxtable, 2000:12). As Huxtable

⁴⁸ 'Hot' interpretation refers to interpretation '*where the story of a site is told from different perspectives*' (Huxtable, 2000:13) and in a manner which does not seek to hide from sensitive or controversial issues. It reflects much the same principles as this thesis in arguing for a multi-layered interpretation of the past.

(2000:13) concludes, *'history needs to be told from a variety of perspectives that are provoking and revealing rather than instructing, and by being prepared to cause emotional responses – then, and only then, is interpretation effective and able to make an important contribution'*.

If the incorporation of controversial and sensitive issues is essential in making important social contributions, interpreters should not shy away from addressing these issues in interpretive programs. Care should be taken to address these issues in a way which utilises the four principles of the effective interpretation of the shared past mentioned in the previous section. The inclusion of multiple stakeholders in the consultation process should help ensure that differing perspectives on sensitive or controversial issues are incorporated into interpretative programs. The principle of integration helps the interpreters to see the need to provide some sort of coherent interpretation of the issues, perhaps through the use of interlinked themes (as in the case of the Meeting Place Precinct) through which divergent views can be presented, rather than confront the visitor with an extensive jumble of opinions. As a matter of course, the interpretation should also aim to be interesting and informative (alerting the visitor to a range of viewpoints for example, and integrating factual or chronological accounts of the past with personal opinions).

Some final points to note in this discussion of approaching controversial or sensitive issues is the importance of adequate consultation regarding the content of interpretative programs. Interpreters must be willing to accept that some issues may be too sensitive for communities to agree to incorporate them at historic or heritage sites. Interpreters must be adaptive and flexible enough to find alternative approaches for site interpretation should this become apparent. Further, particularly in the current politicised climate, interpretation at heritage sites may need to avoid attributing guilt for past injustices or face being labelled as simply part of the 'black armband' movement. This can be avoided to some degree by simply ensuring the inclusion of multiple voices. An example where this has unfortunately not been avoided is in the 2004 Myall Creek Memorial Ceremony. The Memorial Ceremony in 2004 incorporated the usual device of having local Indigenous and non-indigenous school children read aloud portions of the service alternatively to each other. In the case of the 2004 service, it can be argued, that the commentary written for the non-indigenous students to announce was overly politicised, apportioning blame firmly on

current state and federal governments (see quote from the ceremony program below). This approach risks alienating sections of the community who may well have attended the event and is also arguably inappropriate in that it sees school students acting as a mouthpiece for a political statement that was almost certainly written by an adult. Fixed viewpoints such as given in the Myall Creek Service do encourage visitors to truly think about the issues for themselves, to make up their own minds given a range of information and perspectives and at the same time, can easily alienate potential audience members.

'Non-indigenous students:

"We know that oppression continues in the present;

In racist discrimination in schools, employment, shops, and the justice and health care systems;

In the inequity of access to, or use of the land;

In the abolition of ATSIC without the establishment of any alternative representative body;

*In a history still told largely from the perspective of non-Aboriginal people."*⁴⁹

(The Myall Creek Memorial Committee, 2004).

8.4 Avoiding the Prehistory Stereotype

Research conducted for this thesis has shown that the predominant view regarding the management and interpretation of Aboriginal heritage in Australia today still perceives Aboriginal heritage as being a distinctly separate field from 'historic heritage'. Indeed, more often than not, Aboriginal heritage, where overlaps with other types of heritage are acknowledged, is linked in with 'natural heritage'. The interpretation of sites of shared post-contact importance is still a relatively rare phenomenon in Australia. Research such as that undertaken as part of this thesis is vital therefore in educating those involved in

⁴⁹ Certainly some of the content here is valuable, particularly stating that history is still largely told from a non-indigenous perspective. Where the statement becomes overtly political is on the commentary on ATSIC etc.

heritage management and interpretation about the implications of confining Aboriginal heritage to the prehistoric past and the rich potential for the creation of innovative interpretation programs at sites which reflect Australia's post-contact history.

In 1998, the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) in WA published a book cited by members of the Interpretation Association Australia as covering examples of best practice heritage interpretation. Titled *Best Recipes for Interpreting our Heritage*, the book does little to further shared history or for that matter historic heritage interpretation. The focus of the book is predominately on natural rather than cultural heritage. The book also fails to enunciate general principles that interpretation programs could utilize by purely giving examples of interpretive activities with little useful analysis. This is a trend that is evident in a large proportion of literature on heritage interpretation.

The movement towards developing a set of guidelines or principles for heritage interpretation, such as the ICOMOS *Ename Charter* currently in the drafting process, is a step towards correcting the dominance of prehistory in the interpretation of Aboriginal heritage. However, broad guidelines on interpretation in general, designed to cover an international scale, may well be inadequate for providing a set of principles on interpreting the shared Australia past. For example, the current draft of the ICOMOS *Ename Charter* (2004) whilst espousing broad principles such as equitable access, consultation, innovation, flexibility, multiple perspectives and voices and the dynamic nature of interpretation, is unable to tailor these principles to shared history broadly let alone in the Australian context. The discussion of the principles devised in the ICOMOS *Ename Charter* will therefore need to be grounded in an Australian context with relevant examples to illustrate the varying ways in which these principles can be implemented. This thesis can be seen as a forerunner to such a process.

It is crucial that heritage interpreters are aware of the context in which they are operating. Chapter Four of this thesis highlighted some of the current issues of particular relevance to heritage interpreters in this country. Any charter developed in an international context needs to be translated to an Australian setting. As Wong (2002:1) writes: '*Interpretation does not happen in a vacuum. It is set in the context of personal and organisational worldviews. The approach to interpretation sets boundaries for what we think and feel*'.

Interpreters need to be aware of the nature and construct of the heritage system in Australia, of the way in which historic and heritage sites are identified and how significance is allotted in this system. Only then can the prehistoric stereotype of Aboriginal history be challenged. Before general interpretive guidelines can be applied to effectively present the shared past, interpreters need to be confronted with alternative ways of viewing Aboriginal heritage and the concept of 'shared history'. Without this, they will continue to operate within current, exclusionary interpretative frameworks. Indeed, even when heritage practitioners are aware of the concept of shared history, it is easy to fall back into stereotyped pre-conceptions of what constitutes Aboriginal history and heritage. This was evident on the example of the attitudes towards construction of a statue of the 'two warriors' at the Meeting Place Precinct at Botany Bay National Park, which initially was labelled an inappropriate or 'un-Aboriginal' way to express the history of the area. Education within heritage organisations and agencies is vital to help address these issues.

8.5 The Importance of Acknowledging the Contemporary Past

It is difficult to understate the importance of adequately acknowledging the contemporary or post-contact past in Australia. The way in which the past is interpreted at sites of shared historic importance is just one way in which post-contact history can be illuminated for the general public. Nevertheless, it is an important way. As Creamer (1990:134) writes, '*Site presentations offer one of the best opportunities for changing popular perceptions about the Aboriginal past and concomitant attitudes towards Aborigines today*'. The poor socio-economic conditions faced by many Aboriginal people in today's society are an indisputable product of the history of the past two hundred plus years. It can be argued that only through an adequate understanding of the past can these problems be tackled in the present. In discussing the famous 'Redfern Speech'⁵⁰ of the then Prime Minister of Australia, Paul Keating, Don Watson (Paul Keating's speechwriter) described the reaction the speech received at Redfern Park. He states:

⁵⁰ The Redfern Speech, given in December 1992, centred on Indigenous issues and acknowledged the role of the past in the creation of the present circumstances of indigenous people in Australia. Given at Redfern, an inner city suburb of Sydney which has historically had a significant Aboriginal population, the speech celebrated the launch of the International Year of Indigenous Peoples in 1993.

'The speech was made to a black audience but its core was an appeal to white Australians... They were not cheering as Martin Luther King's audience did when he described his dream, but there were murmurs – and occasional shouts of approval. A month later I read in a collection of essays that thought of Vico's: historical knowledge is less like knowing the facts of things and more like knowing what it is to experience them – "what it is to be poor, or to belong to a nation".... The first principle of the Redfern speech was that the problem could only be solved by an act of imagination... There was no hope of useful debate if the truth was not acknowledged and consequences imagined....The speech could not afford to be bleak: it had to convey resolution, confidence, hope.'

(Watson, 2003:288-290).

The principles Watson describes here are principles that are also vital in the effective interpretation of sites of shared history. Effective interpretation has the potential to engage the visitor's imagination, to go beyond revealing a mere chronological or factual interpretation of the past by engaging the visitor with the multiple ways in which the past is experienced by different individuals. By embracing personal and emotive interpretations of the past, and presenting each interpretation (even where interpretations clash or seem to be diametrically opposed) of the past as valid, can visitors to heritage and historic sites truly gain an understanding of the range of impacts and experiences of the past in Australia.

Wong (2002) raises some points of particular relevance regarding the establishment of heritage interpretation, which accurately reflects the involvement of a range of cultural groups in a nation's history. She writes:

'Heritage interpretation can work powerfully at many levels. Heritage Interpretation which strikes at the heart of historical relationships of the countries of the world can confirm the legitimacy of the presence of diverse minority cultural communities who are a testament to a web of shared histories across the globe. Uniqueness and sameness will be seen in continuity with each other. It is part of the process of the healing of a

society that can contribute to the re-positioning of intercultural relationships in the world. Or, heritage interpretation that recognizes and explains little-known cultural practices of minority groups can bring comfort to individuals.'

(Wong, 2002:3).

Recognising the prior presence of Aboriginal people within Australia has been achieved to some degree through the recognition of prehistory and the growing movement of recognising traditional ownership of country. A further step, however, is to promote recognition of the ongoing involvement of Australia's Indigenous people in the contemporary historical development of the nation. This not only has the potential to give Aboriginal communities a strong sense of involvement in the creation of the nation but to educate non-indigenous Australians about the integral role many Aboriginal people played and the impacts of the past upon them. Indigenous and non-indigenous interpretations of the past can sit side by side as legitimate ways of perceiving the Australian past.

8.6 Ensuring a Truly Shared Involvement in Interpretative Projects

Creamer (1990:131) writes that *'The Indigenous world view can best be incorporated into interpretation through an explicitly Aboriginal perspective to site management'*. This view is consistent with much of the literature on the interpretation of the Aboriginal past in Australia. Whilst this approach may be both advisable and feasible in the management and interpretation of sites that are exclusively of Indigenous significance (such as occupation sites etc.), for the range of sites considered in this thesis, it is considered to be too simplistic an approach. This thesis argues that for the management and interpretation of sites of shared history that a shared Indigenous and non-indigenous involvement is necessary. For example, the reality is there will never be exclusive Indigenous management of Old Government House at Parramatta. It is a site of considerable non-indigenous significance and would never be 'handed over' for Indigenous control. Yet, it is particularly relevant to incorporate Indigenous interpretations of the site in order to acknowledge the often hidden aspects of the post contact past. In this setting, the

Aboriginal interpretation must occur in an environment which also firmly acknowledges the non-indigenous history of the site. Indeed, as Interviewee Six highlighted in her discussion of the interpretive programs at Old Government House, she felt that she couldn't teach the Aboriginal history of the site without knowing and teaching the non-indigenous history. They both impacted on each other. They were indisputably intertwined.

If the optimal approach to interpreting the shared past is therefore shared involvement in interpretive programs, the question then becomes:- how can shared involvement in projects be ensured? The case studies and examples utilised in the thesis have demonstrated a range of different ways in which this can occur. In the case of the Meeting Place Precinct at Botany Bay National Park, the initial planning stage of the project tried to establish shared involvement through community consultation. In particular, the planners incorporated a targeted Indigenous approach to ensure Indigenous voices were heard. Further plans for the project include the employment of Indigenous staff to help ensure a balance between the traditionally dominant non-indigenous interpretation of the site and ensuring that Indigenous stories are also heard. In the case of Myall Creek, initial consultation with the Indigenous community about the project lead to the establishment of a steering committee for the project which incorporated the principle of ensuring equal representation of Indigenous and non-indigenous people by stipulating the committee must consist of a 50-50 representation of Indigenous and non-indigenous people. At the Melbourne Museum, Indigenous staff have been employed in the establishment and interpretation (e.g. as guides) of displays in the Bunjilaka Gallery). Indigenous guides are also utilised at Old Government House, The Royal Botanical Gardens in Melbourne and at the Johnny Mullagh Museum at Harrow.

It seems that there are two main approaches used to ensure shared Indigenous/non-indigenous involvement in the interpretation of sites of shared significance. Largely, these approaches have focussed on the need for including Indigenous voices, as the nature of the sites involved (having non-indigenous historical significance) has previously meant that non-indigenous voices either dominated or excluded Indigenous ones. The approaches can be labelled as forms of either *representation* or *consultation*. Representation of Indigenous people may be accomplished by their physical inclusion on management or steering committees, the employment of Indigenous guides, project managers and the like or, in

cases where budgetary constraints are considerable, simply by ensuring the representation of Indigenous voices in the final interpretative products. Examples could be oral histories incorporated in signage or audio displays, where appropriate consent is achieved. Where involvement is through consultation, a key aspect is to ensure community satisfaction by creating a consultation process that is ongoing through all stages of interpretative projects. As noted by Tourism Queensland (2000:25), *'In creating cultural heritage interpretation, allow the time to develop the contents. To include Aboriginal people the process needs time, it has its own life'*. The Meeting Place Precinct is a good example where ongoing consultation with the Aboriginal Community has been regularly scheduled as part of the consultation process. The Myall Creek Memorial Committee also engages in regular schedules of meetings with the community on relevant issues such as the future direction of the memorial project and its possible heritage listing. It is important to note that both 'representation' and 'consultation' can also be used in conjunction with the other, and, indeed, are arguably more effective when implemented in this way.

A major issue raised in utilising concepts of representation and consultation is identifying who the appropriate stakeholders are, with whom to consult or for whom it is necessary to represent. Sometimes, this can be a relatively straight forward problem to solve, stakeholders being quite easily identified. At other times, a considerable amount of preliminary consultation may be necessary (before any consultation regarding the direction of interpretative projects themselves) in order to determine who are all the potential stakeholders. In determining stakeholders, heritage interpreters must again be constantly aware of the ways in which the dominant 'prehistory' stereotype of Aboriginal history within Australia, has influenced who interpreters have been traditionally willing to identify as stakeholders in historic sites. In sites of post-contact or contemporary Indigenous significance, traditional owners and land councils certainly need to be consulted but interpreters may need to consider the range of non-traditional owners who may have powerful connections to sites. These non-traditional owners or 'historicals' may not be obviously apparent and, unlike traditional owners, may not have any easily accessible organisation through which they can be contacted. Nevertheless, they have the potential to contribute significant stories to sites of shared historic importance. The key here is approaching the identification of stakeholders with an open mind. Being aware that the

range of potential stakeholders may well be greater than first anticipated can help ensure that consultation and representation are as inclusive as possible.

The final and perhaps one of the most provocative issues to discuss regarding the establishment of shared involvement in interpretation projects is *whether shared involvement in shared history projects necessarily amounts to equal involvement?* The case studies of the Meeting Place Precinct at Botany Bay National Park and Myall Creek both reflected the ways in which this issues surfaces in relation to shared history. Discussion amongst interviewees at Botany Bay ranged from stressing that displays should be devoted to showing *fifty percent Indigenous* and *fifty percent non-indigenous*, to a belief that the Cook story was *the most dominant story* at the site and therefore, although some attention should be dedicated to Aboriginal perspectives, Cook should hold the majority of space and time in any interpretation of the site. Other perspectives noted throughout this research were that *as Aboriginal history is by far the most lengthy in Australia, it should be given more space in presentations than non-indigenous stories, perhaps even linked proportionately to a relevant time scale* (40, 000 plus years: 215 years). *The 'equity' argument* also appeared. That is, because a limited amount of attention has been paid to the contemporary Aboriginal past previously, much more weight could be placed on the Aboriginal perspective at sites of shared history in order to correct this imbalance. Museum galleries like Bunjilaka at the Melbourne Museum, are examples of this. They largely present the otherwise hidden Aboriginal story from Aboriginal perspectives in order to present a fuller version of the past. All of these ways of presenting the past are arguably valid ways of expressing the notion of a 'shared history'. This final section argues that there is a need for flexibility in the concept of 'shared history' and that a mathematical construct of what constitutes 'shared' is a very artificial way in which to approach something as dynamic as the interpretation of the past. Whilst any of these approaches may be taken and indeed may be appropriate at individual sites, dividing up the presentation of the past tends to create a presentation which isolates Indigenous and non-indigenous perspectives into two distinct groups. This often reinforces the idea that there are two separate or distinct histories. This can have the disadvantage of failing to show what Byrne (1996) labelled as the 'entanglements', the places where Indigenous and non-indigenous history intertwine and overlap in complex ways. This thesis therefore advocates a thematic approach to the presentation of the past which is able to illustrate both the

distinctive and the similar elements of Australia's shared Indigenous and non-indigenous past. One of the best examples of this approach was set out in the *Master Plan* for the Meeting Place Precinct, where relevant themes at the site were drawn out and Indigenous and non-indigenous perspectives of these themes were to be incorporated into the interpretative content. As discussed in the example of the Australian Gallery at the Melbourne Museum, where either Indigenous or non-indigenous perspectives are not relevant to a particular theme, (i.e. a theme which was predominately only relevant to one group such as railways in Melbourne) the inclusion of the other group under that theme should not be 'forced' into the interpretation. Again, this would merely be an artificial and irrelevant construct of inclusiveness, leading to an interpretive program which did not relate the past in meaningful and interesting ways.

8.7 Implications of the Thesis

This thesis has identified characteristics of effective interpretation of sites of shared historic importance. Through examining a range of examples and case studies around Australia, a number of guiding principles for those working in the field of heritage interpretation have been established. These principles of inclusive, integrative, interesting and informative interpretation (when used in tandem with innovation and with a broad understanding of how the previous treatment of Aboriginal history and heritage has influenced interpreter's perspectives of the past) have the potential to actively change the presentation of the past at historic and heritage sites around Australia. Once these conclusions are accepted then the next step is to ensure their broad dissemination amongst heritage practitioners. For this it will be necessary to publish the results of the research across a range of scholarly journals, magazines and newsletters and present the research at conferences that interpreters and other heritage professionals may attend.

Promoting an understanding of how the heritage system and the presentation of the past in Australia has influenced the status of heritage interpretation today, is vital in moving towards the presentation of a shared, post-contact past in Australia. Utilising the four principles established, provided that they be used in innovative and non-prescriptive ways, provides a 'toolbox' for interpreters to work with the shared past. Sharing the experiences

of the examples and case studies utilised in the thesis is also important, not only for illustrating the development of these principles but for highlighting the potential pitfalls that can be encountered in establishing interpretive programs which present the shared past. Largely, these problems revolve around establishing effective methods of consultation and representation. Other factors which can have a great impact on the success of an interpretive program include achieving funding (both for the establishment and ongoing maintenance of programs, though the former is usually easier to achieve) and maintaining motivation (more often than not the establishment of shared history projects are the result of a small, motivated group of individuals - whilst their motivation remains the project remains.). Knowing in advance the influence that each of these factors can have on the success of a project means that interpreters can take steps to meaningfully address each of these issues *before* they are encountered. For example, a plan for attracting ongoing funding for historic sites can be drafted in conjunction with the plan for the site itself. A result of making sites economically sustainable is that the establishment of more heritage sites of shared historic importance around Australia becomes easier. Thus the promotion of shared history to the public becomes more achievable because success breeds success.

8.8 Future Work

This thesis has by no means exhausted the potential number of case studies and examples in Australia of heritage and historic sites presenting the shared past. There is considerable potential for future work that carries out a greater survey of sites of shared history throughout Australia. Similarly, international examples could also be incorporated in order to learn from overseas experiences. Sites in New Zealand and Canada, for example, which illustrate the shared Indigenous and non-indigenous history of these nations, could easily add important elements to heritage interpreter's 'tool kits'.

Whilst this thesis has largely targeted heritage practitioners as individuals, heritage agencies, organisations and institutions remain a key target for future work. Expanding on the research of this thesis has the potential for the facts discovered to influence policy within these organisations. Targeting individuals involved in interpretation is the first step

in creating both interest in and aspiration to achieve effective interpretation at sites of shared historic importance. Targeting the policies of the organisations to which interpreters are responsible is the next step in obliging those in the field of interpretation to move towards interpretive practice that is truly inclusive. In her paper on inclusive heritage as it relates to multi-cultural Britain, Wong (2002) identifies the need for heritage institutions to actively be involved in changing interpretive practice to enable the process of establishing socially inclusive heritage sites to truly take off. She lists a number of actions that institutions need to carry out in order for this to be achieved, many of which could be applied to a shared history setting in Australia including:

- Encouraging and supporting those from diverse cultures to make connections with history and heritage from local to national scales (e.g. trying to actively counter previous exclusion)
- Encourage and support *'the creation of new artefacts which embody and celebrate cultural memory, and multi-cultural history and heritage in the urban and rural environment at large'* (e.g. creating new monuments, or interpreting sites previously not interpreted)
- *'Enable the population at large to see themselves positively in the context of multi-cultural history and heritage'* (e.g. educate the community about shared history)

Wong (2002:3).

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport in the United Kingdom provides an excellent example of what can be achieved in influencing policy in these areas on a broad scale. Its *Social Inclusion Policy for the Built and Historic Environment*, published in 2002, is a first step in providing a practical, and importantly government sanctioned guide to moving towards a greater degree of social inclusion to those involved in the built and historic environment. Certainly, it has a far broader focus than for the interpretation of sites of shared significance; however, it provides a broad base principle of inclusion which heritage agencies could then embrace as a springboard to change. Further research in Australia could, therefore, target various state and national heritage institutions for their input in drafting appropriate guidelines for an Australian context. The research undertaken

in this thesis could provide an important base for this work. An understanding of the kinds of interpretive projects already in existence and the ways in which they were established along with an understanding of the influences of the current heritage system is essential before any formal policy guidelines can be contemplated, just as forming an understanding of the past is essential before any contemplation of the direction of the future.

8.9 Final Words

'The historic environment is a vital part of the social and cultural identity of our nation' (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2002:12). If we as a society fail to acknowledge all relevant historical actors, that is, all the relevant 'voices' at historic and heritage sites, we are not only failing to tell the whole story, but actively excluding social groups in the formation of our national identity. The impact of this exclusion can then filter into many facets of life. It is not confined to the past but impacts upon the present. Moves to correct the manner of presentation of the past in Australia have been steadily progressing in the field of history. In heritage interpretation, however, the dominant stereotype that Aboriginal history ended somewhere around 1788 with non-indigenous history then taking over, has persisted. Only by highlighting and then challenging the existence of this stereotype, and by creating projects which effectively present the shared past, can social exclusion through heritage begin to be countered. *'It takes time, flexibility and courage to create innovative interpretation'* (Tourism Queensland, 2000:1). This thesis provides both a set of guiding principles and examples for heritage interpreters to assist them on the road to effective and innovative interpretation of the shared Australia past.