



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

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BOOK REVIEWS

RIVERS AND RESILIENCE: ABORIGINAL PEOPLE OF SYDNEY'S GEORGES RIVER

Heather Goodall & Allison Cadzow

University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2009, xii-327pp, ISBN 9781921410741

Reviewed by Clive Moore

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This year, the centenary of The University of Queensland, I found myself writing a short history of the Forgan Smith building. To do this, I needed, briefly, to discuss the site of the St Lucia campus of The University of Queensland, situated in a meander of the Brisbane River. The university site, on a border between the lands of the Turrbal and Jagera peoples, was once a rich environment for its Aboriginal inhabitants. The first European use of the land was as part of a pastoral lease in the 1850s, then as a sugar plantation and the base for mixed farms supplying produce for Brisbane. Slowly, the Aboriginal inhabitants were pushed away from the river, and by the 1870s they lived mainly in the western end of the meander, using the scrub and rich waterways down around Anderson's Creek, now in the St Lucia golf club's area. Presumably they also worked as casual labour for the early settlers, while they could still remain living on their land. Once the St Lucia area was subdivided in the 1880s and became more urban, the Indigenous inhabitants would have been totally dislodged and have had to shift further away. I deliberately used the word "dislodged" to describe the process, as I thought it carried the right meaning of the dispersal that took place due to urbanisation. I felt frustrated that I knew nothing of what happened to the Aboriginal people of the area.

Soon after, I read Heather Goodall and Allison Cadzow's *Rivers and Resilience*, about the long term interactive history of the Aboriginal people of the Georges River, which runs from its source above Appin, to Liverpool and down to Botany Bay in Sydney. On its way the river passes through several local government areas south of the centre of Sydney – Campbelltown, Liverpool, Fairfield, Bankstown, Kogarah, Rockdale,

Hurstville and Sutherland. I realised the similarities with the Turrbal and Jagera on the Brisbane River and what the authors had been able to achieve in writing the history of Aboriginal peoples whose lands have been absorbed into a large city. *Rivers and Resilience* will become a new model for writing Aboriginal history, quietly showing the continuity and resilience that exists. The Aboriginal peoples of the Sydney area have stayed right where they always were and in doing this have been able to maintain cultural identity and a presence on their land. The book is both a history of Aboriginal families and an urban history, using a wide variety of sources, including oral testimony and personal knowledge of the Georges River area by the authors.

The main focus which holds the book together is the river itself, and the continuing Aboriginal mobility that such a major waterway allowed, even though European settlers probably found it an impediment. The river went through much the same cycle as the Brisbane River, from grazing and agriculture to urbanisation and industrialisation. The account is largely chronological and regional, but also links to wider New South Wales government policies and to Aboriginal involvement with employment, education and increasingly politics. Another theme is the constant remaking of locality and cultural relationships with land, and yet another is mobility and migration. Goodall and Cadzow make the point that studies of Australian migration seldom consider the less visible Aboriginal migrations, yet Aboriginal mobility has enabled them to continue to hold their communities together. Each of the 11 chapters deals with a distinct theme, and teases out the relationship between place, communities and interaction with the encroaching city of Sydney.

There is an advantage in having Sydney as the backdrop for this study, in that, properly mined by good historians, the documentary sources generated by the creation of a city over more than two centuries are substantial. Even so, sections of the book are thinly stretched, relying on clever extrapolation from slim sources. We have detailed knowledge of the intense conflict that took place in the decades immediately after the British colony began, then from some Indigenous documents, such as an early petition by Jonathon Goggey in the 1850s, grandson of Kogi, one of the early leaders. Goggey's land claims exposed the lack of coherent government policy over Indigenous land. The assertive protests by Lucy Leane to the Protection Board in the 1890s, when she petitioned

as "the only surviving Native Women of the Georges River and Liverpool District" are another part of the historical narrative that shows Aboriginal activism during the nineteenth century. Use of twentieth century newspapers, and government and family sources provide details about King Burruga in the 1930s, grandson of Paddy Burragalung, about to be evicted from Salt Pan Creek and threatening to petition the King, or Charlie Leon on the Aboriginal Welfare Board and the Aborigines Advisory Council in the 1970s. Links to Tranby Aboriginal Cooperative College in Glebe in the 1980s are another insight into how education and politics mixed. Interaction and intermarriage between the Irish settlers and the Indigenous inhabitants are also important features, allowing subtle study of racial interactions. By the 1960s and 1970s, many of the Georges River community had become involved in Aboriginal political activism around Sydney. The study is also a working class history from below, piecing together the lives of families who always lived close to the financial edge. The documentary sources have been supplemented by collaboration with the Aboriginal community of today, which has tapped into current memory and photographs.

Rivers and Resilience will become a model for tracing the history of urban Aboriginal communities. Goodall and Cadzow have shown what can be done, using sophisticated intellectual underpinning, a good knowledge of all possible sources, and the cooperation of members of the community. While the Turrbal and Jagera peoples were dislodged from the St Lucia meander of the Brisbane River, they have remained just as much part of Brisbane history as the Gweagal, Cobragal and Bediagal peoples have of the Georges River area and to the history of Sydney.

The book is essential reading for anyone interested in Indigenous Australian and urban history. The techniques used are a model for an approach that could be applied to other Australian urban areas. The technique would be best for experienced historians, but I could envisage a larger team approach involving non-Indigenous documentary historians and Indigenous historians, particularly from the region under study. Another capital city such as Brisbane, which has also generated substantial documentary sources since its creation, would be a suitable candidate.

THROWING OFF THE CLOAK: RECLAIMING SELF-RELIANCE IN TORRES STRAIT

Elizabeth Osborne

Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2009, xvii-188pp,
ISBN 9780855756628

Reviewed by Duncan Wright

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For researchers interested in Indigenous autonomy and Native Title you need to read this book! Using interviews with Torres Strait Islander elders and letters and articles released through the local media, Osborne fills a sizable gap in our documented social history of the Torres Strait Islands (north-eastern Australia). This book approaches Islander responses and strategies to external influences and controls since the 1840's. By doing so it situates seminal Australian political decisions such as Wik, Mabo and the recently awarded Torres Strait Sea-claim. Although documenting Islander communities under a "cloak" of paternalistic government the central message is intrinsically positive: Indigenous communities did not passively accept external controls but initiated and maintained an active struggle towards autonomy.

Elizabeth Osborne has maintained a close interest in Torres Strait education and political development since 1967. For five years she and her husband lived on Thursday Island, during which time she became a foster mother for several local children. Dr Osborne wrote her first book, *Torres Strait Islander Women and the Pacific War*, published in 1997. In many ways *Throwing off the Cloak* represents a natural progression as the author once again examines cultural contact in the Torres Strait using the voices of the Torres Strait Islanders she represents.

The first chapter situates and introduces the early years of cultural "collision" between Europeans and Indigenous Torres Strait Islanders. A vibrant history of culture contact is presented prior to and proceeding European arrival (see also Lawrence, 1998). The Torres Strait was visited regularly during the late 19th century by Beche-de-Mer fishers, missionaries, explorers and later Queensland government officials. In many cases these new arrivals were at least partially dependant on the good will and support of local Islanders (Ash & David, 2008). This chapter presents a recurring theme in this book, the difficulty for Islanders to negotiate nested (macro/Pan-Islander to micro/regional) identities (see also Shnukal, 2004, p. 105). To advocate for autonomy over country it was first necessary to