Conspiracy of silence: the colouring of Australian history and the killing-times on the nineteenth-century Queensland frontier

Timothy Bottoms

The Cairns Post published the following on 3 October 1891:

Missions to Blacks

He asks for bread and not for stones,
Some corner where to lay his bones,
We hunt him from the land instead,
And stones we give in place of bread,
And the fair land of Queensland free,
Shall teach the blacks the Litany.

Where now his happy hunting ground?
Those marked with murderous looking mounds?
And what, pray, are the dark contents
Of those sad lonely monuments?
Ah! Sometimes white and oft-time black,
The parsons well may cry, slack!
And the fair land of Queensland free
Resolve to teach the Litany.

He asks for bread sues for life,
And in return we 'nex his wife,
A fair exchange for all his sins,
We give him rum, he gives us jins,
And then we prate of freedom tall
While he exclaims you've got 'myall'.
Revenge and murder come accursed
Troopers report 'The blacks dispersed',
And the fair land of troopers free,
Have taught the blacks their Litany.

The remnant of the outlawed race,
With spindle shanks and monkey face,
Now take their gawdy fluery ease
In towns - in rot - in filth - disease
Followed by vermin stricken curs
Whose lot is happier than theirs.

The earth he cumbers - there's no room,
The white man has pronounced his doom,
And the fair land of Queensland free
To cheer him cross the silent sea
Shall teach the blacks the Litany.¹

'GTB' is the author of this literary piece, and one wonders why he would have written and published it if there had not been some sort of twisted truth to the matter. The author also

¹ Cairns Post, 3 October 1891. The author acknowledges the generous assistance of the National Museum of Australia through its National Museum of Australia Visiting Fellowship Program.
vehemently attacked JB Gribble, who was attempting to establish a mission to the Aborigines in the Cairns district.\(^2\) Gribble’s association with Professors Rentoul and Drummond, and the subsequent publicity given to ‘public secrets in Cairns’, that is, massacres, may well have been the factor that influenced the negative view of the missionary, by bringing the district into disrepute within the colony. Gribble nevertheless went on to establish his mission in 1892 at Cape Grafton.

This attitude initially might seem quite perverse, but seen within the parameters of one of the national Australian traits is perfectly in keeping. Growing up in rural New South Wales, I was particularly aware of a big silence regarding the convict era and Aborigines. It was only in the 1980s that I started to notice a change in attitude regarding Australia’s convict heritage. What had for over 150 years been hidden, ‘swept under the carpet’, was starting to be claimed by convict descendants. Australians began to not only acknowledge a convict ancestor but also to be proud of it! So much so that as we reach towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, some 30 years on, it is hard to believe that it had ever been considered a ‘birthstain’. Current generations appear to be wholly unaware of it — and yet the psychological ramifications are still there in the national psyche. How else, as Raymond Evans has identified, could

the same silences, obfuscations and weasel words from authority figures and their acolytes today about refugee detention, the ‘Pacific Solution’, Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, Bagram airbase and the torture facilities of Northern Africa and Eastern Europe\(^3\)

be countenanced?

This same form of selective amnesia applies to the killing-times on the nineteenth-century colonial frontier. It has the same sense of profound silence; and yet in the last decade a cacophony of deniers have ridiculed the efforts of serious, professional historians to find the truth in our history. The evidence is there. Through my 20 years as a postgraduate researcher I have never failed to be horrified by what I and so many others have discovered in the primary sources, let alone what Aboriginal and white oral history recounts; this, despite Indigenous Australians living with an Australian history that tells a completely different story from that of the purported reality. Many have trod there before me, but all their independent and corroborated research has been debunked by a few who nefariously want to create a more serene version of colonial frontier expansion. There have been no laurels for these

\(^2\) ‘GTB’ of the Cairns Post began his attacks on 16 March 1891, and continued on 15, 19 and 26 August, 30 September, 3, 14, 16 and 28 October (‘I will in my next article endeavour to show that the Reverend Gribble in reality knows no more about Bellenden Ker and its inhabitants than he does of the mountains of the moon.’) and 19 December (‘that fraud Gribble’), and also on 16 January 1892 and 11 and 25 June 1892. The attacks stopped a month after Gribble arrived in the district and during his subsequent illness.

intellectual marathon runners – the ‘tall-poppy’ syndrome arising from the convict era has made sure of that. The anti-intellectualism of the same era has also managed to seep its way through to contemporary times and is used to sneeringly deride the truth about our country’s colonial past.

How is it that, like a protective family of a child-abuser or rapist, these ‘pioneering myth’ promoters see fit to deny or ‘downplay’ the truly indictable evidence that can be found in the archives and oral history recollections. This form of selective forgetfulness, amnesia or outright disinformation still pervades our national character. What is more, it continues to deny Indigenous Australians their rightful place in the nation’s identity. Other countries proudly tout their Indigenous people and their cultures, but not so in Australia. Why? Could it be that this is the aspect that we as a nation have yet to come to terms with – a stolen land, a decimated people, and a series of government systems that autocratically controlled every aspect of Aboriginal life for 90 years, including stealing wages honestly earned?
Patterns of Interaction

The advent of the Myall Creek massacre in 1838 and the subsequent hanging of seven white perpetrators set in motion the white settlers/squatters approach to violence on the frontier: *they kept quiet about it*. It is this aspect that has become white Australia’s ‘conspiracy of silence’. It is possible to see that what was espoused officially had little to do with what was actually going on in the ‘wilds’ of the moving frontier. Certainly the massacre of 11 whites at Hornet Bank in 1857 led to horrendous retaliation, as did the massacre of 19 whites at Cullen-la-ringo, 300 kilometres to the north-west, four years later in 1861. There were reasons for these attacks by the local Indigenes. Hornet Bank was the result of the older sons having sexual relations with local women, an activity that their mother had warned them not to participate in, and this incident, as Gordon Reid has identified, ‘set the pattern for white attitudes and colonial government policy towards the Aborigines of Queensland for forty years’. The Cullin-la-ringo massacre occurred because a nearby station owner had killed members of the local tribe and this was a retaliatory response. The squatters’ response was totally out of proportion on both occasions: some 400 Aborigines were killed in relation to Hornet Bank and between 300 and 370 in response to Cullin-la-ringo. In regard to

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mapping these massacres, it is extremely difficult to identify numbers killed, particularly in the area to the north in central Queensland, where only archaeological evidence today hints at the numbers of people who lived in the region, and where none or very few live today. Some 140 years later, only half a dozen Aboriginal families lay claim to these their traditional lands. I have mapped those clashes that resulted in eight and more Aboriginal deaths and for which there is corroborative evidence. This is not to trivialise the tragic sporadic killings of individuals and small groups, but to give an indication of the veracity of what was at the time referred to as the ‘Black Wars’ of Queensland.\(^5\) Inland from the area between Rockhampton and Townsville and across to the Northern Territory border there seems to be a dramatic reduction in the number of Aboriginal deaths, but from the western side of the Gulf the killing-times return with a vengeance. Tony Roberts’ research has identified that many of the squatters in the Gulf country of the Northern Territory came from the central Queensland area, where they appeared to have learnt their aggressive approach to establishing their runs.\(^6\) So the gaps in central Queensland are not necessarily representative of what occurred. While I acknowledge that I have not mapped all the massacres, there are sufficient to seriously reconsider how we incorporate this truth into the story of our colonial period.

Queensland came into existence on 10 December 1859, and the colony that had begun with seven and a half pence in its Treasury desperately needed more revenue, and it got this by renting out land to squatters. Gold rushes, first in 1858 at Canoona, north-west of the future Rockhampton, then in Gympie in 1867, and finally at the Palmer River in 1873 followed by the Hodgkinson in 1876, all boosted population and revenues for the colony. The impoverished nature of Queensland’s finances partially explains the official attitude towards tolerating or ignoring frontier violence.

The establishment of the NSW Native Police in 1848 led to an escalation in the number of Aborigines killed on the Darling Downs. In the 12 months to August 1849, Aboriginal resistance was estimated to have cost the Darling Downs, Moreton Bay and Wide Bay

\(^5\) See, for example, A Laurie, ‘The Black War in Queensland’, *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, vol. iv, no. 1, September 1959, pp. 155–73. One of Captain Frederick Walker’s Native Mounted Police clashes on the MacIntyre River in 1849 was recorded, where: ‘[s]pears and boomerangs were flying in every direction, the flashing of fire arms shewing [sic] the blacks the position of their assailants; the yells of the savages, answered by the war cry of the police, and the ring of carbines must have had a most exciting effect ... It is surprising that the government does not declare the disturbed districts in a state of siege, and thus relieve the Commandant from his great responsibility. Why does the government not at once acknowledge there is a war, when it is so notorious?’ *The Maitland Mercury*, 1 August 1849. The *Queenslander* on 19 June 1880 stated that ‘[t]here is no district in the colony where the war of races is carried on with more persistency than the Cook district, and from nowhere do we receive more narratives of loss of life and property. The cost of the war of extermination that has been carried on in that part of the colony is almost incalculable ...’

districts £10,000, and made labour ‘scarce & dear’. This acute labour shortage was also affected by the abolition of the transportation of convicts to New South Wales in 1840, and by rushes to the Californian (1849–50), Victorian and NSW goldfields (1851). A sense of settler fear on the frontier can be gauged from letters to newspapers of the time.

Expansion into the Future Southern Queensland

A war of resistance by the Indigenous people of the Mooney, MacIntyre and Barwon Rivers in the area now bounded by St George, Goondiwindi and Moree led to 17 stations on the MacIntyre being abandoned in 1843, and only 13 had been re-established by 1846. In a campaign to rid the district of white settlers, Indigenous groups targeted settlers’ horses and cattle and seriously endangered the newcomers’ economic viability. The leaseholder of Carbucky station, D Lanarch, had within a year lost over 50 percent of the 1,600 head of cattle that he brought to his run in 1847. Matters were not helped by the violent vigilante actions of some of the settlers such as James Marks at Goodar station (40 km north-west of Goondiwindi), who in September 1847 shot a ‘native boy’ sent by the neighbouring Callandoon station to share meat from a recently killed beast. This outraged the Bigambul, one of whom in retaliation killed Marks’ son and dismembered his body. A year-long reign of terror on the local Indigenous people by Marks and his fellow landowners and stockmen resulted. At least 47 Aboriginal people died in a series of attacks from October 1847. Within a year, attacks had been made on Indigenous people camped on Carbucky, Broomfield, Callandoon and Umbercollie stations surrounding the future town of Goondiwindi.

In early May 1849 Frederick Walker and 14 of his Native Police troopers (from southern New South Wales) arrived on the MacIntyre and had their first action, ambushing Aborigines on the Severn (now Dumeresq) River. A squatter, John Watts, reported that the troopers

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7 Jan Walker, Jondaryan Station: the relationship between pastoral capital and pastoral labour 1840–1890, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1988, p. 35.

8 For example, a squatter wrote to the editor: ‘The state of the district with respect to the aborigines, appears now to have arrived at such a crisis that the necessity of some means being immediately adopted to suppress outrage on their part, and unwarranted retribution on the part of the settlers, is obvious.’ Sydney Morning Herald, 23 August 1842, p. 3.


10 Gardner, Production and resources, p. 78.

11 He lost 900 cattle to ‘depredations’. D Larnarch to Colonial Secretary, 24 November 1848, State Records NSW (SRNSW), 4/2929, 48/13167.


attacked ‘a large tribe’ and ‘were so excited that Captain Walker could not control them, this being the first time they had been in action’ and hinted sinisterly that ‘the number they killed no one but their commander and themselves knew’.\(^{15}\)

Walker’s Native Police next went into action at Carbucky station which had only recently been bought by WB Tooth, a member of the NSW Legislative Assembly, ‘at a sacrifice’ from Lanarch, the previous owner.\(^{16}\) Tooth wrote: ‘The blacks were so completely put down on that occasion, and terrified at the power of the police, that they never committed any more depredations near there’.\(^{17}\) Squatters saw not only the value of their runs increase but also a decline in wages expended on employees, as it was now not as dangerous on the frontier properties as it had hitherto been. Over the ensuing months of May and June 1849, Bigambul resistance was overwhelmed by the Native Police as they crisscrossed the district.\(^{18}\)

Walker was cautioned by the NSW Colonial Secretary ‘not to commit acts of aggressive warfare against the Aboriginal Natives’, and that ‘the Command of the Native Police had been entrusted to him for the maintenance of peace and order and not for the purpose of carrying warfare to an enemy country’.\(^{19}\) Nevertheless, Walker felt vindicated, and two years later he was boasting that because of his actions on the MacIntyre ‘[a] run which could not have fetched £100 in May 1849, was disposed of 6 months later for £500’.\(^{20}\) Within four years only 100 Bigambul were left.\(^{21}\)

**Expansion into the Future Central Queensland**

In 1843 Moreton Bay was given representation in the NSW Legislative Council. Between 1843 and 1845 Ludwig Leichhardt journeyed from Jimbour station through to Cape York Peninsula and around the Gulf to Port Essington. Thomas Mitchell found good grazing land around the Barcoo River system (1846), in what was to become central Queensland. Edmund Kennedy also explored the areas of the Barcoo and Maranoa Rivers in 1847 and died exploring Cape York Peninsula in 1848. There were further explorations by Landsborough, Gregory and surveyor Burnett. Victoria’s separation from New South Wales...
in 1851 reactivated the growing separation movement in the north, where the squatters had only remote contact with the government in Sydney. In 1858 gold was discovered at Canoona 160 kilometres north of Gladstone, which caused the first rush to the north before separation and involved as many as 16,000 gold seekers at its peak.

A newspaper correspondent, Frederick Sinnett, commented on frontier race relations at the new gold-rush settlement, two years after the first white settler, William Elliott, had established his run there in 1856, on the traditional lands of the Darumbal:

The ordinary relation between the black and white races is that of war to the knife. The atrocities on both sides are perfectly horrible, and I do not believe the Government makes any effort to stop the slaughter of the aborigines. A native police force is indeed actively engaged, but exclusively against the blacks who are shot down ... I believe the blacks retaliate whenever they can.\(^\text{22}\)

The British colony of Queensland came into being with a white population of 28,000 and a conservatively estimated Indigenous population of 200,000.\(^\text{23}\) A year and a half later the Queensland Report of the Select Committee on the Native Police considered the treatment of Indigenous Queenslanders on the frontier. One witness, Captain John Coley, estimated that 250 white people had been killed over the 19-year period 1842–61.\(^\text{24}\)

In October 1861, 19 whites were massacred at Cullin-la-ringo station (south-southwest of the future Emerald). Harry Creaghe, an overseer at Albinia Downs station, 70 kilometres to the southeast, reported that neighbouring squatters formed a posse that committed ‘fearful havoc, wreaking a terrible and bloody vengeance’ and made a pact to shoot Blacks on sight.\(^\text{25}\)

Poisonings

The role of poisoning and the desperate behaviour of whites was openly acknowledged in the Queensland Daily News and Mail in mid-1933, when there were still men living who had participated in the violence on the frontier.\(^\text{26}\) The patterns of European behaviour had

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\(^{22}\) F Sinnett, An account of the ‘rush’ to Port Curtis, including letters addressed to the Argus as special correspondent from the Fitzroy River, Geelong, Ray and Richter, 1859, p. 69.


\(^{24}\) Captain John Coley’s evidence, Queensland Votes & Proceedings (QV&P), Select Committee on the Native Police, 14 May 1861, No. 20: ‘... there have been two hundred and fifty [whites] killed going over a space of nineteen years – in the Northern Districts [i.e. southeast Queensland]’.


\(^{26}\) ‘These men would be frightened out of their lives by the blacks, and not being strong enough to go out and fight them, and being always in a state of fear, they would pop a gun through the slabs of the hut and fire upon them, and perhaps kill a blackfellow; at other times they would put poison in a damper and give it to the blacks. It was never the case when the stations were strongly manned …’, QV&P, 1861, Select Committee on the Native Police, p. 481. ‘In our Wide Bay and Burnett district
already been laid. The NSW Commissioner for Crown Lands in the Clarence River District, Richard Bligh, acknowledged rather cryptically that the settlers during the 1840s:

> Seem to have restrained the blacks in the way in which you, no doubt, as a bushman, are aware that blacks are restrained in the bush, where no authorised system of protection exists. There are ways of doing that, which, though not strictly legal, are very effective. People, of course, will defend themselves when left to their own resources.²⁷

In January 1842 the frightened shepherds of Kilcoy Creek, some 100 kilometres to the northwest of Brisbane Town, were of this order when they fled their outstation and left poisoned flour behind which caused some 60 agonising Indigenous deaths.²⁸

William Coote in 1882 assessed the validity of the Kilcoy poisoning, and observed that the owner of the run, Sir Evan McKenzie, remembered an overseer saying to him:

> ‘Don’t you think it would be a good thing to give those fellows a dose?’ Of course I expressed my abhorrence of the suggestion, and no more was said about it.²⁹

What he failed to mention was that it was his brother, Colin John, who was most likely the authority responsible for instigating this ruthless form of disposal.³⁰

The enquiry of the overseer [Cootes wrote] appears to me of great significance. It pointed not to an experiment, but a method – something already tried and found sufficient for the purpose, and intended to be repeated as occasion might seem to require. Taking the whole of the evidence in conjunction with the narratives of Schmidt and Petrie, it would be difficult, in the absence of stronger proof to the contrary, to doubt the truth of the charge brought.³¹

Edgar Foreman recalled how as a little boy in the 1870s he ‘rode through a small pocket on what was called Rush Creek and saw scores of bleached bones, including a complete blackfellows were shot down at sight by some of the earlier settlers, and many scores [twenty plus] of men and women were poisoned by strychnine being placed in the flour that was distributed to them, or that had been left in places handy for the blacks to themselves take possession of.’ Clipping from the Daily News and Mail, 29 July 1933, Hayes Cutting Book, no. 36, p. 40, Fryer Library, University of Queensland. Jack Kane in 1884 as an 18-year-old participated in the Skull Pocket–Mulgrave River– Skeleton Creek battue, from the southern Atherton Tablelands to the outskirts of Cairns. He was interviewed by Dr Norman Tindale, Tindale Expedition Diary, 11–13 September 1938, Harvard and Adelaide Universities Anthropological Expedition, 1938, South Australian Museum, cited in T Bottoms, A history of Cairns – city of the South Pacific 1770–1995, Rockhampton, PhD thesis, Central Queensland University, 2002, pp. 148–54.

²⁶ Established in late June and early July 1841. J McKenzie-Smith, ‘Kilcoy, the first six months – Sir Evan McKenzie’s albatross’, Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland, vol. XIII, no. 12, November 1989, pp. 437–9. Dr Simpson, Commissioner for Crown Lands, wrote on 6 May 1843 to the NSW Colonial Secretary: ‘... the Giggarbarah Tribe the one said to have suffered [poisoning] I was not able to meet with ...’.PK Lauer, ed., Cultural and historical records of Queensland, no. 1, October 1979, p. 11.


skeleton’. Earlier Foreman had noted that at Whiteside station ‘fifty or sixty of them lost their lives through being poisoned’.32

One can glean an indication of frontier violence on the inner Darling Downs from the reminiscences of William Stamer who went there during the late 1850s. He observed:

It was enough to make one’s blood run cold to listen to the stories that were told of the diabolical manner in which whole tribes had been ‘rubbed out’ by unscrupulous squatters. No device by which the race could be exterminated had been left untried ... One ‘lady’ on the Upper Condamine [River] had particularly distinguished herself in the poisoning line, having, if report spoke the truth, disposed of more natives than any squatter by means of arsenic alone ... 33

Some 25 years later and further up the coast, Harold Finch Hatton, in his 1886 recollections of his eight years on the Queensland frontier, tells of a man from Mt Spencer station, some 50 kilometres inland from Mackay, who:

is still famous for the tremendous ‘haul’ of Blacks which he made in one day. They had been giving him a great deal of trouble, and had lately killed four of his shepherds in succession. This was past a joke ... One day, when he knew that a large mob of Blacks were watching his movements, he packed a large dray with rations, and set off with it from the head station, as if he was going the rounds of the shepherds' huts. When he got opposite to the Long Lagoon, one of the wheels came off the dray, and down it went with a crash. This appeared to annoy him considerably; but after looking pensively at it for some time, he seemed to conclude that there was nothing to be done, so he unhitched the horses and led them back to the station. No sooner had he disappeared than, of course, all the Blacks came up to the dray [which had] ... a vast supply of flour, beef, and sugar ... [and] they lost no time in carrying the rations down to the waterside, and forthwith devoured them ... 34

... The rations contained about as much strychnine as anything else, and not one of the mob escaped ... More than a hundred Blacks were stretched out by this ruse of the owner of the Long Lagoon. In a dry season, when the water sinks low, their skulls are occasionally to be found half buried in the mud.35

Long Lagoon is a part of the Mt Spencer station, which was owned in various partnerships between the Finch Hatton brothers individually and their kinsman Lionel Knight Rice and the station manager, Charles Walter Toussaint.36 Oblique and as detailed as Harold Finch Hatton was, there is a suggestion that it may well have been his older brother, Henry, who perpetrated the poisoning incident. These were members of the English aristocracy. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that a ‘conspiracy of silence’ was fostered.

**Expansion into Cape York Peninsula**

In 1864 Frank and Alex Jardine drove 250 head of cattle from Rockhampton on the first attempt to take cattle up the west coast of Cape York Peninsula. The Jardine brothers...

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34 KH Wills, Korah Halcomb Wills Diary Extracts, John Oxley Library, Henry Brandon Collection, box 8946, OM 75-75
35 *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)*, online edition.
managed to kill over 31 Indigenous people when they came across a gathering of some 80 men on the Alice River participating in ceremony. Fifty-nine rounds were expended, so it is not inconceivable that more men were killed or died from their wounds. David Day has suggested that '[t]he party shot perhaps as many as 72 Aborigines in 11 separate incidents without incurring a single casualty themselves.'

Today there are big gaps in the genealogies of the clans of the Top End groups on the Alice River – the Okunjen, Uwkangand and Okkol, as well as visiting neighbouring clans, including among others the Awbakhn and Oyaan, Kokomenjena or Yir Yiront, and Kokobera, whose territory it was that the Jardines trespassed upon.

Extract from Queensland frontier massacre map in forthcoming book: *Conspiracy of Silence*. Some of the massacres on the southern and central Queensland frontier are shown (T Bottoms 2009)

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37 *Private journal of the surveyor*, 18 December 1864, p. 36.
39 Personal communication with Mrs Alma Wason, Okunjen Elder, Kowanyama, 5 May 1998.
Central Queensland

One year later, in 1865, Sub-Inspector Paschen reported on the activities of his own and two other detachments in central Queensland. At Coomooboolano station he found that Acting Sub-Inspector Cecil Hill had been killed and Trooper Fred severely wounded some 110 kilometres west of Rockhampton. Paschen reported four major 'dispersals of blacks' during 4–10 June near the Expedition and Comet Ranges. Whatever the numbers were, they were never divulged publicly.

During the 1860s, white settlers, banking on making their fortune, continued to move into what we now call central Queensland, west of Rockhampton, Mackay and Bowen. Korah Halcomb Wills was one of them. He had arrived as a 21-year-old in Adelaide on 15 April 1849, moved onto the Victorian goldfields at the age of 34 with his family, and moved from Brisbane to Bowen in 1862. Wills wrote in his diary that 'there is very little of the dispersing going on now in the colonies,' but:

what there is must be done very much on the quiet or you may hap get into trouble, but in my time they were dispersed by hundreds if not thousands ... [on] one of my dispersing expeditions I was in company of a few squatters and their friends ... When the Blacks had been playing up. And killing a shepherd and robbing his Hut ... we turned out and run them to earth where they got on the top of a big mound and defied us and smacked their buttocks at us and hurled large stones down on us. And hid themselves behind large trees and huge rocks but some of them paid dearly for their bravado. They had no idea that we could reach them to a dead certainty of a mile by our little patent breach loading 'Terry's'.

Wills then tells us that he kidnapped a little Aboriginal girl who rode on the front of his saddle the 80 miles to Bowen, with her crying nearly all the way. If this was not enough, he then, incredibly, tells us:

I took it in my head to get a few specimens of certain limbs and head of a Black fellow ... I first found the subject that I intended to anatomize, when my friends were looking on, and I commenced operations dissecting. I went to work business like to take off the head first, and then the Arms, and then the legs, and gathered them together and put them into my Pack saddle[.]

Later he stripped the flesh off the limbs in a lagoon. Korah Wills became the mayor of Bowen in 1867 and the mayor of Mackay in 1876–77. He retired in 1882 and returned to England.

Cuthbert Fetherstonhaugh owned Vine Creek station west of the Suttor River near the junction with the Belyando River, at the southern end of the Jangga people's territory. He related an incident at Vine Creek in 1864, where a large flock of sheep were stolen and two

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40 Bowen to Carnarvon, Dispatch 61, 12 November 1866 (sub-enclosed in Enclosure 3), QSA, GOV/24.
41 Korah Halcomb Wills, diary extracts, John Oxley Library, Brisbane, Henry Brandon Collection, Box 8946, OM 75-75.
shepherds killed. A punitive expedition with the Native Mounted Police resulted and after ten days of the chase a group who were assumed to have been responsible were cornered and 12 men were shot. Several women were also captured and the police lieutenant and Fetherstonhaugh shared their dinner among the corpses and the bound and roped women. Within six weeks of this incident, 'twenty-one whites were killed by the Blacks' within a 200-mile radius.

Lorna McDonald makes the salient point that 'in the early years of frontier warfare the Aboriginals attacked only two kinds of people – the squatters and shepherds who threatened their way of life, and the Native Police who indiscriminately shot members of the tribe'.

Albert Wright, who owned Avon Downs north of Clermont, also noted that there had been four years of conflict prior to his arrival. While at Fort Cooper, north of Nebo, he recorded in his diary that 'about sixty Blacks were shot at Grosvenor [Downs] last week'.

Some 60 kilometres to the southwest, Oscar de Satgé, in partnership with James Milson, had established Wolfang Peak. This initially highly successful wheeler-dealer pastoralist and 'pure merino' readily acknowledged that 'there is a kind of “greed of country” that comes over the pioneer, which spurs him up to great efforts if the reward before him is a good slice of rich sheep country'. He, like other Queensland squatter land-speculators, promoted a vigorous scheme of heavy stocking. De Satgé played a

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43 ibid., pp. 270–4.
46 ibid., p. 152.
prominent role in representing squatters in the Queensland Legislative Assembly, and made a vast fortune from his pastoral exploits. However, this was not to last, for he returned to England in 1882, and when he died 24 years later, his estate was only valued at £443.

Mining became important in the Clermont/Peak Downs/Moranbah/Nebo area to the west of Mackay from the early 1860s. Gold was found, as well as copper, and during the 1880s some 14 copper miners were attacked and killed at Mt Gotthardt by Aboriginal warriors. In response, the clan was wiped out on the slopes of the mountain.

The Frontier Moves to Far North Queensland

In 1866 George Elphistone Dalrymple had arrogantly informed the Wargamay, in the Cardwell district opposite Hinchinbrook Island, that he had come to take the land and that they must not interfere. John Ewen Davidson recorded in his diary in January 1866 that the ‘Blacks’ were:

pursued and shot down; it was a strange and painful sight to see a human being running for his life and see the black police galloping after him and hear the crack of the carbines; the gins and children all hid in the grass ...

The Dyirbal-speakers and the Girramay were to experience many more violent encounters, particularly after the wreck of the Maria on the Great Barrier Reef in 1872. Some survivors were killed by local Aborigines and others were looked after and fed. From Cardwell came a retribution party with Sub-Inspector Robert Arthur Johnstone of the Native Police and his troopers, and a posse of local settlers who annihilated the Djiru opposite Dunk Island.

It was gold that brought Europeans to far north Queensland in October 1873. Their destination was the Palmer River goldfield nearly 200 kilometres inland from the township of Cooktown, which was established for the goldminers on Cook’s Endeavour River in the heart of Guugu Yimithirr territory. Over 70 miners and government officials landed as the precursor to some 18,000 new arrivals. Three years later, at the Hodgkinson, 150 kilometres to the south, another rush began. Conflict arose with the ‘Battle of Hell’s Gate’ inland from Cooktown and a myriad other lesser known contests.

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50 JE Davidson, ‘Summary of John Ewen Davidson’s diary 1865–1868’, typescript, n.d., NQ Collection, James Cook University, Entry for 7 January 1866.
The port of Cairns was established in October 1876 to service the new Hodgkinson goldfields. Within eight years an event occurred that became one of Cairns’ best-kept secrets. In 1938 Jack Kane related ‘without an ounce of emotion, as plain fact’, what had occurred at a site not far north of Allumbah Pocket (which became Yungaburra in 1910), when he was an 18-year-old:

In 1884 he took part in a police raid which lasted a week, culminating in a round up at Skull Pocket and others following at Mulgrave River and near the Four Mile [Woree]. At Skull Pocket police officers and native trackers surrounded a camp of Idindji
[Yidinydji][52] blacks before dawn, each man armed with a rifle and revolver. At dawn one man fired into their camp and the natives rushed away in three other directions. They were easy running shots, close up. The native police rushed in with their scrub knives and killed off the children. A few years later a man loaded up a whole case of skulls and took them away as specimens. [Old Jack stated] ‘I didn’t mind the killing of the “bucks” but I didn’t quite like them braining the kids.’ From Skull Pocket the raiders journeyed to the Mulgrave & again at [the] Four Mile, and shot other natives, some of them with wounds received in the raid at Skull Pocket.53

Michael O’Leary, writing as ‘Coyyan’ many years later, recalled:

[A] most imposing sight was when we struck Skeleton Creek, for nearly every stump or tree had a nigger’s skull as a trophy of the days when ‘dispersing’ was the law. When we made camp, I strolled round and counted sixteen of these gruesome relics.54

One Alf Martin, who was at Smith’s Landing in the early days of the establishment of Cairns, and who later settled north of the Barron River on the Cairns coastal plain, was also ‘a member of the party who captured the murderers of Wills ... at Cullinaringo [sic].’55 The only problem with this is that nobody was captured. However, one can readily surmise that the attitudes on the central Queensland frontier were transferred to those on the far northern frontier. David Cormack wrote to his sister Anne from Ravenswood, south of Townsvllle, in November 1880, regarding attitudes to Aborigines, stating: ‘I have knowen [sic] plenty of men in this Country that will shoot the poor things for Sport ... the same as we used to shoot rabbits back home.’

On the upper reaches of the Mulgrave River, in September 1886, a group of a hundred Malanbarra Yidinydji who were participating in a significant Cockatoo ceremony were attacked by the explorer Christie Palmerston and his Ngadjanydji carriers.57 It is not possible to assess what the Malanbarra casualties were, but there can be no doubt they were sizable.

‘Depredations’ were sometimes followed by the murder of a white man, which regularly led to a violent European response culminating in a massacre. One John Clifford disappeared from the Russell River gold diggings and his body was found in late July 1889. A magisterial inquiry at Boar Pocket in September 1889 found that he ‘had been killed by the Blacks.’58

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52 Dulgubarra [dulg: ‘scrub’/rainforest, barra: ‘people belonging to’] Yidinydji, roughly encompassing the area from old Top Gate (on the Gillies Highway) to Lake Barrine to Kulara and Skull Pocket. Personal communication with Yidinydji Elder, Nganygabana (George Davis), 5 January 1999. See RMW Dixon, Words of our country, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1991, p. 190.
53 Tindale, Expedition Diary, 1938, pp. 413–17.
55 My emphasis, Cairns Post, 25 August 1919.
57 P Savage, Christie Palmerston explorer, Townsville, James Cook University, pp. 205–6.
As a result of this murder, a massacre occurred at the site which became Butchers Creek. The late Ngadjanydji Elder Molly Raymont recalled her mother, Granny Emily, finding her 'husband shot and hung up on a tree, but still alive, [he] tried to push his stomach back, but couldn't'. Molly's mother and grandmother found refuge with the Malanbarra Yidinydji on the Mulgrave River:

as all their people up the top [of the range] had been attacked at [the] corroboree ground, [and because the] Police [were] around the district all the time – around Herberton way – hunting [and] killing people ... One girl [was] dragged through a blazing camp fire [by the Native Police], she escaped and hid in a log, but they found her and killed her and then [the Native Police] were sitting down and cutting her up like a meat.

There appears to have been coordinated attacks by Bama groups from the coast to the ranges and onto the Tableland, which might suggest that they were fighting a guerrilla war. A local historian, Bill Johnston, perceived that retribution by the new settlers 'was seldom a matter of boasting, [a] knowledge of which was handed down from father to son, or ...

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60 Molly Raymont, Black Oral History Collection.
gleaned from the glossed over official reports'. 61 Johnston noted the use of strychnine with the Madjanydji on Babinda Creek and the ‘armed bands and “nigger hunts” which wiped out men, women and children at Bones Knob and at Evelyn.62

Along the coast from Johnstone River north to Cooktown, rainforest Aborigines were being badly treated. One George Demetries wrote to the Queensland Colonial Secretary in 1898 stating that:

About 12 to 13 years ago [c. 1885] Beach de mere [sic] men were in the Mowbray river shooting the blacks, so they came and reported it in Town, but nobody seemed to take any interest in the matter ... and they done the same thing the other side of Cairns [on the Mulgrave River?].63

Inland from Cairns, near Kuranda, George Hobson was killed on his property, just opposite Myola railway station, on 20 July 1890.64 The Northern Herald later recalled that John Atherton, while making his way back to his Emerald End homestead with his daughters, made a camp:

at the wayside shack kept by Groves near the Clohesy [River]. In the morning a pony ridden by one of the girls was missing, and its tracks followed, disclosed the fact that a number of the blacks were in possession ... and finally, after penetrating the jungle for some distance, the natives were surprised in the act of cutting up the beast for an anticipated feast [at Guwulu, old Speewah, near today's Snake Gully].65

An elderly Djabugay, Buttercup, remembered being present as a famished five-year-old who was salivating at the prospect of eating the minya [meat], but as the pony was being prepared for bayngga [earth oven – hot rocks], in its death throws it kicked a stone that hit the young Buttercup in the chest. Her mother, Minnie, took her to the river to wash and cool the injury.66 The newspaper report ominously concluded: ‘Needless to say, the banquet did not come off’.67 While down at the river, Buttercup and Minnie heard gunshots and on returning to the camp later saw the bodies of their people where they had been shot down. In terror they fled for their lives down to Crystal Cascades and the sanctuary of a white selector’s family, that of the American Andrew Banning.68

61 WT Johnston, ‘Aboriginals’, Cairns, Historical Society of Cairns (HSC), Bulletin, 106, February 1968, p. 2. When men were getting hickory logs for the railway, between the second selection (in the vicinity of modern Smithfield) and Jamieison’s (at Buchan Point), they found the coastal Djabugay an ‘intolerable nuisance’. They had to leave one man on guard in camp, ‘otherwise every scrap of food is taken by the thieving rascals’. Cairns Post, 8 June 1887. Johnston, ‘Aboriginals’. Johnston stated that most of his references were based on local white folklore (personal communication, 28 September 1989).
63 Queensland State Archives, COL A791 4020/1895.
66 Kelvin Hill, ‘Outline of origins of Buttercup Banning’, unpublished manuscript in possession of the author. Mr Ernie Grant confirmed that Buttercup had recounted the events of the massacre to Kelvin Hill who recorded her recollection, which is believed to be in the possession of Kelvin’s widowed wife. Personal communication with Ernie Grant, 4 November 2003. The author had an opportunity to see Mr Hill’s collection at Tully on 5 March 1993. Djabugay country, pp. 40–2.
67 Northern Herald, 18 July 1928.
68 Buttercup and Binda Nyiwul (Tamho Banning) brought their family up on Andrew Banning’s selection. Andrew Banning was an American who with his wife ran an hotel in Abbott Street [WF
Queensland's Disreputable Reputation

The hypocrisy about white attitudes on the colonial frontier can be observed from an advertisement in the *Cairns Post* in 1885, which proclaimed:

> Englishmen, Irishmen & Scotchmen – what brings you to Queensland, leaving home in the dear old island 1000's [sic] of miles away? It is not for love of country, is it? No, plainly I can hear you answer. It is to make money, & at no distant date to return ... home. 

Interestingly, while the newcomers did not perceive their own presence and usurpation of resources from the original inhabitants as being unjust, they did consider other newcomers like the Chinese in this light.

It was during the 1880s that Queensland's annexation of eastern New Guinea was nullified by the British Imperial Government due to the colony's treatment of Aboriginal Queenslanders and South Sea Islander labour. It had been noted that upon annexing the Torres Strait Islands, which had a pattern of land use and tenure similar to Papua, the first act of the Queensland government was to advertise the islands for sale at five shillings an acre, regardless of the fact that they were 'the homes and property of many hundreds of natives'. The *Times* of London stated:

> While there might be exaggeration in many of the stories of atrocity in Queensland it was impossible to converse with any average colonist, to read local newspapers, to listen to speeches in parliament without perceiving that the native was 'regarded as simply an encumbrance on the soil', as being destitute of rights and existing 'only on sufferance, for which he should be grateful'. To allow Queensland to gain control of New Guinea would 'incur grave moral guilt'.

Indigenous Queenslanders across the state can confirm the truth of *The Times* opinion, as do white oral history and archival sources. I have mapped only some of the massacres in colonial Queensland; it is my belief that it does not represent the true nature of violence on the frontier. One can understand why white colonial Queenslanders were ashamed of what they allowed to happen, but why the conspiracy of silence since then? More pertinently, why does a vocal minority of contemporary white Australians persist in such a Machiavellian way, to continue to deny and obfuscate about the truth on the colonial Australian frontier? There can be no doubt that we have gone way beyond the time for 'the fair land of Queensland free, to teach the whites the litany!'