In this paper I examine three "eras" of mission endeavour at Lockhart River, not to be judgemental, but to draw out the underlying motivation for mission in each period and then, recognising that we missionaries and Aboriginal people are as human as anyone else, consider the gains and limitations. The three eras are the establishment period under the first superintendent, Harry Rowan, the post-war era of the Co-operative movement under superintendent John Warby, and the post-mission era under government administration which began with my time at Lockhart River as Chaplain. I will briefly refer to a fourth era just begun, that of administration by the Aboriginal Council.

Early Background - "Giblet time"

The Lockhart people had considerable outside contacts before the mission began in 1924; these included Japanese, Chinese, Islanders, Papuans and Europeans. The period of work on luggers for bêche-de-mer, trochus and pearl shell, particularly for the Japanese, is known as "Lugger time".¹ On land there was contact with sandalwood gatherers and miners. Of particular significance during the fifteen years prior to the beginning of the mission was the role of Hugh Giblet who set up a base camp at Lloyd Bay for gathering sandalwood. (The Lockhart River flows into Lloyd Bay.) According to the writer Ion Idriess, he was known as the "Sandalwood King"² because of the adventurous way he had established an effective and sympathetic working relationship with local Aborigines and built up a profitable business. From his base at Orchid Point in Lloyd Bay, he recruited Aboriginal workers for gathering sandalwood during the dry season, protected them from unscrupulous lugger captains, and rewarded them well with food, clothing and cases of liquor for a Christmas party.

Christmas was a gathering time for dancing and initiation before they dispersed to their homelands for the wet season. Not surprisingly, this period is known as "Giblet time". Idriess attributed this statement to Giblet -

The good old abos work for me...That is, they work when they feel like it - when they are hungry for "whiteman tucker", for tobacco and tomahawks. When they're not spearing my packhorses, or sneaking about to get a crack at one of my men with a nulla-nulla. But it is their own country, and they've a right to their own way of living. Whether or no, lots of them have been of good service to me and my men. When I give them a Christmas party when the lay-up season come, I give them the best I can get, whether its tucker or tobacco, blankets or billy-cans, a tomahawk or stockings.³

Important to Giblet's relationship with the Aborigines was his acceptance of their customs and life-style and the trust he placed in them, particularly in operating his boats and in continuing operations in his absence. Aboriginal oral accounts say that he repelled an early attempt to establish a Mission in the region⁴ and in fact it was only after his death in 1923 that the Anglican Mission began.

However, the diaries of the Rev. John Done give a different perspective on his first trip in 1921 to investigate establishing a Mission. At Lloyd Bay he met Giblet whom he referred to as "uncrowned king",⁵ and who "supplied us with a good deal of information" including numbers of people in the Reserve, numbers of VD cases and problems with the Japanese. The planned location for a Mission was then further north at the Pascoe River, perhaps no great threat to Giblet who gave advice on soil and accessibility. Later the Pascoe River site was considered problematic because of mining leases, and the government agreed to transfer the Reserve to the Lockhart River region.⁶

³ Ibid., p.31.
⁵ John J.E. Done, Wings Across the Sea, Brisbane 1987, p.67.
The establishment era - "Rowan time": 1924-38

Athol Chase has suggested that the multi-ethnic contact of the early period actually helped to define and strengthen local Aboriginal identity, although some adaptations in life-style had taken place. John Done certainly found a strong sense of identity among the Aborigines when he arrived with Harry Rowan to establish the Mission in 1924 at the "Waterhole" in Lloyd Bay, adjacent to Giblet's old camp.

Among thirty or forty that we saw, were two kings, King Fred of Lloyd Bay and King Charlie of Ash River and Night Island. These sporting their brass plates, were careful to explain, "all this country belong to us". They regarded themselves as no small fry either, as Fred said, "I king belong this place, I got business, I learn them young fellow dance". They were asserting their "kingship" according to their understanding of it, which meant their smaller-scale leadership for their clans in ritual and its association with the land.

The Mission picked up where Giblet left off, at least in the sense providing protection and mediation to the European world; this seems to have been accepted by those who came in, at least for the protection and access to European goods. "One old man knew the Mission boat [i.e. Herald] and said they were looking long time for mission". However, a markedly different emphasis quickly emerged for Done's diary records that the building of the superintendent's house included time for prayer and a religious talk each night. The talks included, God is my Friend, God the Father, God our big brother, The Sower, God our light, God the way, God our helper. The Torres Strait crew taught them the hymn "There is a green hill".

In contrast to Giblet's symbiotic relationship with the Aborigines, the missionaries had highly moral and idealistic aims: to transform their lives with a combination of the Christian faith and economic self-sufficiency and so raise them to a new standard of Christian living.

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7 Chase, "All Kind of Nation", p.18.
8 Done, Wings Across the Sea, pp.73-4.
9 Ibid., p.69.
10 Ibid., pp.70-1.
The Church of England has, with Government assistance, commenced a mission in the vicinity of the Lockhart River and, while teaching the blacks there the elements of religion, will endeavour to instil into them the principle of self help and, side by side with higher things, will teach them the rudiments of that industry which will enable them to earn their living, and take their place in the economy of things to which they surely have a right.\(^\text{11}\)

This approach was negative in dismissing Aboriginal culture as heathen and uncivilised, but positive in assuming that they could be fitted to take their place in wider society.

As has been so frequently proved in other places, these people can be taught, can be made useful to themselves and the country, can be led into a higher life instead of one of degradation and exploitation. Let us hope then, that the day is not far distant when these, the original owners of the land, will come into their full rights.\(^\text{12}\)

"Full rights" here is somewhat ambiguous, but is clearly related to the Mission program of teaching and disciplining them in a way of life religiously and economically acceptable or "civilized". The Aborigines' spiritual relationship with the land was not taken into account. In referring to "other places" Done most likely had in mind Yarrabah, near Cairns, under the strong hand of Gribble, and the Torres Strait Mission to the north which served Melanesian Islanders with a settled land and sea economy and a different leadership structure. It is significant that the Mission staff from the early days included people from Yarrabah and from the Torres Straits for they were seen as ambassadors of the next stage of settled development envisaged for Lockhart River. Nomadic or "wandering" activities were discouraged, except for outside employment or during times of financial hardship in the Mission.

Actual experience of Mission life soon revealed that redemption for the Aborigines was not merely a spiritual matter but also meant discovering new ways to survive: shifting from a hunter-gatherer subsistence economy to an industry-based economy centred on a village life-style. Notions of social evolution from primitive nomadic society to settled agricultural

\(^{11}\) Ibid., p.73.

society to industrial modern or civilised society, were implicit in the mission station approach. The view is implicit in early reports that a nomadic lifestyle is uncivilised and that abuses of grog, prostitution, and infant mortality had to be overcome in the new order of the Mission. The *Carpentarian* of October 1930 stated the Mission's aims as -

getting the wandering tribes settled under happy conditions, to encourage them to be self-productive with their own bit of land and their home...to help him fulfil a part in the development of the country which was his before it became ours.\(^{14}\)

The Waterhole site proving unsuitable for these aims, a move was soon made to the south of Cape Direction, first to Cutha Creek\(^{15}\) and the Bare Hill. This site was significant as it marked the boundary between the northern and southern language groups. There Rowan worked with dedication to build up a settled and self-supporting lifestyle. Aboriginal councillors and police were appointed.\(^{16}\) Gardens were developed to produce staples such as sweet potato, cassava, banana and pawpaw. Cotton was also planted. There were some opportunities for paid employment at the Mission, on fishing boats or on the mission ketch *Abaipil* which was used for carrying stores from Thursday Island and as a trochus shell and fishing vessel.\(^{17}\) A boiler was purchased to cure fish. The store opened each Saturday and supplied rations in return for produce the people supplied during the week at fixed rates. Other items could be purchased for cash. At the end of the first year a communal work day was introduced to develop gardens and buildings; other occasional work was paid for in cash at an

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\(^{13}\) Athol K. Chase, *The Australian Aborigine - His Place in Evolutionary Anthropology*, unpublished BA Honours thesis, University of Queensland 1970, pp.5-6. To some extent the shift had already been made in working on luggers and gathering sandalwood for Giblet.

\(^{14}\) Diocese of Carpentaria, *The Carpentarian*, vol.XXX, no.120, October 1930, p.283.

\(^{15}\) Variously spelt as Cutha, Coutha, Cutta or Cutter; derived from *Kuuku Ya'u: katha "bad smell"*.


\(^{17}\) Bayton, *Cross Over Carpentaria*, p.155.
hourly rate. Some old people were given rations and children were provided with two meals a day.\textsuperscript{18}

A girls' dormitory was established, described in 1930 as a building "without bolts and locks" and without problems of girls running away.\textsuperscript{19} In 1933, and again in 1938, the dormitory was closed down for a period but re-opened when it was felt that the girls were not being adequately looked after.\textsuperscript{20} It was closed again during the war and never re-opened.\textsuperscript{21}

The aim of economic self-support was handicapped from the beginning by lack of capital and staff. Half the initial government grant of £1000 was spent on purchasing a vessel,\textsuperscript{22} and of the £500 promised by ABM for 1925 only £100 had been received by the end of the year.\textsuperscript{23} A large debt continued to dog the Mission; in 1928 it was £577 and, despite doing without a Chaplain for two years, repairs to the mission vessel caused it to rise to £1026 in 1929.\textsuperscript{24} Again in 1933, there were no funds for a Chaplain and this continued until 1937.

In the earlier years the "nomadic character" was seen as a handicap. For a short period in 1928, "they all went bush and lived in the old native fashion, a lapse much to be regretted".\textsuperscript{25} This was about the time when the anthropologist Donald Thomson encouraged and witnessed initiation ceremonies. Rowan’s disapproval is an indication of the marked change from the openness of "Giblet time". He is also said to have confiscated all fighting spears.

The Islander residents, including Fr. Sailor Gabey, were praised for their gardening skills, but in the mid 1930s poor rainfall meant that the gardens were less productive and had to be supplemented by hunting and

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\textsuperscript{18} A.B.M. Review, 12 February 1926, p.192.  \\
\textsuperscript{19} Carpentarian, vol.XXX, no.120, October 1930, p.283.  \\
\textsuperscript{20} Year Book of the Diocese of Carpentaria 1934-5, p.36; W. Nicholls, A.B.M. Review 1 August 1939, pp.145-6.  \\
\textsuperscript{21} Conversation with John Warby, 4 August 1992.  \\
\textsuperscript{22} Bp. Stephen Davies, A.B.M. Review, 12 June 1925, p.52.  \\
\textsuperscript{23} Harry Rowan, A.B.M. Review, 12 May 1926, p.50.  \\
\textsuperscript{24} Bp. Stephen Davies, A.B.M. Review, 15 June 1930, p.49.  \\
\textsuperscript{25} Harry Rowan, A.B.M. Review, 1 August 1938, p.143.  \\
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In 1937, cattle work began after 250 head were brought from Mitchell River Mission. This became another avenue of employment and food for the Mission. Outside employment on the sea also remained an important source of income. This kept young men away from Mission influence for lengthy periods, but also aided the decline of bush living, use of language and ceremonial practices.

Rowan concluded "Rowan time" in July 1938 after 14 year service. He served with enterprise, perseverance, firmness and dedication to establish the institutional pattern of the Mission. Rowan often had to double as teacher or chaplain. There was never sufficient capital to fully achieve self-support and the Aborigines became dependent on the Mission infrastructure and white leadership.

Changes in belief and social practice went hand in hand with economic changes. In the development of the Church at Lockhart River, the Torres Strait Islander Church was taken as a model, despite significant cultural differences. Lockhart people already had contact with Islanders through lugger work and had made requests at Thursday Island to have their own Mission prior to the first exploratory trip by Revds. Done and Macfarlane in 1921. There were also some cultural similarities: Lockhart people were mainly a sea people with dugout canoes, they used a similar native drum to the Islanders and some ceremonies show similarities to practices in the Pacific. There was, however, a marked difference in social organisation. Islanders had a village-based life-style with strong individual leaders, while among the Aborigines authority lay in family relationships and they depended more on subsistence living through hunting and gathering in defined areas of land.

From the beginning of the Mission, Islanders such as Kebisu were brought in as staff and served as examples of the changed life-style desired of the Aborigines. They worked as boat crew, in building and gardening. Rowan particularly praised the family of Tom Savage (a carpenter) and

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26 *Year Books of the Diocese of Carpentaria*, 1932-3 and 1934-5.
29 *Carpentarian*, vol.XXX, no.120, October 1930, p.283.
later also Kitty Savage who was the school teacher from 1930 to 1938. The first Chaplain was the Rev. Poey Passi from December 1926 to March 1927. He was followed by the Rev. Arthur Flint from August 1927 to November 1928. Another Islander, the Rev. Sailor Gabey, followed from September 1931 to 1933. In addition, a mixed-descent man from Yarrabah, Mick Conrad (Conrad Madigan), helped in cooking for the children.30

As a result, Lockhart Church grew to have many of the characteristics of the Torres Strait Church: Anglo-Catholic monastic tradition with daily services, use of the native drum, language hymns with Islander melodies, and Torres Strait style secular dancing on festival days. Entry to the Church was through a program of teaching and then baptism. Infants of baptised adults were also baptised. This pattern and the growth in numbers baptised in the early years, suggest a group response to the Church as part of the life of the Mission. The first baptism of 29 adults took place in 1930. In 1932, the total was 91; in 1936 the 260 baptised included 90 confirmed, and by 1945 almost all residents had been baptised. In 1927 the Report noted: "The work of evangelisation is necessarily slow; it would be easy to show big lists of baptisms, but soundness and depth are being aimed at."31 Night literacy classes for adults were also held at this time. In 1931, the practice of sorcery was discussed with some old people preparing for baptism and they came forward with various objects, each with its own superstitious settings, they showed a lively anxiety to put away old beliefs, and at the same time to readjust the intricate relationship laws (which had been a real stumbling block to their spiritual progress).32

Some sensitivity by Rowan is suggested here but evidently traditional language and ceremony were discouraged as counter to Christian "civilised" living. Then followed a high period in which Rowan reported -

I must admit I have been surprised at incidents showing how whole-heartedly some at least have taken on the new life, and are holding fast.33

31 A.B.M. Review, 15 June 1929, p.66.
32 Year Book of the Diocese of Carpentaria, 1932-3, p.41.
33 A.B.M. Review, 1 June 1933, p.38.
Indigenous leadership was fostered in the Church through the appointment of church-wardens and councillors. The authoritative "big man" style of the Torres Strait Church, however, did not always have the same impact in the Aboriginal Church as it came into conflict with the smaller-scale pattern of authority through family relationships, and the consensus approach to wider decision making.

At one level, the aims of the Mission were partly achieved in that the Aborigines became adapted to a more permanent village-based life-style, acquired skills in gardening and cattle work, and had improved health care. A local church was also established with almost all the community baptised in a relatively short period. These developments, however, involved a decline in self-determination and use of traditional lands, and denigration of traditional language and ceremonies. The Aborigines became more dependent on outside support which was also inadequate, and the ongoing structure of the Mission was dependent on the skills and cultural ideals of the missionary staff.

At another level even more basic and significant difficulties can be discerned. There were culture clashes which both sides probably did not fully understand. There were obvious differences: ways of settling disputes, attitudes to hygiene and child-rearing. Less obvious were differences in leadership patterns and decision-making processes, and the fundamental conflict between subsistence habits and attitudes, and those required for an accumulative, profit-based industry economy which the Mission espoused. These deep level differences persist to the present at Lockhart River. Another inherent difficulty which had full impact in the post-Mission era, was the effect of combining secular and spiritual aims in a miniature established Church with secular control.

Lockhart was typical of many Missions in bringing together Aborigines from different clans, in which authority was based primarily in obligations to close kin, reinforced through initiation and ties to land. The people of the Lockhart River Mission were drawn from small groups along 200km of coastline. The dialects were very close in this region, although wider contact did occur for initiation ceremonies, when decisions were made by consensus among the ceremonial leaders. The Mission, on the other hand, introduced a more centralised authority structure. In consequence the authority of individuals, and democratic decisions taken by elected
representatives, were not necessarily accepted down the line unless by consensus or enforced by Mission authorities.

Secondly, the subsistence life-style of hunter-gatherers has its own deeply-rooted ethic which conflicts with capitalist aims. The hunter-gatherer's objective is to obtain food requirements for immediate use from naturally available resources with minimum effort. There is a strong obligation to share the supply with kin in prescribed ways, particularly in hard times: not a benevolent sharing with anyone as if often assumed. Hoarding is antisocial.

The Mission alternative required consistent effort, often without immediate gain, and accumulation of capital and goods for the future. The Aboriginal ethic expected minimum effort with direct results, and when there appeared a benevolent source of supply in the Mission there was natural pressure for it to be shared for immediate needs. Instead, the Aborigines were brought to depend partly on non-natural food sources and on a cash economy. They no longer had full control of the means of production, and became dependent on the capitalist mode of production and Mission patronage.

A third difficulty for the long term was the merging of Church and State in the structure of the Mission. In one respect this was an advantage because Aborigines do not make a separation between secular and spiritual aspects of life. The main disadvantage, however, was in the confusion of Christian Faith with western civilisation, its material benefits and power relations. The Church was readily seen as the provider of material benefits, and spiritual or ritual commitments were easily seen as the required obligation for receiving these benefits. This was more evident after the handover of administration to the Government when there was some decline in church activities. There are, however, indications of genuine commitment by a core of residents as already noted. Despite the separate roles of superintendent and priest, the priest could not be perceived as separate from the Mission, and Church involvement readily assumed some compulsory connotations. This was enhanced by the high ritual emphasis of the Anglo-Catholic tradition, and by Islander styles of leadership. The negative effects of this will become clearer when the post-Mission era is considered.
Given deep-seated cultural attitudes highly resistant to change and inadequate Church and Government support, expectations of a rapid transformation of the Aborigines' life-style were unrealistic; instead of integrating Aborigines into a sustainable capitalist mode, the Mission placed them in a situation of underdevelopment, dependent on external support.

The chaplain, Rev. William Nicholls, succeeded Rowan as acting superintendent. The lay missionary Herbert (Harry) Johnson, who arrived at the Mission in October 1938 as his assistant, eventually succeeded Nicholls as superintendent in 1941 and stayed until 1948. Staff were very difficult to obtain during this period. Some recruits left because of the Japanese threat; one is said to have collected all the firearms from the Aborigines and thrown them in the sea for fear they would support the Japanese.34 The Johnsons were the only whites there in 1941; when they went on four months' furlough in 1942, the people were dispersed in two or three camps under their own control.35 While Johnson returned in July 1942 with a temporary priest, it appears that it was late 1944 before all the groups returned to the Mission. The original impetus of the Mission appeared to wither and die following Rowan's departure. Johnson became concerned at the dependency and loss of traditional skills of the younger generation and he encouraged use of language, bushcraft and sea hunting, and allowed families to take extended holidays.36 During the war, 28 men enlisted in the Small Ships Section and operated around New Guinea. (According to Jimmy Doctor, all but two were Islander crew.) Others took up labouring work in agricultural and dairy industries in the Cairns and Atherton regions.37

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34 Ibid., p.116.
36 Ibid., p.118.
The Co-operative Era - "Warby time"

After Johnson left in 1948, there were short-term superintendents - Mr Arthur Briggs who contracted TB, and the Rev. A. Biggs - before John Warby, a pearler, arrived in April 1951 to take up the position. He found a run-down settlement with inadequate housing and poor health, including cases of TB and endemic hookworm. All able-bodied men were away from the Mission employed on trochus luggers, while the people at the Mission existed on Mission welfare and some hunting and gathering. Church and Government funding continued to be inadequate.

John Warby set about transforming this situation by building up an integrated and healthy Aboriginal community, and establishing an economic base through a local trochus shell industry. In 1951, the diocese bought the cutter Cape Gray from John Warby for this purpose. The Mission then ended outside employment and began employing men to dive for the shell. At the same time, the quality of rations was improved and an energetic program of building houses, store and church began. Warby worked hard to break down the self-perpetuating relationship of the Mission as benefactor and Aborigines as welfare recipients. A vegetable farm was established near Cutta Creek (but failed in later years). The trochus income was split 50/50 between the workers and the Mission in 1952 and 60/40 in 1953. In 1953, two Administrative Councillors were elected to manage the boat and other community matters. Although this approach marked a significant change of direction in management and economy, the Mission structure continued in other areas and became more institutionalised in the care of children.

Warby was against dormitories, but instigated a comprehensive care program for the children in order to combat malnutrition. Several

40 Ibid., p.106.
41 W.H. Williams to Frank Coadrake, 5 January 1961, ABM Chairman's Correspondence Relating to Aborigines, Series 10.
42 John Warby, typed report, late 1954, ABM Chairman's Correspondence re Aborigines, Series 9.
Aboriginal women were employed under the supervision of Sister Hazel Conn to provide the children with two meals, five days a week (plus supper if they wished), as well as iron and vitamin supplements. Eventually the children were supervised in taking showers before school, and school clothes were sewn and washed at the Children's Centre.\(^{43}\) While dramatic improvement in the children's health may have justified this approach at the time, it took over some of the parents' primary responsibilities in child nurture, and in this respect, ran counter to Warby's aim to increase self-respect and self-reliance.

In the 1950s the Australian Board of Missions, following experience in Papua New Guinea, set up its own Department for Co-operatives with the Rev. Alf Clint as Director. He visited Lockhart Mission for three months in 1953 and talked to the workers each morning about the Co-operative Movement whose principles of democracy, equal opportunity and benefit he thought ideal means to build on Warby's approach. The people responded; in 1954, the Lockhart River Aboriginal Christian Co-operative was enthusiastically launched and Aboriginal directors elected.\(^{44}\) The process of transforming Missions into Co-operatives was seen as progress towards assimilation into white society.\(^{45}\)

Some seeds of failure were present from the beginning; the parallel drawn between Co-operative democracy and Aboriginal cultural obligations to share was superficial. Kylie Tennant expressed the common but simplistic view of Aboriginal sharing in her popular book on this period of Lockhart's history -

The Australian aborigine, in his native state, was a natural born co-operator.
He hunted for his group, not himself. What a man brought in did not necessarily belong to him. The catch was shared.\(^{46}\)

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\(^{45}\) Tennant, *Speak You So Gently*, p.173.

In practice, co-operation is not universal in Aboriginal society. At the
community level there is a view of Lockhart as "one people" but only in
relation to outside groups and influences; there is only a low level of
obligation along marriage lines. Chase distinguishes five levels of social
organisation at contemporary Lockhart, the closest equivalent to "tribe"
being the third level, the dialect group. Within a dialect group there are
closer ties between those with descent links to land in adjoining
"countrymen" estates. The closest ties are between those with descent rights
to the land and resources of an individual estate. Co-operation and
obligation across these various levels of identity are varied and complex.
During Mission history the five or so dialect groups coalesced into two
distinctive and competing groups known as yiipaalu and kungkaalu, north
and south. But the major focus for co-operation and sharing occurs within
the smaller "countrymen" groups. The sharing of knowledge and resources
among such countrymen is proportional to the closeness of kin
relationships. A lesser level of sharing then goes out to a wider range of
people related through marriage.

Clearly this process of sharing is neither equal nor democratic, which
further illustrates the endurance of deep-level cultural attitudes in
Aboriginal society. The potential conflict with the aims of the Co-operative
was hidden in the first few years by the enthusiasm engendered by Warby
and other support staff, and the viability of the trochus shell industry.
However, John's oversight, and his wife Bunty's efficient role as treasurer
of the Co-operative, were crucial to success. In 1955-6, there was full
employment in the Mission and Co-operative, and up to four boats were in
use. There was a good complement of competent staff and adult education
was reintroduced.

By 1957, however, the situation was dramatically reversed and the Co-
operative was under pressure on several fronts. During 1956, two boats sank

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48 For information on dialect groups see David Thompson, Lockhart River "Sand Beach"
49 Ibid., pp.218-277.
and only one, Mary Lockhart, could be restored after its engine was overhauled.\textsuperscript{51} The demand for trochus shell began to collapse as the plastics industry emerged. This led the Co-operative into financial difficulties at the end of 1957 when Co-operative members had been paid for a large quantity of shell before it was shipped to Thursday Island, but the payment of £1800 to the Co-operative was not forthcoming.\textsuperscript{52}

Frantic efforts were made to find alternative industries for the Co-operative\textsuperscript{53} but significant obstacles to agricultural, timber, cattle and marine industries were lack of capital and staff, high freight costs and southern competition, cattle duffing\textsuperscript{54} and lack of power and facilities to hold perishables such as crayfish. Lockhart was also hampered by poor anchorage and difficult access by road and sea; it was 60 kilometres from Iron Range airstrip and further from Portlands Roads wharf. A co-operative Store was commenced but its viability was shaky because of the loss of employment and the income needed to purchase goods. The elderly and widows gained pensions in late 1959\textsuperscript{55} but others had to depend on their own resources.

Considerable effort and heartache went into attempts to gain the right to exploit minerals on the Reserve including small gold finds. The Queensland Government, however, had granted mineral exploration rights to BHP which had first claim to any significant finds,\textsuperscript{56} and would not acknowledge any Aboriginal rights to minerals.\textsuperscript{57} Although the Mission gained

\textsuperscript{52} John Warby to Frank Coaldrake, 9 February 1958, ABM Chairman's Correspondence re Aborigines, Series 9.
\textsuperscript{53} Warby, extract letter to Alf Clint, 1 February 1958, ABM Chairman's Correspondence re Aborigines, Series 9; Warby, letter to Coaldrake, 9 February 1958, ABM Chairman's Correspondence re Aborigines, Series 9.
\textsuperscript{54} Tennant, \textit{Speak You So Gently}, p.60.
\textsuperscript{55} John Warby to Bishop Hudson, 12 September 1959, ABM Chairman's Correspondence re Aborigines, Series 9.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Sun}, Brisbane, 3 December 1958; \textit{Courier Mail}, 5 January 1959.
\textsuperscript{57} G. Evans, Minister to S.R. Ramsden, M.L.A., 8 October 1957, ABM Chairman's Correspondence re Aborigines, Series 11; W.A. Brown, report on Interview with Dr Noble, Minister for Health and Home Affairs, Brisbane, 27 November 1957, ABM
permission to work a small gold lease, the high capital expenditure required by the Government finally made exploitation impracticable. Even their rights to the Reserve land appeared tenuous in the light of the loss of land for bauxite mining at Weipa. Reserves were simply Crown land under another name.

On another front the Warbys experienced internal opposition to the Co-operative both from some Mission staff and from Bishop Hudson who became exasperated with unrealisable goals. The new bishop, John Matthews, felt an underlying tension between the old Mission structure, directed by the diocese, and the Co-operative which was supported by Alf Clint as Director of ABM Co-operatives. The Chairman of ABM, Frank Coaldrake, was also active behind the scenes in support of the Co-operative. On the personal front the Warbys felt the pressure of separation from their young children who went south for primary school. At this time the Queensland Government became critical of the achievements of Church Missions, but strong defences were made and the abysmal underfunding of them was revealed when it was admitted in parliament that a takeover of Church Missions would cost the Government 1.25 to 1.5 million pounds a year.

Chairman's Correspondence re Aborigines, Series 9.

Clint to Frank Coaldrake, 30 October 1957, 22 September 1958; John Warby to Frank Coaldrake, 1 November 1957; John Hudson to John Warby, 2 April 1958; ABM Chairman's Correspondence re Aborigines, Series 9.

Bishop Matthews to Frank Coaldrake, 2 October 1960; W.A. Clint, Notes to Chairman, A.B.M., 8 October 1960; Frank Coaldrake, letter to Bishop Matthews, 13 October 1960; ABM Chairman's Correspondence re Aborigines, Series 9.

Tennant, *Speak You So Gently*, p.117.

*Courier Mail*, 7 November 1958; Statement by Chairman of ABM, Subject: Aborigines, 10 November 1958, ABM Chairman's Correspondence re Aborigines, Series 29.
Underlying all these external difficulties was the disparity between Aboriginal understanding of sharing and motivation, and Co-operative principles. According to Chase there were group resentments at work in the Co-operative although this is denied by Warby. Tennant's account (quoting Clint) of the director's inquiry into the sinking of Francis Pritt suggests some lack of enthusiasm and unity. "The Directors gave the men a pretty hard time. They'd left that boat when they had orders to stay aboard". The single crew members had been left aboard to pump out leaking water overnight before repairs could be effected the next day. Many did not understand the financial workings and difficulties of the Co-operative and even in the 1970s there were feelings by some that funds had been misappropriated by directors. Administration slackened after the Warbys left and Williams had to stop the signing of blank cheques and other loose practices when he arrived during 1960.

The Co-operative finally failed to establish a sound future for Lockhart partly because of material conditions, but also because of cultural factors which worked against it holding together in hard times. Stanner, noting such difficulties with Co-operatives, observed that "aboriginal groups, for all their ideals, are usually made up of factions". After Warby left in February 1960 to enter St. Francis Theological College, there was a concerted effort to save the Co-operative from bankruptcy. Mr H. Williams spent the

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64 Tennant, *Speak You So Gently*, p.93.
66 Warby to Coaldrake, 24 December 1958, ABM Chairman's Correspondence re Aborigines, Series 9.
67 In fact remaining funds were used to meet a tax assessment of $1997 in 1967.
70 Williams to Chairman, A.B.M., 1 May, 23 May, 6 June 1960, ABM Chairman's Correspondence re Aborigines, Series 10.
remainder of the year at Lockhart and, by scaling operations down to the Co-operative Store, and with firm restraint and an ABM grant, he managed to achieve a small credit by October. However, by June the following year, the new authoritarian superintendent Mr J. Currie, with Diocesan Council support, returned the Co-operative Store to Mission control and inhibited further development of the Co-operative. Despite the eventual demise of the Co-operative, this period is remembered as a time of vitality at the Mission and John Warby is remembered as the best of the old missionaries because of the way in which he established warm personal relationships and battled tirelessly for the community. Moreover, he supported the practice of traditional language and ceremony.

**Demise of Mission Control and Relocation**

The difficulties that ended the Co-operative era were to lead to the demise of the Church's control of the Mission itself. Bishop Matthews first began a public campaign to raise adequate funds for the development of the Diocesan Missions; at the same time, he considered relocating Lockhart River. However, the isolation of the Mission, lack of viable local industries and tightening government funds finally forced the Diocese to hand over its Aboriginal Missions to Government control. Bishop Matthews felt that any attempt by the Church to continue it would be doing disservice to the Aborigines.

In early 1961, the superintendent J.T. Currie expressed great dissatisfaction with the state of the Mission and suggested moving the site further north closer to Iron Range airstrip and Portland Roads wharf. The Bishop took this up and proposed it to the Director of the Department of

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71 Williams to Chairman, A.B.M., 17 October 1960, ABM Chairman's Correspondence re Aborigines, Series 10.
73 Conversation with John Warby, Rockhampton, October 1988.
75 Report to the Bishop of Carpentaria from the Superintendent, Lockhart River Mission, 24 January 1961, Departmental records, Dept. of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, Brisbane.
Native Affairs. While the Government agreed to this, it was only prepared to offer a lease subject to future mining interests, and in 1962, the Bishop decided that this relocation in the same area would be "unwise". A move of the people to "our other Missions" was now considered: the extraordinary idea of resettling the Lockhart people across the Cape in the "foreign" land of the Edward and Mitchell River Missions. The Board of ABM was cautious and after advice highlighting the practical and cultural obstacles, passed a circumspect motion:

> That with regard to the Lockhart River Mission the Board considers the best solution is the removal of the Mission people if it can be arranged with the consent of the people and to their advantage.

By May 1963, however, the Bishop had had discussions with the Queensland Government and his proposal had developed into one which would resettle the people on the Bamaga Reserve near the tip of Cape York and transfer temporal welfare to the Department of Native Affairs while the Church continued responsible for spiritual welfare. Immediate implementation was hampered because most of the people refused to move, but a handful of younger families did move in 1964 to the new settlement of Umagico on Bamaga Reserve, partly it seems because of a community

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76 Letter from Bishop of Carpentaria to the Director of Native Affairs, 30 June 1961, Departmental records, Dept. of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, Brisbane.

77 Letter from C. O'Leary to Bishop of Carpentaria, 16 October 1961, File 19A/21, Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, Brisbane.

78 Deputy Director of Native Affairs to Director of Native Affairs, 25 May 1962, quoting Archdeacon of Carpentaria, Departmental records, Dept. of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, Brisbane.


dispute.\(^2\) (With some encouragement from the Church, most returned to the Lockhart settlement in the 1970s.) The others were not pressed to move and the focus shifted to negotiating a transfer of temporal responsibilities to the Government. By 1965, the Government was funding welfare and development programs while the ABM maintained superintendents and clergy.\(^3\) At this time, the new Director, P.J. Killoran, became critical of the Church and tightened funding, forcing the Church to hand over control of Lockhart River on 22 May 1967.\(^4\) Rebuilding the community began at a new site 60km up the coast nearer to the Iron Range airstrip: basically J. Currie's original suggestion. Resettlement at the new site was completed in April 1969 with the assistance of the Navy vessel Paluma.

The Post Mission Era

"Old Site" and "New Site" were to become vivid contrasts in Lockhart vocabulary. I arrived at the New Site in February 1969 at the tail-end of life at Old Site. Most people had made the move either into new prefabricated houses or into temporary tents. The tail-end at Old Site was sad - a remnant holding fort in a lost paradise.

New Site had many contrasts, change upon change. There was confusion over the site, Aborigines expecting it to be a sandy ridge near Quintall Beach, while the contractors chose a hill of clay 2.5km inland. Town planning was incredible, with houses in close juxtaposition, suburbia style, with an inner circle of staff houses on the hill surrounded by an outer circle of Aboriginal housing. There was a new kind of staff, often somewhere on the public service ladder, some heavy drinkers. Was this a flashback to

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\(^3\) *A.B.M. Review*, July 1965, p.88.

Giblet time, to a gang of Giblets? The personal relationship was not the same. Now a new ideology reigned, a secular version of assimilation.

"Church is not boss anymore", I was told by an Aboriginal man, and so I learnt to tread warily. It was a new era for the Church also. How could the Church be relevant, how could the Gospel speak to this situation? Strangely enough, a new direction had been developing in missionary circles, a new awareness of the depth and integrity of cultural life of different peoples and of the breakdown of social frameworks through missionary endeavour.

I was fortunate to have had six weeks locum at Edward River the year before and then nine months of preparation at the ABM Training Centre (House of Epiphany) in Sydney. Of most value were the introductions to anthropology and missiology which raised appreciation of culture, and sensitivity to western ethnocentrism and Australia's lack of experience of other peoples. This was followed by a three months course with the Summer Institute of Linguistics learning how to learn another language and translate the Scriptures into it. Yet books and courses were not enough. In the situation the feeling came, "If only ABM could tell me just how to go about communicating the gospel here". I then realised that we in the field had to break new ground and find out the hard way, by making mistakes. A missiology for Aboriginal people was non-existent.

Learning the language, however, was a good start. It is hard to treat a learner as a boss. You can laugh at his mistakes. He became a friend to relate to, to give to, to receive from. Music was another bridge. There was so much talent in creating songs, singing in harmony, in dancing, so much identity wrapped up in it all. Tape recordings returned to them in two custom records of their music did much for our egos, theirs and mine. Inside all of this the gospel could speak. Ears are closed to outside voices, especially the cajoling and berating. The gospel can only be real from within the heart of the present Aboriginal cultural life. That was my vision.

But the new age had arrived with a vengeance. Underlying attitudes were: "Who needs the Church today? We, the government, have the answers now. We're pouring money in, building a new township, bringing modern life. Our staff will show the way; they can copy us, gradually they will be able to run things our way by themselves. In the meantime we will keep control, we will guard them from making mistakes".
The Aboriginal response was a mixed one, caught between two worlds. "The white boss must be obeyed, at least up front, for he brought this new materialism, but they don't really understand us. We have our ways too, our land and traditions. We will try to show them, even initiate them, into our ways". I was one of those initiated in Bora ceremonies while most staff were not allowed; that stuff had to be left behind. At night, staff parties were frequent and noisy, while prohibition ruled for the Aborigines. "Why shouldn't we Aborigines be allowed to drink like them? We are as good as they are". So many ordered liquor up by barge, and later by plane, with consequent disruption to community life and noise in front of staff houses.

Sadly, this blatant discrimination in drinking rights became the focal point for equality with whites, and finally a beer canteen was introduced to the community. While this regularised Aboriginal drinking and reduced the amount of hard liquor brought in, the long term effects have been tragic. Alcohol, the fateful standard of equality, also became the means of escape from the powerlessness and confusion of the contact syndrome, marked, as Professor Stanner observed, by "the inertia, the non-responsiveness, the withdrawal, the taking with no offer in return, and the general anomie that have so widely characterized aboriginal life [sic] during their association with us". Sober, the Aborigines were usually compliant or passively resistant to white authority. Only once did I see large-scale sober indignation against a Manager after he complained about the persistent sound of drums in the village late at night and attempted to stop the preparatory dances of the Bora initiation.

Initially, feelings were confused. The sharper sacred/secular distinction of this government time was hard to grasp. The Church seemed cut off, without authority, without a place. The Church "had given them up"; the sense of obligation to attend church had lifted, although a few old hands tried to maintain it. On the other hand the Church was freer to find local roots. In 1972, I wrote:

The Church has been freed from the power structure and also from much of the subsequent anti-white and anti-establishment attitudes. The primary content of the Christian Faith becomes more clearly evident without the

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85 Stanner, *After the Dreaming*, p.49.
administrative tie-up and confusion with material advantages. While this makes the Church's proclamation more difficult it is certainly clearer and less encumbered with unconscious props...There is now a greater freedom for the Church to identify with the cultural life of the people and to develop a local church that is more truly indigenous.  

Old styles of leadership had to be lived down. Church councillors were reluctant to express a view until they sensed what the priest's views were. I would leave the room to get them talking on their own. On one occasion I made it clear that I would not organise a fete; if they did not want it and do it, then it would not happen. In such ways they were encouraged to take leadership, to be the Church at Lockhart River. My role was to be a friend, facilitator and pastor. This could not be done from a power base, but through accepting people as they were and building relationships with them.

There were plenty of opportunities to have a serving role in the community, ranging from becoming a purchasing agent for small but essential items like fish hooks that the Government store often ran out of or did not stock, repairing a sewing machine or outboard motor, to prompting the Government's conscience particularly at election time when no policies were offered, or counteracting the blatant political stance of some Department officials, or chipping the Director in company with the National Party candidate for handing out boiled sweets to the adults instead of policies. The purchasing side eventually developed into Jamies Shop and this helped to fund a new church building which was consecrated by Bishop Hawkey on St James Day, 1974.

Another side to the serving was encouraging Aboriginal identity through language, song and ceremony, and mediating in cross-cultural misunderstandings. In 1971, I was privileged to participate in the Bora initiation ceremonies by invitation. (The anthropologist Athol Chase and a teacher also took part.) This took some thought. Would it compromise Christian belief or my priestly role? It also implied a long-term commitment to Lockhart. By then I was aware of the way the Bora made symbolic links with totemic ancestors in order to establish relationship ties

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86 David Thompson, Church and Aborigines in the Diocese of Carpentaria: Past, Present and Future, typed notes, 1972, p.3.
and identity in the present. I felt the risks minimal and worth taking, but I did ensure that I had Bora mothers from both major groups (north and south) in order to have closer community-wide ties. Afterwards, there was a definable difference in my acceptance in the community: a sense of belonging and closeness on both sides that was not there before. People knew how to relate to me and were confident in addressing me by kinship terms.

Later, a different community involvement developed. During the Whitlam years, when funds were available for self-help projects in Aboriginal communities, I initiated discussions on how Lockhart might benefit. This led to the formation of the Lockhart River Co-operative Advancement Society in 1975, with two sections, one for each of the major community groups, so that each could control their own activities without conflict. They requested funding for two jet barges to allow each group mobility for access to their traditional country to the north and south, and for sea hunting. This would have relieved the pressure of community living and allowed a more meaningful lifestyle in their terms, but Government officials could not think in this way. The DAA would fund only one barge or two less expensive fishing vessels. They went ahead with the latter, but they were not suitable for the original purpose and the Queensland DAIA attempted to turn it into a fishing enterprise. This accelerated after I left in 1977 and the enterprise folded through a typical process of passive resistance. Aboriginal aspirations and solutions had not been recognised or accepted by those with power.

After my time, a white priest was appointed for a short time, but since 1979 the diocese has placed Melanesian Brothers at Lockhart River, and an ex-Brother was priest-in-charge from 1985 to 1991. This has had mixed results. The black skins broke through anti-white barriers, but they came with a different cultural baggage; some were young and inexperienced, and their training had been for primary evangelism among food-growers with different religious traditions. They were also out of their depth in some of the political machinations of Aboriginal affairs. In 1987, the Brothers

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87 David Thompson, *Bora is like Church*, Sydney 1985.
attempted to find a new role by establishing a household with gardens near
the old mission site where young offenders and others could be involved in
an alternative situation away from the pressures of the Lockhart
community. The Brothers were withdrawn, however, in 1993. Visits to the
Old Site were not encouraged in the early years of New Site, but I made an
annual pilgrimage with a few people to clear around the old church and use
it for worship. Later, visits by community groups became more frequent
during dry seasons when there was road access.

A significant development in the life of the Lockhart River Church was
the ordaining of two men as deacons in 1985. Jimmy Doctor had faithfully
served the Church for many years and Stephen Giblet had turned from the
bondage of alcohol to new life in Christ and trained for a year at
Nungalinya College, Darwin. Sadly, Stephen died in 1986 and Jimmy in
1990.

What my time at Lockhart achieved for the Church is hard for me to
assess. I think it helped to rebuild some confidence in the Church and its
role in the community and the people’s place in the Church. The positive
approach to the Bora and the encouragement of Aboriginal thinking about
the relationship of Bora and Church helped to indigenise the local church.
The relationship is a sensitive one, however. After my time, the Melanesian
Brothers viewed the Bora through Melanesian eyes and thought the people
were worshipping a skull.\textsuperscript{89} I found a continuing role in mediating
understanding. In 1981, the Bishop’s encouragement of Bora/Church links
gave rise to fears that the Church wanted to change the Bora. Again I
became involved in mediating reassurance. In 1988-9, both Athol Chase
and I were involved with the community in working through the issues
posed by a proposed immense tourist development on freehold land
adjacent to the community. It was made clear that we were regarded as
people they could trust.

There have been limitations, however, to the effectiveness of the
Church’s ministry and the vitality of the local church in the post-Mission
era, due mainly to the modernising and secularising thrust of this time, and
the breakdown of stability of community life through developing

\textsuperscript{89} Quoted in \textit{Crescendo}, parish news of St. Alban’s Griffith, NSW, October 1980.
alcoholism and its related health and welfare problems. These pressures have increased the fragility of religious foundations, in both Bora and Church.  

The Uncertain Future

A new era began at Lockhart River in October 1987 with the Deeds of Grant in Trust legislation and the increased control of the management of the community by the Aboriginal Council. The Council faces considerable pressure both from enduring cultural factors and from social instabilities. Health and employment prospects are little changed from earlier times, probably worse. The Government's emphasis on material progress, without an equal emphasis on addressing the social impact of rapid change, has only resulted in an increased dependence on an institutional community life and has provided no hope for the future.

The attempts by both Church and Government to introduce a western style economic life to the community have not taken root in any substantial way. White staff are still employed to support the institutional framework. When I visited the community in February 1989, the people were very concerned that proposed tourist development would close off access to their main area of hunting and fishing to the north of the community. This had increased the desire by many to return to the old Mission site and other places. It is evident to me that Lockhart people desire a lifestyle which includes a mixture of traditional and modern elements, with freedom of movement on land under their own control. Further development pressures occurred with proposals for sand mining in Shelburne Bay, a Space Port 80km north in Temple Bay, and mineral exploration south at Nesbit River. This pressure on the community and their traditional lands has given the Aborigines a new awareness of what is at stake; permanent camps in these areas are now being established and they present new hope for the future.

The Church is now free from its power position of Mission days and the distorting effects of this upon the Christian Gospel, despite the advantages of the direct link between spiritual and social work. Now that a freer Gospel

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can be shared, the Church also has to deliberately make fresh links to social development. Hence there is a challenge for the Church to continue a significant presence in the community, both in spiritual ministry and in social development.