‘Your connections to Nappamerrie is as strong as ours’: Pastoralism, Paternalism and the Legacies of Settlement

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Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Thesis Declaration	4
Acknowledgements	5
List of Figures	7
Introduction	11
Chapter One: The Background of Nappa Merrie Station	39
Chapter Two: A Story of Positive Cross-Cultural Relations	59
Chapter Three: Geordie and Nappa Merrie Peter: Stories of Men	97
Chapter Four: Cora and Nelly Parker: Stories of Women	116
Chapter Five: Growing Up on Country	148
Chapter Six: Legacies	180
Conclusion	205
Appendix 1	211
Bibliography	213

Abstract

This thesis examines the relations between Aboriginal people and settlers on Nappa Merrie Station in far south-west Queensland. The station, established by John Conrick in 1873, remained in the author's family for eighty-one years, with three generations of Conricks growing up there. A core focus is the written historical record and stories passed down by descendants, all of which place an emphasis on the Conrick family's positive relations with, and conciliatory treatment of, Aboriginal people. This is especially significant given the notoriously violent interactions between Aboriginal people and pastoralists in Queensland. The author is the great-great-granddaughter of John Conrick, and this thesis follows the author's journey to uncover the nature of the Conrick's relations with Aboriginal people and analyse the veracity of the stories passed down through the generations. Additionally, the complex relationship and sense of belonging Conrick descendants have with Nappa Merrie and its Aboriginal population is examined.

Using 'insider' knowledge, the author blends personal experience with academic historical training, connecting family history to the national story. A unique element of this thesis is the utilisation of the author's rich family archive, which includes diaries, unpublished memoirs, letters, an extensive photograph and album collection, artefacts, and dictionaries of local languages. These are examined in conjunction with government records, newspaper articles, oral history transcripts and local historian Helen Tolcher's books and research notes.

While this thesis reveals the Conricks were more humane and conciliatory in their treatment of Aboriginal people in comparison to others at the time, it also reveals the enduring legacies of this history which continue today. This research demonstrates the veracity and selectivity of social memory and oral histories, through comparing family stories with historical records. The inconsistencies and absences in Conrick family narratives allow an insight into the influence of social norms and expectations on both individual and family memory over the decades. The thesis concludes with the recorded oral history of two Aboriginal Conrick descendants. This sharing of stories allows an insight into Aboriginal perspectives and contributes to the continuing legacies of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations on Nappa Merrie Station.

Thesis Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

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Signed: Date: 11/7/2023

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List of Figures

1	John Conrick, c. 1920s	11
2	John Conrick, c.1860s-1870s	16
3	Agnes (nee Ware) and John Conrick, 1885	17
4	Family Tree 1 - tracing my family line, showing my connection to John	18
5	John Conricks Sons, c. 1941	19
6	'Nappa Merrie H.S. Cooper's Creek 1898'	42
7	Nappa Merrie homestead, c. 1903	43
8	The 'Dig Tree', Nappa Merrie Station	45
9	The 'Dig Tree' cairn made by Ted Conrick	47
10	Aboriginal Stockman on Nappa Merrie	50
11	'Flash Tommy, Bennie, Jimmy and Paddy'	51
12	'Shearing Board' at Nappa Merrie, c. 1911	52
13	'Aboriginal Natives Woolpicking', Nappa Merrie, c.1911	53
14	Drying wool on Nappa Merrie	54
15	'Nappa Merrie wool scour'	54
16	Messrs F. Fisher, H. Crozier, John Conrick and Gilbert, Aboriginal boys Jacky, Larry, Sailor, Adelaide, 1878	56
17	Newspaper excerpt – 'Story of John Conrick, Pioneer: Told By Himself No. 1'	60
18	Family Tree 2 - showing John Andrew's and Neil's connection to John Conrick	61
19	'First hut built by John Conrick on the Cooper at Goondahbinna. Pulled down & re erected at Barrioolah'	67
20	'Danbidleli, also known as Jim Mariner', c.1920	70
21	Edward Neil Conrick's handwritten note in Sarah Murgatryod's *The Dig Tree*	71
22	'Kangaroo' dog fighting a kangaroo	72

23	Page 1 of handwritten notes of Edward Neil Conrick, c.1980s	74
24	‘An old Nappa Merrie native’	78
25	Handwritten description on back of Figure 24	78
26	Page 33 of Ted Conrick’s photograph album	79
27	Excerpt from handwritten note by Aaron and Gloria Paterson to Ken Conrick, 2015	91
28	Newspaper excerpt - ‘A Bush Woman to the Rescue’	99
29	‘Picture of Geordie’	101
30	‘Barrioolah – Geordie’	102
31	‘Geordie & Cora – Humpy’	104
32	‘Nappa Merrie Station Aborigines – Geordie and Cora in front’	104
33	Newspaper excerpt - ‘Death of Game Swimmer’	107
34	Page 1 of Edward Neil Conrick’s handwritten notes, ‘Mort’	108
35	‘Peter King Nappa Merrie’	111
36	Nappa Merrie Peter	112
37	Cora. Cropped image of Figure 31, ‘Geordie & Cora – Humpy’	118
38	Family Tree 3 - showing Aaron Paterson’s relation to John King	121
39	Minjah Station Homestead	123
40	‘Prospect Hall – Group includes, Clive, Jack and Ted as children; Cora, the Aboriginal girl from Nappa Merrie’, c.1892	126
41	Prospect Hall, Bowden-on-the-Hill, Adelaide; home of Agnes Conrick, c.1892	127
42	Children Clive, Jack & Ted Conrick at Prospect Hall, c. 1892	128
43	‘Grandmother & Cora’, c.1892	129
44	Prospect Hall. Group includes Cora, Aboriginal girl from Nappa Merrie, c. 1892	131
45	Family Tree 4 - showing how Leslie Harris (Junior) and Aaron Paterson descend from John Conrick and Cora	135
46	‘Picture of Nellie (Tim)’, c. 1950s	138

47	‘Limpica with pups at Nappa Merrie Station’	144
48	Nappa Merrie Alice holding Richard (Dick) Conrick, Madge Conrick and Timpika (Nelly)	145
49	John with eldest three sons	152
50	‘Nappamerrie Alice. Taken Feb. 1945’	156
51	Aboriginal woman with Conrick child, c.1934	157
52	‘Betty with Alice’	158
53	Three Aboriginal women with two Conrick children, c.1927	158
54	Five Aboriginal Women with a Conrick child, c.1925-1932	159
55	Ted with his children	161
56	‘Dieri’ and ‘Yantra Wantra’ Dictionary by Pat Conrick	166
57	Page 19 of ‘Native Vocabulary’	167
58	Excerpt of Edward Neil Conrick’s handwriting (in red) on map of the Durham Downs area, c.1984	169
59	Aboriginal ‘rock carving’ on Nappa Merrie	170
60	Two throwing spears, a boomerang and a spear gifted to Neil Conrick	172
61	A boomerang, a Nulla-Nulla and shield with tribal markings gifted to Neil Conrick	173
62	Five boomerangs with tribal carvings gifted to Neil Conrick	174
63	Tribal markings on Nulla-Nulla gifted to Neil Conrick	174
64	Tribal markings on boomerang gifted to Neil Conrick	175
65	7 March, 1922, page in Ted Conrick’s diary	177
66	Neil Conrick, Mitchell Sallis, Madeleine Sallis (the author), Alyssa Sallis and Julie Sallis (nee Conrick) at ‘The Dig Tree’ on Nappa Merrie Station	181
67	Neil Conrick at the tree where John Conrick first camped at Goondabinna, Nappa Merrie Station	182
68	Family Tree 5 - showing how Aaron and Gloria, Julie and Madeleine (the author) are related	185

69	Four Descendants of John Conrick (Left to Right) Madeleine Sallis, Julie Sallis (nee Conrick), Gloria Paterson and Aaron Paterson, Rockhampton, Queensland, 29 April, 2022	186
70	Excerpt from handwritten note by Aaron and Gloria Paterson to Ken Conrick, 2015	190
71	Nappa Merrie Peter's Breastplate	195
72	Nappa Merrie Peter's Breastplate: Inscription 'Nappa Merrie Peter King of Barioolah Tribe'	196
73	Nappa Merrie Peter's Breastplate: Peter's Totem, '*Palyada'* (Stick-nest Rat)	196
74	Aaron Paterson wearing Nappa Merrie Peter's Breastplate, Innamincka, 26 May, 2022	201
75	Aaron Paterson speaking during Smoking Ceremony, Innamincka, 26 May, 2022	202

INTRODUCTION

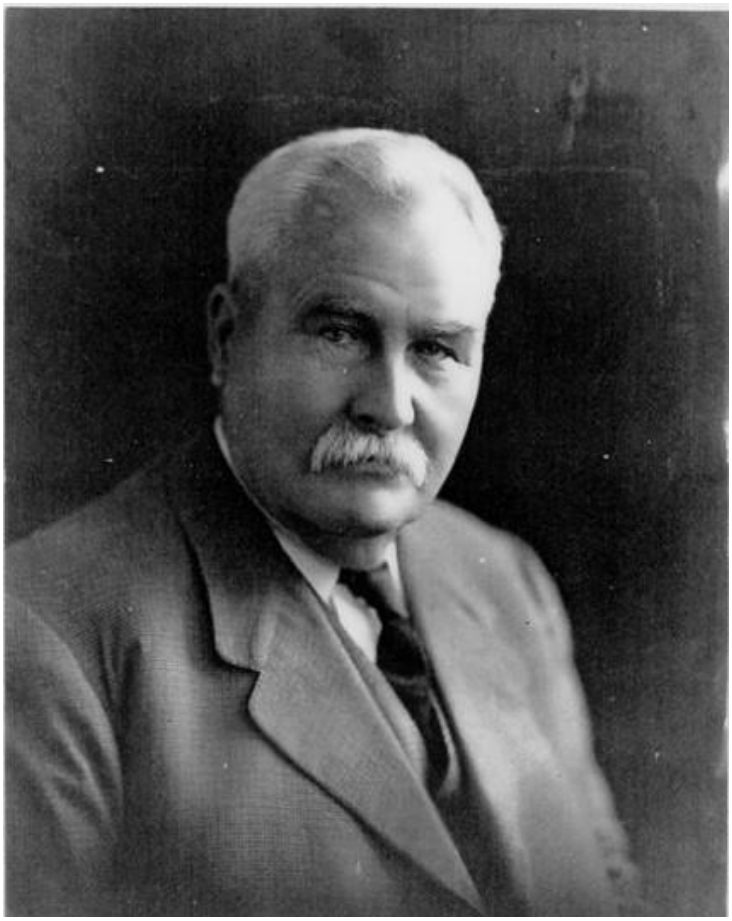

Figure 1: John Conrick, c. 1920s (framed photograph on wall of Sallis family home).

My whole life I have been surrounded by stories about John Conrick of Nappa Merrie, my great-great-grandfather.[1] A framed photograph of John aged in his seventies (Figure 1) has always hung on the wall of my family home, situated next to a charcoal drawing of John in his youth, and a 1923 photograph of fourteen elderly 'Pastoral Pioneers' (including John Conrick at the age of seventy-two), which also appeared in *The Register*

[1] There are various recorded spellings for Nappa Merrie, I use this spelling unless using a quotation. This spelling is more commonly used in public and is how my grandfather, Edward Neil Conrick, spells it in his notes. Other spellings are Nappamerrie, Nappamerry, Nappamerri and Nappa Merry.

under the title ‘Men from the Saltbush. A group of fine old pioneers’.[2] I was told with pride the history behind these pictures, and whenever we had visitors, the photographs were always part of the tour. Originally, they had been at my grandfather’s, Edward Neil Conrick (henceforth referred to as ‘Neil’), house in Adelaide which was in the Conrick family from when they left Nappa Merrie in 1954 until its sale in 2000. Throughout that entire period, these photographs were on the wall, creating a family tradition which has now been ongoing for almost seventy years. Following the sale of the house, Neil gave the photographs to my mother, Julie (his eldest daughter), and they have hung on our walls since then.

Before 2017, when I began to take interest in my family history, I saw these portraits of John as a reminder of my grandfather, Neil, who had strikingly similar facial features. Now I do not simply see a seventy-year-old man who died over ninety years ago, but a man whose image is deeply embedded within the Conrick family’s historical narrative. This man’s importance to his descendants has been passed down through family stories, to the point where my family home would feel incomplete without this photograph hanging on the wall.

As well as being my great-great grandfather, John Conrick was the first white man to permanently reside on the Cooper Creek. In 1873 he established Nappa Merrie Station, where both my great-grandfather and my grandfather grew up and lived until its sale in 1954.

[2] ‘Men from the Saltbush. A group of fine old pioneers’, *The Register*, 16 October, 1923, 10.

For many years this family history remained in the periphery of my mind until one memorable night in late 2015. While I waited for a friend in the early hours of the morning outside a pub in Adelaide, I struck up conversation with two Aboriginal men.[3] One of the men asked where my family was from, before he told me 'his people' were from Innamincka. I felt self-conscious, as I had done little research on my family history, but knew my relative was the first white man to 'settle' in the region and took Aboriginal people's land without compensation. Wanting to have an honest discussion, I said, 'this is awkward, I'm a Conrick'. The man's face instantly lit up as he said, 'Me too!' and gave me a hug. He then told me the story of John Conrick of Nappa Merrie having a daughter with a Yandruwandha woman, Cora (this man's great-great-great-grandmother). This was the first time I ever heard of John having relations with an Aboriginal woman. Before this, I had never contemplated the possibility of having Aboriginal relatives. My discovery of a new Aboriginal branch to the Conrick family tree was a surprise to my mother, as this was not a story she was told while growing up.

Aboriginal people always had an underlying presence in my grandfather's stories, but when I was looking through his photographs after his death in 2015, I realised how much Aboriginal people were a part of his life. I was discovering a different side to him which I had never previously contemplated – it was like I was meeting a completely new person. A few years later, while studying undergraduate courses at university and learning about the violent treatment of Indigenous populations around the world, I was surprised to hear of the abuse of Aboriginal people in the Australian pastoral industry.

[3] I use the term 'Aboriginal' throughout, and not 'Indigenous' or 'First Nations', as this is the term preferred by the Yandruwandha people I am in contact with.

This conflicted significantly with the stories I had been told by my family. I began asking the question: 'Were the Conrick stories of positive relations with, and treatment of, Aboriginal people on Nappa Merrie valid, or was there something more to be found in my family history?'

This thesis follows the path of my research to uncover the nature of the Conrick's relations with Aboriginal people and analyse the veracity of the stories passed down through the generations while revealing the legacies of this history which continue today. In conducting this research and writing this thesis, I have been conscious to critique the behaviour of my ancestors, and anxious not to glorify the Conricks as heroes for their treatment of Aboriginal people in my portrayal of them. I acknowledge I am an 'insider' to this history, as it deals with my own family, and that this makes it difficult to remain completely independent and objective. However, I use my historical training to maintain an element of separation from the sources and the content. Historian Victoria Haskins has investigated her relatives' involvement in using Aboriginal women for labour, and I use her approach as a guide. Haskins recognises her great-grandmother was a 'product of her time' and how she is herself a 'product of a different time'.[4] She discusses the deep self-consciousness she feels as a white Australian scholar writing about Aboriginal policies her great-grandmother was implicit in. Furthermore, she does not romanticise her family's actions which would reinforce European dominance over Aboriginal people.[5] Historian David Lowenthal likewise states that the study of history is not about glorifying someone's ancestors, but 'to understand

[4] Victoria Haskins, *One Bright Spot* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 8.
[5] Haskins, *One Bright Spot*, 8.

what happened in the past'.[6] My sentiments are similar to Haskins; while I love my grandfather, I recognise he was from a different time, which had particular views on race and Aboriginal rights to land and equal pay – views which differ from my own.

Although my familial connections may be perceived as complicating my objectivity, there are some clear advantages to being an 'insider'. I am a living part of this history; I can therefore draw on and analyse my own memories and experiences which contribute to the social memory of the Conricks. This also gives me access to sources and insights not available to others. Using my 'insider' knowledge, I have sought to comprehensively investigate the relations between my forebears and Aboriginal people on Nappa Merrie and analyse how the memory of these relations has developed through generations of descendants.

Who are the Conricks?

John Conrick, the son of two Irish immigrants, was born in Portarlington, Victoria (near Geelong) in 1852, and grew up on his father's farm at Tower Hill, near Warrnambool. After eight years of schooling, aged sixteen, he managed one of his father's properties for six months before working as a customs and shipping clerk in Warrnambool. Over the years he had heard of the 'fine' cattle country in western Queensland. So, on 28 November 1872, John and three other men (Fred and Tom Archer and Robert Bostock), all under twenty-one years old, set off from Tower Hill with 1,600 head of cattle, twenty

[6] David Lowenthal, *Possessed By the Past* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 103.

Figure 2: John Conrick, c. 1860s-1870s (original glass slides held by Bulloo Shire Council).

horses and a team of bullocks. It took the men eleven months to complete the 1,200 mile (1931 kilometre) trek to Cooper Creek. John first camped at a waterhole called Goondabinna on 28 October 1873.[7] While John explored the area, another two men (John Bligh Nutting and R. Doyle) submitted applications to lease Goondabinna, so John moved further down the Cooper to what became known as Nappa Merrie Station.[8] Nappa Merrie is located where the South Australian and Queensland borders meet, around twenty-five miles (forty kilometres) north-east of the Innamincka township, and over 186 miles (three-hundred kilometres) north-west of Thargomindah. The name of

[7] Helen Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie* (Linden Park: Helen Tolcher, 1997), 20-23; 'Story of John Conrick, Pioneer, Told By Himself – No. 1', *The News*, 25 July, 1923, 5.
[8] Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 25; 'Story of John Conrick, Pioneer, Told By Himself – VIII', *The News*, 8 September, 1923, 9.

the station derives from the Yandruwandha word for the waterhole, *gnappa merri*, meaning water and sandhill.[9]

With the establishment of Nappa Merrie, John became the first white man to permanently 'settle' on Cooper Creek. He was an intimidating figure, described as a 'tall, well-built young man of exceptional physical strength', standing at 'about 6ft 3 inches' (190 centimetres) and, at one point weighing at least '20st' (127 kilograms).[10] John Conrick married Agnes Ware, the sister of his business partner George Ware, on 31 August 1885. They had four sons: John Ware, Edward Gerald (henceforth referred to as 'Ted'), Francis Clive (henceforth referred to as 'Clive') and Joseph Patrick

Figure 3: Agnes (nee Ware) and John Conrick, 1885 (original glass slides held by Bulloo Shire Council).

[9] Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 36.
[10] 'Nappa Merrie on the Cooper Has Big History', *The Barrier Miner*, 6 January, 1948, 5; 'An Old Colonist', *The Capricorn*, 7 March, 1908, 28; Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 6.

(henceforth referred to as ‘Joe’). Ted married Nellie Harvey in 1923, and they had five children: Elizabeth (henceforth referred to as ‘Betty’), Edward Neil (Neil), John Rupert (Rupert), Peter and James Desmond.

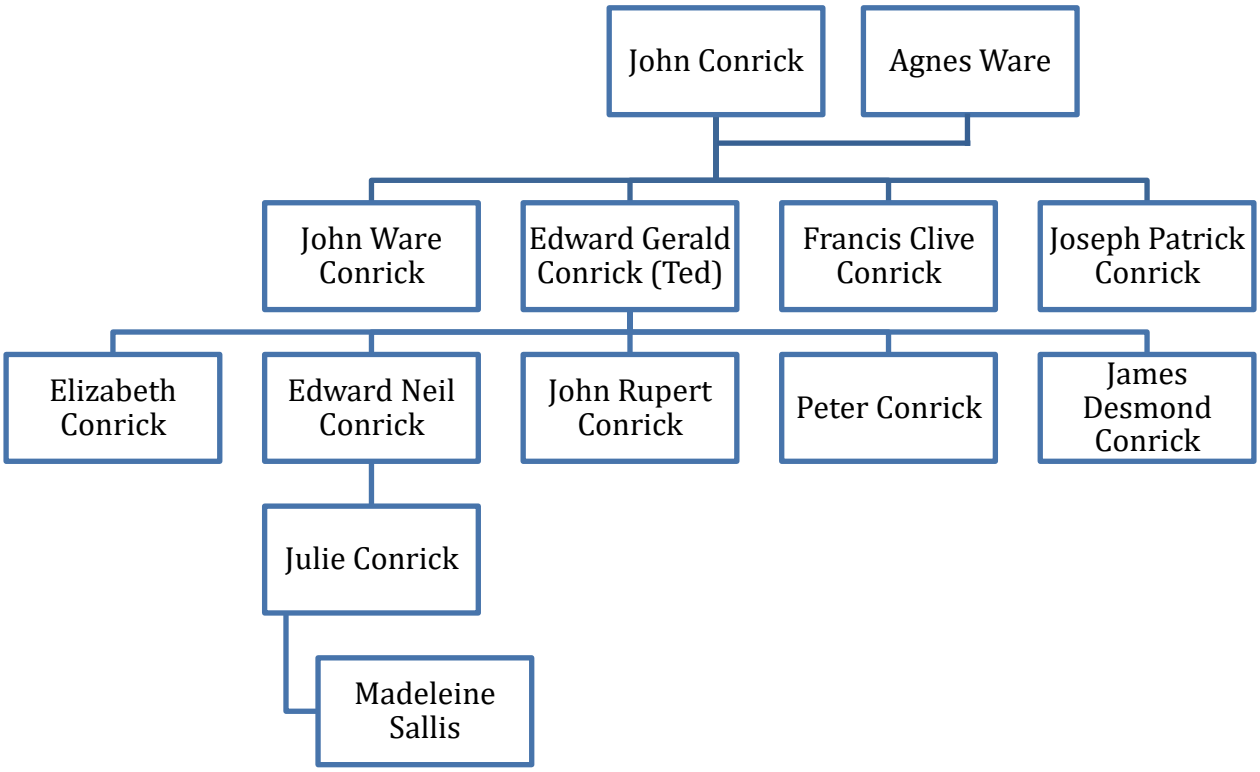

Figure 4: Family Tree 1 - tracing my family line, showing my connection to John.

John Conrick died aged seventy-four at Rua Rua Hospital in Adelaide on 10 January 1926. Obituaries published in Adelaide’s *The Register* and *The Advertiser* newspapers described him as ‘one of the best known and highly esteemed pastoralists in Australia’, and as a ‘pioneer and squatter who blazed the way’ for pastoralists after him.[11] An earlier article, published in 1922, stated he had played ‘his part in blazing the track’ for

[11] ‘Death of Mr. J. Conrick’, *The Register*, 12 January, 1926, 10; ‘Pioneer and Squatter. Mr. John Conrick Dead’, *The Advertiser,* 11 January, 1926, 14.

pastoralists in Queensland.[12] More recently, John has been described as a 'battling pioneer who had taken the wilderness by the scruff of its neck and shaken it into partial submission'.[13]

Like many families, the Conricks used the same first name across the generations. To minimise confusion, where possible I explain the connections and include family trees throughout this thesis. There are four 'John Conricks'. I refer to the first John (1852-1926) as John Conrick. His son is referred to as John Ware (1889-1960), while the two grandsons are referred to as John Andrew (1922-2006) and Rupert (1928-1996). There

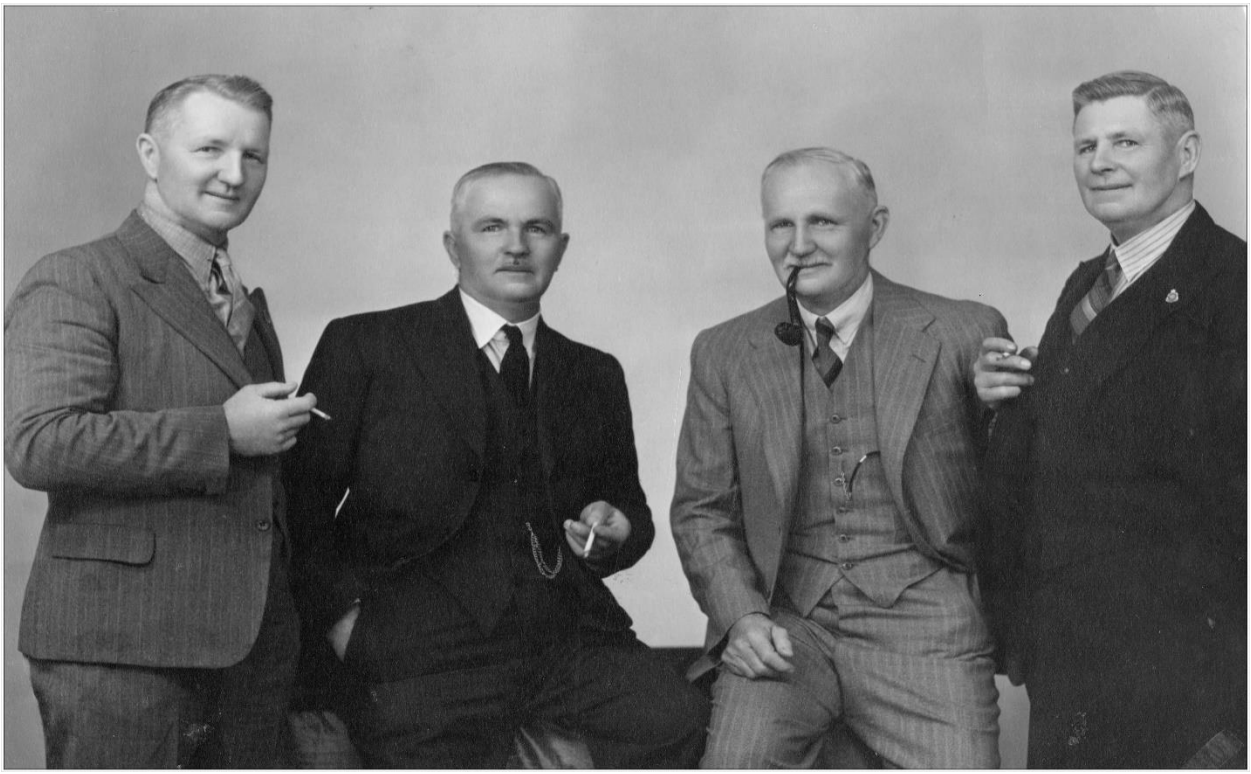

Figure 5: John Conrick's sons. From Left: Francis Clive, John Ware, Edward Gerald and Joseph Patrick, c. 1941 (located in 'Conrick History Box 1 – Clear', held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

[12] 'Sheep in the Far North East', *The Register*, 5 September, 1922, 5.
[13] Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 133.

are also two Edwards: Edward Gerald (1890-1965) who is referred to throughout as Ted, and his son, Edward Neil (1927-2015), who is referred to as Neil.

Although there were many Aboriginal groups in the region, the group central to this thesis is the Yandruwandha, and their dialect sub-group, whose Country includes Nappa Merrie, the Parlpamadramadra.[14]

Literature Review

Given the themes of my thesis, my review of the literature is focussed primarily on Aboriginal labour in Australia's pastoral industry. Other areas of discussion include the role of Aboriginal women in domestic work, the violent treatment of Aboriginal people on the frontier, the application of family history and memory, and the role of reconciliation.

In my examination of Nappa Merrie, my principal focus is on Aboriginal labour. While there is vast and comprehensive literature regarding Aboriginal people's role within Australia's pastoral system in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I have drawn principally on the scholarship of historians Ann McGrath and Dawn May because their research creates a generalised context for the Conricks and Nappa Merrie and fills in the gaps in the family's oral and written historical record. However, historical sources

[14] At the time of submission there is a Native Title case in the Federal Court, where both the Yandruwandha and Wangkumara are laying claim to Nappa Merrie and Barrioolah. This thesis is not involved with this matter nor is it constructed with the intention to aid one side or the other. I discuss only what is present in the Conrick descendants' stories and research I have uncovered relating to the Conrick family. Helen Tolcher refers to the Parlpamadramadra in *Seed of the Coolibah* (Linden Park: Helen Tolcher, 2003), 4.

produced by and relating to the Conrick family provide much needed nuance, and, in places, challenge understandings and generalisations commonly held by McGrath and May regarding relations between Aboriginal people and station owners and their descendants.

From the 1960s to mid-1980s, scholars examining Aboriginal workers in the pastoral industry who were sympathetic to Aboriginal people, tended to focus on their mistreatment and exploitation which they described as slavery.[15] For example, historian Bill Thorpe proposes the term 'colonised labour', which he defines as a 'related but distinct' variation of slavery specific to the exploitation and domination of Aboriginal labour in the process of colonisation, where, unlike ordinary slaves, the workers are 'valued as a labour commodity, but also devalued'.[16] In comparison, McGrath focuses on the relationships of coexistence between Aboriginal people and pastoralists, where Aboriginal workers were able to apply their traditional skills to their stockwork, and negotiate their adaptation to this new culture. McGrath does not deny the abuse and exploitation of the Aboriginal labour force by white pastoralists, but nevertheless suggests the dynamic was more complex than previously proposed by scholars.[17] This is relevant to my research, as the Conrick family story alludes to a more peaceful existence between their forebears and the Aboriginal population on Nappa Merrie than were depicted in the 'slavery' interpretations.

[15] See Raymond Evans and Orlando Patterson.
[16] Bill Thorpe, 'Aboriginal employment and unemployment: colonised labour', in *Beyond Industrial Sociology*, ed. Claire Williams and Bill Thorpe (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 96.
[17] Ann McGrath, *'Born in the Cattle'* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin Ltd, 187), 175.

May's research focuses on the economic and social history of Aboriginal labour in the pastoral industry of Queensland. She demonstrates a more broad, comprehensive study with similar arguments to McGrath, and creates a significant foundation for my research. McGrath and May's findings provide context of the experiences of Aboriginal people in Queensland to situate my findings. May's work focusses on the northern sections of Queensland, but includes a discussion on the far south-west region (where Nappa Merrie is located). In comparison, this thesis focusses on race relations on Nappa Merrie Station as a singular case study.[18]

Another important element of this thesis is an examination of Aboriginal domestic work on the station. While most literature on Aboriginal labour in the pastoral industry discusses the treatment of women, the work of Victoria Haskins is particularly influential and relevant to the examination of Aboriginal women's role in the domestic sphere. Haskins examines the relationships between Aboriginal women and their non-Aboriginal employers in her family history. Her book, *One Bright Spot*, follows her 'journey' of exploring her great-grandmother's (Ming) relationships with four young Aboriginal women placed in her household. Haskins begins with the discovery of a photograph depicting her grandmother in the arms of her Aboriginal carer. She then traces the lives of these four women in order to reveal the story of Ming's advocacy against government policies controlling the lives of young Aboriginal girls.[19] There are a lot of parallels with my own story – the uncovering of a photograph, which uncovered my forebears'

[18] Dawn May, *Aboriginal Labour and the Cattle Industry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9.
[19] Haskins, *One Bright Spot*.

connections to Aboriginal people, followed by the 'journey' of examining these relationships.

While Haskins' research has been influential in my consideration of the relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women, there are some distinct contrasts. Haskins analyses the intervention of government institutions, such as the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board, in placing and removing young Aboriginal women into white households. The four women who worked for Haskins' great-grandmother were not from the local area and had been removed by the government from their own communities. In contrast, the Aboriginal women working for the Conrick family were from the Cooper Creek region; they lived, to some degree, amongst their own people, and were able to maintain connections to their culture and land. Additionally, Nappa Merrie is located in a more isolated outback region than Haskins' research area. This isolation impacted on white women's reliance on Aboriginal women for housework and companionship.

While researching this thesis, I have drawn on the autobiographies of non-Aboriginal women who lived in the region, such as Alice Duncan-Kemp, Edith McFarlane, and Elizabeth Burchill. Duncan-Kemp grew up on Mooraberrie Station, around 200 miles (320 kilometres) north of Nappa Merrie, in the 1900s and wrote numerous books detailing her experiences.[20] McFarlane is the wife of a station manager who had previously worked as a governess to station children. She lived in the Channel Country

[20] The two I find most relevant are: Alice Duncan-Kemp, *Our Sandhill Country* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1933) and Alice Duncan-Kemp, *Our Channel Country* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1961).

for over forty years and in 1976 published her recollections.[21] Burchill, an Australian Inland Mission nurse stationed at Innamincka for two years in the early 1930s, chronicled her time on the Cooper in the 1960 book *Innamincka*.[22] These autobiographies act as comparisons to the Conricks written and oral histories and will provide information regarding other non-Aboriginal people's observations, attitudes and opinions. McFarlane and Burchill also discuss their interactions with members of the Conrick family and allow an insight to how other non-Aboriginal people perceived the Conricks' relationships with Aboriginal people on Nappa Merrie.

Jackie and Rita Huggins, McGrath and Myrna Tonkinson provide insights into Aboriginal women's perspectives of their domestic work, which provides a much needed contrast to narratives provided by non-Aboriginal women.[23] Due to the lack of formal records of Aboriginal women's experiences on Nappa Merrie, these accounts are essential to understanding their experiences in domestic work. The stories told of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women in this thesis are mostly from the oral and written histories of their descendants.

An important aspect of my study is the story of 'peaceful relations' between the Conricks and Aboriginal people on Nappa Merrie. This is especially significant given the notorious reputation of interactions between Aboriginal people and pastoralists in Queensland. In the nineteenth-century, Queensland was renowned for its violence against Aboriginal people through Governmental policies, policing bodies and the reprisals of white station

[21] E. McFarlane, *Land of Contrasts: Recollections* (Fortitude Valley: W.R. Smith & Paterson, 1976).
[22] Elizabeth Burchill, *Innamincka* (Melbourne: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960).
[23] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 64-66; Myrna Tonkinson, 'Sisterhood or Aboriginal Servitude? Black women and White women on the Australian frontier', *Aboriginal History* 12 (1988): 37-38; Jackie Huggins and Rita Huggins, *Auntie Rita* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005), 37-38.

owners/workers. Jonathan Richards' *The Secret War* is an extensive examination of the notorious Mounted Native Police of Queensland (often referred to as the 'Native Police'). The Native Police were armed units of Aboriginal men led by a non-Aboriginal Inspector, who would violently 'disperse' Aboriginal populations.[24] Richards emphasises the lack of 'reliable data' in regard to the deaths of Aboriginal people, as they often were intentionally unreported or the evidence destroyed. He states the Queensland frontier was 'based on secrecy, discretion and suspicion'. As a result, the private European records, both oral and written, are essential in filling in the 'absences and inaccuracies in the historical record'.[25] This highlights the importance of personal and unpublished archives, such as those of the Conrick family.

Although there is a wide range of literature on frontier conflict, I especially draw on the insights of Timothy Bottoms in *Conspiracy of Silence*, published in 2013. Bottoms provides a comprehensive, but not 'definitive', analysis of Queensland Aboriginal people's experiences. Bottoms uses a wide range of sources, including official records, newspaper articles, diaries, private letters, oral histories and local community archives.[26] Bottoms' methodology has influenced my own research in examining sources more localised to a community. His powerful conclusion strongly resonates with me:

> No Australian today is responsible for what happened on our colonial frontier. But we are responsible for not acknowledging what happened. If we do not, our

[24] Jonathan Richards, *The Secret War*, (St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2008), 43.
[25] Richards, *The Secret War*, 43, 51.
[26] Timothy Bottoms, *Conspiracy of Silence* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2013), xxiv, 9-11.

> integrity as a nation is flawed and we are shamed as a people for perpetuating a lie.[27]

This captures one of the core elements of this thesis – to examine my forebears' treatment of Aboriginal people on Nappa Merrie in order to uncover the veracity of stories of 'positive relations' passed down through the generations. I want to ensure this thesis does not contribute to, as Bottoms calls it, 'perpetuating a lie'.

In a paper looking at cross-cultural relations, Skye Krichauff states the 'colonial experience was diverse' and that although there are a great number of sources outlining the violent treatment of Aboriginal people, archives also contain those which suggest 'positive cross-cultural interactions'. These positive histories passed down by descendants are essential in creating a 'more nuanced analysis of Australians' historical consciousness'.[28] This highlights the importance of family stories like the Conricks. This thesis will establish whether there is evidence of positive cross-cultural relations on Nappa Merrie or if the family story contributes to a history of silence.

A distinctive feature of this thesis is that it is not just a study of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations on a pastoral property, it is also a family history. As such, careful navigation between subjectivity and objectivity is required from me, the researcher and author. In general, family history is a continuously growing area of interest; over the past few decades public interest in genealogical research has increased, with television programmes and websites dedicated to tracing one's family origins. In the past, family

[27] Bottoms, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 207.
[28] Skye Krichauff, 'A Boomerang, Porridge in the Pocket and Other Stories of "the Blacks' Camp"', *Journal of Australian Studies* 43, no.3 (2019): 299-300.

historians have been viewed as ‘sentimental amateurs’, ‘conservative’, ‘nostalgic’ or ‘misty-eyed and syrupy’, and their findings perceived as irrelevant by professional historians.[29] However, there has been a shift in the last few decades and academics are now recognising the benefits of adding family history research into the national historical narrative.[30]

I have been especially drawn to the insights of sociologist Ashley Barnwell. Her research focuses on how family histories can break or uphold ‘silences’ in Australian post-colonial history. The ‘intimate spaces’ in family history are where stories of relations (both violent and peaceful) between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have been passed down through the generations, despite absences in the national historical record.[31] Her book *Reckoning With the Past*, co-authored with Joseph Cummins, states the importance of family historiographies in uncovering the ‘interconnections between national and family history across generations’, and rewriting the ‘dark’ and ‘forgotten or silenced chapters’ in Australian colonial history.[32]

Tanya Evans emphasises the benefits of ‘combining the methodologies of academic, social and cultural history with those of family history’.[33] She argues ‘family history woven carefully with academic history has the potential to change the way in which Australians think and write about the past’.[34] Evans believes family history has

[29] Ashley Barnwell, ‘Keeping the Nation’s Secrets: “Colonial Storytelling” within Australian Families’, *Journal of Family History* 46, no.1 (2021): 48; Tanya Evans, ‘Secrets and Lies: the Radical Potential of Family History’, *History Workshop Journal* 71 (2011): 49-50.
[30] Barnwell, ‘Keeping the Nation’s Secrets’, 48; Evans, ‘Secrets and Lies’, 49.
[31] Barnwell, ‘Keeping the Nation’s Secrets’, 48.
[32] Ashley Barnwell and Joseph Cummins, *Reckoning with the Past* (London: Routledge, 2018), 3, 7.
[33] Evans, ‘Secrets and Lies’, 49.
[34] Evans, ‘Secrets and Lies’, 51-52.

‘revolutionized’ access to historical sources through internet sites, archival institutions, and private family records.[35] Katie Barclay and Nina Koefoed support this, stating privately held family collections help ‘diversify the archive’ and can open the discipline of history to other types of ‘research, perspectives, and narratives’.[36] One significant difference between these scholars and my research methodology is that I am involving my own family history in my work – I focus solely on the Conrick family, as a singular case study.

There is an overlap in the literature pertaining to family history and memory, as both are inextricably entwined. The research of one’s family requires the analysis of the memories passed through the generations. French historian Jacques Le Goff states memory is the ‘raw material of history’ and the ‘living source from which historians draw’.[37] Cultural historian Annette Kuhn believes memory work is the practice of unearthing and making public ‘untold stories’ in order to ‘create new understandings of both past and present’.[38] American philosopher Edward Casey defines social memory as ‘memory held in common by those who are affiliated either by kinship ties, by geographical proximity … or by engagement in a common project’, which can include memories of events they may not have themselves experienced but occurred to someone in the same associated groups. These memories are not always public.[39]

[35] Evans, ‘Secrets and Lies’, 49.
[36] Katie Barclay and Nina Koefoed, ‘Family, Memory, and Identity: An Introduction’, *Journal of Family History* 46, no.1 (2021): 9.
[37] Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), xi-xii.
[38] Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 1995), 9-10.
[39] Edward Casey, ‘Public Memory in Place and Time’, in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall Phillips (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 21-22.

Many scholars argue that French philosopher Maurice Halbwachs' work on 'collective memory' laid the foundation for literature on family memory.[40] Halbwachs states although the collective memories of a family resemble each other – he refers to the 'common familial' past which he understands as a 'community of interest and thoughts' – each individual family member will recall them differently, depending on individual relationships, distance from each other and their own historical consciousness.[41] This is important to bear in mind when examining Conrick descendants' stories, and how different family members recall certain events.

Skye Krichauff's work has also been influential on my research. Her book *Memory, Place and Aboriginal-Settler History* explores settler descendants' historical consciousness and sense of belonging in mid-north South Australia. Krichauff's study includes her own family history, and her approach to her own subjectivity assists my own methodology in this thesis. In addition, Krichauff found family stories are a 'powerful conduit' in which 'the intangible past is transferred through the generations'. These stories pass on attitudes, ways of thinking, sentiments, experiences, and perceptions which act as moral compasses and guides to the younger generations.[42] Krichauff argues descendants absorb information of family history through 'lived experience' and memory.[43] Her research examines the absence of Aboriginal people in descendants' stories, which contrasts with Conrick descendant stories, where Aboriginal people have always had some presence.

[40] Barclay and Koefoed, 'Family, Memory and Identity', 3.
[41] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 52-54.
[42] Skye Krichauff, *Memory, Place and Aboriginal-Settler History* (London: Anthem Press, 2017), 17, 98.
[43] Krichauf, *Memory, Place and Aboriginal-Settler History*, 17, 63.

In undertaking this work, I have been strongly motivated by ideals of reconciling with the past. In Australia, 'Reconciliation' is a highly political term and a process which has been debated over the decades. In the last fifty years non-Aboriginal Australians have had to face the truth of their country's violent past. When people think of Australian reconciliation with Aboriginal people, they think of national responses. For example, Penelope Edwards defines reconciliation as a 'public performance… expressing the desire for virtuous compact, unity and redemption under the sign of the nation'.[44] Heather Goodall defines it as people 'resolving past conflicts and restoring or building new positive relationships'.[45] Historians Henry Reynolds, Peter Read, and Bain Attwood all highlight the importance of 'sharing histories' in the reconciliation process. Reynolds argues how, without the 'convergence' of stories, the 'broader agenda of reconciliation' cannot proceed.[46] Although the scholars above suggest this on a more national scale, the sharing of historical narratives can happen at the lower levels. Barnwell and Cummins argue family history narratives are a 'vital mode of post colonial reckoning'. They define reckoning as a 'process, a measurement, a settling of accounts', which has been used in the same context as reconciliation.[47] I am further guided by Victoria Haskins. When meeting the descendants of the four young Aboriginal women who served her great-grandmother, she discovered they knew little about their relatives' experiences. Haskins felt as though she was the 'keeper' of their life stories and had a 'significant degree of control over their re-telling', all because she was a descendant of

[44] Penelope Edmonds, *Settler Colonialism and (Re)conciliation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1.
[45] Heather Goodall, 'Too early yet or not soon enough? Reflections on sharing histories as process', *Australian Historical Studies* 33 (2002): 8.
[46] Henry Reynolds, *Why Weren't We Told?* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books Australia, 1999), 171; Peter Read, *Belonging* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Bain Attwood, 'Unsettling Pasts: reconciliation and history in settler Australia', *Postcolonial Studies* 8, no.3 (2005): 247-249.
[47] Barnwell and Cummins, *Reckoning with the Past*, 2.

their white employer.[48] This thesis concludes with the sharing of histories and knowledge between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal descendants of John Conrick, starting the process of reconciling with our forebears' colonial past.

Sources

My research relies heavily on my family's extensive private archive, as well as newspaper articles, the oral histories of two Aboriginal Conrick descendants, and the books and research notes of local historian Helen Tolcher.

A significant portion of the unpublished primary sources drawn on in this thesis are held by members of the Conrick family.[49] Examples include: four versions of dictionaries recording the local languages written by John Conrick's sons and grandsons; personal letters to John and Ted Conrick; family and station photographs; handwritten papers of Neil Conrick; diaries of Ted Conrick; handwritten and detailed maps of the station including Aboriginal place names; and Aboriginal artefacts, including six boomerangs, a spear, two throwing sticks, a nulla-nulla and a shield.[50] A considerable portion of these sources are held by my branch of the family and have not been seen even by other Conrick descendants. My great-uncle James (Ted's youngest son) was quite secretive and hoarded his belongings, not allowing even his own siblings access. James'

[48] Haskins, *One Bright Spot*, 10-11, 36-37, 107-108.
[49] Unfortunately, border closures and social-distancing regulations due to COVID-19 have impacted the ability to visit relatives interstate who have their own archives, so this thesis relies only those accessible to me.
[50] The documentation of this archive is a continuing process, with new items frequently being uncovered. This thesis only uses a portion of this archive.

collection included letters, books, diaries, slides, photographs and several photo albums.

One unique part of the family archive is a series of handwritten papers written by my grandfather, Neil Conrick, who grew up on Nappa Merrie (before leaving for school aged 12) and worked there as a stockman from 1948 to 1954. These papers were most likely written in the 1980s and discuss events which occurred in his early childhood or stories he heard growing up. They provided detailed information about key Aboriginal men in Neil's life, and about a massacre of Aboriginal people on a neighbouring station. I analyse Neil's recollections in conjunction with other primary and scholarly sources.

A core source drawn on throughout the thesis is my family's personal photograph collection. There are more than one-thousand photographs relating to Nappa Merrie, with over one hundred of these including Aboriginal people. Thirty-two were professionally taken to be published as an advertisement for the station, but majority of the collection were taken by Conrick family members for private use. These photographs show Aboriginal people working on the station, Aboriginal cultural practices and key individuals who were important to various family members and who continue to resonate in Conrick descendants' social memory. There are also personal photographs and a video recording from my own family's trip to Nappa Merrie in 2002.

In addition to hundreds of loose photographs, there are several albums belonging to various Conrick family members – namely Ted, Nellie, and their children Betty, Neil and

James – in the family collection. While the albums of Nellie, Neil, James and Betty all conform to stereotypical family albums (i.e. by showing pictures of family, friends, school and holidays), around half the pages of Ted's thirty-nine page album are dedicated to Aboriginal people or their culture with only two pages dedicated to his family. Ted's album includes images of dwellings being built, tribal scarring, rock formations and graves.

As cultural historian Annette Kuhn makes clear, the placement of photographs within an album is of great significance; a photograph's 'currency is its context or contexts of reception', and part of that is where the photograph is kept, who has possessed or currently possesses it, and its purpose.[51] Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson make a similar observation, as they believe a photo's narrative can be 'generated by their arrangement'.[52] Antje Lübcke likens family albums to a 'personal memory storehouse', while Andrew Walker and Rosalind Moulton state they are an 'important device' in which people make 'lasting statements' about their lives – what they consider important, and how their lives are understood by others.[53] Kuhn believes it is the personal nature which gives these albums their true value, as the intended viewers were of a restricted group, so the photographs included had value to the owner.[54]

[51] Kuhn, *Family Secrets,* 8.
[52] Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson, 'Introduction: Oral History and Photography', in *Oral History and Photography* ed. Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 5.
[53] Antje Lübcke, 'Two New Hebrides Mission Photograph Albums: An Object-story of Story-objects', *The Journal of Pacific History* 47, no.2 (2012): 206; Andrew Walker and Rosalind Moulton, 'Photo Albums: Images of Time and Reflections of Self', *Qualitative Sociology* 12, no.2 (1989): 169.
[54] Martha Langford, *Suspended Conversations*, (Quebec City: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 5.

My family's archive includes a large collection of newspaper articles which refer to Nappa Merrie or the Conricks. Newspapers are valuable in understanding public perceptions of John Conrick, as well as which events were publicly recorded, or those omitted. From July 1923 to February 1924, John Conrick published seventeen autobiographical articles in Adelaide's *The News*, titled 'The Story of John Conrick, Pioneer, Told By Himself'. These detailed his 1872-1873 journey to Cooper Creek from Victoria, his establishment of Nappa Merrie Station and early exploration of the area. Aboriginal people feature prominently in these articles and are referred to consistently in all but the first article. John describes his first perceptions and interactions with the local population, as well as small insights into their culture.

I have also drawn information from a private Facebook group dedicated to 'The Conrick Family', which has 174 members, including both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal descendants. The purpose of this group is to 'facilitate the sharing of things such as family history, photos and stories'. My membership to this group enriches this thesis by allowing me access to photographs and stories posted by members, family genealogical material (family trees) and contact with Conrick descendants throughout Australia. Importantly, it was through this site that Aboriginal descendants of John Conrick have been introduced to the non-Aboriginal side, which has allowed communication and new connections to develop.

Overall, there are few Aboriginal perspectives of the cross-cultural experiences on Nappa Merrie. Fortunately, I was able to contact Yandruwandha descendants Gloria

Paterson and her son, Aaron. Gloria, born in 1942, was raised by her maternal grandmother, Nelly Parker (Timpika), who is the daughter of John Conrick and a Yandruwandha woman, Cora.[55] During Gloria's childhood, she listened to her 'Granny's' stories, and learnt the language. Aaron, her eldest son, born in 1964, was told old Yandruwandha bush stories by his great-grandfather Benny Kerwin (the last initiated Innamincka Yandruwandha man and Nelly Parker's husband). Over the past twenty months, Aaron and I have corresponded by telephone, email, Facebook Messenger and text. In April 2022 I met Aaron and Gloria in Rockhampton, Queensland and we recorded an oral history interview. My initial ambition had been to do a wide range of oral history interviews with both Conrick descendants and Aboriginal people, but due to border closures and social distancing regulations caused by COVID-19, this was not achievable for this thesis.

Throughout the thesis I refer to the work of local historian Helen Tolcher, who spent over forty years researching the European history of the Cooper Creek region, focussing primarily on Innamincka and the South Australian side of the border. She published five books, including a biography of John Conrick titled, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*. As a local historian (an amateur historian who focuses on the 'collective memory and cultural traditions of a local community'), Tolcher's work does not conform to the 'standards' expected of academic scholarship and, although she has conducted extensive research, there are limitations to her work, which are deemed symptomatic of

[55] Nelly is also spelt Nellie, but to avoid confusion with Nellie Conrick, I will refer to her as Nelly. Timpika is also spelt 'Timpicka', but I am using this spelling as it is used by her descendants.

local histories.[56] For example, as Ian Willis (an author and public historian) states, local historians usually focus on listing facts, which leads to a lack of commentary on arguments or analysis of source material and methodologies; Tolcher does not critique or deeply analyse her sources.[57] None of Tolcher's books include a bibliography and only one includes references, which are scarce and incomplete. Arnold Pilling, in his scathing review of Tolcher's *Drought or Deluge*, highlights how the lack of references means scholars are unable to see where her information is sourced, their accuracy, or if she is citing the work of another historian. This can make it hard to follow exactly where her argument is drawn from.[58] Additionally, Tolcher does not discuss taboo subjects such as massacres of Aboriginal people or sexual relationships between white men and Aboriginal women. Nevertheless, the books create a comprehensive base from which to begin an understanding of the local history.

Furthermore, thirty folders of Tolcher's notes are located at the South Australian Museum, which include nine transcripts of Tolcher's interviews between 1975 and 1984 with various people who have lived in the region.[59] These include those with three Conrick descendants, namely Joseph Conrick (John's youngest son) and his wife, Florence; my grandfather, Neil (John's grandson); and John Andrew Conrick (John's grandson). These folders also contain letters from Conrick descendants, photocopies of archival documents, newspaper articles and drafts of her work, enabling me to trace

[56] Ian Willis, 'Academic snobbery: local historians need more support', *The Conversation*, April 4, 2012, https://theconversation.com/academic-snobbery-local-historians-need-more-support-5710
[57] Willis, 'Academic snobbery'.
[58] Arnold Pilling, 'Australian local and regional histories as anthropological works', *Reviews in Anthropology* 18 (1991): 19-20.
[59] A member of staff and I discovered these notes, and they had not been formally catalogued by the museum.

where Tolcher sourced specific information and how she formulated her narrative. Importantly, they include information she had access to, but omitted from her books. My intention in this thesis is to fill in the gaps and build on Tolcher's work using photographs, written memoirs and oral histories she did not have access to.

Chapter One of this thesis gives a brief historical background of Nappa Merrie Station, its placement within the history of the 1860 Burke and Wills Expedition, and an outline of the tasks expected of Aboriginal station workers. Chapter Two discusses the Conrick family story of positive cross-cultural relations through examining the social memory of incidents of frontier violence, John's responses to a massacre on a neighbouring station and his paternalistic and conciliatory approach to the Aboriginal population on Nappa Merrie. Chapter Three explores the nature of both past and current Conrick descendant perceptions of the relationships their forebears had with the Aboriginal men they worked with. Through the written and oral histories of Conrick descendants, the stories of two Yandruwandha men, Geordie and Nappa Merrie Peter, are analysed. Chapter Four focuses on the stories of two Yandruwandha women who remain dominant in the stories and memories of current Conrick descendants, namely Cora (Nanpika) and her daughter with John Conrick, Nelly (Timpika). Through the discussion of these women's stories, the relationships between Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal men and women on Nappa Merrie are analysed. The fifth chapter delves into the relationships two generations of Conrick children had with the local people and their culture as they grew up on Country. Under the care of Aboriginal women, the children were educated and integrated into local traditions. The final chapter examines the legacies of the

Conrick family's residence on Nappa Merrie for the subsequent generations. I discuss my grandfather's legacy, and his connections to Nappa Merrie and how both have shaped current family memories. The chapter concludes with the new connections being made today, as both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal descendants come together to share stories and reconcile with the past.

CHAPTER ONE - The Background of Nappa Merrie Station

This chapter provides a brief historical background of Nappa Merrie Station, the pastoral run on Cooper Creek, which John Conrick occupied in 1873 and remained in the family until its sale in 1954. I discuss the station's foundation, its placement in the history of the Burke and Wills Expedition, and a general description of the working relationship with the local Aboriginal population, all of which provide context for the following chapters.

Nappa Merrie Station

Nappa Merrie is located in south-western Queensland, just above the meeting point of the South Australian, Queensland and New South Wales borders. Cooper Creek, although dubbed a 'creek' by Charles Sturt (the first white man to record its existence) in October 1845 due to its lack of flow when he visited, forms part of Australia's second-largest inland river drainage system.[1] Forming part of the 'Channel Country', its tributaries include the Barcoo, Thomson and Wilson Rivers, and it can flow up to 807 miles (1300 kilometres) in length, finishing at Lake Eyre. Australian Geographic author Mitch Reardon highlights how the Cooper could appear as a 'creek, a raging river or a dry ditch', depending on the rain from the catchment area.[2] There were times of severe drought followed by significant flooding throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Droughts killed thousands of cattle and bankrupted many stations; by the

[1] Originally named 'Cooper's Creek', but now known as Cooper Creek.
[2] Mitch Reardon, *The Australian Geographic book of Corner Country* (Terry Hills, NSW: Australian Geographic Pty Ltd, 1995), 93.

time of his retirement in 1922, John Conrick was the only original pioneer still in the area.[3]

John's original acquisition of land in 1873 was sixty-five square miles (105 square kilometres), which grew over the years as he took up more leases. He acquired the neighbouring station, Chastleton, in 1908, which he renamed Barrioolah (its Yandruwandha name) and included Goondabinna (John's original choice of land). This brought John's pastoral landholding to 2,275 square miles (5,892 square kilometres). By its sale in 1954, Nappa Merrie Station was around 2,833 square miles (7,337 square kilometres) and could carry up to 15,000 head of cattle and 40,000 sheep in a good season (it generally carried 6,000 cattle and 16,000 sheep), with around three-hundred horses.[4]

John's choice of the homestead's location was based on the advice he was given by his father, Patrick, when he left Victoria, namely 'do not stop until you get good and permanent water'.[5] Nappa Merrie proved to be an appropriate choice due to the consistent source of water produced by the Nappa Merrie Waterhole, which John described as being eighty yards (seventy-three metres) wide and fifty to sixty feet (eighteen metres) deep.[6] The Burkitt family, who owned Tinga Tingana Station to the south from 1875 to 1889, described the waterhole as 'a superb sheet of water', which

[3] Helen Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie* (Linden Park: Helen Tolcher, 1997), 131.
[4] Helen Tolcher, *Drought or Deluge* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1986), 254-255; 'Nappa Merrie Sold', *Queensland Country Life*, 16 September, 1954, 21; 'Nappa Merrie on the Cooper Has Big History', *The Barrier Miner*, 6 January, 1948, 5.
[5] 'Story of John Conrick, Pioneer, Told By Himself – No. 1', *The News*, 25 July, 1923, 5.
[6] 'Story of John Conrick, Pioneer, Told By Himself – No. XI.', *The News*, 22 September, 1923, 8.

was usually sixty foot (eighteen metres) deep and ‘has never been known, by Aborigines or whites to be dry’.[7]

In siting the homestead complex on the large sandhill overlooking the Nappa Merrie Waterhole, John Conrick was utilising the site of an often-used Aboriginal camp, which contained campfire ash and ‘discarded implements’.[8] By taking over a campsite which was clearly regularly used and erecting buildings on this site, John shows how he drew on local people’s knowledge and learned from them, while disregarding their occupation of the land. The height of the sandhill, being the tallest along the Cooper (one person stated it was over one-hundred feet or thirty meres high), means the homestead is one of the few in the area which never flooded.[9] While the position on the sandhill benefited John, his occupation of this site meant the local people did not have a camp protected from rising water in times of flood.

Figure 6 is a photograph taken in 1898 which shows the Nappa Merrie homestead sitting on top of a sandhill, with the outbuildings below, and garden and paddocks some distance away. This fits the ‘idealised station layout’ described by Ann McGrath.[10] Elizabeth Burchill, a nurse stationed at Innamincka in the early 1930s, states Nappa Merrie ‘had the reputation of being one of the most beautiful pastoral homes in the Inland’.[11] Author Barry Stone describes Nappa Merrie as a ‘‘model’ pastoral station’.[12]

[7] Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 93.
[8] Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 36-37.
[9] Elizabeth Burchill, *Innamincka* (Melbourne: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960), 88; Helen Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah* (Linden Park: Helen Tolcher, 2003), 62; Tolcher, *Drought or Deluge*, 217.
[10] Ann McGrath, ‘*Born in the Cattle*’ (Sydney: Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1987), 28-29.
[11] Burchill, *Innamincka,* 88.
[12] Barry Stone, *The Squatters* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2019), 89.

Figure 6: 'Nappa Merrie H.S. Cooper's Creek 1898' (located in 'Conrick History Box 1 – Clear', held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

The homestead, originally built out of 'mud bricks', but later made with stone eighteen inches (forty-five centimetres) thick, had six large rooms, a detached kitchen and large wide verandas.[13] In the middle of the photograph there is the store, stockmen's quarters and the kitchen. At the bottom, there are three Aboriginal dwellings which are away from the stockmen's quarters, but still close enough to the other outbuildings. The 'non-working' Aboriginal camp was on the other side of the waterhole.[14] When comparing the 1898 photograph to the one from 1903 (Figure 7), it is evident much of the homestead

[13] Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 87.
[14] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle*', 28-29.

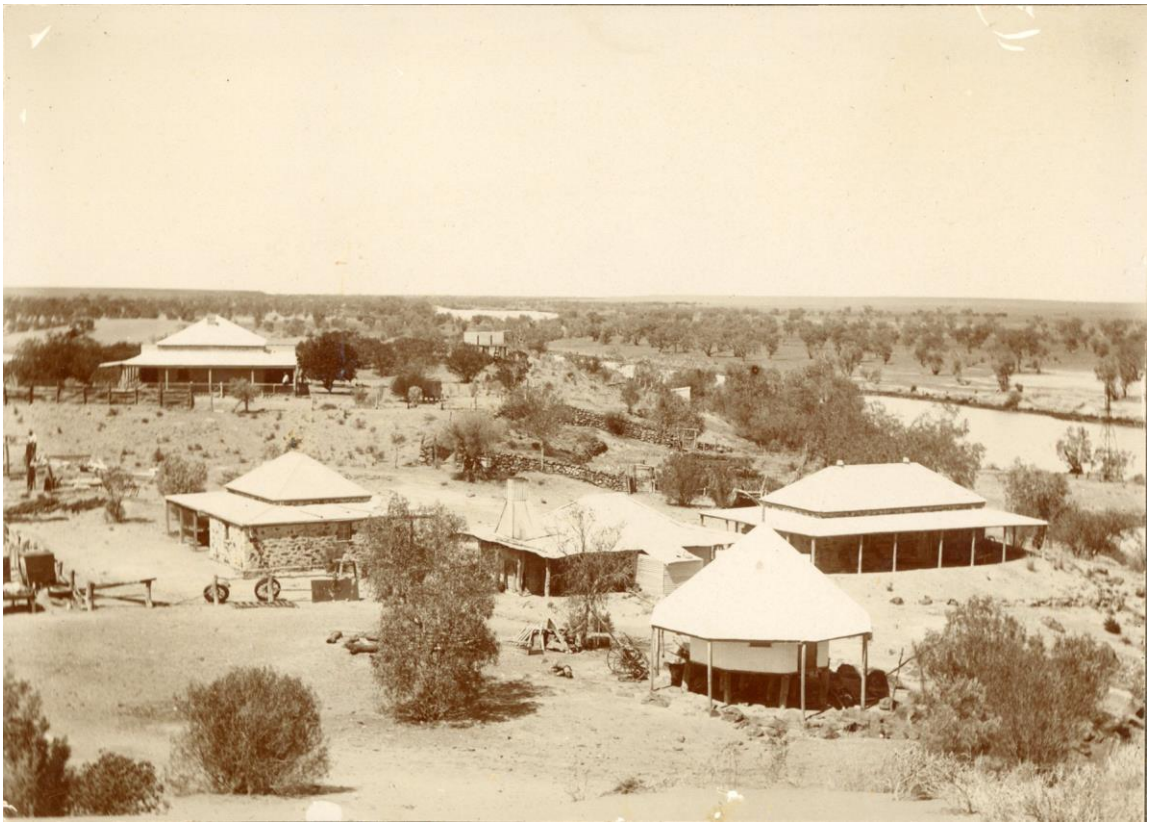

Figure 7: Nappa Merrie Homestead, 1903 (located in 'Landscape' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

complex remained the same. Although only taken five years apart, the most significant difference is that the Aboriginal dwellings near the outbuildings are no longer present. Unfortunately, there is no explanation in any historical documents as to why this may have been the case.

Over the years, John Conrick increased his holdings and placed his sons as managers on various properties. In 1921 he purchased Popiltah Station in New South Wales where he sent his eldest son, John Ware, to manage. In 1922, he sent Clive to manage Wallerberdina Station in South Australia. Ted took over as manager of Nappa Merrie in 1922 and remained on the station until its sale in 1954. John's youngest son, Joe, did not grow up on the station, but arrived in 1909, aged seventeen. When John Ware and

Clive left, he worked as head stockman at Nappa Merrie, residing at the Barrioolah outstation with his wife Florence until 1927.[15]

The Burke and Wills Expedition

The social memory of the Cooper Creek region cannot be discussed without mentioning the well-known Burke and Wills Expedition. This thesis will not endeavour to recount the broader history of this expedition but will focus on the key events which are prevalent in both Yandruwandha and Conrick descendants' social memory, and are relevant to the history of Nappa Merrie.

The Victorian Exploring Expedition left Melbourne on 20 August 1860, led by Robert O'Hara Burke, who aimed to be the first to cross the continent from south to north. The party reached Cooper Creek on 11 November, creating Depot XLV, now known as 'The Dig Tree'. Burke, with a party consisting of William John Wills, John King and Charles Gray, separated from the expedition and ventured north. When Burke, Wills and King (Gray having perished) returned to the depot on 21 April 1861, malnourished, exhausted and low on supplies, they discovered the remainder of the party who had been waiting for them had left earlier that day.[16] The local people, the Yandruwandha, who had watched the men from afar, were hospitable to the ailing explorers and gave them gifts of fish and native food. Burke responded with hostility and often shot at them.

[15] Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie,* 128-130.
[16] Tolcher, *Drought or Deluge*, 29; Tim Bonyhady, *Burke and Wills: From Melbourne to Myth* (Balmain, NSW: David Ell Pty Ltd., 1991), 60; William Wills, 'Wills's Diary from Cooper's Creek to Carpentaria', in A.W. Howitt, et al., 'Exploring Expedition from Victoria to the Gulf of Carpentaria, under the Command of Mr. Robert O'Hara Burke', *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 32 (1862): 460.

Burke's behaviour would have been considered disrespectful to the Yandruwandha; Aaron Paterson, a Yandruwandha descendant, finds it very surprising his people did not attack the explorers and, instead, continued to offer food and assistance.[17] This mistreatment proved fatal for Burke and Wills, who both perished due to malnutrition and exhaustion. There is no definite date of Burke and Wills' deaths, but Wills' last journal entry was on June 26, and it is believed they both passed in the following seven

Figure 8: The 'Dig Tree', Nappa Merrie Station. Aboriginal man sitting at foot of tree. C.1910 (located in 'Pastoral Homes Photos' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

[17] Aaron Paterson, 'Introduction: a Yandruwandha perspective', in *The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills: Forgotten Narratives*, ed. Ian Clark and Fred Cahir (Collingwood, Victoria: CSIRO Publishing, 2013): 14-17; Mary-Lou Considine, 'Secrets of the Dig Tree', *ECOS – Science of Sustainability*, 14 October, 2013, http://www.ecosmagazine.com/print/EC13234.htm.

days.[18] King, the sole survivor, was taken into the care of the Yandruwandha, who fed him, gave him shelter, and protected him from other tribes until he was found by the Victorian Relief Expedition, led by Alfred Howitt, on 15 September 1861.[19]

Dominance in Conrick Remembrance

The Burke and Wills Expedition is prominent in the stories of Conrick descendants and there are several reasons for this. The obvious explanation is the proximity of the key sites of the Expedition to Nappa Merrie. The trees where Burke and Wills died are on the South Australian side of the border, near Innamincka, but the 'Dig Tree' is located on Nappa Merrie, around three-and-a-half miles (six kilometres) from the homestead.[20]

John Conrick's rationale for stocking Cooper Creek started at the age of nine, when he watched Burke and Wills leave Melbourne in 1860, triggering a great interest in exploration and pioneering.[21] In his autobiographical newspaper articles, John reflects on how the story of Burke burning their camp and supplies whilst cooking a large fish intrigued him, as he believed the existence of large fish meant there must be a permanent water source, ideal for stockbreeding, 'I made my mind up that one day I should go to Queensland and see for myself'.[22]

[18] Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah*, 51.
[19] Alfred Howitt, 'Howitt's Diary', in A.W. Howitt, et al., 'Exploring Expedition from Victoria to the Gulf of Carpentaria, under the Command of Mr. Robert O'Hara Burke', *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 32 (1862): 450-451.
[20] It is now a reserve and heritage listed, under the care of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland. Today it is a tourist attraction with considerable visitation every year.
[21] 'City Visitor has Burke and Wills Tree as Neighbour', *The Courier-Mail*, April 11, 1940, 5; 'Story of John Conrick – No. 1'.
[22] 'Story of John Conrick – No. 1'.

Due to the Conricks' interest and the property's proximity to the key historical sites, they became experts on the Burke and Wills Expedition. Keith Thallon describes Ted as a 'local guardian for this living memorial to a poignant chapter of Australian exploration' and the 'best authority to consult' on the history.[23] Ted's knowledge was constantly sought after, with many letters in the family archive sent from authors and journalists requesting help for their research.[24] Additionally, the Conricks were involved in the preservation of the famous trees and the continuation of the local history. In 1937 the

Figure 9: The 'Dig Tree' cairn made by Ted Conrick (located in '2002 – Nappa Merrie' Sallis Family Album, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

[23] Keith Thallon, 'Return to Cooper's Creek: In the Tracks of Burke and Wills and Their Predecessors', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland* 8, no.2 (1967): 314.
[24] This includes Frank Clune and John McKellar.

Royal Geographic Society at Broken Hill contacted Ted to build a cairn next to the 'Dig Tree' in fear of the inscription on the tree degrading (Figure 9).[25] Conricks have also donated items from the explorers to museums. For example, John mentioned finding lead bullets, horseshoe nails and a sixpence, which he donated to the 'Adelaide Museum', while his grandson, Patrick Conrick, donated a pocketknife to the Burke Museum in Beechworth, Victoria.[26]

Prominence in Yandruwandha Remembrance

Yandruwandha people are still involved in the conservation and continuation of Burke and Wills history. Aaron Paterson is the most active, with contributions in books, such as Michael Cathcart's *Starvation in the Land of Plenty*, Sarah Murgatroyd's *The Dig Tree* and the introduction of *The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills*. Paterson shares stories passed down through his ancestors, hoping the Yandruwandha story of European-Aboriginal interaction can help trigger the sharing, understanding and appreciation of the different viewpoints of Australian contact history. He believes through a 'simple sit down and talk around the fire' there can be a 'collaboration of kindred spirit[s] from different walks of life'.[27]

[25] Thallon, 'Return to Cooper's Creek', 314; 'City Visitor has Burke and Wills Tree as Neighbour'.
[26] 'Story of John Conrick, Pioneer, Told by Himself – VII', *The News*, 20 August, 1923, 5; Anthony Bunn, 'Knife adds to Burke Collection', *The Border Mail*, 26 April, 2014, https://www.bordermail.com.au/story/2242314/knife-adds-to-burke-collection/?fbclid=IwAR320yxZdUsuj52GOmJnXeBYdIVg3nD7moQtoJCoUSHLdLCCf4q24pNkOjo.
[27] Paterson, 'Introduction: a Yandruwandha perspective', 15-16.

Aboriginal Station Workers

Before discussing the relationships between the Conricks and the Aboriginal population on Nappa Merrie, the role of Aboriginal station workers needs to be established. Nappa Merrie was a working pastoral station running cattle (1873-present), sheep (1892-1934) and horses (1873-1954). Throughout John Conrick and his sons' lifetimes, due to its location in an isolated region, there was a reliance on utilising the local Aboriginal population for labour. It seems John Conrick won the respect of the Yandruwandha people through his conciliatory approach; within months of his arrival in the district, he persuaded some of the men and boys to work for him.[28] Aboriginal people performed a range of jobs on stations and the men were usually employed in stockwork and cattle management. Their tasks included mustering, branding, tailing, yarding, droving, breaking horses, tracking, running messages, carting supplies and other transport.[29] Ted Conrick describes Aboriginal workers as 'trustworthy, capable stockmen'.[30]

The pastoral industry relied heavily on Aboriginal workers, and would not have succeeded without them. By the turn of the century, Aboriginal people were the main source of labour in the Cooper Creek region. Historian Dawn May states 'the cattle industry could not exist without Aboriginal labour', while Tolcher highlights how

[28] Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 35.
[29] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle*', 30-33.
[30] A.F. Tylee, 'Memories of Nappa Merrie', *The Pastoral Review and Grazier's Record*, 19 November, 1962, 1269.

Figure 10: Aboriginal Stockman on Nappa Merrie (located in 'E.G. (Ted) Conrick's Album' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

Aboriginal men made themselves 'indispensable' to station managers with their instincts with cattle and horses, 'intimate knowledge' of the Country and its varying seasons, their ability to locate water and their tracking of both men and cattle.[31] Alice Duncan-Kemp, who grew up on Mooraberrie Station, highlights the importance of Aboriginal stockmen's natural instincts and abilities, which were 'invaluable' to station owners and managers in mustering cattle and finding water.[32] She reflects the station community 'depended almost entirely' on the 'goodwill and judgement' of Aboriginal people.[33] However, Aboriginal workers rarely received any wage from the stations, and would

[31] Dawn May, *Aboriginal Labour and the Cattle Industry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 65; Tolcher, *Drought or Deluge*, 133.
[32] Alice Duncan-Kemp, *Our Sandhill Country* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1933),186-187.
[33] Alice Duncan-Kemp, *Our Channel Country* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1961), 134.

instead be paid with food, clothing, tobacco, medicine and sometimes housing.[34] Even if treated poorly by station managers, Aboriginal people were reluctant to leave their traditional lands.[35]

Conrick reminiscences do not focus on the specific details of everyday life on Nappa Merrie, such as the number of Aboriginal workers, the tasks they performed, or the rations/wages they received. Nevertheless, Joe Conrick recalls he had 'six or eight' white stockmen working for him, 'and then the blacks', whereas his brother Clive had '2 or 3 men and a black boy too'.[36] Instead, most of the everyday working life has been captured in photographs. This contrasts with the findings of Helen Ennis, a former

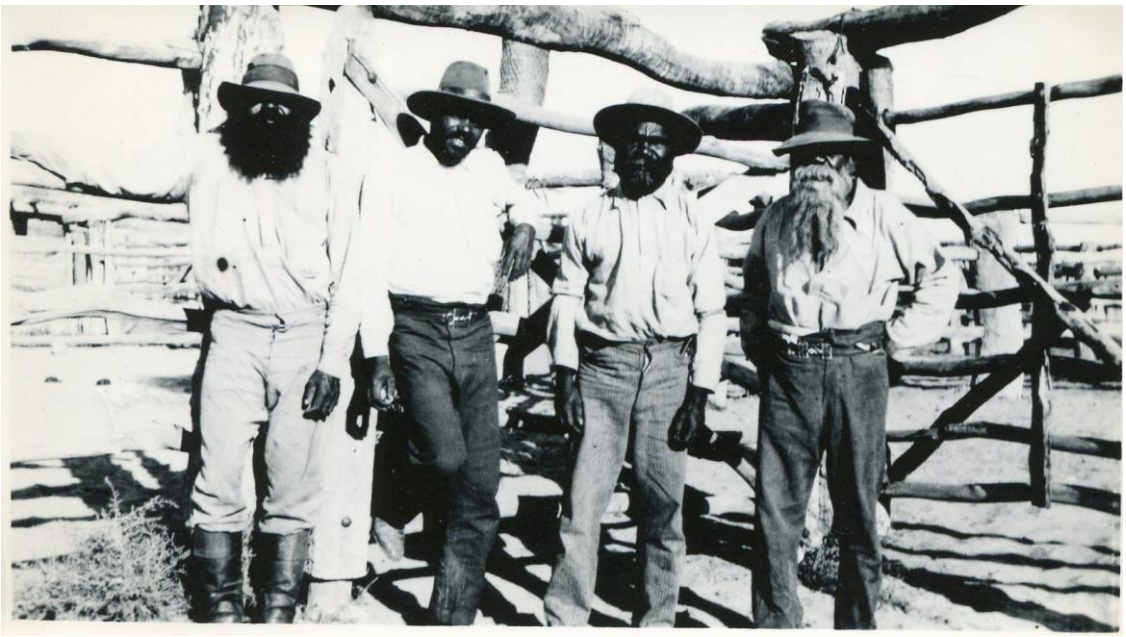

Figure 11: 'Flash Tommy, Bennie, Jimmy and Paddy' (located in 'Joe Conrick List Photos' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

[34] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 105; Henry Reynolds, *With the White People* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books Australia, 1990),169; Duncan-Kemp, *Our Sandhill Country*, 246.
[35] Robert Foster, 'Rations, coexistence, and the colonisation of Aboriginal labour in the South Australian pastoral industry, 1860-1911', *Aboriginal History Journal* 24 (2011): 19; Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1982), 124, 127-128.
[36] Transcript of Mr. and Mrs. Conrick's (believed to be Joseph and Florence Conrick) Interview with Helen Tolcher, located in Helen Tolcher's notes, held at South Australian Museum Archives.

curator of photography at the National Gallery of Australia, who states while Aboriginal people played a significant role in the development of the pastoral industry, images of them as workers are ‘relatively rare’.[37]

Along with cattle and horses, Nappa Merrie ran sheep from 1892-1934. On other stations in Australia ,Aboriginal men would work as shearers, but this was not seemingly the case on Nappa Merrie. Figure 12, titled ‘Shearing Board’, shows the Nappa Merrie shearing shed in action, taken in around 1911. Of note, none of the shearers are Aboriginal; there are three Aboriginal men in Figure 12, one is barefoot and sweeping,

Figure 12: ‘Shearing Board’ at Nappa Merrie, c.1911 (located in ‘Pastoral Homes Photos’ folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

[37] Helen Ennis, *Photography and Australia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 36.

while the other two are observing. This may reflect the clear designated roles of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers. However, this photograph was part of a professional series produced for the purpose of advertising the station in *The Pastoral Homes of Australia: New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia*, so the photograph was most likely staged.[38] This could be the reason Aboriginal shearers are not included, and it is possible that ordinarily Aboriginal men may have been amongst the shearers at Nappa Merrie.

Figure 13: 'Aboriginal Natives Woolpicking', Nappa Merrie, c.1911 (located in 'Pastoral Homes Photos' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

[38] This particular photograph was not included in the final published product.

Figure 14: Drying wool on Nappa Merrie (located in ‘E.G. (Ted) Conrick’s Album’ folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

Figure 15: ‘Nappa Merrie wool scour’ (located in ‘E.G. (Ted) Conrick’s Album’ folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

Another photo from the professional series taken in 1911 (Figure 13), 'Aboriginal Natives Woolpicking', shows five women sitting among large piles of wool clippings. Before a drying machine was installed, Aboriginal women would spread the wool on calico sheets to dry in the sun, and turn the wool.[39] Figures 14 and 15 show this drying process. Between thirty to ninety bales were produced at one time, highlighting how this was a labour-intensive task.[40]

Although the majority of Aboriginal stockmen were in their twenties and thirties, it was normal to see boys as young as five or ten out among the cattle.[41] It was common practice to take young Aboriginal children from the camps and train them to be horse or stockboys. Ann McGrath suggests Aboriginal parents knew their children were taken 'regardless of their consent', but family members could sometimes receive 'something in return' for voluntarily offering their children to station managers.[42] Dawn May highlights how those born on stations from birth watched and learned from their elders working among the stock.[43] Station owners believed the earlier these children were taught these skills and 'Europeanised', the more reliable and loyal they would become. May states most of these children were treated well by pastoralists.[44] There is no evidence in the available sources to suggest children were taken by force on Nappa Merrie.[45] The tasks

[39] Tolcher, *Drought or Deluge*, 89-90.
[40] Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 95, 100-103, 112.
[41] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 32.
[42] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 59.
[43] May, *Aboriginal Labour*, 96.
[44] Dawn May, *From Bush to Station* (Townsville: James Cook University, 1983), 68.
[45] Unfortunately, there is also little information in the Conrick archival records about the level of contact these children were able to maintain with their parents or whether they slept in the station complex or the nearby camp.

given to the children often related to stockwork, including driving packhorses, fetching water, and taking care of horses by hobbling, feeding and watering them.[46]

The first 'horseboy' for John Conrick was 'Jacky', later known as Nappa Merrie Jack, Nap Jack or Napilla Jack. Jack has been identified by Tolcher as 'the first Aboriginal child seen on the Cooper by John Conrick'.[47] He features in Figure 16, as the Aboriginal boy in the front left, sitting next to two other boys (named Larry and Sailor/Diamantina Boy). Figure 16 is the most well-known and circulated photograph of John Conrick, as it is on the front cover of Tolcher's *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, and features in her other books, *Seed of the Coolibah* and *Drought or Deluge*. This photograph was taken in

Figure 16: Messrs F. Fisher, H. Crozier, John Conrick and Gilbert, Aboriginal boys Jacky, Larry, Sailor, Adelaide.1878 (located in 'Mounted Photos/Cabinet Cards' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

[46] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 32; Duncan-Kemp, *Sandhill Country*, 55.
[47] Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah*, 61.

Adelaide in 1878 as celebration for John Conrick (standing, second man from right) completing his first successful droving trip to the Adelaide cattle markets. Accompanying him on this trip were three non-Aboriginal drovers, identified as F. Fisher, H. Crozier and Gilbert, and the three Aboriginal 'horseboys'.

Pastoral stations were predominantly male communities, especially in the more isolated regions, where there was a very small population of white women. This meant Aboriginal women played a dominant role in the 'domestic duties' of running the homestead.[48] Young girls were usually drawn from the camps to be trained as housemaids. Their duties would include scrubbing, sweeping, dusting and cleaning the house and veranda, household laundry, cooking meals, sewing, washing dishes, polishing and fetching water.[49] On other stations Aboriginal women did stock work, but this was not seemingly the case on Nappa Merrie.[50] The roles of Aboriginal women are discussed further in Chapter Four.

Over the eighty-one year occupancy of Nappa Merrie, the Conricks used the knowledge and labour of the local Aboriginal population to grow from a pioneering pastoral enterprise into a thriving cattle and sheep station of around 2833 square miles (7337 square kilometres). While the Burke and Wills Expedition occurred a decade before John Conrick reached Cooper Creek, its geographical connection to Nappa Merrie

[48] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 50; Reynolds, *With the White People*, 207-208; Beatrice Laufer, ''We Were Proper Horsemen, Us': Aboriginal Women – Workers of the Outback', *Studies in Western Australian* History 22 (2001): 44.
[49] Reynolds, *With the White People*, 207-208; McGrath, *Born in the Cattle'*, 50; Duncan-Kemp, *Our Sandhill Country*, 246.
[50] May, *Aboriginal Labour*, 51; McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 50; Laufer, ''We Were Proper Horsemen, Us'', 50.

impacted the interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people on the station and the expedition remains prominent in current Yandruwandha and Conrick family social memory. Scholars and local non-Aboriginal people emphasise the dependence of stations in isolated regions on their Aboriginal workers, and Aboriginal labour was essential in the everyday running of Nappa Merrie. Both men and women had a range of significant roles, such as stockwork, preparing wool and domestic duties. These everyday working relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people form the foundation of the family stories and social memory discussed in the following chapters

CHAPTER TWO - A Story of Positive Cross-Cultural Relations

A consistent element passed down through Conrick descendants' stories is the understanding that positive relations existed between the Conricks and the Aboriginal people of Nappa Merrie Station. In the midst of an area rife with conflict, John is portrayed as being conciliatory towards the local Cooper Creek population. John Conrick's obituary, published in *The Advertiser* on 11 January, 1926, states:

> he had little trouble with the aborigines, holding that their rights should be respected with regard to food and water, and those in the vicinity of Nappa Merrie soon learned that although swift retribution followed any depredations on their part there was what practically amounted to a reservation for them so long as they kept within bounds.[1]

This chapter will explore these claims, through several stories which have been remembered by descendants – namely an incident where John was surrounded by Aboriginal men and saved by his dogs, and a massacre which occurred in the sandhills of the neighbouring station. Additionally, there is no evidence of corporal punishment, or forced removals of Aboriginal people from Nappa Merrie in Conrick descendant oral histories, handwritten memoirs, and government archival documents.

A core source used in this chapter is a series of autobiographical newspaper articles published in Adelaide's newspaper, *The News,* from July 1923 to February 1924. Seventeen articles under the title 'The Story of John Conrick, Pioneer, Told by Himself'

[1] 'Pioneer and Squatter. Mr. John Conrick Dead', *The Advertiser,* 11 January, 1926, 14.

cover John's journey from Warrnambool to Cooper Creek, and his exploration of the region. It is worth noting that these articles were written fifty years after the events described occurred, and John was around seventy-one years old at the time of publishing.[2] These articles are the only written record of early events at Nappa Merrie, and most subsequent texts refer to these articles as a source.[3]

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STORY OF JOHN CONRICK, PIONEER

TOLD BY HIMSELF

No. 1

Unique adventures of famous Australian bushman begin with his early days in Victoria. He starts on overland journey to Queensland with cattle.

Figure 17: Newspaper excerpt – 'Story of John Conrick, Pioneer: Told By Himself No. 1', *The News*, 25 July, 1923, 5.

John's obituary in *The Pastoral Review* on 16 February 1926, boldly states 'at no time during his fifty odd years in the bush did he have much trouble with the natives'.[4] Tolcher supports this with the claim 'there was never any trouble between the Aborigines and the white man on Nappa Merrie.[5] John's grandson, John Andrew, recalls 'there was never any trouble even in the very early days', while Neil Conrick

[2] Helen Tolcher offers two possible explanations for the articles suddenly stopping; the first being *The News* editor had been editing the articles without John's permission. The other reason was his decline in health during the 1920s; Helen Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie* (Linden Park: Helen Tolcher, 1997), 129.
[3] It is believed John Conrick kept a diary, but so far Conrick descendants have not been able to locate it. Helen Tolcher refers to these journals in her books.
[4] 'John Conrick', *The Pastoral Review*, 16 February 1926, 127.
[5] Helen Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah* (Linden Park: Helen Tolcher, 2003), 76.

(John's grandson) suggests John never 'had any problems from the blacks around'.[6] The way the 'trouble' is measured in several of the stories, is whether or not Nappa Merrie cattle were killed. The depredation of cattle was a common feature in the frontier, and usually triggered violent reprisals against the Aboriginal population.[7] Neil further explains that his father, Ted, always said Aboriginal people would only harm the cattle of those Europeans who gave them 'a rough time'. Neil then declares 'but they didn't touch any of ours – never did'.[8] These statements contradict John Conrick, who affirms he experienced a 'little trouble' in the first few years, when his cattle were being speared.[9] John Andrew (John's grandson), when questioned by Tolcher about 'spearing or massacres', states he had never heard of any massacres occurring on Nappa Merrie, 'none whatsoever'. He recalls several occasions when single Aboriginal people were

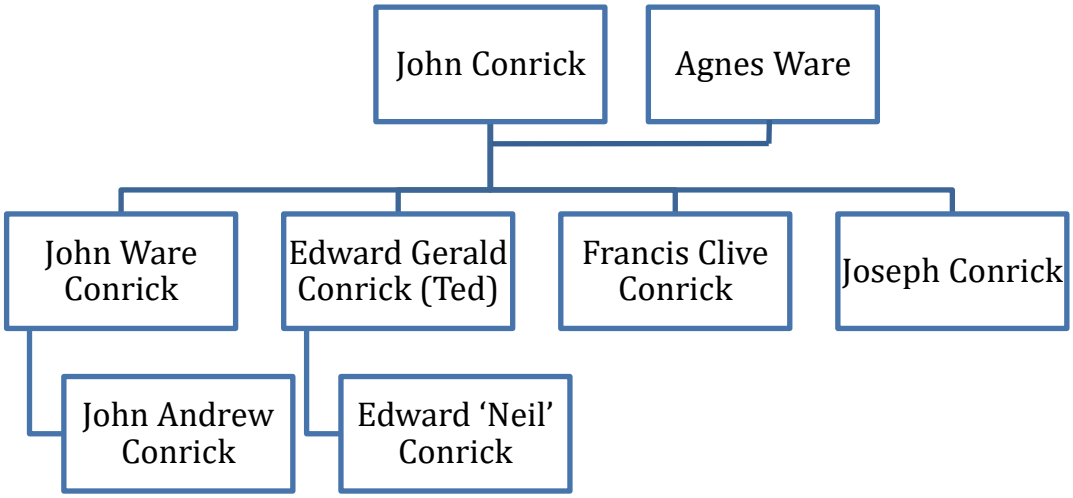

Figure 18: Family Tree 2 - showing John Andrew's and Neil's connection to John Conrick.

[6] Transcript of John Andrew Conrick's Interview with Helen Tolcher, 26 November, 1976, located in Helen Tolcher's notes, held at South Australian Museum Archives; Transcript of Neil Conrick's Interview with Helen Tolcher, 4 July 1984, located in Helen Tolcher's notes, held at South Australian Museum Archives.
[7] Ann McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle*' (Sydney: Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1987), 13.
[8] Neil Conrick Interview with Tolcher.
[9] 'Living in the Never-Never From '73 to Present Day', *The Barrier Miner*, 8 November, 1919, 6.

tracked by the police onto the station and were then ‘shot on the spot’, but ‘no massacres’.[10] However, there is no other written or oral record of these police incidents.

It is not only Conrick descendants who highlight John Conrick’s conciliatory relations with the local people at Nappa Merrie. Edith McFarlane, who lived in the area for over forty years, mentions how John Conrick ‘knew and treated well, all the natives around him’.[11] Author Keith Willey in *The Drovers* dedicates the majority of a chapter to John, titled ‘One of the ‘far-out’ men’. He sources his information from John’s newspaper articles and from conversations with John’s youngest son, Joe. At the conclusion of the chapter Willey states, ‘Conrick himself never fired a rifle at an Aborigine – in fact risked his life more than once to avoid doing so’.[12]

In contrast, John’s newspaper articles and stories told by Neil, indicate that while he never actually shot an Aboriginal person with intention to kill, he did use his rifle against them for intimidation purposes. Ted and John Andrew both tell of John’s policy of not allowing Aboriginal people within ‘boomerang range’ until they had discarded all their weapons. If they did not comply, John would fire a ‘warning shot’ over their heads.[13] John's account of this is more cryptic, as he simply states that non-compliance ‘meant action at once’.[14] Although this was claimed to be used for safety, Conrick used guns to instil fear and reinforce his access to essential natural resources.

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[10] John Andrew Conrick’s Interview with Tolcher
[11] E. McFarlane, *Land of Contrasts: Recollections* (Fortitude Valley: W.R. Smith & Paterson, 1976), 58-59, 12.
[12] Keith Willey, *The Drovers* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1982), 54.
[13] A.F. Tylee ‘Memories of Nappa Merrie’, *The Pastoral Review and Grazier’s Record*, 19 November, 1962, 1269; John Andrew Conrick Interview with Tolcher.
[14] ‘Story of John Conrick, Pioneer, Told by Himself –No. XIII’, *The News*, 15 October, 1923, 9.

Neil also mentions when non-local Aboriginal men – whom he referred to as 'trouble-makers' – came near Nappa Merrie, John would 'load his gun with saltpetre'.[15] My father, Neil's son-in-law, can confirm Neil told him this story many times. John Conrick would shoot salt bullets at unknown Aboriginal people on his property if they became aggressive, and he did this not with the intent of causing serious harm, but to ward them off.[16] Additionally, John had two massive dogs, who had a reputation among the local people for being ferocious, which he used for protection. This is further discussed below. The saltpetre and dogs suggest John's relations with Aboriginal were not universally peaceful as claimed, and that, at times, he used force and intimidation to assert his presence on Nappa Merrie.

Frontier Violence in far-South-West Queensland

As land became increasingly occupied by pastoralists from the 1860s, instances of frontier violence between Aboriginal people and Europeans grew, due to conflicts over limited natural resources. By 1880 the whole region was occupied by pastoralists.[17] The historical records contain evidence of the murders of two stockmen and a pastoralist by Aboriginal people, and subsequent reprisals in the years leading up to John Conrick's

[15] Neil Conrick Interview with Tolcher.
[16] Personal communication with Lynton Sallis.
[17]Helen Tolcher, *Drought or Deluge* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1986), 43; Mitch Reardon, *The Australian Geographic book of Corner Country* (Terry Hills, NSW: Australian Geographic Pty Ltd, 1995), 101.

arrival. Although there were many additional incidents in the wider area, I concentrate on the events referred in John Conrick's newspaper articles.

In June 1865, at what is now Thargomindah Station, pastoralist John Dowling was struck over the head and killed by his 'blackboy', and his body was found seven weeks later.[18] The number of Aboriginal people killed in the subsequent reprisals led by Dowling's brother, Vincent, is much debated. Historians Henry Reynolds and Jonathan Richards highlight how omissions and ambiguities in official sources mean specific details and numbers cannot be obtained, meaning the true number of frontier deaths will never been known.[19] The general consensus of both Aboriginal and European written and oral histories surrounding Dowling's death is that a party of white men slaughtered 300 Aboriginal people.[20] Although Timothy Bottoms suggests this number is most likely an exaggeration, he believes it was still a 'sizeable killing spree'.[21] After this incident, a Mounted Native Police of Queensland (Native Police) force was based at Thargomindah. The Native Police were armed units consisting of Aboriginal troopers under the command of a white Inspector, who were notorious for their violent actions

[18] 'The Murder of Mr. John Dowling', *The Wallaroo Times*, 9 September, 1865, 5; Mark Copland, Jonathan Richards and Andrew Walker, *One Hour More Daylight* (Toowoomba: The Social Justice Commission, Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba, 2006),77-78; Timothy Bottoms, *Conspiracy of Silence* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2013), 63-64.
[19] Henry Reynolds, *Forgotten War* (Sydney: New South Publishing, 2013), 103-104, 132; Jonathan Richards, *The Secret War* (St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2008), 4, 42-43, 51.
[20] Copland, Richards and Walker, *One Hour More Daylight*, 77-78; Hazel McKellar, *Matya-Mundu: A History of the Aboriginal People of South West Queensland* (Cunnamulla: Cunnamulla Australian Native Welfare Association, 1984), 57.
[21] Bottoms, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 64.

against Aboriginal populations.[22] They have been linked to the massacre and 'dispersal' of those who 'hindered white settlement'.[23]

In his initial exploration of the region, Conrick was told of the recent murders of three European men by Aboriginal people.[24] The first was Maloney, an eighteen-year-old stockman, who was beaten to death and speared after offending the local people. Conrick believes the offence was caused by the throwing of a sharpening stone, whereas Michael Costello and Mary Durack suggest he shot an Aboriginal man's dog (an offence which historian Pamela Watson compares to shooting a pastoralists' horse).[25] Although the death is recorded in non-Aboriginal accounts, it was never reported in the newspapers. A short time later, in May 1872, Richard Welford and another stockman were killed by an Aboriginal man on Welford's station, now known as 'Welford Downs'.[26] The responses to these events were similar, with pastoralists seeking out the Native Police stationed at Thargomindah to carry out reprisals. Due to both events occurring within a short period of time and in the same area, it is hard to determine which reprisal was connected to each murder. On both occasions, later accounts demonstrate how entire tribes were believed to have been slaughtered, with Tolcher describing it as an 'indiscriminate massacre of every Aborigine who could be

[22] Richards, *The Secret War*, 43.
[23] Kim Torney, 'Native Police', in *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, Oxford University Press, 2001, https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195515039.001.0001/acref-9780195515039-e-1056?rskey=EyMoUS&result=1.
[24] 'Story of John Conrick – Pioneer, Told By Himself – V', *The News,* 6 August, 1923, 10.
[25] Michael M.J. Costello, *To the Savage Land: The Life of John Costello* (Sydney: Dymocks, 1930), 27-28; Bottoms, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 65; Mary Durack, *Kings in Grass Castles* (London: Corgie Books, 1973), 150; Pamela Watson, *Frontier Lands and Pioneer Legends: How Pastoralists Gained Karuwali Land* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 59-60.
[26] 'Early Days of the Barcoo', *The Capricornian,* 5 November, 1921, 46; 'The Early Days', *The Gympie Times*, 12 June, 1909, 5; 'Story of John Conrick – V'.

found in the area'.[27] In later years, skeletons could be found as sandhills shifted and mass graves were exposed.[28] A Native Police detachment was patrolling when John Conrick entered the area in 1873, searching for the 'murderers' of Maloney and Welford. He saw 'traces of the blacks' dispersed due to Dowling's murder. John immediately understood why the Aboriginal people had been so fearful and ran away whenever they saw white men.[29]

'Surrounded in night'

Due to these events, when John Conrick entered the Cooper Creek region, he was apprehensive and fearful of being attacked by 'wild blacks'. John describes one instance in 1873 or 1874 where he was stranded on one side of the flooded Cooper without food or weapons, with an Aboriginal camp close by. Any attempt to alert his station workers to his whereabouts would have attracted the attention of the locals. John believed he would starve or be killed, so, through fear, he taught himself how to swim.[30] John also prevented Aboriginal people coming close to the camp, as he had heard stories of pastoralists murdered and their stations burnt down. He had previously reprimanded his European hutkeeper, Normand, for allowing Aboriginal people to come too close to the hut, which caused Normand to leave. Now, completely alone, John found himself in a very vulnerable position.[31]

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[27] Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 17.
[28] Durack, *Grass Castles*, 154-155; McFarlane, *Land of Contrasts*, 16.
[29] 'Story of John Conrick – V'; 'Story of John Conrick, Told By Himself – No. VIII', *The News*, 8 September, 1923, 9.
[30] 'Story of John Conrick, Pioneer, Told by Himself – No. X', *The News*, 17 September, 1923, 9.
[31] 'Story of John Conrick – No. VIII'; 'Story of John Conrick – No. X'.

Figure 19: 'First hut built by John Conrick on the Cooper at Goondahbinna. Pulled down & re erected at Barrioolah' (located in 'Joe Conrick List Photos' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

One story in John's newspaper reminiscences, 'Surrounded in night', signals a major turning point in his relationship with the local population. John describes how he spent two months alone at Goondabinna, near the current outstation of Barioolah (Figure 19 shows this original hut, which was later re-erected at Barioolah), when one night around two-hundred Aboriginal men surrounded his hut as he slept. John later learned they were planning to attack him when he left the hut to milk his cows at first light.[32] Henry Reynolds explains how it was common for Aboriginal people to watch and learn the daily routines of pastoralists in order to find the best opening for attack. This usually occurred after a pastoralist had established himself in the area through building huts

[32] 'Story of John Conrick – No. X'.

and stockyards, and showing no sign of leaving, such as John Conrick had.[33] Fortunately for John, his two staghounds, who were sleeping at the entrance to the hut, confronted the attackers. The dogs latched onto one man, causing the others to flee. John assumed his dogs were reacting to dingoes – a frequent occurrence – and called them off with a whistle. It was when he heard human yelling that he picked up his rifle, having slept with his pistols in his belt, and cautiously left the hut.[34]

According to John, he made the decision to 'save' the life of his 'would-be murderer', as he knew the young man was only doing the bidding of the Elders. John ensured the young man understood he had no intention of killing him and indicated he could crawl to a nearby abandoned camp for safety. John later explains how his actions created goodwill among the local Aboriginal population and after this night he 'never again had trouble with the blacks'. Although others in the area had ongoing issues with the depredation of cattle, none 'interfered with [him] in the slightest degree', and within three years he could stand between two fighting tribes and diffuse any hostilities.[35] In Tolcher's words, 'most white settlers would have shot the man without compunction, as an act of self-defence', and what she calls his 'merciful dealing', earnt him great respect amongst the local population.[36] John states most men would have been 'justified' to retaliate as a form of 'self-protection'.[37]

[33] Reynolds, *Forgotten War*, 87.
[34] 'Story of John Conrick – No. X'.
[35] 'Story of John Conrick – No. X'.
[36] Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah*, 61.
[37] 'Story of John Conrick – No. X'.

John and his dogs' reputation after this incident spread over a considerable distance. In 1875, John travelled down Strzelecki Creek with the aim of opening the stock route from South-West Queensland to Adelaide through Port Augusta. On this journey, near Blanchewater, (over two-hundred miles from Cooper Creek) when approaching a soakage near an Aboriginal camp, John and his party were confronted by a group of men who objected to the pastoralists' access to their water. John used his guns to intimidate the men, letting them know he would access the water regardless of their permission. They recognised John as the man with the 'sulky' or 'terrible' dogs and ceased hostilities. According to John, the news spread down the 'mulga wires' (a term used for news passed between Aboriginal tribes over long distances in the outback). This is interesting, as John is not being recognised for his 'merciful' act, but due to his dangerous dogs. In this situation, John believes his dogs' reputation saved his life.[38] John boasts how these dogs would not 'allow a blackfellow to come near the place'. They soon learnt the difference between a 'fully clothed' and a 'naked' Aboriginal person, attacking the latter without hesitation.[39] He emphasises the importance of guard dogs with the statement 'if you are asleep your revolver is asleep, but not so your dogs, which always smell danger'.[40] It was for this reason that most pastoralists used dogs to guard themselves from Aboriginal attacks at night.[41]John highlights how Aboriginal people would never kill a dog due to their 'superstitious beliefs', and would often treat dogs better than their 'picaninnies' (children).[42] These comments suggest John's

[38] 'Story of John Conrick –No. X'; 'Story of John Conrick – No. XIII'.
[39] 'Story of John Conrick – No. X'; 'Story of John Conrick – No. VIII'.
[40] 'Story of John Conrick – No. X'.
[41] Richards, *The Secret War*, 203.
[42] 'Story of John Conrick – No. X'.

relations with the local people were not always peaceful and positive, as there were obvious underlying tensions. Although he earned the local people's respect, it does appear John initially maintained 'peace' through force and intimidation.

Figure 20 shows a Yandruwandha man, Danbidleli (also known as Jimmy Mariner) standing next to a dog. My grandfather, Neil, wrote in pencil underneath this photo in Sarah Murgatroyd's *The Dig Tree* (Figure 21) how this man was known to him as 'Uncle Daniel', who was six feet and six inches tall, while the dog next to him is an 'Irish wolfhound cross from Grandad', meaning this dog was a descendant of one of John

Figure 20: 'Danbidleli, also known as Jim Mariner', c.1920 (located at State Library of South Australia, part of 'Innamincka Collection', B32222/70).

Conrick's original dogs.[43] The size of this dog in the photograph gives some indication of the enormity of John Conrick's staghounds, and how intimidating they would have been.

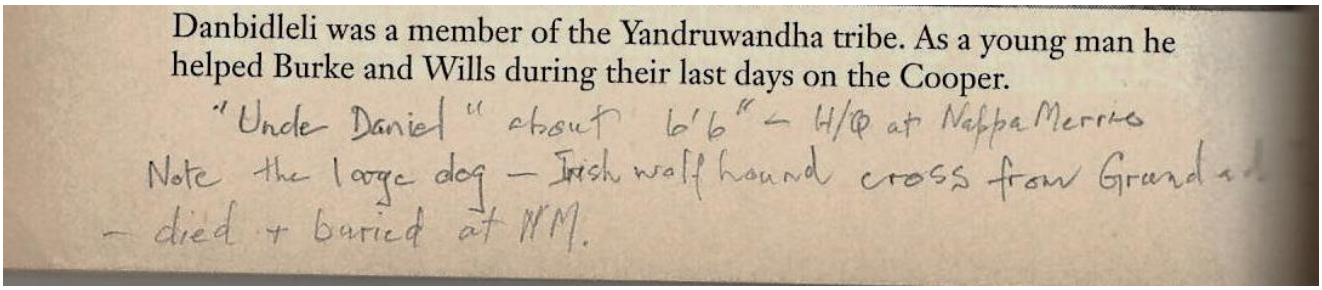
Danbidleli was a member of the Yandruwandha tribe. As a young man he helped Burke and Wills during their last days on the Cooper.
"Uncle Daniel" about 6'6" ← H/Q at Nappa Merrie
Note the large dog – Irish wolf hound cross from Grand
– died + buried at NM.

Figure 21: Edward Neil Conrick's handwritten note in Sarah Murgatryod's *The Dig Tree* (original held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

Interestingly, although this story of 'merciful dealing' is indicative of the Conrick story of positive relations, it is the memory of the dogs which has passed down through the generations. John Andrew Conrick (John's grandson) was told on one occasion, when a couple of Aboriginal men got 'obstreperous', or 'bit too close', John set the dogs on the 'leaders', calling the dogs off when the men ran away. John Andrew reinforces there was no more trouble after this and 'the dogs were very much respected'.[44] Furthermore, John's obituary in *The Pastoral Review* emphasises how his lack of troubles with Aboriginal people on Nappa Merrie was 'principally due to his staghounds'.[45] I have my own memories of this story. Around fifteen years ago, during an early morning car ride to sports training I remember my mother pointing out an Irish Wolfhound, and telling me how John Conrick, her great-grandfather, took two dogs very similar into the outback for

[43] Handwritten note of Edward Neil Conrick in Sarah Murgatroyd's *The Dig Tree,* original held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).
[44] John Andrew Conrick Interview with Helen Tolcher.
[45] 'John Conrick', *The Pastoral Review*.

protection, and the local people were intimidated by their size. My father also recalls Neil would make comments about the big dogs John used to protect himself and to intimidate and assert dominance over Aboriginal people. The other aspects of the story are never mentioned.[46] Interestingly, the dogs' names are not included, despite their importance in Conrick folklore.

Figure 22: 'Kangaroo' dog fighting a kangaroo (located in 'Nellie Conrick Album' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

The family memory of John's dogs is significant, as it highlights how the local Aboriginal population were subdued by his 'bravery', supposed cleverness, giant dogs and physical strength. During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the current Conrick descendants are coming to terms with their forebears' role in the colonisation process and the impact this had on the Aboriginal population. Historians Ashley Barnwell and Joseph Cummins discuss how current descendants are having to 'grapple with the inheritance of colonial memories in a climate where the meaning of such memories has begun to change, or to be contested'.[47] One explanation of why the dogs are

[46] Personal communication with Lynton Sallis.
[47] Ashley Barnwell and Joseph Cummins, *Reckoning with the Past* (London: Routledge, 2018), 9.

remembered while the rest of the story is forgotten may be due to the reasons John needed these large dogs for protection – he was invading the Aboriginal people's land and occupying it by force and intimidation. This is a confronting admission for those who hold pride in their ancestor's accomplishments. The dogs appearing in descendant's stories was not problematic throughout most of the twentieth century, which is why it has been passed on as it has. However, in general non-Aboriginal people are now more aware of the impacts of colonisation and are more sensitive and empathetic to the past experiences of Aboriginal people than non-Aboriginal people throughout the twentieth century. The fact John did not retaliate to this attack may have been viewed more positively in previous generations, but not so much in the current cultural climate. Another explanation could simply be that in white society, dogs are more memorable than Aboriginal people, and subsequent Conrick generations were more interested in the dogs.

Massacre in the sandhills of Barioolah

Another story passed down to John's grandson, Neil, concerns the massacre of around one-hundred Aboriginal people by the Native Police on Chastleton (later known as Barioolah) Station, which neighboured Nappa Merrie to the east.[48] Chastleton Station was owned at this time by John Bligh Nutting and R. Doyle. Nutting was a police

[48] Originally, this land had been settled by John Conrick, but was purchased before he could stake his legal claim.

magistrate of Queensland and a retired Police Inspector from a ‘dynasty’ of non-Aboriginal Native Police officers.[49]

Neil Conrick mentions this massacre in both his 1984 interview with Helen Tolcher and his handwritten notes from a similar time.[50] According to Neil, Nutting had called for the Native Police, who were under the command of Sub-Inspector Cheeke, in response to the spearing of cattle. This police group were said to have committed reprisals in two

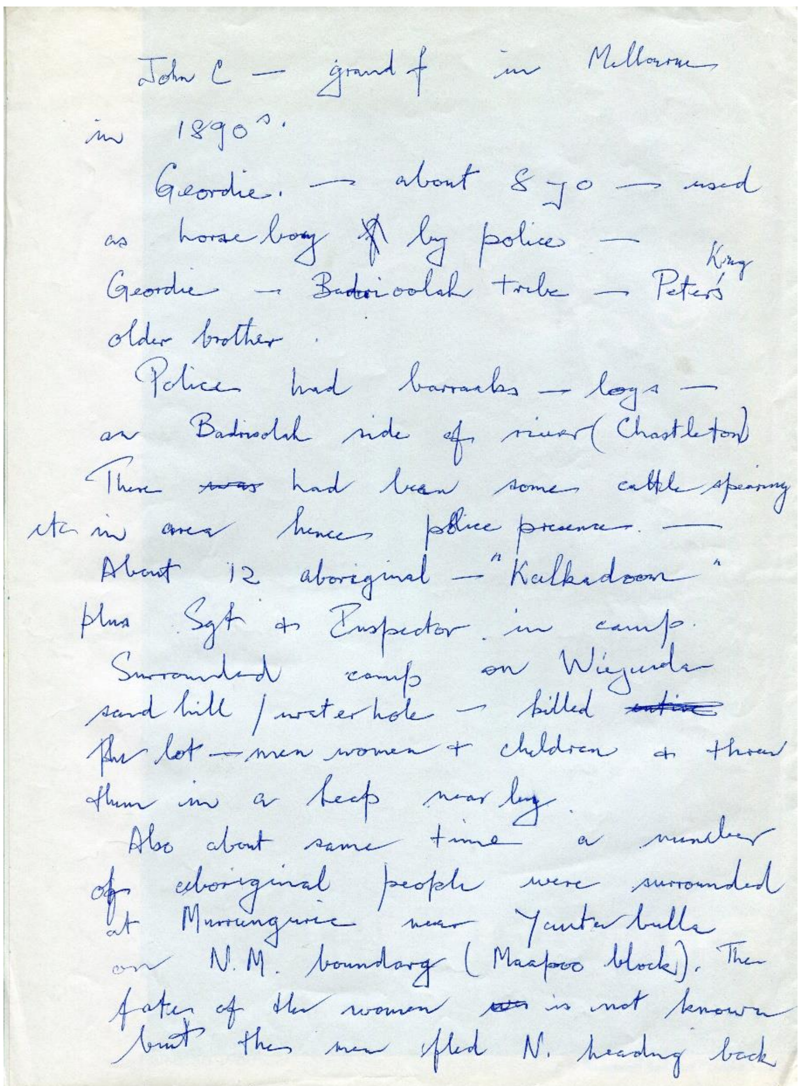
John C — grand f in Melbourne
in 1890s.
Geordie. — about 8 yo — used
as horse boy by police —
King Geordie — Badrioolah tribe — Peter's
older brother.
Police had barracks — logs —
on Badrioolah side of river (Chastleton)
There ~~was~~ had been some cattle spearing
etc in area hence police presence. —
About 12 aboriginal — "Kalkadoon"
plus Sgt + Inspector in camp.
Surrounded camp on Wiyunda
sand hill / waterhole — killed ~~entire~~
the lot — men women + children + threw
them in a heap near by.
Also about same time a number
of aboriginal people were surrounded
at Murrungunie near Yantabulla
on N.M. boundary (Maspoo block). The
fate of the women is not known
but the men fled N. heading back

Figure 23: Page 1 of handwritten notes of Edward Neil Conrick, c.1980s (located in ‘Conrick Documents Post-1940’ folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

[49] Richards, *The Secret War*, 86, 117-118.
[50] Handwritten notes of Edward Neil Conrick, c.1980s. Located in ‘Conrick Documents Post-1940’ folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick); Neil Conrick Interview with Tolcher.

locations, namely a waterhole at the edge of the sandhills south-west of the Chastleton Station homestead and (later) on the boundary of Chastleton and Nappa Merrie.[51] When visiting Nappa Merrie in 2002, my parents recall Neil identifying this sandhill and would not let anyone near it.[52] Neil's handwritten notes state the Native Police 'came in and massacred a whole tribe' at the waterhole, with men, women and children killed and carelessly discarded in a pile, while those who attempted to flee were pursued and shot. Only one young man managed to escape, with a bullet in his foot, as he ran to the Nappa Merrie homestead. This survivor remained 'protected' at Nappa Merrie for the rest of his life as a gardener, until his death in the 1930s.[53] Joe Conrick recalls seeing the bullet scar on an 'old fellow' who was the only survivor of a native police shooting. He mentions there were many who were shot, but this man was the only one who survived. Joe's account supports Neil's, as he likewise states Aboriginal people were shot for no reason at Barrioolah, which at the time was a property of 'Doyle and Nutting'.[54] Additionally, Patrick Conrick, John's grandson, wrote a series of notes to Tolcher, mentioning 'the Police Inspector … who took it upon himself to wipe out the Aboriginal people'.[55] Interestingly, although Tolcher had access to this information, she does not mention this survivor in any of her publications.

Neil is inaccurate with the timing of the massacre, as he claims the event occurred in the 1890s, but the evidence discussed suggests the massacre occurred in 1877. A

[51] Handwritten notes of Edward Neil Conrick.
[52] Personal communication with Lynton and Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).
[53] Handwritten notes of Edward Neil Conrick; Neil Conrick Interview with Tolcher.
[54] Transcript of Mr. and Mrs. Conrick's (believed to be Joseph and Florence Conrick) Interview with Helen Tolcher, located in Helen Tolcher's notes, held at South Australian Museum Archives.
[55] Letter from Patrick Conrick to Helen Tolcher, no date, located in Helen Tolcher's notes, held at South Australian Museum Archives.

newspaper article in August 1877 confirms the presence of Inspector Cheeke, who was in charge of the Native Police detachment at Thargomindah, on Cooper Creek.[56] Nevertheless, Patrick Conrick mentions how Neil 'know[s] a fair lot of these facts' and directs Tolcher to Neil for further comments regarding police violence.[57] In both accounts Neil describes a Yandruwandha named Geordie, (who later worked closely with the Conricks) who was a child at the time and worked as a 'horseboy' for the Native Police stationed at Chastleton Station. However, it is likely Neil has confused the name with another Yandruwandha boy, as the accompanying information he provides is not consistent with other sources.[58] This does add some doubt to the reliability of Neil's account. The events occurred around fifty years before Neil was born, and over a hundred years before he wrote the notes or spoke to Tolcher. He did not experience these events firsthand and would only have heard this story through others.

Besides Tolcher, the only other scholar to formally acknowledge and discuss this massacre is Timothy Bottoms. Bottoms makes a small error in his work, referring to Chastleton and Barrioolah as separate stations (both spelt incorrectly), and places 'Massacre Sandhill' on Nappa Merrie rather than Barioolah or Chastleton.[59] He sources his information from Tolcher's books. This is important, as Tolcher sources her information from Neil, which means all references to the massacre stem from Neil's

[56] 'Cooper's Creek', *The Brisbane Courier*, 4 August 1877, 7.
[57] Letter from Patrick Conrick to Helen Tolcher.
[58] Most likely the 'horseboy' was Nappa Merrie Jack, the first Aboriginal child John found on the Cooper, and used as his 'horseboy'. His age fits with being 8 years old at the time, whereas Geordie was supposedly born around this time. Neil also states Geordie was King Peter's older brother, which is not true, as Geordie was tribally married to Peter's sister. However, as his brother-in-law, this could, in some respects, make Geordie 'Peter's older brother', according to Aboriginal customs.
[59] Bottoms, *Conspiracy of Silence*, xv.

accounts. Furthermore, in *Seed of the Coolibah*, Tolcher states 'accounts of what happened during [the Native Police] presence there have been passed down through the Conrick family … with a consistency of detail which implies accuracy', which suggests she heard similar information from other Conrick descendants.[60]

A photograph in the family archive also displays oblique references to the frontier era. In 2019, I found an old photo album belonging to Ted Conrick stored in an old luggage case. I opened the brown suede cover held together with old string and slowly flipped through the pages, seeing photos which I had never seen before. I am unsure why this photograph stood out to me. On a page with photographs of tribal scarring, body paint, and an Aboriginal dwelling being built, is a picture of an elderly Aboriginal man with a long beard, wearing loose fitting western clothing (Figure 24). Written on the back in red pencil is 'an old Nappa Merrie native now dead was shot in leg in early days by native police and was always lame from effects. Photo by JW. Conrick' (Figure 25). Unfortunately, this was written sometime after the photo was taken, so it is difficult to date the photograph. However, Neil states the man died in the 1930s, so the photograph would have been taken before then.[61] This photograph adds credibility to Neil's story, as this appears to be the sole survivor he wrote about.

[60] Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah*, 132.
[61] Neil Conrick Interview with Tolcher.

Figure 24: ‘An old Nappa Merrie native’ (located in ‘E.G. (Ted) Conrick’s Album’ folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

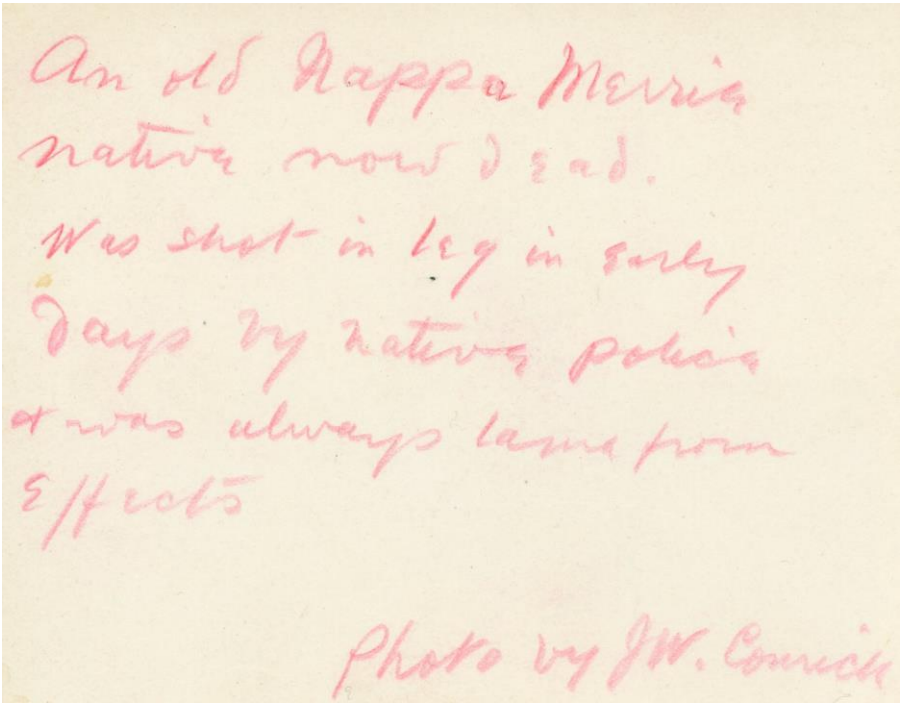

Figure 25: Handwritten description on back of Figure 24 (located in ‘E.G. (Ted) Conrick’s Album’ folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

There is no record of why Ted placed this picture in his album and his album does not conform to what is expected of a family album. The pictures capturing Aboriginal culture are held in the same album as a photo of my grandfather grumpily standing next to his brothers; a photo of Ted's wife, Nellie, as a nurse, and a photo of his brother, Joe, in his light horseman uniform. Some scholars believe the lack of captions accompanying photos could suggest the album was intended for personal use and was constructed with the presumption it would always be viewed with the owner present. There would have been a 'verbal narrative' to accompany the album, most likely told by Ted, which would have told the 'story' behind the images, and the purposes for their inclusion.[62]

Figure 26: Page 33 of Ted Conrick's photograph album (located in 'E.G. (Ted) Conrick's Album' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

[62] Andrew Walker and Rosalind Moulton, 'Photo Albums: Images of Time and Reflections of Self', *Qualitative Sociology* 12, no.2 (1989): 164-165; Antje Lübcke, 'Two New Hebrides Mission Photograph Albums: An Object-story of Story-objects', *The Journal of Pacific History* 47, no.2 (2012): 188-189, 200.

Unfortunately, this means a lot of information has been lost, as Ted and his children have passed away. It is likely Ted and his siblings knew the name of the man in Figure 24, so this information has now disappeared.

The Chastleton/Barrioolah massacre is believed to have occurred in May 1877, while John was away in Melbourne. According to Neil's account, when John returned, he was angry and pursued the Inspector to Brisbane, threatening to shoot him in the street. John's protest resulted with the police being permanently 'withdrawn' from the area and Nutting, one of the managers of Chastleton Station, was forced to 'give up' his lease.[63] Tolcher, on the other hand, suggests the removal of the police was due to 'representations' made by an 'engaged and distressed' John to Sub-Inspector Cheeke's superiors.[64] Bottoms believes this was done in the form of a letter, but does not elaborate or provide a reference for this.[65] Because of the location of the massacre it is possible those killed were among those with whom Conrick had developed a relationship in the early days. Tolcher mentions that due to John's strong relationship with the 'river people' he would not have allowed the Native Police onto Nappa Merrie.[66] Furthermore, John in his newspaper articles mentions briefly how one of his early Aboriginal guides, Yarrie, was shot by Native Police by 'terrible mistake', and how he was away in Victoria at the time.[67] An interesting outcome of this event is that when

[63] Handwritten notes of Edward Neil Conrick.
[64] Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie,* 63-64.
[65] Bottoms, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 70.
[66] Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 64.
[67] 'Story of John Conrick, Pioneer, Told By Himself – No. 15', *The News,* 5 December, 1923, 11.

Nutting was removed from the area, John Conrick was appointed as a Commissioner of the Peace and Magistrate of the territory in 1878, at the age of twenty-six.[68]

I was first told of this massacre in 2017 by my Aunt Cherise, Neil's youngest daughter. She remembered a newspaper article from the late 1800s she had read with a title similar to 'mad Irishman held up Brisbane'.[69] Cherise explained a massacre occurred on the neighbouring station to Nappa Merrie while John was away. When John returned, he was enraged and rode two days straight to Brisbane. He walked down the street, a rifle under each arm, threatening to shoot those responsible. Cherise mentioned from this time on, Queensland Police were not allowed to enter Nappa Merrie without permission.[70] Patrick Conrick supports this statement in his notes, mentioning how John would not allow 'the police inspector' onto Nappa Merrie.[71] Ann McGrath suggests this was a common occurrence, as station managers did not like police entering stations and 'interfering with their Aborigines' without permission.[72] Cherise had also been told the story of the massacre by her father, but recalls there being some minor discrepancies between Neil's account and the article, but most of the information was the same.[73]

The Conricks were not the only ones who recorded this massacre. Descendants of the neighbouring tribe, the Kullilla, recall the shooting of one-hundred people next to a big

[68] 'Government Gazette', *The Queensland Times*, 25 July, 1878, 4.
[69] Cherise has since been unable to relocate this article.
[70] Personal communication with Cherise Conrick 2017.
[71] Letter from Patrick Conrick to Helen Tolcher.
[72] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 100.
[73] Over the past four years I have searched through newspapers, online archives, my family archives and Tolcher's notes, but have been unable to locate this article.

sandhill at Barioolah, and the subsequent massacre at a waterhole.[74] A Wangkumara man, Cecil 'Ngaka' Ebsworth states his people suffered in 1877 'at the hands of the Mounted Native Police' at Chastleton Station, close to his birthplace.[75] Ebsworth's account confirms Neil Conrick's story of events in terms of the massacre, but there is no mention of John Conrick's reaction to it. In contrast, Yandruwandha man Aaron Paterson states he was told by his great-uncle, Jack Guttie, how his 'old people' (men, women and children) were 'shot at' at Barioolah.[76] Edith McFarlane, who lived in the region for over forty years, was told of a 'roundup' south of Nappa Merrie where Aboriginal people were 'herded up and shot' at around the time John Conrick arrived in the region. In 1926, she met an old man, who was the sole survivor of this massacre and was taken in and cared for by John. She describes him as a 'very faithful old man. Very faithful to Mr. Conrick'. However, she suggests the 'old man' was rescued by John as a child, after he was found hiding in a bush.[77] This deviates slightly from the stories told by the Conricks, but there does not appear to be any record of other massacres occurring in the sandhills near Nappa Merrie, suggesting McFarlane may have met the man in Figure 24. A 2002 Department for Environment and Heritage report on the 'Heritage of the Birdsville and Strzelecki Tracks' mentions an 'Oontoo massacre on Nappa Merrie'. The authors of the report, Lyn Leader-Elliott and Iris Iwanicki, state it is 'unlikely' John Conrick had any involvement as 'while firm in his dealings with

[74] McKellar, *Matya-Mundu*, 57.
[75] There is a Native Title dispute currently in the Federal Court as to whether Nappa Merrie and Barioolah are Yandruwandha or Wangkumara Country. It is not my place to intercede, so I have included statements of both people's version of events; David Huggonson, 'Cecil 'Ngaka' Ebsworth: Wangkumara Man of Corner Country', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland* 14, no.3 (1990): 113.
[76] Aaron Paterson, interviewed by Madeleine Sallis, in Rockhampton, Queensland, 29 April, 2022.
[77] Transcript of Edith McFarlane's interview with Trish Fitzsimmons, 17 May, 2002, Braided Channels Research Collection, https://ausnc.org.au/corpora/braided-channels/braided-channels-of-history-recording-transcript-82-raw; McFarlane, *Land of Contrasts*, 16.

Aborigines, [he] had no record of violence'. They attribute the massacre to the Queensland Native Police acting without Conrick's knowledge.[78] These accounts support the Conrick descendants' recollections of this massacre to an extent, as they mention John's aversion to violence against Aboriginal people and confirm there was a significant massacre/dispersal in the area.

The Letter

There is one significant element missing from Conrick descendants' stories; around twenty-one months before the massacre, a letter was sent to the Colonial Secretary of Brisbane in August 1875, asking for police protection to deal with Aboriginal 'depredations' of livestock. It was common for pastoralists in South-West Queensland and far South-West Queensland during the 1860s and 1870s to respond to cattle spearing by writing to government authorities seeking police intervention.[79] All nine signatories of this letter, including John Conrick, are residents of Cooper Creek, who were petitioning for 'a body of police' to be stationed at Durham Downs Station, north of Nappa Merrie.[80] However, the letter does not specify if they were requesting for European police or Native Police. There is also some ambiguity regarding the date of the letter.

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[78] Lyn Leader-Elliott, Iris Iwanicki and Austral Archaeology Pty Ltd, *Heritage of the Birdsville and Strzelecki Tracks: Part of the Far North & Far West Region (Region 13)* (Adelaide: South Australian Department for Environment and Heritage, 2002), 47.
[79] Copland, Richards and Walker, *One Hour More Daylight*, 75; McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle*',14.
[80] Photocopy of Letter to Colonial Secretary of Brisbane from residents of Cooper Creek, c. October 1875, in Helen Tolcher's notes. Held at South Australian Museum. (Appendix 1); I have been unable to find the letter in the Queensland State Archives. The references given by Tolcher come back with files which are completely irrelevant. When given a copy of the letter, the archivists were still unable to locate the original.

Tolcher refers to this letter twice in *Seed of the Coolibah*; confusingly, in both the main text and the notes section, she dates it as 1875, and then later as 1876.[81] Although it is hard to decipher the exact date of the letter, two handwritten notes list dates in December 1875, which is when it was most likely received by the Colonial Secretary's department. This would suggest the letter was written in the months preceding this. Interestingly, Tolcher implies the massacre at Chastleton in 1877 was possibly a consequence of this letter.[82] This seems unlikely, as the massacre occurred around twenty-one months after the letter was written, which is a long time for a police response. Of note, the letter states the police Sub-Inspector Dunne had not visited the area in over twelve months, while it was Inspector Cheeke who participated in the massacre in 1877. This further indicates the letter and the police response at Chastleton may not be connected. Furthermore, the Secretary has written a note on the letter dated 9 March 1876, stating the situation had been dealt with as a new station has since been established north of Thargomindah. This suggests this letter did not cause the Native Police to be deployed in May 1877, as they believed the issue had been dealt with over a year before. This too discredits Tolcher's argument that the Chastleton/Barioolah massacre could have occurred as a result of the letter.

Also in need of correction is how the writing of this letter has been attributed to John Conrick. Although it was filed by the Colonial Secretary as being written by 'John Conrick and Others, Nappamerrie', and his signature is the first, the writing is not

[81] Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah*, 65, 132.
[82] Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah*, 65, 132; Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 63-64.

John's.[83] Nevertheless, the decipherable signatories – George Ware, Frank Doveton, Willie Ware, John Wilson, Alec McKay and Thomas Dargin – all have some connection to Conrick, with most working either with or under him. This suggests, although John Conrick may not have personally written this letter, he would have had a lot of influence as he was, himself, a 'victim' of the depredations. Interestingly, the signatures of Chastleton's managers, Nutting and Doyle are not present, despite cattle being killed on their station. However, one signatory lists his residence as 'Chastleton'.

Regardless of the expected outcome of this request, it contradicts John Conrick's later claims of no 'trouble' with Aboriginal people after the 'Surrounded in Night' incident discussed earlier. It is unlikely Conrick would have supported this letter, unless his own cattle were being affected. Conrick descendants emphasise Nappa Merrie cattle were never killed, and this letter is not referred to in any family stories. It is unknown if this is a purposeful omission, or John may not have told anyone of this letter, so knowledge of its existence may not have been passed down through to the younger generations. There could be several reasons for this, including John may have simply forgotten about it, as it was in the early years of establishing the station, or the absence is due to the letter's contradiction of John Conrick's 'peaceful' public persona. The implications of connecting John to a massacre of Aboriginal people could create awkwardness for descendants which they may wish to avoid, suggesting the potential of intentional

[83] This was done through comparing the handwriting to two letters written by John Conrick to George Ware in 1880 and 1882; Personal letter from John Conrick to George Ware, 9 June, 1880, located in 'Conrick Documents Pre-1940' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick); Personal letter from John Conrick to George Ware, 2 May, 1882, located in 'Conrick Documents Pre-1940' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).

omission. Neil offers an alternative explanation, as he emphasises the cattle spearing in the area was not done by the local people, but 'outside blacks'.[84] Tolcher specifies how John never 'lost a beast' to the spears of the 'river people', suggesting he possibly lost cattle to another group of Aboriginal people, who he did not have an established relationship with.[85] Hence, the depredation of Conrick cattle does not necessarily reflect on his peaceful interactions with the local Aboriginal population, as they were not the ones killing his cattle. Another prospect is that this letter had no connection to the 1877 massacre but was in response to another event, which is discussed in more detail below.

Maracoota

There is additional story of violence on Chastleton Station, as told by William Oliffe (a white stockman who worked for Nutting and Doyle) in a newspaper article of Oliffe's memoirs published in 1935. Oliffe details his involvement in a Native Police skirmish led by Sub-Inspector Dunne against an 'Aboriginal outlaw' called Maracoota in 1875 and a band of forty warriors who had been killing cattle and pastoralists in the region for ten years.[86] According to Oliffe, when Maracoota was killed, the remaining Aboriginal warriors surrendered to the police, and were told 'white men had no quarrel with them' so they were free to go, as long as they never killed cattle or pastoralists again. Oliffe

[84] Neil Conrick Interview with Tolcher.
[85] Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 64.
[86] 'Native Outlaw Meets His Doom', *The Adelaide Chronicle*, 23 May 1935, 13.

believes this made an impact as he concludes boldly how ‘never again did the Cooper’s Creek tribe murder white settlers or spear cattle in a spirit of wanton destruction’.[87]

There are several elements of Oliffe’s story which need further examination. As historian Timothy Bottoms points out, Native Police were not known for ‘leniency or restraint’ and Oliffe is vague about how many men were killed in this skirmish.[88] Interestingly, although Oliffe claims Maracoota held a ‘reign of terror’ over Cooper Creek for ten years, he is not mentioned in any pastoralists’ publicly published personal accounts, governmental records or newspaper articles, and there are no recorded deaths attributed to Marracoota. This is unusual, as it would be expected for a large group of aggressive Aboriginal men to be reported, especially if pastoralists believed their lives and cattle were at risk. It is, however, within the realms of possibility that the letter written by the pastoralists, including John Conrick, seeking police assistance at the end of 1875 was in response to the depredation of cattle by Marracoota. Furthermore, this may be the group of non-local Aboriginal people spearing cattle, which Neil Conrick refers to above.[89]

After the 1877 massacre it appears there was little conflict between pastoralists and Aboriginal people in the area. In May 1882, Alfred Walker, the manager of Innamincka and Chastleton Stations (now under the ownership of William Campbell), and eight other manager/owners wrote a letter to the South Australian Police Commissioner’s

[87] ‘Native Outlaw Meets His Doom’.
[88] Bottoms, *Conspiracy of Silence*, 70.
[89] Neil Conrick Interview with Tolcher.

Office, requesting the foundation of a police station at Innamincka, as the nearest station was nearly three-hundred miles (482 kilometres) away. John Conrick was the only person to sign both the 1875 and 1882 letters. Unlike the letter written in 1875, there is no mention of Aboriginal people. Instead, the reasons behind this request are 'sly grog' selling, and other minor offences.[90] This indicates there were no longer any issues with Aboriginal people spearing cattle or threatening pastoralists. The variation in reasons given for the need for a police station suggests, in the seven years between the letters, the relationship between white men and Aboriginal people became more 'peaceful'. Tolcher mentions how the station managers usually let petty crimes be dealt with by Elders, and the main interaction between Innamincka Police and the Aboriginal population was in regard to rations, medical care and protection from exploitation.[91] This supports the claims of pastoralist descendants of peaceful, working relations between Aboriginal people and their forebears. However, it may reflect the rapidly declining Aboriginal population in the area, due to introduced European diseases, such as influenza, pulmonary disease, venereal diseases, and 'spiritual malaise'. Alfred Walker reported around three-hundred Aboriginal people when he arrived in 1882, but by 1887 the number was around thirty or forty. Tolcher states only 'equally small camps' remained of the large populations found by the 'pioneers' on Nappa Merrie Station and at Barioolah.[92] Unfortunately, Tolcher does not explain where she sourced this information.

[90] Letter from Alfred Walker and others to South Australian Police Commissioner's Office, 15 May 1882, held at State Records of South Australia, GRG 5/2 638/1882.
[91] Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah*, 91.
[92] Tolcher, *Drought or Deluge*, 150.

Protection of 'his' Aboriginal people

John Conrick's obituary in *The Advertiser* reflects on John's treatment of Aboriginal people, stating he believed Aboriginal people's

> rights should be respected with regard to food and water, and those in the vicinity of Nappa Merrie soon learned that although swift retribution followed any depredations on their part, there was what practically amounted to a reservation for them.[93]

This conciliatory approach has been a consistent element in Conrick descendant memories. John's daughter-in-law, Florence (Joe's wife), describes John as a 'kindhearted' man who 'always saw the [Aboriginal people] got what they should have'.[94] Factors which strengthen the claim regarding the Conricks' story of peaceful relationships, include no evidence of corporal punishment, strong working relationships with both Aboriginal men and women, an absence of requests for the removal of Aboriginal people from the station, and no Aboriginal children from Nappa Merrie Station being taken by the government.

It is difficult to find documents in the Queensland State Archives relating to the Conricks of Nappa Merrie. There are reports to the Queensland Protector of Aborigines which mention surrounding stations, such as Nocundra, Nockatunga, Durham Downs Station, and Oontoo (a township established on resumed Nappa Merrie land on the South Australian and Queensland borders), but no mention of the Conrick family or Nappa

[93] 'Pioneer and Squatter: Mr. John Conrick Dead'.
[94] Mr. and Mrs. Conrick's Interview with Tolcher.

Merrie. In 1903, the traveling Protector of Aborigines, Harold Meston, crossed the border into South Australia to visit Innamincka, yet Nappa Merrie and John Conrick were still not mentioned. This could suggest there was nothing worth reporting on Nappa Merrie regarding treatment of the Aboriginal people or it could support the Conrick family story regarding no police being allowed on the station after the incident in 1877. Dawn May similarly found few official records involving Aboriginal people working on Queensland pastoral stations prior to 1897.[95]

Tolcher emphasises how John 'kept a sternly paternal eye on the Parlpamadramadra remaining on Nappa Merrie', (the Parlpamadramadra are a sub-language group of the Yandruwandha located at Nappa Merrie).[96] He fed and clothed those who worked for him and the aged and sick, despite not receiving any ration support from the Queensland Government. John, at one point, attempted to improve the housing for the Aboriginal people, by building 'neat little huts', but these were 'firmly rejected' in preference of their traditional dwellings.[97] A 1937 *Courier-Mail* article titled 'He Was Not So Ignorant' discusses the declining number of Aboriginal people at Cooper Creek due to introduced diseases. The author, Randolph Bedford, states 'the Cooper blacks died by scores, despite the care and nursing they had at Nappa Merrie and other Cooper stations'.[98] Tolcher mentions how the Conricks would 'quarantine' the Aboriginal

[95] Dawn May, *From Bush to Station* (Townsville: James Cook University, 1983), 3.
[96] Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah*, 76.
[97] Tolcher, *Drought or Deluge*, 137-138; Tolcher *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 79.
[98] Randolph Bedford, 'He Was Not So Ignorant', *The Courier-Mail*, 20 August, 1937, 20.

population when influenza outbreaks would occur, not allowing off-station Aboriginal people to enter.[99]

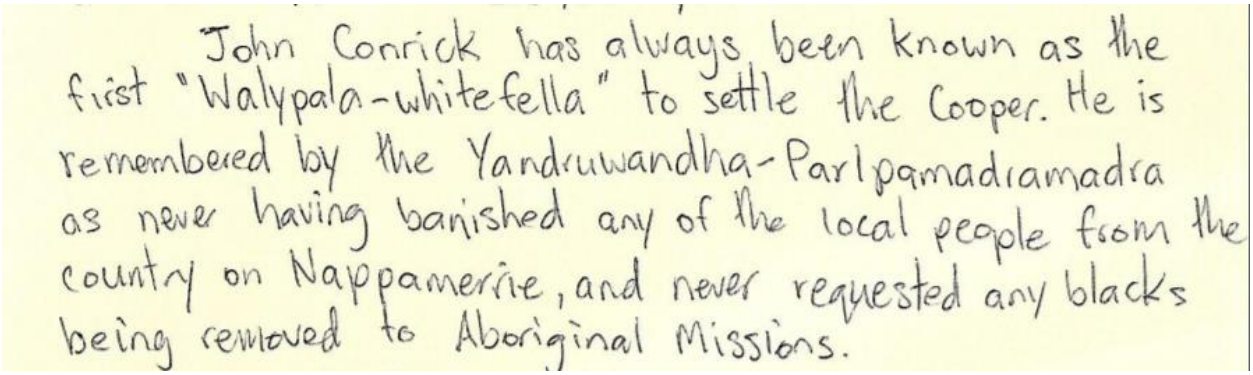

John Conrick has always been known as the first "Walypala-whitefella" to settle the Cooper. He is remembered by the Yandruwandha-Parlpamadramadra as never having banished any of the local people from the country on Nappamerrie, and never requested any blacks being removed to Aboriginal Missions.

Figure 27: Excerpt from handwritten note by Aaron and Gloria Paterson to Ken Conrick, 2015, in front page of Helen Tolcher's *Seed of the Coolibah* (original held by Ken Conrick).

A handwritten note by Aaron and Gloria Paterson in the front of a copy of Tolcher's *Seed of the Coolibah* which was given to a Conrick descendant, William Kenneth Conrick (henceforth referred to as 'Ken'), in 2015 (Figure 27), states how John 'is remembered by the Yandruwandha-Parlpamadramadra as never having banished any of the local people from the Country on Nappamerrie, and never requested any blacks being removed to missions'.[100] Due to this, Tolcher believes the Aboriginal people on Nappa Merrie were 'fortunate' in comparison to others in the area.[101] Governmental records pertaining to the removal of Aboriginal people in the Cooper Creek region support this claim. The removal of people from their traditional lands to missions or reserves by white pastoralists was a common process across Queensland. In fact, many used the threat of removal in order to control the Aboriginal population. Between

[99] Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah*, 137.
[100] Handwritten note by Aaron and Gloria Paterson to Ken Conrick, 2015, in front page of Helen Tolcher's *Seed of the Coolibah*, original held by of Ken Conrick.
[101] Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah*, 149.

1859 and 1972, two-hundred-and-sixty Aboriginal people were recorded as being removed from far-South-West Queensland, but the actual number of unrecorded removals is expected to be higher.[102]

The main peak of removals in the Cooper Creek area was in the early 1900s. The region suffered severe droughts in the 1890s and 1900s, which had a crippling effect on the pastoral industry, with many stations struggling to survive.[103] The deplorable conditions in far south-west Queensland were so severe that the Protector of Aborigines, Archibald Meston, investigated the need to open a reservation called 'Whitula'. A report labelled 'The Western Aboriginals' states, although Aboriginal workers on stations were fed sufficiently, those who were still relying on traditional hunting and gathering methods struggled. The report suggests supplying rations was too costly and created logistical issues, so the answer was mass removal. It declares 'station after station' was requesting assistance, with many sending 'repeated applications' to have Aboriginal people removed.[104]

In October 1901, a letter was sent from the Border Customs Office at Oontoo to the Protector of Aborigines regarding the deplorable conditions of Aboriginal people due to the devastating drought.[105] John Conrick is mentioned, explaining there was only 'a gin and two boys' on Nappa Merrie, as John 'could not afford to keep' all the men. This led

[102] Copland, Richards and Walker, *One Hour More Daylight*, 98, 101, 108.
[103] Copland, Richards and Walker, *One Hour More Daylight*, 121-122.
[104] 'The Western Aboriginals', letter from Archibald Meston to W.H. Ryder, Principal Under Secretary, located at Queensland State Archives, PR3504426, 17982, 15120/01.
[105] The first page of the letter has been written over several times, so this page is unreadable, and even the date of authorship cannot be seen. The month mentioned was determined by the date of government responses.

to some of the Aboriginal people leaving the stations and travelling to Oontoo, where they had access to some rations. The author of the letter is asking for rations to be supplied, as he does not have enough to support the population. The response from both the Protector (Meston) and the Home Secretary, was to recommend the removal of the Aboriginal people.[106] Furthermore, a January 1902 report advised against 'feeding any blacks' as this could discourage them from having to work for food and for all non-working Aboriginal people to be moved to reserves on the east coast of Queensland.[107] This report was followed by a list of recommended removals, including a twenty-year-old 'girl' from Oontoo, called Cora and her three-month-old child.[108] Cora is a Yandruwandha woman who lived at Nappa Merrie most of her life. She worked for the Conricks from a young age and is a key figure remembered by Conrick descendants.[109] There is no explanation of why Cora was at Oontoo at this time, or when she returned to Nappa Merrie. However, she is present in Conrick photographs during the 1920s and early-1930s and died there in 1932. As such, although she was recommended for removal, there is no evidence suggesting she was removed. This shows how, although removals were occurring in the area, there were no requests for any removals from Nappa Merrie. Nevertheless, due to the conditions, many of the population may have voluntarily left in search of rations.

[106] Letter from Oontoo Hotel manager to the Protector of Aborigines, Brisbane. 1901, located at Queensland State Archives. PR3504426, 17982, 02/3544.
[107] 'Aboriginal Protector. Harold Meston. Report Summarised', 3 January, 1902, located at Queensland State Archives, PR3504422, 17981, 14754/1902.
[108] 'Western Aboriginals – List of those Recommended for removal to the coastal reserves', located at Queensland State Archives. PR3504422, 17981, 14754/1902.
[109] She is discussed in further detail in Chapter Four.

One thing to note when discussing pastoralists' 'protection' of Aboriginal people, is how station managers were, in fact, protecting their cheap labour force. The importance of Aboriginal labour in the pastoral industry is well known, especially on stations in more isolated regions, such as Cooper Creek. Mark Copland, Jonathan Richards and Andrew Walker highlight how Aboriginal workers were usually regarded as 'private property' by their employers, while Ann McGrath suggests station managers disliked government or police intervention with 'their Aborigines'.[110] Station managers would often negotiate 'local agreements' with Aboriginal people, offering protection from the Native Police, allowing access to hunting and water and rations in exchange for labour and knowledge of the land.[111] Aboriginal workers were mostly paid with food rations, tobacco and clothes, making them a lot cheaper than white workers. Gordon Briscoe believes 'protectionism' led to the Aboriginal populations' 'dependency' on these stations, hence confining them and removing their 'liberties'.[112]

Conclusion

Overall, the evidence in this chapter supports the story of John Conrick being more conciliatory in his dealing with Aboriginal people than was common for the time. Despite entering a region experiencing significant incidents of frontier violence, both family and publicly published stories emphasise John Conrick had 'no trouble' with the local people and did not partake in this violence. The 'Surrounded in night' incident outlines John's

[110] Copland, Richards and Walker, *One Hour More Daylight*, 84; McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 100.
[111] Reynolds, *Forgotten War*, 186-187; May, *From Bush to Station*, 92-93.
[112] Gordon Briscoe, 'Aboriginal Australian Identity', *History Workshop Journal* 36, no.1 (1993): 153.

supposed ‘merciful’ dealings with an Aboriginal man who was sent to kill him. According to John, he let the man live when most other white men would have retaliated. Interestingly, the part of the story passed down through his descendants concerned John’s big dogs. This suggests that, over time, subsequent generations of Conricks forgot the reasons why John had these dogs for protection and their role in the colonisation process. The second incident, the massacre at Barioolah, highlights John’s conciliatory behaviour by contrasting his actions with those on the neighbouring property. The story told by John’s grandson, Neil, focuses on John’s angry response to the murder of around one-hundred Aboriginal people, which ended with the brutal neighbour’s removal from the area. An array of sources support Neil’s account, revealing the importance of private family archives in providing details and revealing incidences of frontier violence that might not otherwise be recorded in the national historical narrative.

We see Conrick’s conciliatory behaviour in the Aboriginal people’s oral accounts as well. Two Yandruwandha descendants state Conrick never ‘banished’ or ‘removed’ any Aboriginal people from Nappa Merrie, despite the widespread government removals in the region. This claim is supported by Governmental records. Additionally, there is no evidence of corporal punishment or the removal of children by the Government.

However, there are some indications John Conrick initially maintained these ‘peaceful’ relationships through force and intimidation. Although he may have never shot an Aboriginal person with the intent to kill, he used his guns as a warning and a threat of

further action. This contradicts the notion that John had ‘little trouble’ with Aboriginal people when he first established the station, or that their interactions were always ‘peaceful’. The 1875 letter asking for police assistance due to Aboriginal people killing cattle, which includes John’s signature also contradicts this statement.

CHAPTER THREE - Geordie and Nappa Merrie Peter: Stories of Men

Over the course of their eighty-one-year tenure at Nappa Merrie Station, three generations of Conricks developed strong bonds with the Aboriginal stockmen they worked with. Rather than providing specific details of everyday life, the stories passed down through the Conrick family refer to the loyal relationships between their family and the Nappa Merrie Aboriginal men. Unfortunately, there is no clear written or oral record of any specific Aboriginal workers who lived on the station during the early years, when John managed the station; although John briefly mentions several different Aboriginal men he interacted with in his autobiographical *The News* articles, no particular individuals stand out. In comparison, a series of Neil Conrick's handwritten notes detail the relationships his family had with the Aboriginal men they worked with and highlight the Conrick perceptions of these interactions.

Drawing on family photographs, newspaper articles, oral histories and various archival material, this chapter explores the stories referring to two Yandruwandha men: Geordie (Ngarragili/Nagarragildi), a man who saved John Conrick's eldest son's life with a heroic two-day horse ride, and Nappa Merrie Peter, the 'King of Barioolah'.

Geordie (Nagarragildi/Ngarragili)

One consistent story told by Conrick descendants involves a Yandruwandha man called Geordie, whose actions saved the life of John Ware Conrick (aged twenty-five at the time), John Conrick's eldest son.

On 9 December 1914, while out mustering on Nappa Merrie, John Ware's horse startled and reared, striking him in the head, fracturing his skull, and leaving him unconscious on the ground. Tolcher suggests the Aboriginal stockmen present assumed he had died and covered his body with branches, as per their traditional burial practice.[1] However, according to John Andrew Conrick (John Ware's son) the men who were present stood around, not knowing what to do, while one Aboriginal worker 'took initiative and saddled up' and rode thirty-six miles (fifty-eight kilometres) to the homestead.[2] All the other brothers were away from the homestead and John Conrick was in Adelaide, so the housekeeper (a non-Aboriginal woman) set off in a buggy accompanied by an Aboriginal 'boy', reaching John Ware forty-eight hours after he had fallen.[3] John Andrew identifies this man as Geordie, who then rode from Nappa Merrie to Tibooburra seeking the closest doctor. This journey of over two-hundred miles (321 kilometres) away was completed two days with two horses. John Ware was nursed at Nappa Merrie until he was stable enough to be transported to Adelaide. He left Nappa Merrie on 7 January

[1] Helen Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie* (Linden Park: Helen Tolcher, 1997), 124.
[2] Transcript of John Andrew Conrick's Interview with Helen Tolcher, 26 November, 1976, located in Helen Tolcher's notes, held at South Australian Museum Archives.
[3] Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 124.

1915, underwent surgery in Adelaide, and he made a full recovery.[4] According to the family's story, without Geordie's intervention John Ware would likely not have survived or would have suffered more serious consequences.

A STORY FROM FAR-BACK QUEENSLAND.

A BUSH WOMAN TO THE RESCUE.

The Australian bushwoman has to stand up to sudden emergencies sometimes. The recent experience of Mrs. C. M'Donald (formerly well known in Broken Hill as Miss Minnie Strachan) is a case in point. Mrs. M'Donald lives at Nappamerrie station on Cooper's Creek, in Queensland. Mr. Conrick is the manager of Nappamerrie. He was

Figure 28: Newspaper excerpt - 'A Bush Woman to the Rescue', *The Barrier Miner*, 16 January, 1915, 4.

A different version of this event is reported in *The Barrier Miner* on 16 January 1915. The article, titled 'A Story From Far-Back Queensland: A Bush Woman to the Rescue', praises the housekeeper, Mrs. McDonald, for her 'womanly … devotion during a long-drawn out period of most intense anxiety'. There is no mention of any Aboriginal assistance, but McDonald's 'Australian bush womanhood' is emphasised.[5] Geordie's two-hundred mile trek to Tibooburra is buried in the phrase 'a message was sent for the nearest doctor', while the female doctor is praised for her 'ready and able response' in travelling to Nappa Merrie by car.[6] The contrast between these two stories is interesting: these two women do not appear in John Andrew's story at all, while Geordie's incredible

[4] Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 124; John Andrew Conrick Interview with Tolcher
[5] 'A Story from Far-Back Queensland: A Bush Woman to the Rescue', *The Barrier Miner*, 16 January, 1915, 4.
[6] 'A Bush Woman to the Rescue'.

feat is not referred to in the newspaper report. This reflects on the details that were of interest and acceptable to white Australian society at the time – namely white women handling the pressures of the 'bush', which was perceived as a predominantly male community. This is in contrast to the details deemed more significant to the Conricks; to John Ware's son, Geordie's quick response and long-distance horse ride was more important and memorable than the medical assistance.

Another version of this story is told by Neil Conrick, John Ware's nephew, who states Aboriginal workers cleared the path of the buggy, so it was not interrupted by stones on its return to the homestead. He said there was 'not a stone left on it'.[7] This appears unlikely, as it would have been an incredible feat to remove all stones for thirty-six miles (fifty-eight kilometres). Nevertheless, this exaggeration emphasises Neil's overall perceptions of Aboriginal workers' devotion to the Conrick family. It shows the great care and attention given by the Aboriginal people, suggesting they did not want John Ware to suffer. While Neil did not work with the men involved in this incident, his telling of the story may reflect his own experiences of this loyalty. In comparison, John Andrew's account refers to his amazement at such a feat, followed by appreciation of Geordie taking initiative when others had given up. However, both versions highlight the Conrick descendants' high regard for Aboriginal people's actions.

[7] Transcript of Neil Conrick's Interview with Helen Tolcher, 4 July 1984, located in Helen Tolcher's notes, held at South Australian Museum Archives.

The story is briefly mentioned in William Hatfield's *I Find Australia* published in 1937.[8] In his non-fiction narrative, Hatfield mentions the accident in passing, noting the incident occurred during brumby shooting, and how John Ware was 'never the same' afterwards.[9] This comment 'disgusted' John Ware according to his son, John Andrew, and was incorrect.[10] Interestingly, Hatfield makes no mention of either Geordie and his impressive horse ride in his recollection of events, or the two women who gave medical assistance.

Figure 29: 'Picture of Geordie'. Aaron Paterson, Post on 'The Conrick Family' private group, Facebook, 7 December 2020.

[8] Hatfield was the pen name for English author Ernest Chapman, who immigrated to Australia in 1912 and travelled the Australian 'interior' by working on cattle stations.
[9] William Hatfield, *I Find Australia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 143.
[10] John Andrew Conrick Interview with Tolcher

On 7 December 2020, Aaron Paterson posted a picture of Geordie (Figure 29) on 'The Conrick Family' private Facebook group. Aaron describes Geordie as the 'Yandruwandha man who saved John Conrick Jnr's life in about 1914' after being thrown from a horse. He states 'the other natives looked Conrick over, believed he was dead and bolted', but Geordie noted John Ware was breathing, so raced to the homestead. Aaron mentions Geordie's trip to Tibooburra with three horses to retrieve 'the female doctor'.[11] Aaron was told this story by John Andrew Conrick in a letter.[12] The picture Aaron posted was a digitally coloured and cropped version of Figure 30 in order to 'give it some life', which he was originally sent by John Conrick's great-grandson, Ken Conrick. This photograph of Geordie appears to be next to the meat-house at the Barrioolah outstation. There is a small element of confusion with this photograph, as it is

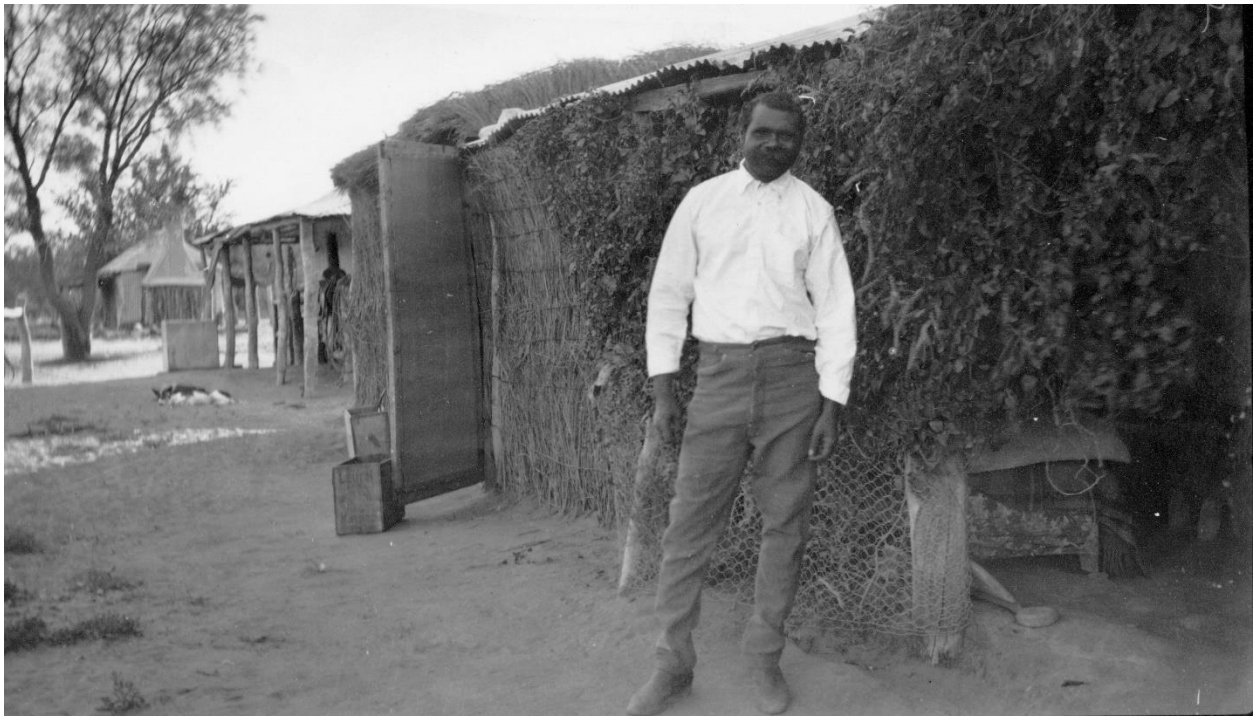


Figure 30: 'Barrioolah – Geordie' (original glass slides held by Bulloo Shire Council).

[11] Aaron Paterson, post on 'The Conrick Family' private group, Facebook, 7 December, 2020.
[12] Aaron Paterson, interviewed by Madeleine Sallis, in Rockhampton, Queensland, April 29, 2022.

captioned in two different ways: one version has the name ‘Barrioolah – Geordie’, while the other is ‘Barrioolah Peter dressed for the occasion’. This does emphasise why sometimes captions can be misleading and create doubt. It is not known who provided the captions, but Aaron received this photograph from the Conrick family, so he was guided by the captions. However, he firmly believes it is not Nappa Merrie/Barrioolah Peter.

There is little else in the Conrick stories about Geordie, other than his tribal marriage to Cora, a Yandruwandha woman.[13] There is no certain date of this marriage, but Aaron believes it to be around the time of John Ware’s accident in 1914.[14] They are pictured in Figure 31 outside their ‘humpy’. There is no date for this photo but it was published in No.15 of ‘Story of John Conrick’ on 5 December 1923 with the caption ‘Aborigines at Barioolah’.[15] Geordie is in another photograph with Cora (Figure 32) alongside three Aboriginal woman and a man. He features in Ted Conrick’s 1922 diary several times regarding the tasks he performed, which include collecting mail from the station homestead, travelling to other stations and shifting cattle out of flood water.[16] Neil Conrick lists Geordie’s work as being ‘building/maintenance’ and ‘stock’, and suggests he died around 1930.[17]

[13] She is further discussed in Chapter Four.
[14] Aaron Paterson, interviewed April 29, 2022.
[15] ‘Story of John Conrick, Pioneer, Told By Himself – No. 15’, *The News,* 5 December, 1923, 11.
[16] Edward Gerald Conrick, *Diary of Edward Gerald Conrick*, 9 February, 1922, 7 March 1922, 17 March 1922, located in ‘Conrick History Box 1 – clear’, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).
[17] Neil would have been around three at the time of Geordie’s death; Handwritten notes of Edward Neil Conrick, ‘Untitled’, located in ‘Conrick Document Post-1940’ folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).

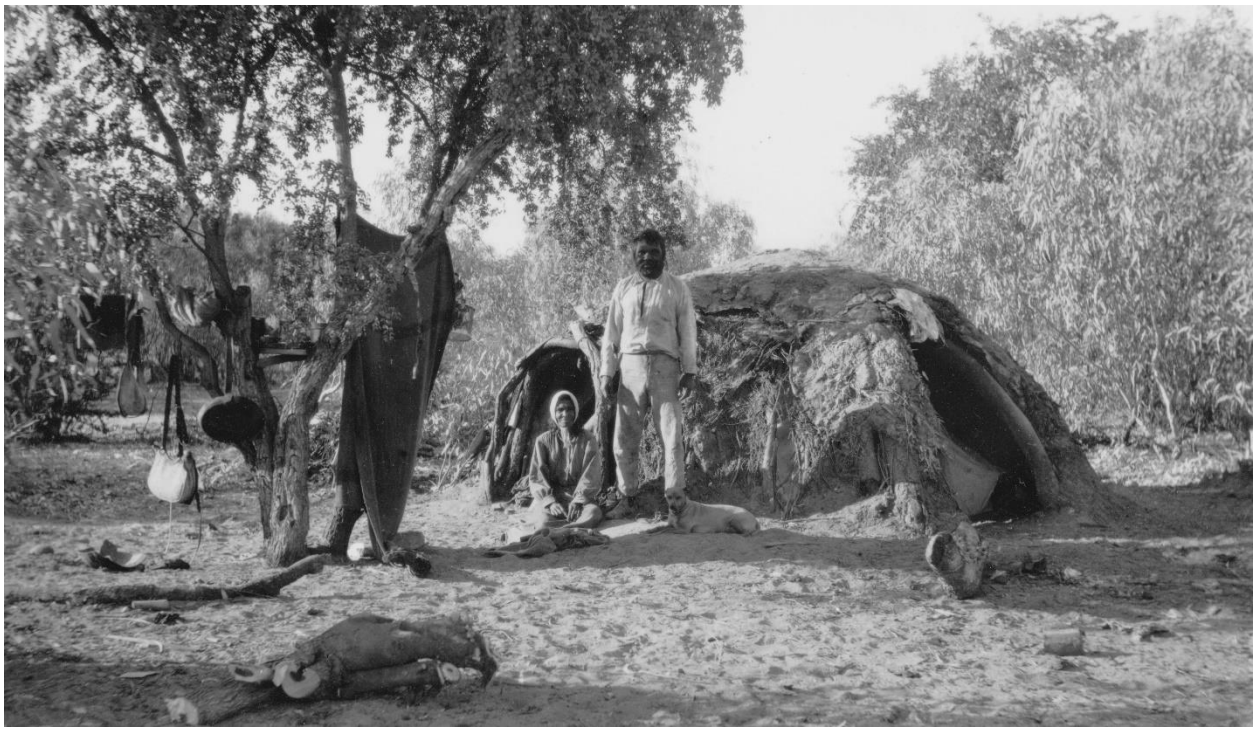


Figure 31: ‘Geordie & Cora – Humpy’ (located in ‘Joe Conrick List Photos’ folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

Figure 32: ‘Nappa Merrie Station Aborigines – Geordie and Cora in front’ (original glass slides held by Bulloo Shire Council).

Nappa Merrie Peter – 'King' of Barrioolah'

Another Yandruwandha man who stands out in the memories of Conrick descendants (especially to Ted and his children) is Nappa Merrie Peter. He was born around 1877 and is the son of Alice King, and Nappa Merrie Jimmy.[18] Handwritten notes by Neil Conrick in the margin of Sarah Murgatroyd's *The Dig Tree*, state Peter was the last of the 'true initiates'.[19] Neil's daughters, Cherise and Julie (my aunt and mother respectively) tell a story regarding their father's and his brothers' relationship with Nappa Merrie Peter. Both were told how some of Neil's brothers saw Peter as more of a father figure than their biological father, Ted. This was partially due to spending more time with Peter than with Ted, but also highlights their admiration and respect for Peter. In a letter to Peter's descendants, Cherise recalls how Neil always 'spoke of Peter and what a great man he was. He looked up to him and was honoured to be considered friends and kin'.[20]

Neil describes Peter as 'Dad's shadow', while Ted's youngest brother, Joe, describes him as 'Ted's best blackboy'.[21] Joe mentions how Peter worked at Nappa Merrie with Ted but he was always more comfortable on Country at Barrioolah, where he was 'in

[18] Alice King was the daughter of John King from the Burke and Wills Expedition. It is possible this might be have attributed to Peter being called 'King'.
[19] Handwritten note of Edward Neil Conrick in Sarah Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree*, 147, original held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).
[20] Handwritten note by Cherise Conrick to Aaron Paterson, April 26, 2022, original held by Aaron Paterson.
[21] Handwritten notes of Edward Neil Conrick, 'Mort', located in 'Conrick Document Post-1940' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick); Transcript of Mr. & Mrs. Conrick's (believed to be Joseph and Florence Conrick) Interview with Helen Tolcher, located in Helen Tolcher's notes, held at South Australian Museum Archives.

the wilds'.[22] This shows other Conricks noticed the close relationship between Ted and Peter. However, it does denote an element of ownership and superiority on the part of Ted, his brothers, and the following generation. The terms 'shadow' and 'best blackboy' hardly suggest equality, but this terminology was common for the day.[23] Alice Duncan-Kemp, a well-known author who grew up on a cattle station north of Nappa Merrie, mentions how her family were 'good friends' with the local Aboriginal people, but there was still a 'clear and well-defined line of demarcation' which had to be maintained.[24] Myrna Tonkinson supports this by stating there are few accounts of friendship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men, as working on stations meant 'rigid' hierarchies were enforced. She reflects how these relationships were 'fundamentally unequal' due to 'prevailing racist ideology' and the colonists' perception of superiority.[25]

One story of Peter's loyalty and dedication to Ted which stands out to Neil involves an accident which resulted in the drowning of Nappa Merrie's head stockman, a white man named Morton (Mort) Forsyth, at Barrioolah in 1931. Mort was Ted's best friend and they had been working together for around fifteen years. Neil, aged four at the time of the event, recalls the moment Ted was told of Mort's accident, and details what was later narrated to him. Although Neil titles this story 'Mort', it is more a story about Nappa Merrie Peter and his relationships with both Ted and Mort. According to Neil, Mort had been leading a 'mustering camp', moving cattle to higher ground as the Cooper was in

[22] Mr. and Mrs. Conrick's Interview with Tolcher.
[23] Neil had originally written 'Dads R/H' but crossed out 'R/H' to write 'shadow' underneath instead.
[24] Alice Duncan-Kemp, *Our Channel Country* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1961), 197.
[25] Myrna Tonkinson, 'Sisterhood or Aboriginal Servitude? Black women and White women on the Australian frontier', *Aboriginal History* 12 (1988): 29-30.

flood, meaning they had to cross the main channel with their horses and supplies.[26] This incident was reported in *The News* on 12 June 1931, under the heading 'Death of Game Swimmer: Braved Flood Creek. Queensland Tragedy'.[27] While Neil estimates from his experience the water would have been up to 164 feet (fifty metres) wide and thirty-two feet (ten metres) deep while 'flowing swiftly', the article puts it at eighteen feet deep (5.5 metres) and recorded the current as being 'exceptionally fast'.[28] While carting supplies across the river, Mort suddenly disappeared under the 'freezing' water and both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stockmen spent hours trying to find Mort, but without success. One man travelled overnight to inform Ted at the homestead.[29]

DEATH OF GAME SWIMMER

Braved Flooded Creek

QUEENSLAND TRAGEDY

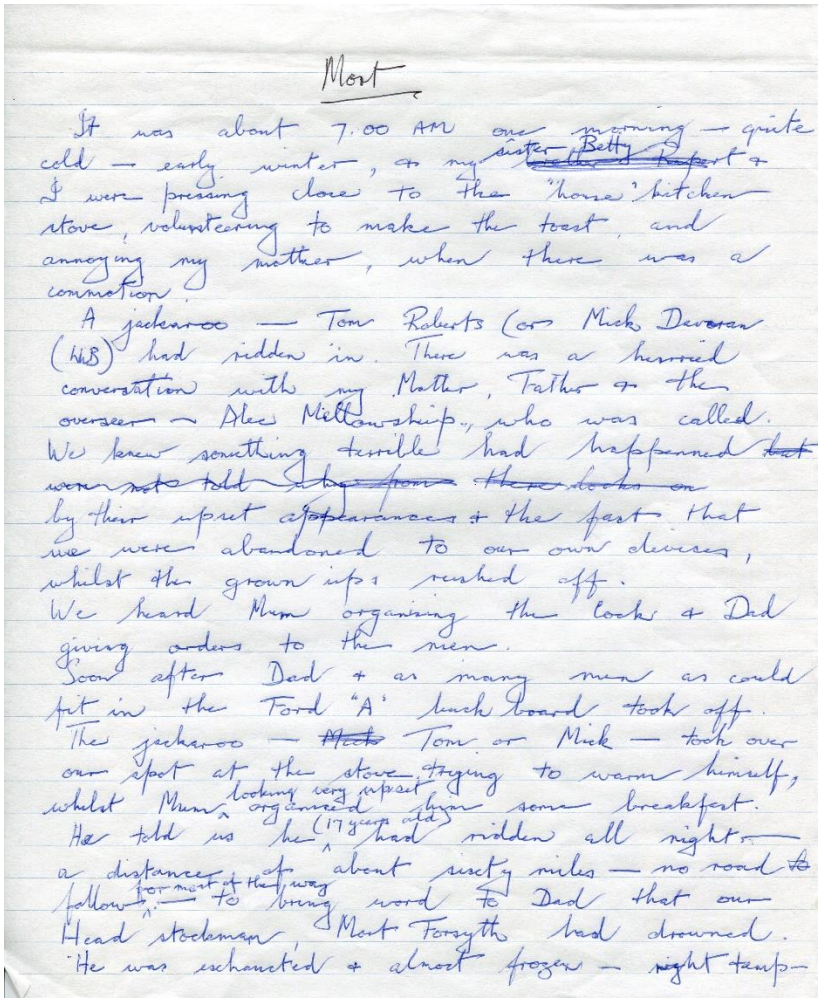
KINGSCOTE, Today.

A remarkable story surrounds the death of Mr. Morton Alexander Forsyth (aged 39 years), formerly of Kangaroo Island, who was drowned during the May flood on Nappa Merri Station, Queensland.

Figure 33: Newspaper excerpt - 'Death of Game Swimmer', *The News*, 12 June, 1931, 4.

[26] Edward Neil Conrick, handwritten note, 'Mort'.
[27] 'Death of Game Swimmer', *The News,* 12 June, 1931, 4.
[28] 'Death of Game Swimmer'; Edward Neil Conrick, handwritten note, 'Mort'.
[29] 'Death of Game Swimmer'; Edward Neil Conrick, handwritten note, 'Mort'.

There is a significant difference between Neil's notes and the newspaper article, namely the involvement of Nappa Merrie Peter. The article suggests none of the men were able to swim well, but Neil contradicts this, stating Peter was a powerful swimmer, and did not stop trying to find Mort for four days, until he later found him downstream. Ted assisted but could not continue for as long as Peter. Neil recounts how Ted asked why Peter had not stopped looking for Mort. Peter then replied how he knew Mort was Ted's best friend, so he just had to find him. Neil writes how Ted described this as 'the most wonderful thing that anyone ever did for another in his lifetime'.[30] In comparison, the newspaper article reports it was the police who found the body of Mort, stating their



Mort

It was about 7.00 AM one morning — quite cold — early winter, as my sister Betty [illegible] & I were pressing close to the 'home' kitchen stove, volunteering to make the toast, and annoying my mother, when there was a connection.

A jackaroo — Tom Roberts (or Mick Devoran (WB)) had ridden in. There was a hurried conversation with my Mother, Father & the overseer — Alec Millthorpe, who was called. We knew something terrible had happened but were not told [illegible] there looks on by their upset appearances & the fact that we were abandoned to our own devices, whilst the grown ups rushed off.

We heard Mum organising the cook & Dad giving orders to the men.

Soon after Dad & as many men as could fit in the Ford "A" truck board took off.

The jackaroo — Mick Tom or Mick — took over our spot at the stove trying to warm himself, whilst Mum, looking very upset organised him some breakfast.

He told us he (17 years old) had ridden all night — a distance of about sixty miles — no road to follow for most of the way — to bring word to Dad that our Head stockman, Mort Forsyth had drowned.

He was exhausted & almost frozen — night temp—

Figure 34: Page 1 of Edward Neil Conrick's handwritten notes, 'Mort' (located in 'Conrick Documents Post-1940' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

[30] Edward Neil Conrick, handwritten note, 'Mort'.

source as a letter from the Nappa Merrie Pastoral Company to Mort's parents.[31] This does not detract from Neil's account which places emphasis on Peter's involvement, showing the emotional impact this had on Neil, and likely Ted. This also highlights the loyalty and friendship felt between the Conricks and Peter from Neil's perspective.

Mort was buried at Racecourse Sandhill near Barrioolah in his swag, a location safe from flooding. Neil emphasises how only those who cared for Mort knew where it was. Neil concludes how Peter 'never forgot Mort and used to often talk of him'. Peter visited and maintained Mort's grave, which Neil referred to as one of Peter's 'sacred sites'.[32] Five years later, Frank Cork published a series of articles for *The Adelaide Chronicle* in 1936 about his experiences on Nappa Merrie, confirming the series of events, including Mort's burial on Racecourse Sandhill. He confirms both stories regarding the swimming, as he states Nappa Merrie Peter, Nappa Merrie Jack and Innamincka's Police Constable Finn 'dived almost continuously' until the body was found six days later.[33] Cork starts the article with the statement 'Napilla Jack, Mort Forsythe, Nappa Merrie Pete – black man and white, drawn together by the necessity of companionship and the realisation of a man's worth'.[34] This highlights Cork's interpretation of the incident revolves around the camaraderie and loyalty between the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal men on Nappa Merrie.

[31] 'Death of Game Swimmer'.
[32] Edward Neil Conrick, handwritten note, 'Mort'.
[33] Frank Cork, 'Colorful Station Districts of Western Queensland: Primitive Land Where Life is Fraught With Danger', *The Adelaide Chronicle*, 4 June, 1936, 51.
[34] Cork, 'Colorful Station Districts'.

It is interesting how there are three different accounts of the same event, which all focus on separate aspects of the story. The 1931 *The News* article completely omits any participation by Aboriginal people, and only mentions the police involvement in the retrieval of the body. By contrast, Neil emphasises Peter's involvement, but excludes any reference police assistance at all, while Cork acknowledges both Peter and the Police's involvement in the process. These three differing interpretations of Mort's death offer insight into each author's perception of the event and reason for recording the story. The 'Death of A Game Swimmer' article repeats the facts given to the paper, stating their source as Mort's family, who received a letter from Nappa Merrie. The discussion of Mort's family and the letter is interesting, as Neil mentions how Ted sent letters to Mort's relatives, but never received a response. As stated earlier in this chapter, the complete omission of Aboriginal people in newspaper articles was not necessarily uncommon in Australian society. In comparison, Neil's story puts great emphasis on Peter's involvement and the reasoning behind Peter's actions. Cork highlights the relationship between Ted and Peter, especially the signs of loyalty. Cork's 1936 article, as discussed above, focuses on the camaraderie of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men working together in the outback. He arrived in the region around five years after Mort's death, and most likely spoke to all men involved, which may have given him a better insight into the events compared to the article published in 1931 or Neil's account. In his article, Cork emphasises his admiration of Nappa Merrie Peter's horsemanship and determination.

Surprisingly, although Nappa Merrie Peter is significant in Conrick descendants' stories, there are few photographs of him in the Conrick family archive. Due to the poor condition and quality of some images, it is hard to differentiate between several people, so there are possibly more photographs of him. The photos taken are not professional or created for public view, but private family shots for personal use. There are only two known photographs of Peter (Figures 35 and 36) in my immediate family's archive, which appear to have been taken at a similar time. Both of these photographs were in a personal photo album of James Conrick, Ted's youngest son, amongst other photographs capturing life on the station. Figure 35 has a caption 'Peter. Nappa Merrie' with 'King' later inserted between the words. It is noteworthy how, although Nappa Merrie Peter meant a great deal to Neil, he is not included in Neil's photo album. This is

Figure 35: 'Peter King Nappa Merrie' (located in 'James Conrick's Album' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

Figure 36: Nappa Merrie Peter (located 'James Conrick's Album' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

important, as Neil's album could be considered an 'autobiographical' family album – namely albums that generally consist of photographs of people, places and things which are important to the creator.[35] Neil's album includes pictures of everyday life mustering on the station, of all the horses they rode, the scenery of Nappa Merrie, the odd family photograph, and holiday pictures, with each photograph clearly labelled. Similarly, Peter is not present in Ted's personal album, despite a large proportion of the photographs relating to Aboriginal people and culture. Ted's album is different to Neil's, as it has more ethnographic qualities in comparison to stereotypical family albums. There are many other Aboriginal men who appear in the album, so it is significant that Peter is not present, considering their perceived close relationship. However, Ted's album does

[35] Andrew Walker and Rosalind Moulton, 'Photo Albums: Images of Time and Reflections of Self', *Qualitative Sociology* 12, no.2 (1989): 173.

have a lot of missing photographs, so it is possible a photo of Peter was among these and had fallen out at some stage.[36]

As Ann McGrath points out, station owners never bothered to educate their workers any more than required for stockwork.[37] Peter, nevertheless, endeavoured to teach himself to read and write. Frank Cork describes Peter's 'unique' method, where he would copy the words from jars and tins and draw a picture of the object in an old exercise book. Cork believes this is an example of 'the ingenuity and perseverance of black man under adverse circumstances'.[38] He also notes the Innamincka Police Constable assisted Peter with this, but no mention is made of any Conrick support. It seems that, although Peter obviously wanted to learn to read and write, the Conricks did not encourage or help him with this.

A consistent element in Conrick descendants' references to Nappa Merrie Peter is the use of the title 'King of Nappa Merrie and Barrioolah'. As Tim Rowes points out, it was 'standard policy' for a station owner/manager to 'bestow the position of 'King'' on his 'favourite employee' – their 'trusted lieutenants' – who would 'act as leaders of the Aboriginal population.[39] These titles were honorific, which was a form of imposition of 'European values and social hierarchy on Aboriginal peoples and societies'.[40] Jakelin

[36] There are also copies of Figures 35 and 36 loose in my family's collection.
[37] Ann McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle*' (Sydney: Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1987), 104.
[38] Cork, 'Colorful Station Districts'.
[39] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 101; Tim Rowse, '"Were you ever savages?" Aboriginal Insiders and Pastoralist' Patronage', *Oceania* 58, no. 2 (1987): 83; Jakelin Troy, *King Plates: A History of Aboriginal Gorgets* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1993), 20.
[40] Jack Norris, 'Aboriginal Breastplates: Objects and Images of the Colonial Frontier', *The Artefact: The Journal of the Archaeological and Anthropological Society of Victoria* 42 (2019): 31-32.

Troy highlights how the men who became ‘Kings’ were often already seen as leaders amongst their people.[41] Dawn May believes, with the segregation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers, there was a need to have a ‘bridge’ between the two cultures.[42] Although there were other titles of rank given, such as ‘Chief’, ‘Duke’, ‘Prince’ or ‘Queen’, the most frequent is ‘King’.[43] Aaron Paterson, Peter’s great-great-great-nephew, states although Peter was most likely the head of his ‘clan’, his people would not have called him ‘King’. He affirms: ‘none of us have ever called him King, we don’t call him that’. Regardless, some of the other Aboriginal men may have acknowledged the ‘King’ name when around the ‘whitefellas’.[44] This is supported by Troy, who believes these ‘fictitious titles’ were often integrated into Aboriginal language and cultural systems.[45]

According to a letter written by the Innamincka Station bookkeeper, Jim Vickery, Peter died in the early hours of 12 December 1957 at Innamincka, aged around eighty. At 10am he was buried in an unmarked grave on the sandy riverbank near Innamincka Station by Vickery, Station manager Ronald Absalom and station worker Kevin McCarthy. The local Innamincka Aboriginal people were unable to touch Peter’s body, as he was from the Parlpamadramadra tribe and not their tribe, but they did witness the

[41] Troy, *King Plates*, 14, 41.
[42] Dawn May, *Aboriginal Labour and the Cattle Industry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 100.
[43] Norris, ‘Aboriginal Breastplates’, 31-32.
[44] Aaron Paterson, interviewed April 29, 2022.
[45] Troy, *King Plates*,41.

burial. The last tribal rites were performed by Wilpie, 'King of Coongie and Innamincka'.[46]

Conclusion

The examination of the family stories concerning Geordie and Nappa Merrie Peter allows an insight into the Conrick's perceptions of the Aboriginal men they worked amongst. By looking at the Conrick descendants' versions of both events highlighted in this chapter, some consistent differences are revealed in how they were remembered and reported by people outside the family. In comparison to the newspaper articles, both of John's grandsons, John Andrew and Neil, focus on the Yandruwandha men's involvement and admiration of their initiative to act when others failed to do so. There is also an emphasis on the loyalty of Geordie and Peter to the Conricks. This is more prominent in Neil's notes, as he alludes to a form of friendship between Peter and his father. Nappa Merrie Peter being bestowed the title of 'King of Barioolah' reinforces how highly Peter was regarded by the Conricks and his ability to act as a mediator with the Aboriginal people on the station. However, although both Geordie and Nappa Merrie Peter were praised in these stories, there is still a clear divide between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men on the station, and there is no suggestion they were ever considered social and economic equals.

[46] Letter from Jim Vickery, Bookkeeper of Innamincka Station, to 'Whom It May Concern', 12 December, 1957. Provided by Aaron Paterson.

CHAPTER FOUR – Cora and Nelly Parker: Stories of Women

There are few stories in both oral histories and the written records of non-Aboriginal Conrick descendants regarding the family's interactions with Aboriginal women on Nappa Merrie. Due to the gendered segregation of many work tasks, perhaps it is no surprise that the Conrick men reflected more on their interactions with Aboriginal men they worked with, rather than women. Ascertaining the exact experience of the few Conrick women on Nappa Merrie and their interactions with Aboriginal women is complicated by the lack of historical sources. However, in the few Conrick stories that have been passed down through the generations, there is a focus on women's role in the domestic sphere as housemaids and nannies. There is one element which has been absent in non-Aboriginal Conrick descendants' stories until recently – namely sexual relationships between white men and Aboriginal women.

This chapter will explore the stories of two Yandruwandha women, Cora (Nanpika) and her daughter, Nelly (Timpika), and their significant role in the recent social memory of Conrick descendants. The experiences of Aboriginal women and their relationships with the Conrick family is sourced mainly through the written and oral histories of non-Aboriginal Conrick descendants and photographs. Fortunately, recent discussions with Aaron and Gloria Paterson, descendants of Cora and Nelly, provide insight into their relatives' lives from an Aboriginal perspective.

John Conrick married Agnes Ware, the sister of his business partner George Ware, on 31 August 1885. Agnes remained on the station until 1893, when she permanently separated from John and left the three eldest boys, aged three, two and one, in his care.[1] In her eight years at the station she had had seven pregnancies, which resulted in four healthy sons; John Ware in February 1889, Edward Gerald (Ted) in May 1890, Francis Clive (Clive) in May 1891 and Joseph Patrick (Joe) in June 1892.[2] Margaret McGuire notes how white women recorded their interactions and perceptions of Aboriginal women in a range of forms, including letters, journals, fiction, and even cookery books.[3] However, there are no records of Agnes' experiences at Nappa Merrie, as there is no known journal or diary. Some insights have been provided by her children and grandchildren. Joe, her youngest son, recollected that his mother rarely spoke about Nappa Merrie or John.[4] After her departure in 1893, there was no 'Mrs. Conrick' at Nappa Merrie until Clive married Marjorie (Madge) King in March 1919.

[1] The exact date of her departure is not recorded.
[2] Ted was born at Nappa Merrie Station and was the first white child born in Far South-West Queensland. Agnes was stranded at the homestead during flooding, but a doctor was present. He was born a twin, but the twin was stillborn. Agnes had four stillborn children in total; Helen Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie* (Linden Park: Helen Tolcher, 1997), 86-87; William (Ken) Conrick, 'The Descendants of John Conrick and Mary Cahill', 72, published December 2014, posted on 'The Conrick Family' page, Facebook, 15 December, 2014.
[3] Margaret McGuire, 'The Legend of the good fella missus', *Aboriginal History* 14 (1990), 125.
[4] Transcript of Joe Conrick's Interview with Helen Tolcher, 7 January, 1981, located in Helen Tolcher's notes, held at South Australian Museum Archives.

CORA (NANPIKA)

Since 2015, Cora (Nanpika) is the most prominent Yandruwandha woman featured in current Conrick descendants' stories. For generations she has been known as the young Aboriginal girl who was trained as Agnes' housemaid on Nappa Merrie. There is a second story, which had not been publicly told by Conrick descendants until 2015 but has always been known by the Yandruwandha. This story refers to Cora's sexual relationship with John Conrick, which resulted in a child. Aaron Paterson, Cora's great-great-grandson, states on a Facebook post how 'the Conricks are connected to Nappa Merrie in more ways than one!'.[5]

Figure 37: Cora. Cropped image of Figure 31, 'Geordie & Cora – Humpy' in Chapter Three.

[5] Aaron Paterson, post on 'The Conrick Family' private group, Facebook, 7 December, 2020.

Although it is hard to determine an accurate birth year for Cora, she was most likely born in the late 1870s. She was the child of Nappa Merrie Jimmy and Alice King, and her brother was Nappa Merrie Peter. Cora's first child was born around 1901, a son called Bob Parker (also known as Punbilli, Yellow Bob, Barioolah Bob). Bob was fathered by a white Nappa Merrie stockman, Frank Parker.[6] Cora's second child, Nelly Parker, was born in 1905, and is discussed in more detail below.

The Granddaughter of John King

After the deaths of both Burke and Wills in June 1861, the sole survivor of the Expedition, John King, was fed by the Yandruwandha people until he was found by the Victorian Relief Expedition, led by Alfred Howitt, on 15 September 1861.[7] King's Yandruwandha carer was a woman called Carrawaw, who considered him as one of her sons; when he was rescued by Howitt, she 'screamed and bawled' before cutting her chest, which Aaron describes as an act of mourning only reserved for family members.[8] One explanation for this is highlighted by historians Ian Clark and David Cahir who observed instances where Aboriginal groups perceived the first white people they came across as their reincarnated ancestors who had returned to Country. It was believed

[6] 'Western Aboriginals – List of those recommended for removal to the coast reserves', located at Queensland State Archives, PR3504422, 14754/1902; Personal communication with Aaron Paterson.
[7] Alfred Howitt, 'Howitt's Diary', in A.W. Howitt, et al., 'Exploring Expedition from Victoria to the Gulf of Carpentaria, under the Command of Mr. Robert O'Hara Burke', *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 32 (1862),450-451.
[8] Mary-Lou Considine, 'Secrets of the Dig Tree', *ECOS – Science of Sustainability*, 14 October, 2013, http://www.ecosmagazine.com/print/EC13234.htm.

these white 'ancestors' did not recognise their own relatives due to the 'trauma' of the reincarnation process.[9] It is possible King had been recognised as a returning ancestor.

One important story passed down through the Yandruwandha oral histories is how John King had a sexual relationship with Carrawaw's daughter, Turinyi ('Annie King'), which resulted in a daughter, known as Alice King, or 'Yellow Alice'.[10] She grew up on Nappa Merrie Station and had a daughter, Nanpika (Cora) and a son, Nappa Merrie Peter.[11] These grandchildren of King are important figures in Conrick descendants' memories. This connection to King means a great deal to the Yandruwandha, so in 2012 Aaron, Alice's great-great-great-grandson, decided to share it with the wider community. This led to the meeting between Aaron and the great-great-great-nephew of John King, Lord John Alderdice, in Melbourne in September 2013. Alderdice sought out Aaron in the hope of thanking the Yandruwandha for their hospitality towards King, but in the process discovered an ancestral connection.[12] A story had always existed among the King family in Ireland about a 'secret family' resulting from King's relationship with an Aboriginal woman; Alderdice told Aaron that King confided in his brother a story of leaving a pregnant Aboriginal woman at Cooper Creek and the brother took this knowledge back

[9] Ian Clark and David Cahir, 'Understanding *Ngamadjidj*: Aboriginal Perceptions of Europeans in nineteenth century Western Victoria', *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 13 (2011): 105-106.
[10] Daniel Harrison, 'Annie King: more than a footnote in the mystery of Burke and Wills Expedition', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 September, 2013, https://www.smh.com.au/national/annie-king-more-than-a-footnote-in-the-mystery-of-burke-and-wills-expedition-20130921-2u6fj.html; Considine, 'Secrets of the Dig Tree'.
[11] Considine, 'Secrets of the Dig Tree'; Elizabeth Burchill, *Innamincka* (Melbourne: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960), 90; Aaron Paterson, 'Introduction: A Yandruwandha perspective', in *The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills: Forgotten Narratives*, ed. Ian D. Clark and Fred Cahir (Collingwood, Victoria: CSIRO Publishing, 2013), XV.
[12] Harrison, 'Annie King'.

to Ireland.[13] However, the family assumed this was a myth or an 'embellishment', but Alderdice describes the truth as a 'wonderful reality'.[14]

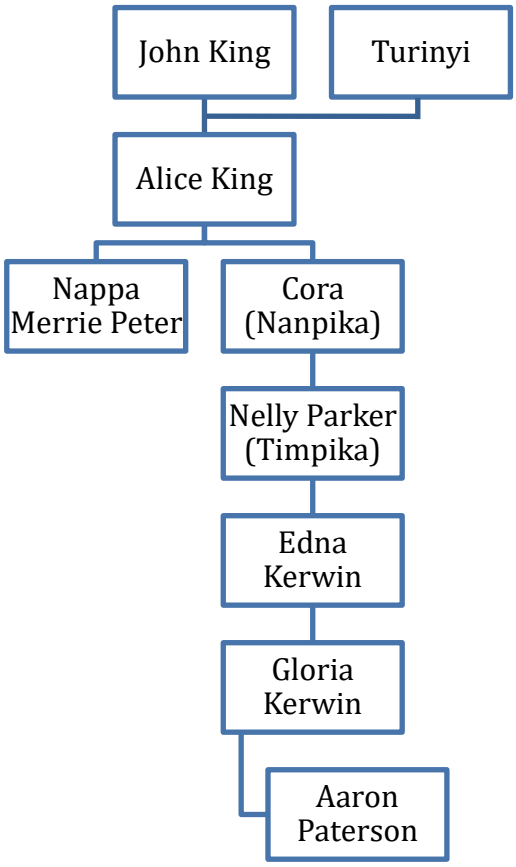


Figure 38: Family Tree 3 - showing Aaron Paterson's relation to John King.

Although Aaron has only recently publicly disclosed this connection, it has always been known and acknowledged by those living in the region. In 1867 a cattle thief known as 'Narran Jim' came across a girl called 'Yellow Alice' and 'Miss King' who was living among the Yandruwandha.[15] Elizabeth Burchill, an Australian Inland Mission (AIM) nurse stationed at Innamincka in 1932, recalls being told by Chief Inspector Finn of the

[13] Telephone communication with Aaron Paterson, November 2021.
[14] Catherine Liddle, 'The Burke and Wills Expedition 152 years later', *NITV News*, 9 September, 2013, https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/nitv-news/article/2013/09/09/burke-and-wills-expedition-152-years-later.
[15] Sarah Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2002), 361.

Innamincka Police of 'Yellow Alice' growing up on Nappa Merrie.[16] The Conricks also knew, with Ted discussing 'Yellow Alice' in a 1962 interview.[17] Additionally, Frank Leahy recalls John Andrew Conrick suggesting Alice might have been employed as a housemaid at Nappa Merrie.[18] These all suggest it was common knowledge to locals, but was never discussed in official literature regarding the expedition. Informatively, neither King's relationship with Turinyi nor their child, Alice, was ever discussed by my grandfather to either my parents or me, and it was not until beginning my research in 2017 that I first heard about this link.

Story of Agnes Conrick's housemaid

A consistent story shared by both Yandruwandha and Conrick descendants is of the young local girl who had been taken in as a housemaid under the 'wardship' of Agnes Conrick. Agnes left her grand family home at Minjah Station (Figure 39), near Warrnambool, to join her husband on Nappa Merrie. She went from a household surrounded by her family and servants, to the isolated Cooper Creek region where the closest non-Aboriginal woman would have been over thirty-one miles (fifty kilometres) away, and the closest station manager's wife was ninety-nine miles (one-hundred-and-sixty kilometres) away.[19] Within the first year Agnes fell pregnant, remaining alone at the

[16] Burchill, *Innamincka*, 90.
[17] A.F. Tylee, 'Memories of Nappa Merrie, *'The Pastoral Review and Graziers' Record,* 19 November, 1962, 1269-1270.
[18] Frank Leahy, 'Remembering Edwin J. Welch: Surveyor to Howitt's Contingent Exploration Party', in *The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills: Forgotten Narratives*, ed. Ian D. Clark and Fred Cahir (Collingwood, Victoria: CSIRO Publishing, 2013): 258.
[19] Agnes was not the first white woman on the Cooper, as Mrs. Henry Colless and Mrs. William Burkittt lived on other stations during the 1870s. Colless left in 1881, four years before Agnes arrived. See Helen Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 89.

Figure 39: Minjah Station Homestead (original glass slides held by Bulloo Shire Council).

homestead for long periods of time while John was out on the run. A 'lonely and perhaps bored' Agnes selected a young Yandruwandha girl from the nearby camp, Nanpika, who she renamed Cora.[20] In Helen Tolcher's words, Agnes 'undertook a project of her own', as she trained Cora in 'domestic duties', including hygiene, the wearing of European clothes, everyday household tasks and caring for children.[21] This was a normal occurrence on stations where the training of young Aboriginal girls was seen as the non-Aboriginal women's role in 'uplifting' them to European cultural norms and etiquette.[22] The domestic tasks included scrubbing, sweeping, dusting, laundry,

[20] It is possible that Cora was 'selected' due to her connection to John King.
[21] Helen Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah* (Linden Park: Helen Tolcher, 2003), 76.
[22] Ann McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle*' (Sydney: Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1987), 60.

washing dishes, and other household chores. As Ann McGrath bluntly states, Aboriginal women did all the work white women did not want to do.[23] Myrna Tonkinson highlights how European women were projected as 'delicate and unable to survive' or work in such harsh regions, while Aboriginal women were expected to do tasks normally assigned to men.[24]

Young girls like Cora would also serve as nursemaids to white children. Alice Duncan-Kemp, who grew up amongst the Mithaka people on Mooraberrie Station, states the children's nurse was usually young and trained specifically in the 'essentials of dress and cleanliness'.[25] There is little in the historical records regarding Cora's specific role in caring for the Conrick children; her role as children's nurse is largely an assumption which has consequently been accepted as fact by Conrick descendants and Tolcher. Tolcher believes Cora 'would have been a useful nursery maid'.[26] Although the Conrick boys had a governess named Mrs. Wylie, it is highly likely Cora and other Aboriginal women would have looked after the three remaining Conrick children – especially in the eight years after Agnes' departure – before they left the station to attend boarding school in 1901 (aged twelve, eleven and ten).

Although there is no formal record of Cora's experiences, some insight into what these young girls encountered can be gleaned through the stories of Rita Huggins, the mother

[23] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 55, 117; Henry Reynolds, *With the White People* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books Australia, 1990), 208.
[24] Myrna Tonkinson, 'Sisterhood or Aboriginal Servitude? Black women and White women on the Australian frontier' *Aboriginal History* 12 (1988): 33.
[25] Alice Duncan-Kemp, *Our Sandhill Country* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1933), 246.
[26] Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah*, 76, 113.

of Aboriginal historian Jackie Huggins, published in the book *Auntie Rita*. In a chapter titled 'Servitude or Slavery', Rita reflects on her job on a station near Charleville, Queensland, likening her work to 'child slave-labour', stating the 'servitude took away a lot of [their] childhood and adolescence'. She recalls the days being 'long and tiring' with repetitive work, and how there were no holidays or breaks. Her entire days were 'spent helping the white people'.[27] In her interviews of Aboriginal domestic workers on Northern Territory stations, McGrath outlines the 'long' and 'arduous' days these women worked.[28] Anthropologist Myrna Tonkinson interviewed a woman called Maggie Ross, whose mother was an Aranda (Arrernte) woman, and grew up on Northern Territory stations. Maggie mentions her surprise at how the 'white lady' was unable to even cook, when white men had learnt the basics. She concludes that Aboriginal women washed clothes, cleaned, carted water and watered the garden while 'white lady never do nothin''.[29]

The only evidence of Agnes and Cora's relationship is a series of photographs taken during an 1892 visit to Adelaide. When Agnes travelled to Adelaide during the hot summer months, she took Cora with her while John remained at Nappa Merrie. The photographs depict Agnes' stay at 'Prospect Hall', a large house the Conrick family rented in North Adelaide. This trip was for the birth of John and Agnes' fourth son, Joseph, in June 1892.[30] Cora appears in five photographs, from a set of glass slides, which originally belonged to John Ware Conrick, who bequeathed them to his eldest

[27] Jackie Huggins and Rita Huggins, *Auntie Rita* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005), 37-38.
[28] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 64-66.
[29]Tonkinson, 'Sisterhood or Aboriginal Servitude?', 37-38.
[30] Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah*, 76.

Figure 40: ‘Prospect Hall – Group includes, Clive, Jack and Ted as children; Cora, the Aboriginal girl from Nappa Merrie’, c.1892 (original glass slides held by Bulloo Shire Council).

son, John Andrew Conrick. John Andrew donated the original slides to the Bulloo Shire Council, who scanned them, and the photographs have since been shared amongst the wider Conrick family. The captions have been included on some of the scanned slides, while others are included on the file names. Agnes is referred to as ‘grandmother’ which suggests John Andrew wrote these captions. Figure 40 shows a group of eleven people on the front steps of ‘Prospect Hall’, who appear to be the household and staff. There are four young children present; three of which are Clive, John Ware (‘Jack’) and Ted

Figure 41: Prospect Hall, Bowden-on-the-Hill, Adelaide; home of Agnes Conrick, c.1892 (original glass slides held by Bulloo Shire Council).

Conrick, while the fourth is unidentified.[31] At the front of the group on the lowest step is Cora, identified in the caption as 'the Aboriginal girl from Nappa Merrie'. She is sitting formally with European etiquette, with a straight back, hands resting on her knees and legs tucked to the side. She is two steps lower than the white women, but still front and centre and not hidden away. Figure 41 is in the same sequence but shows only Agnes with Cora sitting at her feet. The framing of the photograph aims to reinforce an image of grandiosity and wealth. The manner of Cora sitting below Agnes' does not appear

[31] It is not known whether this photograph was taken before or after the birth of Joe, but this fourth child appears too old to be him.

maternal or reflect any form of companionship other than a servant placed at the feet of her mistress. The removal of all other people except Cora is intriguing, as it is separating her from all the other staff seen in Figure 40. It highlights her as an Aboriginal servant, who may have been seen as a form of novelty in comparison to Agnes' friends and family. Figure 42 and Figure 43 are both taken in the garden. Figure 42 shows Agnes and an unidentified woman sitting at a table set for tea, with the eldest three Conrick children. To the left Cora is standing among the bushes, holding a branch in her hand. She is slightly blurred, suggesting she was moving while the photograph

Figure 42: Children Clive, Jack & Ted Conrick at Prospect Hall, c. 1892 (original glass slides held by Bulloo Shire Council).

Figure 43: ‘Grandmother & Cora’, c.1892 (original glass slides held by Bulloo Shire Council).

was being captured. Although she is partially hidden amongst the bushes, the way the photograph has been framed indicates both her inclusion and her distance from the family are intentional. Unfortunately, it cannot be known if this was a decision by Agnes or the photographer. Figure 43 is very similar, but with only Agnes and Cora, who are looking at each other. Of note, in both photographs the white women and children are situated on the manicured lawn with tea, while Cora is placed amongst the bushes. One interpretation of this distinct separation is a clear division of ‘civilised’ and ‘uncivilised’ – the white people on the lawn, while the Aboriginal girl, albeit in Western clothing, amongst the bushes. This emphasises Agnes’ role of training Cora in western cultural

norms and etiquette. However, these photographs also highlight and reinforce Agnes' and Cora's positions within the household – the 'missus' and her Aboriginal housemaid. In a similar fashion, historian Victoria Haskins likens her great-grandmother, Ming's, photographs of her Aboriginal housemaid Mary, as 'marking' her as a 'possession'. Images such as these enabled a white woman's public appearance of 'marital and financial success', hence increasing her 'prestige' among family and friends.[32] Haskins highlights how her great-grandmother's family did not see their use of Aboriginal women as exploitation, but as an act of 'benevolence' and an 'indicator of enhanced social status'.[33] The photographs taken at Prospect House suggest Agnes felt similar to Ming's family, as Figures 40, 41, 42, and 43 all appear to highlight wealth and importance. Although there is no evidence of Agnes, or other Conrick women, mistreating Aboriginal people, this does not mean they treated them as equals, or even as friends.[34] Margaret McGuire has termed the concept and portrayal of non-Aboriginal women as being kind, innocent, maternal mistresses to their Aboriginal servants as the 'goodfella missus' myth.[35] These sentiments are reflected in an 1914 article in *The Catholic Advocate*, titled 'The Women of Western Queensland', which praises the bush women who 'braved the perils and hardships of the bush'. The article attributes the virtues of 'naturalness, sympathy, kind-heartedness and bravery' to these women for their 'self-sacrifice and heroism'.[36]

[32] Victoria Haskins, *One Bright Spot* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 21.
[33] Haskins, *Bright Spot*, 32.
[34] Victoria Haskins, 'Beyond Complicity: questions and issues for White women in Aboriginal History', *Australian Humanities Review* 39 (2006).
[35] McGuire, 'The Legend of the good fella missus', 124; Haskins, 'Beyond Complicity'.
[36] 'The Women of Western Queensland', *The Catholic Advocate*, 14 February, 1914, 30.

These four photographs are among fourteen others, all taken on this day. Figure 41 and Figure 43 are the only two photographs of Agnes and Cora alone. On a different occasion, Agnes and her friends were photographed at Prospect Hall, but Cora only appears in one of these (Figure 44). Interestingly, although Cora is not hidden, she is not looking at the camera and is not a focal point. It is unknown why Cora was included only in this photograph, when no other members of staff are present. However, her clothing in Figure 4 could suggest she is not being depicted as a member of staff, but perhaps as a successful 'civilising project' – the novelty of a young Aboriginal girl from the outback dressed in western clothing and sitting amongst 'civilised' white people.

Figure 44: Prospect Hall. Group includes Cora, Aboriginal girl from Nappa Merrie, c. 1892 (original glass slides held by Bulloo Shire Council).

Soon after these photographs were taken, John ordered Agnes to return to Nappa Merrie and a few months after returning, she permanently separated from John and left Nappa Merrie, taking their youngest son, Joe, with her. She never returned and had no contact with John after this. When Agnes left, Cora returned to 'camp life'. Tolcher suggests Cora then became the 'filthiest' or 'dirtiest gin in the camp' in 'a total rejection of white values'.[37] This reflects Tolcher's own views about Cora returning to her traditional way of life as a reversal of the eight years of training Agnes had implemented to 'Europeanise' or 'civilise' her. This is through the viewpoint of European values and does not portray the freedom Cora may have felt for no longer being under the constraints of a 'missus'. Joe Conrick recalls being told Cora was around twelve years old at the time Agnes left, which does appear to be consistent with the photographs.[38]

Isolation and Companionship

One consistent reflection among the Conrick stories is the effect loneliness and isolation had on the relationship between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal women. Tolcher declares 'the isolation was a fearful thing, weighing on the spirit. How you viewed life on the Cooper was a matter of individual temperament'.[39] Ann McGrath, Dawn May and Henry Reynolds all place significant emphasis on how the complete isolation of white women from other white women for significant periods of time (weeks or sometimes months) on stations, impacted their relationship with the local Aboriginal women.

[37] Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah*, 113; Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 102; Helen Tolcher, *Drought or Deluge* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1986), 138.
[38] Joe Conrick's 1981 Interview with Tolcher.
[39] Tolcher, *Drought or Deluge*, 181.

Although some women may have developed fond relationships, these scholars underline how strict societal norms were still enforced within the social boundaries of the 'missus' and her domestics.[40] All also highlight how these non-Aboriginal women would not have survived without the help of their Aboriginal companions, as the assistance was 'invaluable' and made everyday life 'more endurable'.[41] This dependence would have especially been the case during pregnancy and unexpected labour.[42] Agnes would have relied on the assistance of Aboriginal women, as five of her eight births were at the station (of these five, three children were stillborn and two were successful births).[43] Alice Duncan-Kemp reflects on this, detailing the story of a friend, who had a long and difficult birth, where her only companion was an Aboriginal woman. The lives of both the white woman and her child were solely in the hands of the Aboriginal woman.[44] Duncan-Kemp further states Aboriginal women were 'the saviours of the lonely bush where lie the scattered homes of white women with young children'.[45]

Although Cora was not specifically mentioned by the next generation of Conrick women in the oral histories, she did remain on Nappa Merrie for most of her life, until her death in 1932. She would have remained a companion to Conrick women over the years.

[40] Dawn May, *From Bush to Station* (Townsville: James Cook University, 1983), 84; McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 64; Reynolds, *With the White People*, 208-212.
[41] May, *From Bush to Station*, 84.
[42] Reynolds, *With the White People*, 208-209.
[43] Ted and Clive were born at the homestead. Unfortunately Ted's twin did not survive; William (Ken) Conrick, 'The Descendants of John Conrick and Mary Cahill', 72.
[44] Alice Duncan-Kemp, *Where Strange Paths Go Down* (Brisbane: W.R. Smith and Paterson, 1952) 194.
[45] Duncan-Kemp, *Where Strange Paths Go Down*, 195.

The story of Nelly Parker (Timpika)

As mentioned in the Introduction, in Adelaide in late 2015, I had one of the most profound experiences of my life. While I waited for my friend late outside a pub, I started talking to two Aboriginal men. The conversation started about sport, but soon drifted to where our families were from. One of the men stated 'his people' were from Innamincka. I instantly felt slightly uncomfortable, knowing I am descended from a man who had forcibly occupied Aboriginal land in the Innamincka region. I responded with: 'This is awkward, I'm a Conrick'. Instantly, the man smiled and said, 'Me too!' and gave me a hug. I was then told how John Conrick had a relationship with a Yandruwandha woman, Cora, and they had a daughter, Nelly Parker (Timpika), who was born at Nappa Merrie in 1905. John Conrick was this man's great-great-great-grandfather. This was the first time I realised I had Aboriginal relations; I knew my grandfather during his childhood had interactions with Aboriginal people, but it had never been suggested John had a relationship with an Aboriginal woman. Before this chance meeting, I had known very little about Cora and had not given much thought to the Aboriginal women on Nappa Merrie. It was not until a few years later, when I looked further into the Conrick history, that I truly understood the emotional and historical importance of this meeting.

However, I was not the only Conrick descendant who had this type of experience. Ken Conrick (great-grandson of John Conrick and grandson of John Ware Conrick) in August 2015 wrote a 'mindblowing' and emotional tale of unveiling previously unknown distant relatives while on a trip to Innamincka and Nappa Merrie. At the Innamincka

shop Ken met two Yandruwandha people, a man and a woman. When he introduced himself as a descendant of John Conrick, the man told Ken: 'I have you in my family tree'. This man, Leslie Harris (Junior), who both Ken and I met, descended from John Conrick's daughter with Cora, Nelly Parker.

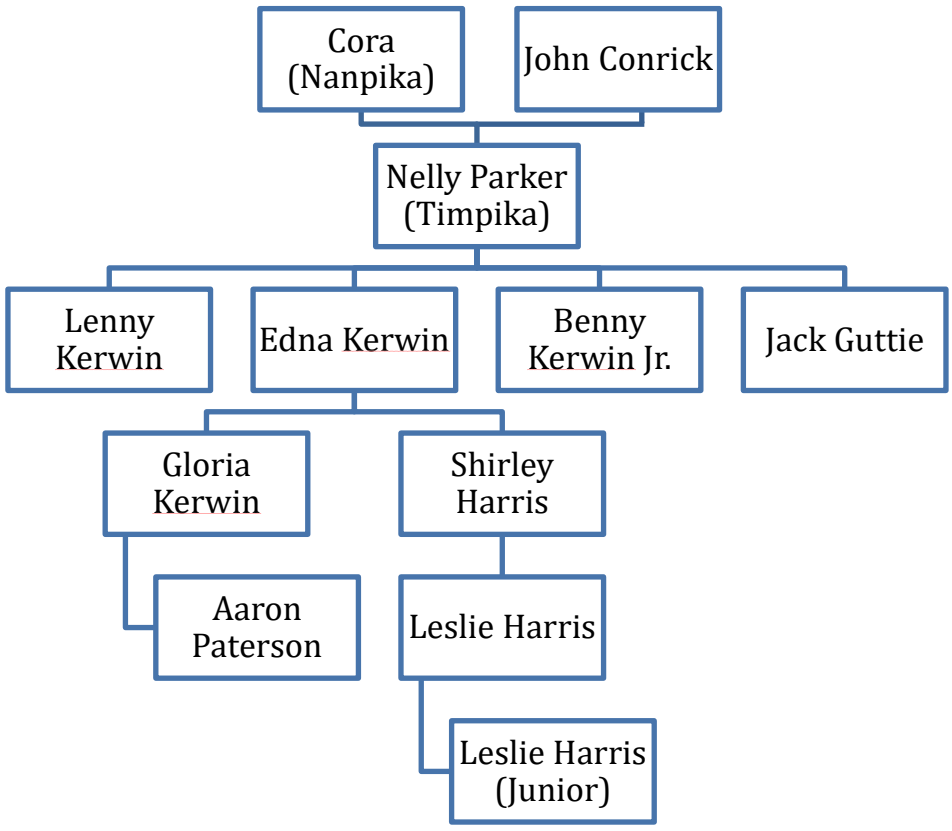


Figure 45: Family Tree 4 - showing how Leslie Harris (Junior) and Aaron Paterson descend from John Conrick and Cora.

Around three months after the initial meeting in 2015, Ken posted a photograph on 'The Conrick Family' Facebook group, titled 'John Conrick's mob', which includes the meeting between Ken and his two brothers with four descendants of Timpika/Nelly. He accompanied the image with a statement of how this meeting 'opened a whole new

chapter on the Conrick family history'.[46] In July 2017, Aaron Paterson uploaded a video on his Youtube page, reading out Ken's story. The video description discusses 'a family story of Aboriginal and European biological connections', as 'John Conrick … fathered a child by a ¾ caste Native Aboriginal woman named Nanpika', Nelly Parker, who is Aaron's great-grandmother. At the end of the reading, he states Nelly was given the last name Parker, as it was the name of her older brother's father, but 'she was in fact Nelly Conrick'.[47]

These two separate encounters in 2015 were the first time this story had been discussed publicly by John Conrick's non-Aboriginal descendants. However, it appears to have been mentioned by some family members in private conversation. Ken states the subject had been 'spoken of in the past' with some Conricks but had been 'flatly denied by others'.[48] My mother recalls her father, Neil, mentioning once a story involving John and an Aboriginal woman, but he flatly denied it being true. My father also recollects Neil skirting around the topic, but never fully discussing it. From my father's impression, Neil could not comment on whether the stories were valid, as he did not know enough about them. Furthermore, Cherise, another of Neil's daughters, remembers Neil never directly addressing the issue, but once mentioned the possibility of other 'bloodlines'.[49] In making sense of this, it is important to recognise that, until recently, relationships between white men and Aboriginal people were frowned upon by

[46] Ken Conrick post on 'The Conrick Family' private group, Facebook, November 21, 2015.
[47] Aaron Paterson, 'Was it fate, or just being in the right place at the right time?', published July, 26, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYiQHgXfGzQ.
[48] Ken Conrick, 'Was it fate, or just being in the right place at the right time?', posted on 'The Conrick Family' private group, Facebook, 8 August 2015.
[49] Personal communication with Cherise Conrick, 2021

the white community, and the children of these relations were severely stigmatised in the racist ideology which dominated Australian society. For this reason, previous generations of Conricks may have denied the existence John's Aboriginal daughter, as this would have diminished the Conrick's social status. This is discussed in further detail below. Nevertheless, since this has been revealed there has not been any public comment of denial or hesitancy. The Conrick descendants have embraced these Yandruwandha relatives with open arms, and Nelly and her descendants are included in the Conrick family tree.

Yandruwandha Story

While Conrick awareness of this relationship has only been recent, this story has been passed down for generations among the Yandruwandha. According to her descendants, Nelly always knew who her biological father was. Gloria Paterson, Nelly's eldest grandchild and Aaron's mother, grew up in Nelly's care, and recalls being twelve years old when she first heard about their connection to John Conrick. Interestingly, Nelly would only discuss this in Yandruwandha language, as a sign of respect to both the Conricks, as was Cora's decision to give Nelly the last name of Parker.[50] An example of this is in both Mary-Lou Considine's 2013 article, 'Secrets of the Dig Tree', and the Introduction of the 2013 book, *The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills*, where Aaron lists Nelly Parker as having the same father as her brother, a Nappa Merrie stockman

[50] Gloria Paterson, interviewed by Madeleine Sallis, in Rockhampton, Queensland, 29 April, 2022.

named Robert Parker.[51] It was the chance meetings in 2015, which triggered the public acknowledgement of her real parentage.

After contacting Ken in 2015, Aaron and Gloria Paterson gifted him a copy of Tolcher's *Seed of the Coolibah* with a personal note written on the first page. This note mentions how Gloria recalls being told Nelly's 'whitefather' was the ''magathat' – boss man of Nappa Merrie', John Conrick. Nelly's parentage is also discussed in a 2015 updated version of linguist Gavan Breen's *Innamincka Talk* (originally published in 2004), where

Figure 46: 'Picture of Nellie (Tim)'. c.1950s. Aaron Paterson (post on 'The Conrick Family' private group, Facebook, 2 March, 2021).

[51] Considine, 'Secrets of the Dig Tree'; Aaron Paterson, 'Introduction', XV.

Breen suggests Nelly's white father 'may have been John Conrick'.[52] On March 2020, Aaron Paterson posted a song, 'Nappa Merrie Melody', a song about the experiences of his ancestors. He dedicates the video as a 'tribute song to my great-grandmother Nelly 'Timpika' Parker, daughter of John Conrick and Cora 'Nanpika' Parker'.[53] On 2 March 2021, Aaron posted about his 'greatgranny' Tim (Nelly), including a photograph of her in Windorah (Figure 46). The words accompanying this picture were: 'Have a read about John Conrick's part aboriginal daughter 'Tim' born Nelly Parker from Nappa Merrie Station.[54] For me this photograph brought some strong emotions, as this was the first picture I had seen of the child of John and Cora, after many years of research.

Reaction to Child

Although the Conricks of today are accepting and welcoming of the knowledge of John Conrick's Aboriginal descendants, this was not always the case. It was not until these meetings with Yandruwandha descendants in 2015 that it was openly discussed. None of Tolcher's interviews with various Conrick descendants make any mention of Nelly Parker or any insinuation of John having a child with a Yandruwandha woman. There is no reference to Nelly Parker being John Conrick's daughter in Tolcher's notes, which suggests Tolcher may not have been aware of it. There are many things which do not appear in her published works and she leaves out many controversial or unsupported

[52] Gavan Breen, *Innamincka Talk: A grammar of the Innamincka dialect of Yandruwandha with notes on other dialects* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015), 6.
[53] Aaron Paterson, 'Nappa Merrie Melody – Original song by Yandruwandha man Aaron Paterson', published 8 March, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cR8j_A_Ix1Y.
[54] Aaron Paterson, post on 'The Conrick Family' private group, Facebook, 2 March, 2021.

stories, as such, the absence of any reference to Nelly's parentage in Tolcher's notes suggest she is not intentionally omitting Nelly's Conrick parentage.

As a comparison, one rumour present in Tolcher's notes, which she does not include in her books, is John Conrick's child with a white housekeeper at Nappa Merrie, Clara Robertson (nee Somerfield) in 1908, named Edward (also known as Ted). John took care of Edward, who was considered a 'living image' of his other sons, and educated him.[55] Additionally, Patrick Conrick, John and Agnes' grandson, states 'Agnes left John because he got his housekeeper pregnant', and that this housekeeper later moved to Innamincka.[56] It appears likely Patrick is referring here to Clara Robertson. The main issue with this is that Clara had a child with John over a decade after Agnes left her husband. Furthermore, Joe Conrick mentions Ted Conrick told him how Agnes 'cleared out', because John was 'playing up' with the woman who was a 'companion to the kids'.[57] There is no way to know if Patrick and Joe are talking about Clara or Cora. Tolcher's husband, Vern, also voiced his suspicion that Clara was the reason for John and Agnes' failed marriage. Irene Rowland, who lived at Innamincka during her childhood (1900-1913), and as a station manager's wife (1917-1927), dismisses this, stating it could not be Clara, as she was not there in 1893, but she thought it was 'a dark lady' instead.[58] However, Nelly was born over a decade after Agnes' departure, and Cora would have been too young at the time.

[55] Transcript of Irene Rowland's (nee Pope) Interview with Helen Tolcher re Innamincka, 23 April, 1977, located in Helen Tolcher's notes, held at South Australian Museum Archives.
[56] 'Notes from Pat Conrick', located in Helen Tolcher's notes, held at South Australian Museum Archives.
[57] Joe Conrick's 1981 interview with Tolcher.
[58] Transcript of Tolcher Interview with Irene Rowland.

There were social stigmas connected to sexual relationships between white men and Aboriginal women. Hannah Robert mentions there was a great obsession with 'racial purity and prestige', which led to beliefs these sexual interactions had to be 'silenced, hidden, and repressed'.[59] The disapproval of these relationships could sometimes cause white men to be ostracised.[60] Hence, there is little surprise there was no recognition of Nelly as a child of John until recently, as this was a common reaction to a relationship between a white man and an Aboriginal woman. Ronald and Catherine Berndt, Ann McGrath, Richard Broome, Hannah Robert, and Myrna Tonkinson all highlight how it was rare for children of the 'sexual encounters' to be recognised or supported, due to the stigma associated with 'half-castes'.[61] McGrath mentions the children of Aboriginal mothers and non-Aboriginal fathers were considered by European society as 'the fruit of the greatest social evil', and were stereotyped as 'morally worthless', 'tainted', 'a blot on civilization' and a 'sin against creation'.[62] They were usually brought up by their mother's Aboriginal husband, and considered as one of their children.[63] Due to the social taboo of these sexual relationships, it is no surprise there was nothing recorded or discussed outside of speculative oral histories. There were exceptions to this, such as Reg Dodd's grandfather, Francis Dunbar Warren of Finniss

[59] Hannah Robert, 'Disciplining the Female Aboriginal Body: Inter-racial Sex and the Pretense of Separation', *Australian Feminist Studies* 16 (2002): 71-72.
[60] Tonkinson, 'Sisterhood or Aboriginal Servitude?', 30.
[61] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 91, 94; Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1982), 133-134; Robert, 'Disciplining the Female Aboriginal Body', 76; Tonkinson, 'Sisterhood or Aboriginal Servitude?', 30, 34; Ronald Berndt and Catherine Berndt, *End of an Era: Aboriginal Labour in the Northern Territory* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1987), 82.
[62] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 94.
[63] Tonkinson, 'Sisterhood or Aboriginal Servitude?', 34; Peggy Brock, 'South Australia', in *Contested Ground: Australian Aborigines under the British crown* ed. Ann McGrath (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 225.

Springs, who openly supported the children he had with a 'proper tribal' Arabunna woman.[64]

Informatively, these relationships were not always viewed negatively by Aboriginal people. McGrath and Henry Reynolds point out that white men's sexual relationships with Aboriginal women were a way for the men to be embraced into the local kinship network, tying them to the community and Country. By this means, station owners or managers were incorporated into the system of 'reciprocal obligations', including the exchange of goods (clothing, food, tobacco, etc.) to the relatives of the Aboriginal woman, enabling Aboriginal people some element of control of the situation.[65] Ronald and Catherine Berndt believe Aboriginal women became 'buffers' or 'hinges' between their people and the European pastoralists. This 'intermediary' position gave the women access to areas forbidden to other Aboriginal people, including the homestead.[66] Broome similarly proposes it often placed the women in higher status amongst her own people.[67]

An explanation for the changing acceptance and open discussion among current non-Aboriginal Conrick descendants is the concept in memory studies called 'cultural composure'. When narrating memory, people compose or construct it in accordance with their cultural norms. Penny Summerfield suggests some 'dimensions' of these

[64] Reg Dodd and Malcolm McKinnon, *Talking Sideways* (St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2019), 6-7.
[65] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 76, 80, 81; Reynolds, *With the White People*, 206.
[66] Berndt and Berndt, *End of an Era*, 119, 278-279.
[67] Broome, *Aboriginal Australians*, 133-134.

narratives are omitted, while others may be emphasised through the influence of dominant ideology.[68] Both Summerfield and Alistair Thomson highlight how some narrative changes occur in order to reinforce 'personal equanimity and psychic comfort', and filter out those which are painful or contradictory to public expectations.[69] As stated above, with previous generations there was a stigma towards white men having relationships with Aboriginal women due to the racist ideology prevalent in past Australian society. The children as a product of these relationships were considered shameful. It is likely that past generations of Conricks did not want to acknowledge John and Cora's relationship, as it could lower their social status. However, the knowledge of having Aboriginal relatives is no longer as stigmatised, and current descendants are accepting of this new branch to the family tree. In fact, many are interested and want to learn more about Cora, Nelly and their descendants.

Broome also suggests when the children of these relationships became of 'working age', they were happily used for their labour.[70] Although we cannot be certain of John Conrick's reaction or treatment of Nelly, as there is no record, Nelly remained on Nappa Merrie and worked for the family. The Register of Permits for Employment of Aboriginals has her recorded as 'Tim' in 1919 and 'Timpika' in 1920, while employed in 'domestic duties' and aged sixteen/seventeen years old at the time.[71] Interestingly, Timpika does not appear in any of the photographs in my direct family's collection. There is no

[68] Penny Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History* 1, no.1 (2004): 66-69.
[69] Alistair Thomson, 'Anzac Memories', in *The Oral History Reader,* ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 2015): 344-348; Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure', 69.
[70] Broome, *Aboriginal Australians*, 133-134.
[71] 'The Register of Permits for Employment of Aboriginals - Nocundra', 1919-1924, located at Queensland State Archives. PR 302451.

explanation for this absence in any of the non-Aboriginal Conrick family oral histories or written records. The diary of Agnes Jean Telfer ('Ness') a friend of Madge Conrick (Clive's wife), who lived on the station 1920-1923, mentions one of the Aboriginal women at the homestead being 'Limpicka (Lim)'. From looking at a photograph of 'Limpicka' included with the diary (Figure 47), it appears this is Timpika, but Ness recorded her name incorrectly.[72] Timpika/Nelly would have been aged around fifteen years old at the time. The photograph is not of great quality but is evidence that Nelly was still on the station during Ness' time there. Additionally, one of Ness' descendants posted photographs from Ness' collection on 'The Conrick Family' Facebook group on

Figure 47: 'Limpica with pups at Nappa Merrie Station'. *Diary of Agnes Jean Telfer* (post on 'The Conrick Family' private group, Facebook, 12 March, 2022).

[72] A descendant of Ness posted a picture of the book pages on the Conrick Facebook page, no negative of this photograph has been found yet; post on 'The Conrick Family' private group, Facebook, 12 March, 2022.

June 6, 2022.[73] One of these photographs, Figure 48 shows Madge Conrick sitting between Nappa Merrie Alice (who is further discussed in the following Chapter) and Nelly, while Alice holds Richard Conrick (Madge's son).[74] This confirms Nelly was working on the station at the time, while looking after non-Aboriginal Conrick children (who were her nieces and nephews).

Figure 48: From Left to Right: Nappa Merrie Alice holding Richard (Dick) Conrick, Madge Conrick and Timpika (Nelly) (post on 'The Conrick Family' private group, Facebook, 6 June, 2022).

In around 1923 Nelly Parker married Benny Kerwin (Mangili), a Yandruwandha man from Innamincka. In their nine years of marriage, they had four children: Lenny, Edna, Benny Junior and Jack. Their marriage ended before the birth of their last child. Nelly then had a relationship with Archie Guttie of Cordillo downs until his death. Nelly worked

[73] Post on 'The Conrick Family' private group, Facebook, 6 June, 2022. This photograph is also present in Madge's personal album.
[74] This Alice is not 'Yellow Alice' or 'Alice King', Cora's mother.

on Nappa Merrie Station but moved to Innamincka in 1923. She was a washerwoman there in 1932. Even Nelly's descendants do not know why, but by 1935, Nelly was living in Tibooburra, where her eldest two children were baptised in the Catholic Church.[75] She spent most of her remaining life at Windorah (215 miles/350 kilometres Northeast of Nappa Merrie), as the washing and ironing woman for the Western Star Hotel. She often returned to Innamincka for 'holidays', some of which could last six months, but she always returned to Windorah. She passed away in 1969.[76] However, the legacy of Nelly/Timpika continues today through her grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Conclusion

The examination of the stories of two Yandruwandha women, Cora and Nelly, provide an insight into the relationships the Conrick family had with Aboriginal women on Nappa Merrie. While there are few oral or written histories amongst non-Aboriginal Conrick descendants regarding these relationships, this chapter utilises family photographs and the oral histories of Cora and Nelly's descendants. For several generations of non-Aboriginal descendants, Cora was remembered simply as Agnes Conrick's housemaid. Cora's role in the Conrick household highlights the unequal power relationships Aboriginal women had with their female employers, despite white women's dependency on these women for work and companionship. Cora's role in the Conrick history changed in 2015, when it was revealed to the non-Aboriginal side of the Conrick family that Cora had a child with John. This knowledge was passed down through the

[75] It is not known if this religious choice was directly influenced by the Conricks.
[76] Aaron Paterson, interviewed 29 April, 2022; personal communication with Aaron Paterson.

Yandruwandha but was absent in the public Conrick narrative. The absence of Cora's relationship with John and their child from the Conrick written record reflects the social stigma attached to sexual relationships between Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal men; public discussion of such relationships impacted on non-Aboriginal people's social status. Hence, it was uncommon for the children to be recognised by their fathers. The current acceptance of the Aboriginal Conrick descendants reflects the changing of attitudes over time. This new branch to the family has been embraced by the non-Aboriginal Conricks and has triggered the sharing of stories.

CHAPTER FIVE – Growing Up on Country

Across Australia, the children of pastoralists often formed close relationships with Aboriginal people due to their 'familiarity' with the women who cared for them and the children they grew up amongst. Some were taught the local languages, stories and tribal beliefs.[1] Two generations of Conrick children grew up 'on Country', being raised by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people on Nappa Merrie Station. Through the relationships with their Aboriginal carers, the Conricks were incorporated into the Aboriginal world and formed a sense of connection to the land. This is expressed in a letter Neil Conrick's youngest daughter, Cherise, wrote to a Yandruwandha descendant, in which she states her father:

> felt a deep connection to Nappa Merrie and the Aboriginal culture and its relationship to country. He explained he had been taught to track, understand land and hunt by the Aboriginal tribe of Nappa Merrie. He felt a deep connection and a responsibility to its care.[2]

This chapter draws on photographs, wooden artefacts and stories passed down through the generations to explore the experiences of the Conrick children as they were reared amongst and educated in Yandruwandha culture.

[1] Franchesca Cubillo, ''I Drew Very Close to These Men, Sharing Their Dilemma…': Elizabeth Durack', in *Uncommon Ground: White Women in Aboriginal History*, ed. Anna Cole, Victoria Haskins and Fiona Paisley (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005): 237; Helen Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah* (Linden Park: Helen Tolcher, 2003),138.
[2] Handwritten note by Cherise Conrick to Aaron Paterson, 26 April, 2022, original held by Aaron Paterson.

Ann McGrath states the child-rearing of non-Aboriginal children was a task station owners or managers entrusted to Aboriginal women whom they felt were the most responsible and reliable and was considered (by Europeans) a job of great status and potential power. McGrath also suggests Aboriginal women were proud of this role, and it created a role of mutual dependency between white and Aboriginal women.[3] In his 'Report on the First Medical Relief Expedition amongst the Aborigines of South Australia' in 1919, Herbert Basedow highlights how Aboriginal women would look after their 'master's' children with 'love and affection … in the fullest measure'. He believes white mothers had no 'care or concern' for their child's welfare, when in the hands of these 'devoted' women. According to Basedow, Aboriginal women 'like nothing better than to look after the children of a white mother'.[4] A governess and station manager's wife for over twenty years, Edith McFarlane, reflects how Aboriginal people 'really really do love children' and took 'great care' of them.[5] Florence (Flo) Conrick, the wife of John's youngest son, Joe, spoke of the local Aboriginal women's assistance and dedication with the raising of her children. While living at Barioolah, an out-station of Nappa Merrie, Flo recalls her young daughter calling out in the middle of the night, causing the women to come running from the camp, to ensure she was okay. Although the child was well, it gave Flo, who was often alone, comfort to know she had support if anything went wrong.[6] Alice Duncan-Kemp, who was raised by the Mithaka people on

[3] Ann McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle*' (Sydney: Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1987), 63.
[4] Dr Herbert Basedow, 'Report Upon the First Medical Relief Expedition to Aborigines in the Far North, 20 February 1920-29 April 1921', located at State Record of South Australia, GRG 23/1/1920/44.
[5] Transcript of Edith McFarlane's interview with Trish Fitzsimmons, 17 May, 2002, Braided Channels Research Collection, https://ausnc.org.au/corpora/braided-channels/braided-channels-of-history-recording-transcript-82-raw.
[6] Transcript of Mr. and Mrs. Conrick's (believed to be Joseph and Florence Conrick) Interview with Helen Tolcher, located in Helen Tolcher's notes, held at South Australian Museum Archives.

Mooraberrie Station, describes an Aboriginal woman, Mary Ann, as her 'very faithful, painstaking servant, a splendid children's nurse', who maintained 'a mental footbridge … between brown world and white world'. Duncan-Kemp 'established a strong and lasting bridge of friendship' with Mary Ann, who made sure the two worlds never 'intruded' on each other and taught the white children the 'talk of the land'.[7] Describing her knowledge of Aboriginal culture and thinking, Duncan-Kemp writes how the 'existence' of the Mithaka people runs 'parallel' to her own, 'on a different plane', yet 'vibrations went from one to the other'.[8] A consistent element from these stories is the respect held for Aboriginal women's childminding skills.

Victoria Haskins had a similar experience to me; when she went through her grandmother's belongings, she found a photograph of an Aboriginal woman in a white apron embracing a 'fair-haired' child. Haskins' 'Gran' explained it was 'dear old Mary' and revealed, 'do you know – she was more than my own mother to me'.[9] These examples highlight the strong relationships white children had with their Aboriginal carers, sometimes more than their own parents. McGrath states it was common for white children to be in the care of these women for significant periods of time, sometimes whole days, with no 'white supervision'.[10] Dawn May believes it is likely when Aboriginal women had 'sole custody' of the children they would use their

[7] Alice Duncan-Kemp, *Our Sandhill Country* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1933), 184, 209, 258.
[8] Duncan-Kemp, *Our Channel Country*, 6.
[9] Victoria Haskins, *One Bright Spot* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 3.
[10] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 67.

traditional child rearing techniques, and teach them the language, their stories and how to read the land.[11]

Unfortunately, the narratives of Aboriginal women on Nappa Merrie are generally told from non-Aboriginal perspectives. These stories emphasise Aboriginal women's love for the children and enjoyment of minding them, but there are few Aboriginal perspectives to confirm this. Jennifer Sabbioni highlights this, stating that, in the past, most Aboriginal women's narratives have been constructed by non-Aboriginal people – 'outsiders looking in'. She believes Aboriginal women have been represented by 'the discourse, the power, and the knowledge of the dominant society'.[12] Therefore, this could suggest a projection by white people with the expectation Aboriginal women wanted to happily care for their masters' children. A small insight can be examined in Rita Huggins' reflections on her time on a station near Charleville, Queensland. She mentions how the Aboriginal domestics were regularly given the children, and would bathe them, change them and wash nappies. Interestingly, Rita states one of the hardest parts for her was lack of authority to discipline the children when they misbehaved. She admits when not with the 'mistress' or 'master' she ignored this and would discipline the children. When Rita began this work, she was only aged twelve.[13] In the 1980s, McGrath did a series of interviews with Aboriginal workers in the Northern Territory. One of the interviewees was Blan from Newry Station, who 'affectionately' recalls how the Aboriginal women, including herself, raised the station manager's daughter – they 'grew em up'. The

[11] Dawn May, *From Bush to Station* (Townsville: James Cook University, 1983), 84.
[12] Jennifer Sabbioni, 'Aboriginal Women's Narratives: Reconstructing identities', *Australian Historical Studies* 27 (1996): 72-73.
[13] Jackie Huggins and Rita Huggins, *Auntie Rita* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005), 37.

impression given by McGrath here, suggests Blan had a 'tender relationship' with the white child in her care and took an element of pride in this task.[14]

Unfortunately, there are few recorded narratives detailing the exact childhood experiences of John's three eldest sons – John Ware, Ted and Clive. Their mother left Nappa Merrie in 1893 (they were aged three, two and one), and they did not start boarding school until 1901 (aged twelve, eleven and ten). During this time, they were primarily brought up by Yandruwandha people, as Tolcher declares Ted had 'grown up

Figure 49: John with eldest three sons. Written on back: 'Edward Gerald, Francis Clive, John Ware & Papa. Christmas 1893' (located in 'Mounted Photos/Cabinet Cards' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

[14] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 63.

among the Parlpamadramadra people … playing with the children, playing jokes on the women and hunting with the men'.[15] Although the boys had a governess, Miss Wylie, in their formative years before they left for school they were often actively learning from their Aboriginal teachers, and 'became proficient in the local people's language and learned enough of the lore and law to be accepted among them'.[16] While other pastoral descendants, such as Duncan-Kemp, wrote in great length about their childhoods, the Conrick's kept no in-depth formal record of their experiences within Aboriginal culture. According to Tolcher, Ted's upbringing amongst the Parlpamadramadra people earnt him the respect of the remaining Aboriginal people at Nappa Merrie when he took over as station manager in 1922.[17] She states this 'bred-in-the-bone knowledge' stemmed from being born on the Cooper.[18] Elizabeth Burchill, a nurse at Innamincka in the early 1930s, describes Ted as being 'skilled in bushcraft and Aboriginal lore, and had sound knowledge of astronomy and botany'.[19] Unfortunately, there is little of this knowledge recorded in writing, and only small pieces have been passed down through oral histories. The only published written records are a few excerpts from John Ware's and Ted's essays, which were printed in their school magazine in 1905 (John Ware and Ted would have been sixteen and fifteen years old respectively). Although these do not provide any insight to their upbringing, John Ware does explain the processes and materials used in the creation of boomerangs, tribal scarring and body painting.[20] This

[15] Helen Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah*, 138.
[16] Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie* (Linden Park: Helen Tolcher, 1997), 120.
[17] Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah*, 138.
[18] Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 133.
[19] Elizabeth Burchill, *Innamincka* (Melbourne: Hodder and Stoughton), 88-89.
[20] J Conrick and E Conrick, 'Wayback Sketches', *Our Alma Mater* (Sydney: St. Ignatius' College, 1905): 47-48.

suggests he was exposed at a young age to the rituals and cultural practices of the Nappa Merrie Aboriginal population.

I remember several times throughout my life being told in passing how my great-grandfather, Ted, had been initiated into an Aboriginal tribe. However, there has always been strong emphasis on how this was not hereditary and could not be passed down. The explanation had always been that since Ted was born on the land, being the first white child born in far South-West Queensland, he could be initiated. According to this reasoning, since my grandfather, Neil, was not born at Nappa Merrie, he was never able to be initiated, but still learnt tribal ways. According to Neil's son-in-law, Lynton, this fact irritated Neil a great deal. This story is confirmed by a letter sent to Tolcher from Clive's son, Patrick. Patrick states 'at least the three youngest boys were initiated into the Yandruwandha tribe and spoke the language fluently. Unfortunately most of that has been lost'.[21] Although Patrick says the 'three youngest' Conrick boys were initiated, it is more likely he meant the three *eldest* were initiated, as the youngest, Joe, did not grow up on the station with his siblings.[22] Yandruwandha descendant Aaron Paterson confirms it was most likely the elder three Conrick brothers, as all of the three boys would likely have been initiated or 'put through the rules' at the same time, as they were only born around twelve months apart. This usually happened between the ages of twelve and fifteen.[23] Additionally, while Ted and Clive were born on the station, John's

[21] Letter from Patrick Conrick to Helen Tolcher, no date, located in Helen Tolcher's notes, held at South Australian Museum Archives.
[22] Agnes Conrick took Joe with her as a baby when she permanently left John in 1892, and Joe did not return to Nappa Merrie until 1909, aged seventeen. See Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 100, 122-123.
[23] Aaron was unable to discuss this further with me, as it is men's business.

eldest son, John Ware, was born in Victoria, so his initiation contradicts what Neil was told about needing to be born on the land. Furthermore, none of the Conrick stories discuss in detail the initiation process the Conrick sons went through, so it is unknown what level of initiation they underwent, what rites they participated in, or if it was a modified process. McGrath highlights how Aboriginal people often invited their bosses to participate in corroborees and other cultural practices, in order to encourage white people's attachment to the land, and more sympathy to the Aboriginal population and their needs. Creating this sense of 'belonging' to the Country meant there was less likely to have a change of managership, ensuring consistency and bosses who could be relied upon.[24] By initiating the Conrick children into their culture and laws, the Yandruwandha ensured these future managers and bosses had ties to the land and understandings of their way of life. It is also significant that the Conricks wanted to be initiated.

NAPPA MERRIE ALICE

According to Conrick stories and photographs, Nappa Merrie Alice is considered the main caregiver of the next generation of Conrick children – i.e., John's grandchildren.[25] This is especially the case for Ted and Nellie Conricks' five children: Elizabeth (Betty), Edward Neil (Neil), John Rupert (Rupert), Peter and James, all born between 1924 and 1933.[26] According to Neil, Alice was one of the few remaining Aboriginal women on

[24] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 102.
[25] This Alice is not 'Yellow Alice' or 'Alice King', Cora's mother.
[26] William (Ken) Conrick, 'The Descendants of John Conrick and Mary Cahill', 84, published December 2014, posted on 'The Conrick Family' page, Facebook, 15 December, 2014.

Nappa Merrie from the 1920s onwards.[27] This is supported by the 'Register of Permits for Employment of Aboriginals', which lists her as one of only two women hired in both 1919 and 1920 (along with Nelly Parker/Timpika). Her age is recorded as thirty-five years old, placing her birth around 1884.[28] A photograph was taken of Alice in February 1945 when she was around sixty years old (Figure 50). Unfortunately, there is no location or other contextual information, but this inadvertently implies she was still on Nappa Merrie or the surrounding stations at this time.

Figure 50: Handwritten on back 'Nappamerrie Alice. Taken Feb. 1945' (located in 'Aboriginal People/Culture folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

[27] Transcript of Neil Conrick's Interview with Helen Tolcher, 4 July, 1984, located in Helen Tolcher's notes, held at South Australian Museum Archives.
[28] 'The Register of Permits for Employment of Aboriginals – Nocundra'.

Ted's wife, Nellie Conrick, grew up in Terang, South-West Victoria. It is unknown if she ever had contact with Aboriginal people before she reached Nappa Merrie in 1923. Nellie was a trained nurse who was known for her kindness, and before the Australian Inland Mission established a nursing home at Innamincka, injured people in the area would be sent to Nellie.[29] She found the isolation of station life tough, but she lived there for thirty-one years.[30] Cherise remembers Neil telling a story highlighting Nellie's relationship with the Aboriginal women. As a baby, Neil was not taking milk properly, so the local women concocted a drink using their traditional medicine. Nellie supposedly combined this with her own knowledge of western medicine and succeeded in feeding the child.[31]

Figure 51: Aboriginal woman with Conrick child. c.1934 (located in 'Conrick Family Photos Pre-1950' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

[29] A family story is that Nellie was involved with the Royal Flying Doctor in its beginning stages, assisting them with patients in the region.
[30] She spent her summers in Adelaide. All children were born in Terang.
[31] Personal communication with Cherise Conrick, 2019.

In my family's collection there are four photographs which show Ted's children in the care of Aboriginal women, and Alice is present in three of them. Unfortunately, one image of Aboriginal woman doing the laundry amongst trees is of bad quality (Figure 51), so it is not possible to positively identify the woman. The child sitting next to her is James Conrick, Ted's youngest son, which dates the photograph as being after 1933.

Figure 52: Handwritten on back 'Betty with Alice' (located in 'Conrick Family Photos Pre-1950' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

Figure 53: Three Aboriginal women with two Conrick children. c.1927 (located in 'Conrick Family Photos Pre-1950' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

Figure 52 shows Ted’s daughter Betty between two Aboriginal women, one of whom can be identified as Alice, in the homestead gardens.

Figure 53 shows three Aboriginal women holding two non-Aboriginal children. Although there are no captions, the woman in the centre can be identified as Alice, who is holding Betty Conrick. The second child's face cannot be seen, but due to Betty's age, the infant is most likely Neil. The first time I saw this photograph was when we were going through a box of his belongings a few months after Neil had passed in 2015, and it sparked an interest in understanding my grandfather’s upbringing. I had heard about him being

Figure 54: Five Aboriginal Women with a Conrick child. c.1925-1932 (located in ‘E.G. (Ted) Conrick’s Album’ folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

raised on a cattle station, but to see him as a baby in the arms of an Aboriginal woman made me realise there was more to this than a simple pastoral childhood.

Figure 54 is located in the albums of Ted and Nellie Conrick, but unfortunately neither are accompanied by a caption. While the child's face is hidden behind a bonnet, due to the picture's presence in their album, it can be assumed to be a child of Ted and Nellie. The clothing suggests it is one of their four sons. The woman in the centre can be identified as Alice, while the woman second from the right is Cora. Cora's presence in the photo dates it between 1925-1932, as Cora died in 1932. This means the child could be any of the three eldest sons – Neil, Rupert or Peter. An interesting note is there are no photos which include Nappa Merrie Alice and Nellie Conrick together, as only children appear alongside the Aboriginal women in these photographs.

Furthermore, there are no photographs of the children with their white governesses. Although the real reason for this may never be known, it could be due to the children spending more of their time in the care of the Aboriginal women than with a governess, or the 'novelty' factor, a point of difference when compared to other families. The absence of the governesses may suggest the women were never fully incorporated into the family in the same way the Aboriginal women were. This is supported by both written and oral histories, which do not even provide the names of the governesses. In addition, no photographs of Aboriginal carers are present in the photo albums of three of Ted's children in my family's possession: Betty, Neil, and James. There may be several possible reasons for this. McGrath suggests it was common for non-Aboriginal

children to disown their ‘minders’ when they grew up, while there is also the possibility some images may have fallen out of the album, or over time photographs were swapped out for others.[32] However, another explanation could be deliberate omission for racial reasons. These photo albums were compiled in the early 1950s, at a time where connections to Aboriginal people may not have been socially acceptable. Neil’s album is slightly different, as he records everyday life as a stockman on the station, with no women present in the album at all. Hence, the absence of Aboriginal people in Betty and James’ albums is more poignant, as these are ‘autobiographical’ albums.[33] The lack

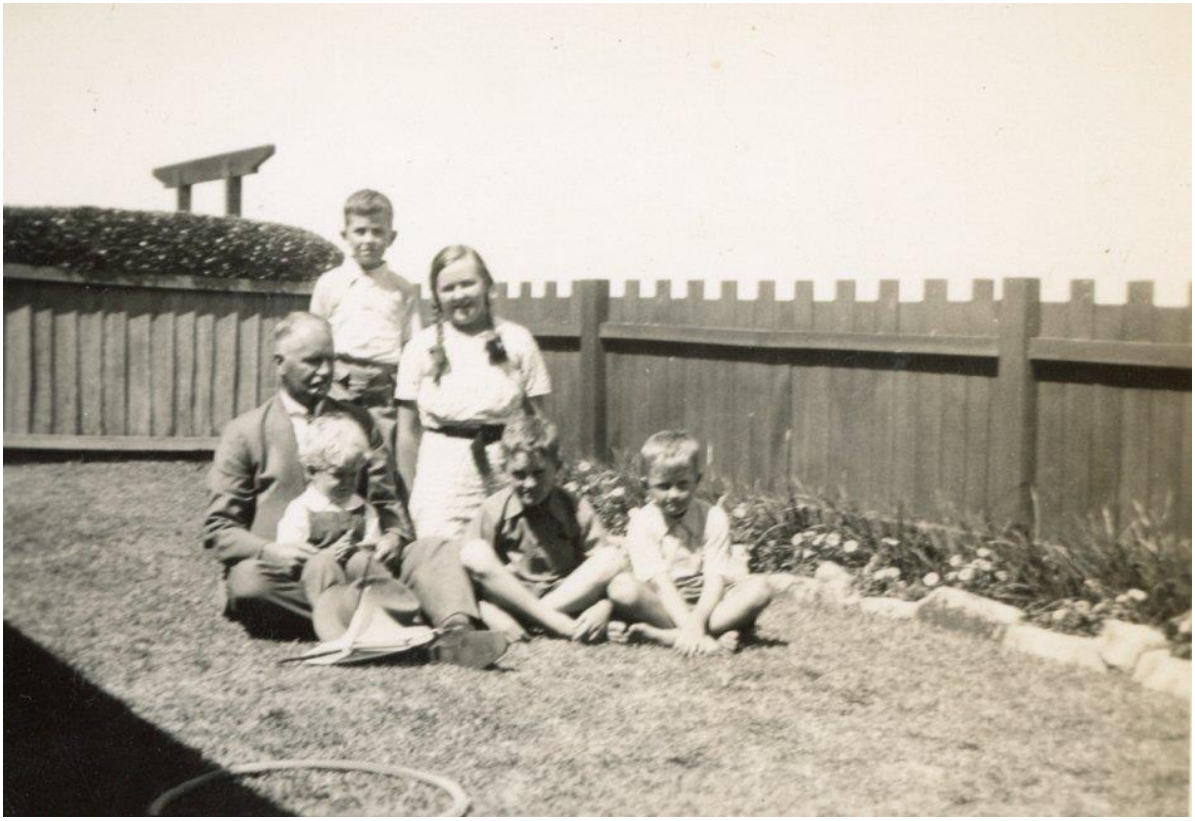


Figure 55: Ted with his children. LtoR: Ted holding James, Rupert (standing), Betty, Neil and Peter. Henley Beach 1938 (located in ‘E. (Betty) Conrick’s Album’ folder, Located in ‘Conrick Family Photos Pre-1950’ folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

[32] McGrath, ‘*Born in the Cattle’*, 63.
[33] Andrew Walker and Rosalind Moulton, ‘Photo Albums: Images of Time and Reflections of Self’, *Qualitative Sociology* 12, no.2 (1989): 173.

of photos of their carers could mean they held little importance to Betty and James when they were in their twenties and thirties. Of note, both Betty and James did not work on the station with the Aboriginal men like their brothers did, so it is possible they did not form as strong or enduring connection to the Nappa Merrie people as much as their siblings.

Learning About Country

While under the care of their Aboriginal 'nannies', the Conrick children were introduced to aspects of Yandruwandha culture. Through close association with their companions, they were educated in the local languages, skills and cultural practices, which helped develop an element of appreciation and respect for Aboriginal culture, not common in Western society.[34] As Cherise Conrick stated above, Neil was taught to track, read and understand the land, and to hunt. Duncan-Kemp, who grew up in a similar situation, describes how the Aboriginal women considered her sister and herself as one of their own, and both white and Aboriginal children were taught the same lessons.[35] Duncan-Kemp learnt by living, working and playing amongst the Mithaka people, as well as observing their practices.[36] From the moment children were able to walk, they began to learn the intricacies of tracking and reading of the land and were taught how to differentiate between animal tracks and those of humans, and eventually were able to

[34] Henry Reynolds, *With the White People* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books Australia, 1990), 191.
[35] Duncan-Kemp, *Our Channel Country*, 211.
[36] Tom Griffiths, 'Alice Duncan-Kemp (Pinningarra) and the history of the Frontier', *Desert Channels: the impulse to conserve,* ed. Libby Robin, Chris Dickman and Mandy Martin (Collingwood, Victoria: CSIRO Publishing, 2010), 32.

tell different people's tracks apart. They absorbed the knowledge of learning to 'talk' with the land, listen to it and read it.[37] According to family stories, Neil was taught to track and read the land in this manner. There is one incident my father recalls, which showcases Neil's skills in this regard. While on a 1995 trip to Coober Pedy, Neil turned off the road into the dirt in search of fossils. Neil explained he was able to find a small patch of fossils in the large expanse of desert outback, due to observing the slight changing of colour in the sand.[38]

Aboriginal hunting techniques were readily adapted to work with cattle, and the men quickly became very skilled stockmen. Their abilities to track and observe animal behaviour made their control of cattle elite.[39] As the Conricks worked with the Aboriginal men, they were taught the best techniques to interact with cattle. I learned of this intimate knowledge of animal behaviour through practices passed down to my grandfather. One of the funniest memories of my childhood is the time when, at my family's small hobby farm in Ashbourne, South Australia, a cow broke through a fence and began eating the saplings Neil had just planted. Neil's response was to grab the cow's tail, lifting it up, while tapping the cow's side with a stick. Neil ended up circling the shed twice doing this, yelling the entire time. Years later, when reading an article of stockman William Oliffe's memoirs in *The Longreach Leader*, I noticed a story which held some similarities. Oliffe was a stockman on Nappa Merrie's neighbouring station, Chastleton (Barioolah) in the 1870s. While out droving they noticed a group of

[37] Duncan-Kemp, *Channel Country,* 184.
[38] Personal communication with Lynton Sallis.
[39] Aboriginal women across Australia also became skilled stockwomen, but this was not the case on Nappa Merrie; McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 45-46.

Aboriginal men had led cattle away from the herd. Oliffe demanded to be shown how the Aboriginal men did this, so one man 'took her by the tail', picked up a long stick, and whenever the cow did not go in the correct direction, he would tap the cow on the head with the stick. It was on reading this article that I realised my childhood memory was an example of Aboriginal knowledge being transferred to pastoralists and their children.[40]

McGrath mentions the frequent use of local Aboriginal languages within stock camps, and often white children were taught them growing up. However, on some stations the children would be able to speak the local language fluently, before they could speak English.[41] My father, Lynton, recalls Neil would often refer to native Australian flora and fauna first by its Aboriginal name, before repeating its 'European' name. At the time Lynton did not think much of it, but it reflects how Neil was most likely taught the names of plants and animals by Aboriginal people in the local tongue when growing up before he learned the English terminology.[42]

McGrath also states very few station managers knew or used the local dialect.[43] This observation is not borne out by the Conrick experience, as the second and third generations compiled their own versions of dictionaries of the Aboriginal languages of Nappa Merrie and the surrounding area. In my family's collection there are four different 'dictionaries', which record the Yandruwandha, Wangkumara and Dieri languages.

[40] 'Early Settlement On The Cooper: William Oliffe's Diary – Keeroongooloo Taken Up', *The Longreach Leader*, 15 January, 1954, 15.
[41] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 63.
[42] Personal communication with Lynton Sallis.
[43] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 166-167.

Three of the four dictionaries were transcribed on a typewriter by Patrick Conrick in 1988. He compiled the vocabulary from the knowledge of his uncle, Joe Conrick. Although Joe did not grow up on Nappa Merrie like his elder brothers, he did spend a significant amount of time working with the people and learning their culture. He worked on the station from 1909 (aged seventeen) until he enlisted in World War One in 1915, and when he returned in 1919, he worked at the outstation Barioolah until he left in 1927.[44] These dictionaries were collated when Joe was around ninety-six years of age and sixty-one years after he had left the station. Patrick shared these compilations with his cousins, asking for their input in adding to the information. Neil edited his copy and added some of his own notes to the end.[45]

The fourth dictionary is a published booklet titled ‘Native Vocabulary’ printed by the Western Australian Government in 1904 to assist in the recording of Aboriginal culture. It is not known how it came into the Conricks' possession, but Ted Conrick has written the Yandruwandha names next to the English. Unfortunately, there is no other contextual information regarding this dictionary. The vocabulary includes the Yandruwandha words for: relationships, parts and functions of the body, animals, birds, fish, reptiles, insects, the elements and any ‘general’ words. All four of these dictionaries display the interest the Conricks had in recording the language passed down through descendants, even thirty-four years after the sale of the property. The compiler of the

[44] Joe enlisted 19 February 1915 and was discharged 26 October 1919. He did leave to work at another station for a period in the early 1920s; see Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 124-127, 130.
[45] It is not known if he sent these changes to Patrick.

1

Box 88 P.O.
LUCINDALE,5272,
SOUTH AUSTRALIA.
10th.FEB.1988.

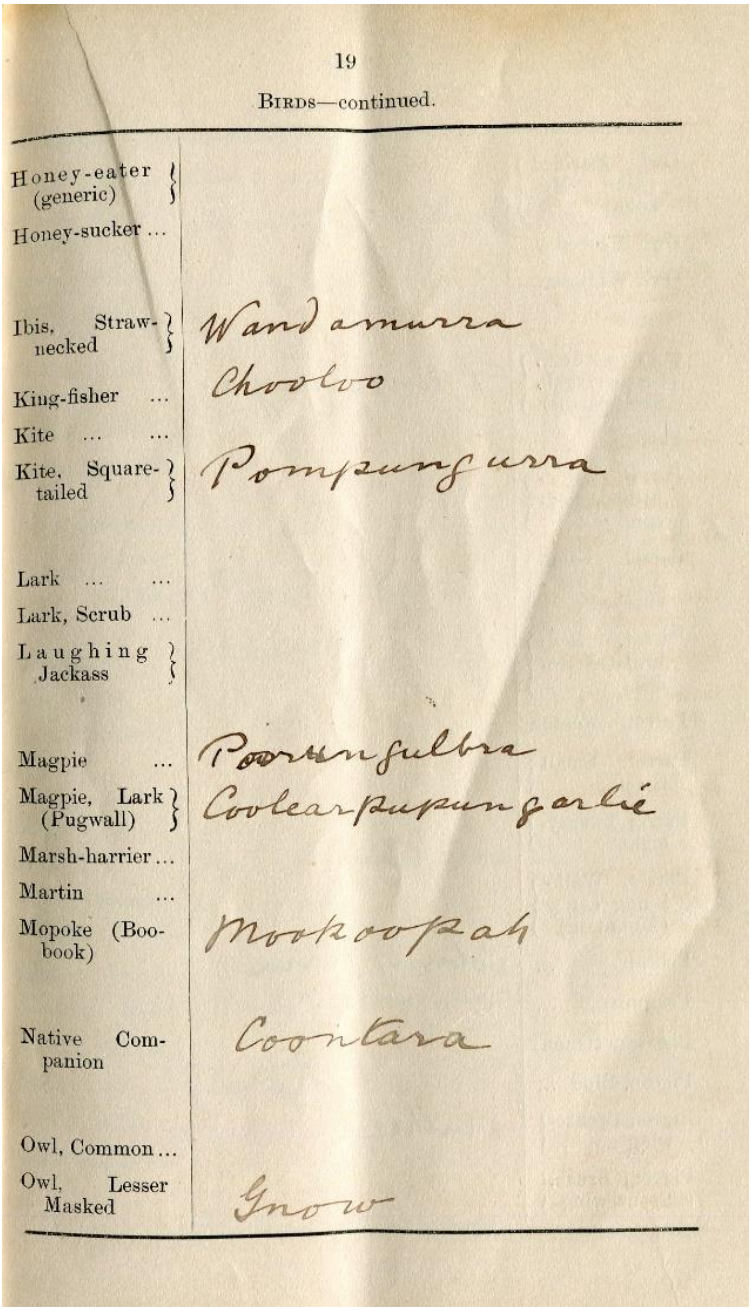
Dear Neil,
Enclosed is a copy of the Dieri Aboriginal dictionary as well as a copy of Joe Conrick's dictionary.There is a suprising similarity between the two.I have enclosed this new information in the hope that it will help you to remember more of the words which you learnt at Nappa Merrie.I would appreciate as much new information as you can supply.When I have colated it all I will forward you a copy.

Regards, Pat.

ENGLISH	DIERI	YANTRA WANTRA
Abdomen	mandra	
adam's apple	wonkili	goolah reirie
adder,death	wiparu	
ancestral being		
ancestral times	warulamala	
ankle		mutter koo
ant,black	mirka	
ant,winged	katjiriri	
anthole,winged	karjiririminka	
anus	minka	minkai
anus,fish		quiapidree
anus,marsupial		calkapidree
apostle bird		dilpunda
arm	ngura	noonahmoonkah
~~armpit,hair of~~	kapurunujdu	
avocet,red necked		khoo khoo
back,the	tuku	
backbone,of fish	tukumukuparundru	
barter,to	jinkimalina	
bat	pintjipintjindara	
bauhinia		diproo diproo
beard		un kah
beat,to	ñandrana	
beating ground to accompany chants	katanandrana	
bee,native	muntjuruntju	
beefwood		kurndie
blind	putju	
blood	kumari	
Bloodwood		toogah warrah
blue-bonnet	pulanku	
boomerang	kira	
bone,sharpened	mukuwutju	
bony bream	paru	paroo
boy,uncircumcised	kanku	
boy,circumcised	karuwali tjutjuru	
boy,fat		butchoo
bream,bony		paroo
breasts	gnama	gnumah
breasts,heavy	gnama madi	
brolga		koontara
broombush,desert		moor koo
brother,eldest	neje	
budgerigar	katatara	dligarinniah

Figure 56: 'Dieri' and 'Yantra Wantra' Dictionary by Pat Conrick (located in 'Other Documents (Dictionaries, etc.)' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

1988 versions, Patrick, only lived on Nappa Merrie for a few months in 1922, after he was born, so he did not grow up among the Nappa Merrie people in the same manner as Ted's children.[46] Nevertheless, his interest in the subject and dedication in seeking



19

BIRDS—continued.

Honey-eater (generic)	
Honey-sucker ...	
Ibis, Straw-necked	Wandamurra
King-fisher ...	Chootoo
Kite	
Kite, Square-tailed	Pompsungurra
Lark	
Lark, Scrub ...	
Laughing Jackass	
Magpie ...	Poorsunfulbra
Magpie, Lark (Pugwall)	Coolearpupungarlie
Marsh-harrier ...	
Martin ...	
Mopoke (Boo-book)	Mookoopah
Native Com-panion	Coontara
Owl, Common ...	
Owl, Lesser Masked	Gnow

Figure 57: Page 19 of 'Native Vocabulary' (located in 'Other Documents (Dictionaries, etc.)' folder, held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

[46] William (Ken) Conrick, 'The Descendants of John Conrick and Mary Cahill', 90.

information shows Patrick thought the subject important and suggests a strong sense of personal connection to Nappa Merrie and its history.[47]

In addition to learning the language, the Conrick children grew up knowing the traditional names for Country and numerous features. John Conrick named the station Nappa Merrie, after the Yandruwandha name of the waterhole the homestead overlooks.[48] When John purchased Chastleton Station in 1908, he reverted the name back to its traditional name, Barioolah, further demonstrating his respect for Yandruwandha names. Having been raised by and working amongst Aboriginal people, the local names for the waterholes, sandhills and rock formations would have been engrained into the Conricks' minds. It had been feared by Conrick descendants that this information had been lost when the last generation of Conricks who grew up on Nappa Merrie passed away. Although Neil discussed these locations in his stories, to those who have no knowledge of the land, or had never even been to the Country, all these names did not mean much.

Fortunately, in June 2022 a collection of 'Neil's Maps' was found in a cupboard by his daughter, Julie, including a 1984 map of the region on which Neil wrote in red pen the local names for the channels, waterholes and sandhills (Figure 58). He has crossed out the European names, corrected the spelling of the Aboriginal place names already on the map and has added arrows to show exactly where specific locations are. The notes on this map were written over thirty years after the Conricks had sold Nappa Merrie.

[47] The State Library of Queensland holds a copy of one of Patrick's typed dictionaries.
[48] Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie*, 36.

While Neil visited the Country several times in this period, this nevertheless shows the knowledge he learnt while in his ‘formative’ years remained. It is fortunate he had the forethought to record this information.

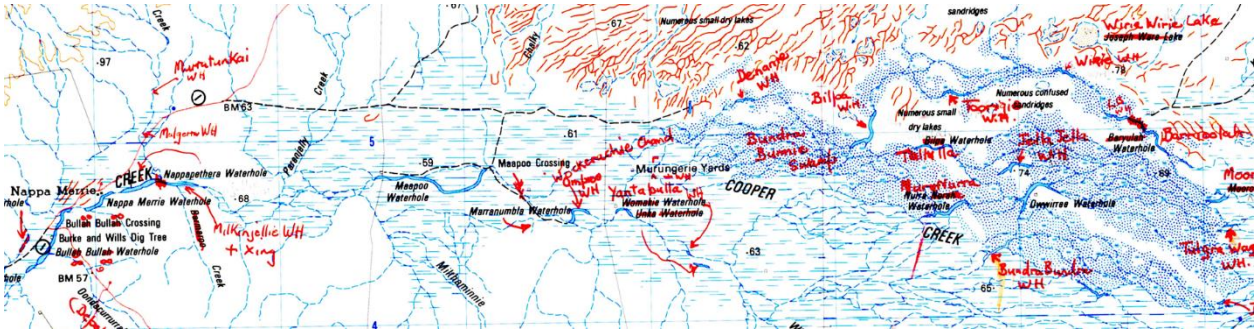


Figure 58: Excerpt of Edward Neil Conrick’s handwriting (in red) on map of the Durham Downs area, c.1984 (original map held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

In 2002 my family travelled to Nappa Merrie with my grandfather. I was only six at the time, and details of this trip which follow come from discussions with my family, photographs and a video taken at the time. Neil showed us a site with Aboriginal rock carvings, which was only a short distance from where we camped. In a video of the trip recorded by my mother, Neil describes how the carvings were made. Neil explains how these were not in fact ‘carvings’, but ‘chippings’. They would grab a ‘hunk of rock’ and ‘hit at’ the larger rock to create the markings. Neil then demonstrates the action, moving his hand in quick short tapping motions. However, he admits he forgot the meaning behind them. Photographs of these carvings, such as Figure 59, have been consistently captured by Conricks over decades and appear in the albums of Ted and Peter Conrick (Ted’s son). These rocks surround a rock cave, where the ‘old high priest’ used to live, and only men who had been through second initiation rites were allowed to go there. Uninitiated men would have died if they went there. Neil recalls one time he tried to get

an Aboriginal stockman, ‘Chippy’, to go to this site with him, but Ted warned him against it, as Chippy, having not been through the rites, would ‘die of fright’.[49] This shows both Ted and Neil had knowledge of these beliefs and practices but did not themselves necessarily believe in these spiritual consequences and maintained their traditional Christian (Catholic) beliefs.

Figure 59: Aboriginal ‘rock carving’ on Nappa Merrie. 2002 (located in ‘2002 – Nappa Merrie’ Sallis Family Album held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

Julie and her sister, Mary-Jane, recall their father being tight-lipped about Aboriginal people and culture throughout their childhood. Neil would keep his photo albums and small objects in the bottom drawer of his desk, which they were forbidden to open.[50] These were considered his ‘special’ things which were to be kept personal and were

[49] Julie Sallis, ‘Nappa Merrie 2002’, home video on VCR, original held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).
[50] Personal communication with Julie Sallis (nee Conrick) and Mary-Jane Stanley (nee Conrick).

possibly too precious to be handled by little children, who may not have understood their true significance. It was not until he was older that he began to open up more. By the time Neil's youngest daughter, Cherise, was a teenager in the 1990s, Neil began to talk more about his experiences at Nappa Merrie. Cherise was told stories of his childhood, some of the knowledge he gained and people he respected. He was given a totem animal and an Aboriginal name, but refused to divulge this information, stating they were something for only Aboriginal people and himself.[51] Neil's reluctance to discuss Aboriginal culture is not unusual in the Aboriginal world. There were tribal customs disallowing the sharing of sacred information to non-initiated people. Two Yandruwandha men, Jack the Ripper (police tracker at Innamincka) and Bob Parker (Cora's son), on separate occasions were asked if they knew about tribal ways, but both denied any knowledge. Jack the Ripper even denied having a tribal name.[52] Linguist Michael Walsh highlights the importance and private nature of Aboriginal personal names, and how they were not for public use, as most would only ever be spoken at particular ceremonies or Corroborees. There would be few people who would have the necessary status to be privy to such names.[53] The Conricks were not the only non-Aboriginal people given personal Aboriginal names. According to Tom Griffiths, Duncan-Kemp had similar experiences. Her father disallowed her to go through full initiation rites but allowed her to take part in a naming ceremony. She was given a 'sacred and secret'

[51] Personal communication with Cherise Conrick.
[52] Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah*, 94.
[53] Michael Walsh, 'Introduced Personal Names for Australian Aborigines: Adaptations to an Exotic Anthroponymy', in *Names and Naming: People, Places, Perceptions and Power*, ed. Guy Puzey and Laura Kostanski (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2016), 33.

name, and gifted a spear from her main caregiver, Mary Ann, which she treasured for the rest of her life.[54]

One of Neil's brothers eventually told Cherise that Neil's animal was similar to a hopping mouse, while another brother's animal was the crow. In addition to a totem and a name, Ted's children were gifted wooden artefacts, such as boomerangs, throwing sticks and spears. Neil Conrick's collection includes eleven objects. Figure 60 shows two throwing sticks, a boomerang and a spear, which have no decorative elements and were most likely used for hunting. Figure 61 shows a large boomerang, a nulla-nulla, and a shield.

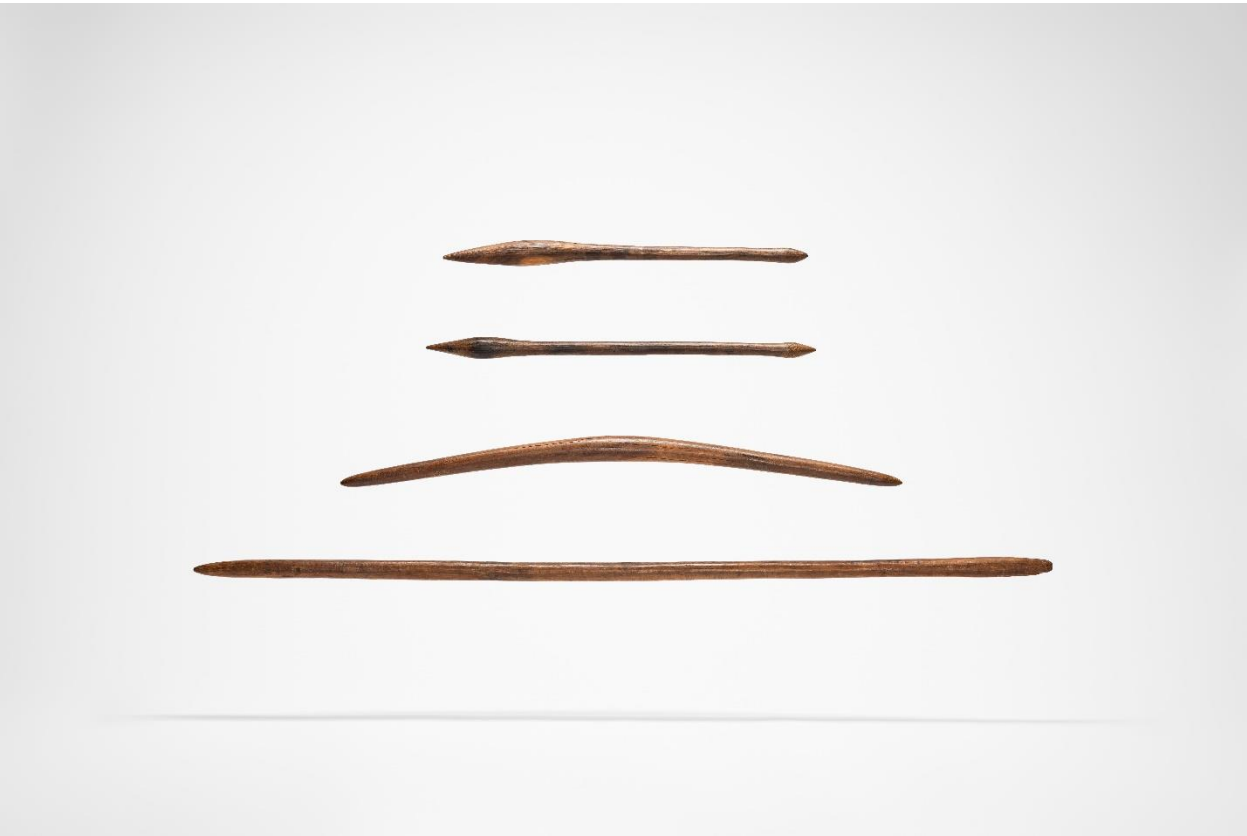


Figure 60: Two throwing spears, a boomerang and a spear gifted to Neil Conrick (artefacts held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick). Photograph © Liam West, Lightly Salted 2022).

[54] Griffiths, 'Alice Duncan-Kemp', 30; Tolcher, *Seed of the Coolibah*, 94.

Figure 61: A boomerang, a Nulla-Nulla and shield with tribal markings gifted to Neil Conrick (artefacts held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick). Photograph © Liam West, Lightly Salted 2022).

Figure 62 shows the same large boomerang from the previous picture, but with four smaller boomerangs underneath. These are all ornamental/ceremonial, decorated in the 'totem markings' of the 'Nappa Merrie Tribe' and not for everyday use (Figures 63, and 64 show some close-up images of the carvings). There were handwritten notes attached to some of these pieces, but unfortunately, they have degraded over time and torn. It is believed by Julie and Cherise that Nappa Merrie Peter was the maker of these artefacts.[55] The artefacts meant a great deal to Neil and were part of his treasured

[55] We are in the process of sharing the photographs with the Yandruwandha in hope of unlocking the meanings behind the carvings.

Figure 62: Five boomerangs with tribal carvings gifted to Neil Conrick (artefacts held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick). Photograph © Liam West, Lightly Salted 2022).

Figure 63: Tribal markings on Nulla-Nulla gifted to Neil Conrick (artefacts held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick). Photograph © Liam West, Lightly Salted 2022).

belongings. He put great emphasis on how they were not only gifted to him but made for him. During the 1970s the Australian public's attitudes towards Aboriginal land rights and equal wages began to change. As stories of frontier violence began to be acknowledged, public sentiment may have shifted and made Neil feel vulnerable and misunderstood. Neil wrestled with a great fear of people taking them away from him, if it was assumed he had stolen them. He felt people would not understand the nature of the Conricks' relationship with Aboriginal people. Cherise states over the last few decades, whenever there were incidents of historical violence uncovered or reported in the region, Neil would become distressed people would think the Conricks were involved.[56] Due to this fear, the artefacts were kept hidden away, stored in places where

Figure 64: Tribal markings on boomerang gifted to Neil Conrick (artefacts held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick). Photograph © Liam West, Lightly Salted 2022).

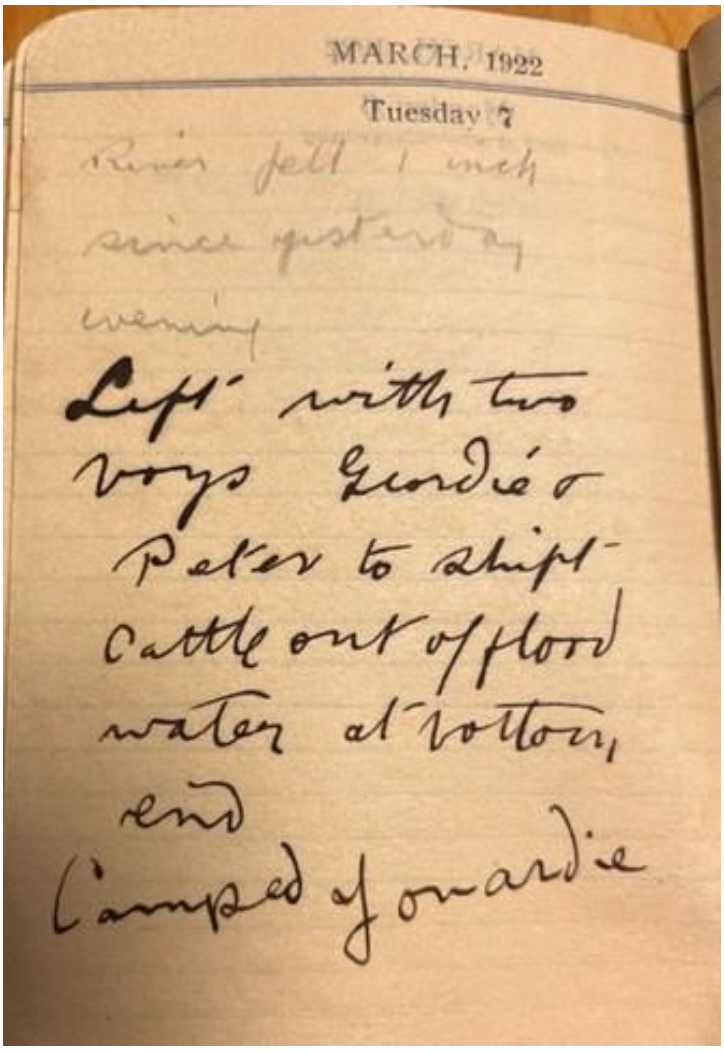
[56] Personal communication with Cherise Conrick.

they could not be seen. They have been in my mother's possession for decades, secreted away. I heard throughout my childhood about these objects and how they were hidden (I knew where they were kept), but never gave them any notice. The first time I saw them was in early 2022.

In concluding this chapter, it is important to point out how the education of the station owner's children in Aboriginal culture did not necessarily mean acceptance of equality. Duncan-Kemp emphasises how growing up this way meant 'mingling, yet never mixing' with Aboriginal people. This highlights how, although being raised by Aboriginal women allowed white children to be knowledgeable about the local culture and develop 'sympathy and understanding' with the local people, there was still a significant divide.[57] This appears to be the same for the Conrick family. Although Ted was said to be initiated and knowledgeable of tribal ways, the social hierarchies of Western society remained. An example of this is in Ted's 1922 diary, where Ted consistently refers to Aboriginal stockmen as his 'boys'. It was common practice to call all Aboriginal males 'boys', regardless of their age, as a way to reassert dominance and reinforce the station hierarchy.[58] Ted's entry for 7 March 1922 refers to 'two boys, Geordie & Peter' (Figure 65) who are tasked with shifting cattle.[59] The 'Peter' here would have been Nappa Merrie Peter, aka the King of Barioolah, and Geordie, who was tribally married to

[57] Duncan-Kemp, *Our Sandhill Country*, 187.
[58] Dawn May, *Aboriginal Labour and the Cattle Industry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 99; McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 33; Reynolds, *With the White People*, 191; Myrna Tonkinson, 'Sisterhood or Aboriginal Servitude? Black women and White women on the Australian frontier', *Aboriginal History* 12 (2011): 29.
[59] Edward Gerald Conrick, *Diary of Edward Gerald Conrick*, 9 February, 1922, 7 March 1922, 17 March 1922, located in 'Conrick History Box 1 – clear', held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).

Cora. This is significant as both Peter and Geordie were highly regarded Yandruwandha men (as discussed in Chapter Three), with Peter being a 'King' and Geordie having saved John Ware Conrick's life in 1914. Both men were also around fifteen years older than Ted and would have been aged in their forties at the time of Ted's diary entry. Duncan-Kemp describes Aboriginal people as 'unfathomable' and states someone must be 'firm and just' and enforce punishment for any transgressions in order to have 'endless respect'. Being 'kind or lenient' to Aboriginal people would only lead to their 'contempt'.[60] John Ware Conrick had similar comments in his school magazine in 1905,


MARCH, 1922

Tuesday 7

River fell 1 inch since yesterday evening

Left with two boys Geordie & Peter to shift cattle out of flood water at bottom end

Camped forwardie

Figure 65: 7 March, 1922, page in Ted Conrick's '1922' diary (located in 'Conrick History Box 1 – Clear', held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

[60] Duncan-Kemp, *Our Sandhill Country*, 247.

stating in order to get an Aboriginal man to work you need to 'treat him fairly', but you had to 'stand no fooling' otherwise he will take advantage of you.[61] This suggests even white children who grew up amongst Aboriginal people were aware they had to maintain a distinction and formality informed by European hierarchies and racist ideologies. Although the children may have held sympathies and understandings of the local people and their culture, they were still the children of the boss. McGrath highlights this was not uncommon and usually the children would 'disown' the women who raised them when they grew older.[62]

Nonetheless, there is no doubt the experience of growing up on Nappa Merrie and being cared for by Aboriginal people during their formative years powerfully shaped my forebears' sense of connection to place and relations with Aboriginal people; my grandfather's and his siblings' experience of being brought up within the culture of the Yandruwandha people remained with them for the rest of their lives. Duncan-Kemp describes it as the 'lure of the bush', where those who lived their lives in the outback are 'indissolubly linked in their lives, their fortunes, and memories with the bush'.[63] This is certainly the case for Conricks, as they formed a sense of belonging to the land. Three of Ted's sons – namely my grandfather, Neil, and two of his younger brothers, Peter and James – suffered dementia in their later years. Nonetheless, all still recalled Nappa Merrie, even when they were past recognising their own family members. My mother said some of James' last words were about Nappa Merrie. When she visited Peter in

[61] J Conrick, 'Wayback Sketches', *Our Alma Mater*, 48.
[62] McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 63.
[63] Duncan-Kemp, *Our Sandhill Country*, 32.

2019 only months before he passed, she told him stories of Nappa Merrie, which he listened to intently.[64] Furthermore, although my grandfather was unfortunately non-verbal for many years due to his dementia, we spoke to him about his days at Nappa Merrie which gained a reaction and excited him.

[64] Personal communication with Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)

CHAPTER SIX – LEGACIES

Although the Conrick family sold Nappa Merrie in 1954, the legacy of their eighty-one year occupancy of the station endures. The last generation of those who grew up and worked on the station has now passed, but there is still an ongoing significance of Nappa Merrie for Conrick descendants. This chapter will examine Neil's relationship with Nappa Merrie, before demonstrating the merging of stories of both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Conrick descendants.

Neil Conrick's Nappa Merrie Legacy

Nappa Merrie has always been foundational to my understanding of the family's history – from the framed pictures of John Conrick on the front hallway wall in my home, to the stories my grandfather would tell. In 2002, my family travelled to Nappa Merrie with Neil for his seventy-fifth birthday. I was too young to understand the real significance of the trip, so my memories revolve around the green frog in the Barioolah outstation toilet, the tortoise that bit my dad and the red sand which was impossible to get out of my socks. Fortunately, my parents, Julie and Lynton, have clear memories of the trip and have discussed their experiences with me. As previously discussed, my grandfather developed a deep connection to the land. He often described Barioolah as his favourite part of the station, and in 2002 he was excited to show his family the beauty of this Country. Upon reaching Barioolah, Neil was devastated to find the station workers had

recently burnt the scrub to smoke the cattle out. My parents have never seen Neil look so furious – he was unable to speak for hours.

Figure 66: From Left to Right: Neil Conrick, Mitchell Sallis, Madeleine Sallis (author), Alyssa Sallis and Julie Sallis (nee Conrick) at 'The Dig Tree' on Nappa Merrie Station (located in '2002 – Nappa Merrie' Sallis Family Album held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

Additionally, Neil did not need a map to make his way around the Country.[1] On one occasion we spent hours looking for a specific tree, where John Conrick first camped in 1873, only guided by Neil's memory, his reading of the land and the age of the

[1] Neil had traveled to the station several times in the forty-eight years since the station was sold.

surrounding trees (Figure 67). On another day, as they were driving through Barioolah, Neil pointed out the ‘Massacre Sandhill’ where a significant number of Aboriginal people were slaughtered and buried in the late 1800s. To Lynton, the big sandhill looked identical to those surrounding it; Lynton could not see any particular identifying features, but Neil was certain.

Figure 67: Neil Conrick at the tree where John Conrick first camped, at Goondabinna, Nappa Merrie Station (located in ‘2002 – Nappa Merrie’ Sallis Family Album held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick)).

My mother videotaped this trip in an attempt to record Neil’s stories. Unfortunately, there are some limitations due to the technology of the time. One significant setback is the

intense wind has made it extremely hard to clearly hear people's voices.[2] The footage includes Neil's stories on the processing of wool, how cattle yards worked, how to cook a tortoise, Burke and Wills, Aboriginal carvings and a sacred site. I have watched this video many times over the years, and it is quite an emotional experience. This was Neil's final trip to Nappa Merrie, and being seventy-five, he knew he would most likely never return. While swimming in the Cooper near the homestead, my father recalls Neil lying back and stating, 'if I died here, I'd die happy'. At the time, this was a startling comment to Lynton as he was worried his father-in-law might suddenly pass. Reflecting on it now, it is instead the words of a man at peace, back in a place he loved.

There was another of Neil's reflections which particularly stood out to Lynton. Neil was not a gambling man, but on the odd occasion he would purchase a lottery ticket. Neil told Lynton if he ever won, he would purchase Nappa Merrie Station, remove all cattle, and convert it into a National Park, as he admitted the land should never have been farmed.[3] This is a strong statement coming from someone whose family's financial existence for over eighty years had been this station – a fundamental part of his identity was connected to the pastoral industry. He always spoke with pride of John Conrick and his feats as a pioneer and being the first white pastoralist residing on Cooper Creek. This statement reflects an evolution in Neil's thinking about Country and how it should be treated, and shows a general love for the land beyond that of a working relationship. These comments display a sense of awareness of the negative effects of his

[2] When converted to VCR and DVD the recording appears edited. The tape cuts suddenly in certain parts, and there is only one hour of footage when more was recorded. We have been searching for the original tape but are yet to find it.
[3] The station today is used for cattle, as well as for oil and gas exploration and extraction.

grandfather's occupation of land, and the irreversible damage it caused. Tolcher highlights the impact brumbies and wild donkeys had, with certain areas being 'reduced to desolation'.[4] Neil's father, Ted, discusses how horses were twice as destructive as cattle, as they would rip the vegetation out of the soil, making the country look 'drought-stricken', and how the culling of brumbies significantly benefited the land.[5]

In 1984 Neil reflected on the emotions and feelings about his father selling the property. He explained it 'still hurts to go back… deep down' even more than thirty years after the station was sold.[6] It is Neil's love for the land which connects his descendants to Nappa Merrie and its history. Lynton, although only related to Neil through marriage, says if he ever won the lottery, he would follow Neil's wishes, and purchase the land and make it a national park. He knew how much the land meant to Neil, so wants to continue his legacy.

A new legacy – the meeting of two stories

On Friday 29 April 2022, in the old Customs House overlooking the Fitzroy River in Rockhampton, two sides of the Conrick story – the pastoralist and the Yandruwandha – met in an act to bring together different stories and reconcile with the past. My mother, my father, and I organised to meet Aaron Paterson, and his eighty-year-old mother,

[4] Helen Tolcher, *Conrick of Nappa Merrie* (Linden Park: Helen Tolcher, 1997), 136-137; Helen Tolcher, *Drought or Deluge* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1986), 199.
[5] A.F. Tylee 'Memories of Nappa Merrie', *The Pastoral Review and Grazier's Record*, 19 November, 1962, 1270.
[6] Transcript of Neil Conrick's Interview with Helen Tolcher, 4 July 1984, located in Helen Tolcher's notes, held at South Australian Museum Archives.

Gloria. Aaron and Gloria are Yandruwandha people, who are descended from Nelly Parker (Timpika), the daughter of John Conrick and Cora (Nanpika). Gloria is my mother Julie's second cousin; they share the same great-grandfather, John Conrick, which makes Aaron my third cousin (Figure 68). Figure 69 shows (left to right) me, Julie, Gloria and Aaron, holding two Yandruwandha boomerangs.[7] This photograph represents the meeting of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal descendants of John Conrick of Nappa Merrie and the beginning of my reconciliation with my forebears' past.

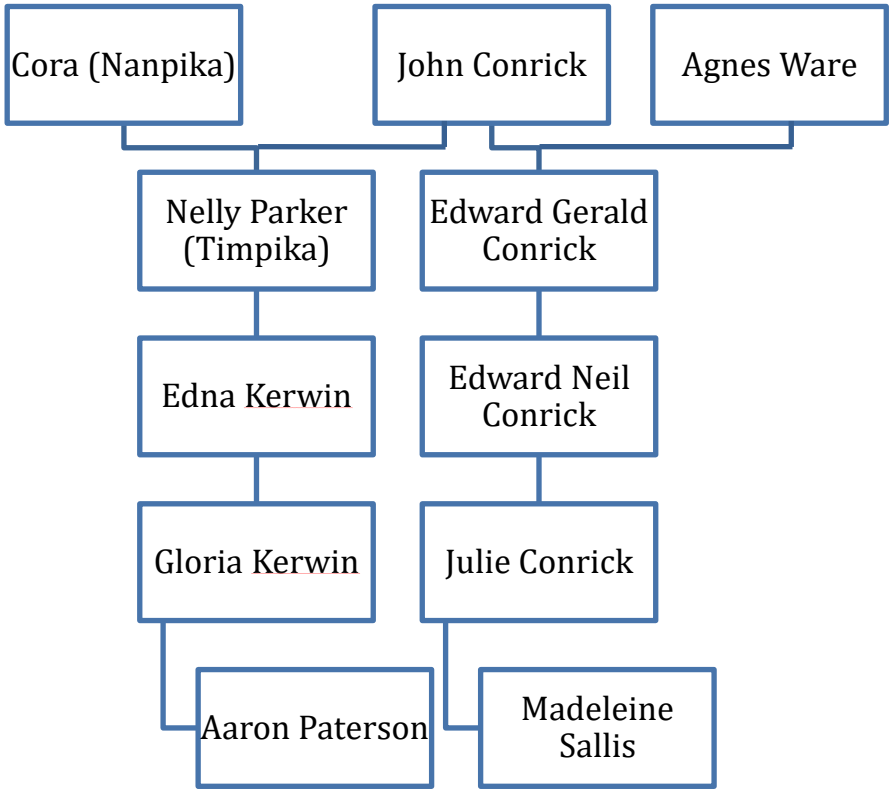


Figure 68: Family Tree 5 - showing how Aaron and Gloria, Julie and Madeleine (the author) are related.

[7] These boomerangs were returned to Aaron by Helen Tolcher, who received them from one of Innamincka's police officers, Inspector Robert de Pury. These were not ceremonial, as they had no carvings, and were worn from use.

I first contacted Aaron on 4 November 2021, on a post on the ‘Conrick Family’ Facebook group. We conversed over Facebook messenger and email, before talking on the phone on 9 December. Over the next few months, the relationship continued to develop with the mutual sharing of information, culminating with the meeting on 29 April 2022.

Figure 69: Four Descendants of John Conrick (Left to Right) Madeleine Sallis (the author), Julie Sallis (nee Conrick), Gloria Paterson and Aaron Paterson, Rockhampton, Queensland, 29 April, 2022 (photograph by Lynton Sallis).

Gloria was brought up in Windorah in Central West Queensland (215 miles/350 kilometres Northeast of Nappa Merrie), by her ‘Granny Tim’ (Nelly Parker/Timpika) who taught her Yandruwandha language and culture. She reflects how they could only talk about certain things amongst themselves, as they were ‘moving into white man’s world’,

where their culture was being suppressed. However, Gloria was taught by Nelly and her elders 'you don't let the spiritual world go by… it's born into you'. Nelly continued practicing her culture and passing the knowledge onto her children and grandchildren. She still held ties to her Country, and would often stand on the sandhills of Windorah, looking in the direction of Cooper Creek, and sing in Yandruwandha language.[8]

One of the core focusses of our discussion was the relationship John Conrick had with Cora, and the paternity of Nelly Parker. As discussed in Chapter Four, while the revelation of John Conrick having a daughter with Cora was news to my mother's and my generations of non-Aboriginal Conrick descendants, to the Yandruwandha it was never a 'secret'. Aaron stated, 'we've always known about that' (i.e. John being the father of Nelly).[9] The identity of Nelly's father was first discussed when Gloria, aged twelve, asked her 'Granny' why they did not have names like 'Williams' and 'Johnsons' in their family history. Nelly explained they got their surnames from 'whitefellas' getting their women pregnant and how Nelly Parker was just her 'whitefella' name. According to Gloria, station managers would write down the man who fathered the child, regardless of whether the father 'claimed' them or not, in the station records.[10] Linguist Michael Walsh supports this, by stating employers were usually the ones to officially record Aboriginal children's surnames.[11] Gloria emphasised when the white fathers did not claim their children, the Aboriginal people would not 'go and embarrass the whitefellas

[8] Gloria Paterson, interviewed by Madeleine Sallis, in Rockhampton, Queensland, 29 April, 2022.
[9] Aaron Paterson, interviewed by Madeleine Sallis, in Rockhampton, Queensland, 29 April, 2022.
[10] Gloria Paterson, interviewed 29 April 2022.
[11] Michael Walsh, 'Introduced Personal Names for Australian Aborigines: Adaptations to an Exotic Anthroponymy', in *Names and Naming: People, Places, Perceptions and Power*, ed. Guy Puzey and Laura Kostanski (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2016), 39.

saying things' or 'run around' talking 'about who [their] whitefella father was', so 'everybody kept their mouth shut and looked after each other'.[12]

I asked Gloria and Aaron if they knew why Nelly was given the last name 'Parker' instead of 'Conrick'. In response, Gloria frowned and said, 'they had to use that name, you can't use the station owner's name, that's not right!'.[13] Aaron added how anyone who attempted this would have been in 'trouble'. He then explained Cora previously had a son, Bob Parker (also known as Barioolah Bob), with Nappa Merrie stockman Robert Parker, so they just named Nelly as a Parker too. She did not have the same father as her brother, but shared the name.[14] Similarly, when I talked with Gloria in November 2021, she stated people did not talk about it openly out of respect for John Conrick. They knew Cora had good reasons for naming Nelly as a 'Parker' and respected this decision.[15] This is not surprising as sexual relationships between white men and Aboriginal women were considered 'taboo' in non-Aboriginal society; other scholars have noted they were often seen as 'shameful, repulsive and worthy of ridicule' and could lead to social ostracism.[16] Many white men denied fathering children with Aboriginal women, refusing to acknowledge them, which meant they were usually raised by their mother's other partners.[17]

[12] Gloria Paterson, interviewed 29 April 2022.
[13] Gloria Paterson, interviewed 29 April 2022.
[14] Aaron Paterson, interviewed 29 April, 2022.
[15] Aaron and Gloria Paterson, telephone conversation, November 2021.
[16] See for examples Hannah Robert, 'Disciplining the Female Aboriginal Body: Inter-racial Sex and the Pretense of Separation', *Australian Feminist Studies* 16 (2002): 74; Ann McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle*' (Sydney: Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1987), 68.
[17] Myrna Tonkinson, 'Sisterhood or Aboriginal Servitude? Black women and White women on the Australian frontier', *Aboriginal History* 12 (1988): 30,34; McGrath, '*Born in the Cattle'*, 91.

A significant part of the Conrick story passed down by the non-Aboriginal descendants of John Conrick revolved around peaceful relations with Aboriginal people. When we met, I asked Aaron about his knowledge of stories of frontier violence. He recalled being told nothing happened on Nappa Merrie itself, but their 'old people' were 'shot at' on Barioolah.[18] Aaron believes these incidents of shooting are one of the main reasons why there are so few Yandruwandha today. When asked about John Conrick, Aaron stated the Yandruwandha called him 'Mayatha', meaning 'master' or 'boss', and there is no basis for them to 'form a negative opinion about him', as no Yandruwandha person has ever said anything to prove otherwise. Aaron remembered his grandmother, Edna (Nelly's daughter and Gloria's mother), talking about their 'whitefella ancestors', the two main ones being John King and John Conrick. When questioned about the Conrick story of John's positive relations. Aaron simply responded: 'If he was a bad person, why would we bother calling him our 'whitefella ancestor'?'. If he had abused their people, the Yandruwandha 'would have wiped him from [their] memory' – he would not have been worth talking about.[19]

Aaron's comments in 2022 align with the note Gloria and Aaron wrote in the front of a copy of Helen Tolcher's *Seed of the Coolibah* sent to Ken Conrick in 2015 (Figure 70). The note outlined how John was 'the first 'Walypala-whitefella' settler' and is 'remembered by the Yandruwandha-Parlpamadramadra as never having banished any of the local people from the country on Nappamerrie, and never requested any blacks being removed to Aboriginal missions'. However, it is the concluding statement of this

[18] It was known as 'Chastleton Station at the time; Aaron Paterson, interviewed 29 April 2022.
[19] Aaron Paterson, interviewed 29 April 2022.

note, which holds more significance to me: ‘Your connections to Nappamerrie is as strong as ours!’.[20]

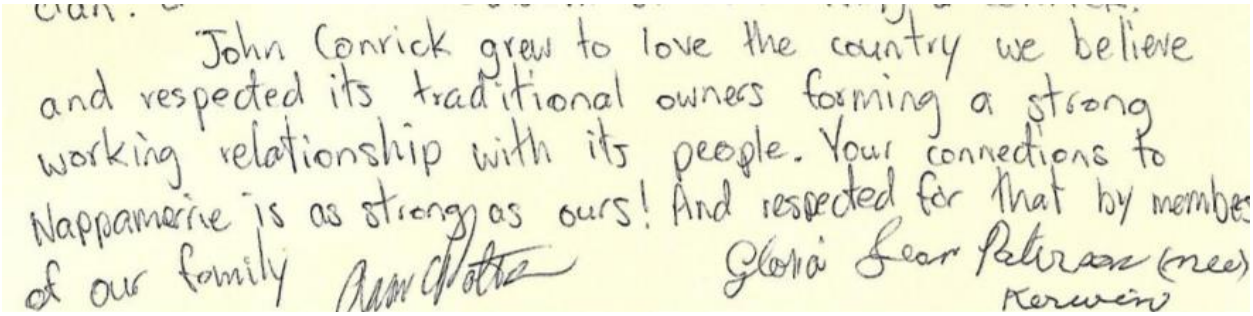

John Conrick grew to love the country we believe and respected its traditional owners forming a strong working relationship with its people. Your connections to Nappamerrie is as strong as ours! And respected for that by member of our family Gloria Dear Paterson (nee) Kerwin

Figure 70: Excerpt from handwritten note by Aaron and Gloria Paterson to Ken Conrick, 2015, in front page of Helen Tolcher’s *Seed of the Coolibah* (original held by Ken Conrick).

This is a very generous statement. I do not compare the Conrick sense of belonging to Nappa Merrie to the Yandruwandha’s spiritual connection to Country. Instead, I am more inclined to David Trigger and Richard Martin’s way of thinking about these relationships. Trigger and Martin highlight how Aboriginal people and pastoralists’ descendants have ‘divergent’ but ‘overlapping’ connections to land. They believe ‘all share the same space, but there are quite different sense of place’.[21] The written statement by Gloria and Aaron shown in Figure 73 is an articulation of this. Aaron reiterated this a month after our meeting in a message. He wanted me to know how he considers ‘Nappa Merrie SHARED COUNTRY between the Yandruwandha and Conrick family’.[22] He followed this response with

> as far as we Yandruwandha are concerned, we have always recognised John Conrick as a person from our country, he didn’t try to hunt us off it, he understood

[20] Handwritten note by Aaron and Gloria Paterson to Ken Conrick, 2015, in front page of Helen Tolcher’s *Seed of the Coolibah*, original held by Ken Conrick.
[21] David Trigger and Richard Martin, ‘Place, Indigeneity, and Identity in Australia’s Gulf Country’, *American Anthropologist* 118 (2016): 825-826.
[22] Aaron Paterson, Facebook Messenger conversation with author, 27 May, 2022.

> the best way to succeed in his ventures was to form a relationship with us, we didn't see him as an invader.[23]

This statement was an emotional one for my family, as it is a powerful acknowledgment and recognition of both John and his descendants' relationship with Nappa Merrie. This also reinforces the Conrick family's stories of positive relations and John's conciliatory behaviour.

Due to the imbalance of power in the colonisation process, the colonisers were the ones to take photographs and make records of the Aboriginal population. This means, for a long time, it is the descendants of colonists who maintained control over the history which is publicly known and told. Aboriginal people often do not have access to photographs of their forebears. As such, before meeting with Aaron and Gloria, I organised to share the Conrick family's photographic collection with them. At the beginning of the meeting, I gave a USB to Aaron, containing photographs and digitised documents, as well as physical copies. The last hour and a half of the meeting on 29 April was spent going through these. Gloria and Aaron were overwhelmed by the number of photographs I showed them, and we did not have time to go through them all. It became apparent they had not seen the majority of these before. This was a big moment for me, as from the time I had first uncovered my family's photographs of life on Nappa Merrie, many of which are of Aboriginal people, my hope had been to share them with the Yandruwandha people. Although these photographs were in my family's possession, they were images of someone else's family and culture, and did not solely

[23] Aaron Paterson, Facebook Messenger conversation with author, 27 May, 2022.

belong to the Conricks. For example, at one point in our correspondence, Aaron asked if we had any photographs of Nappa Merrie Peter, because he had never seen one before. I was shocked at first – Peter was Cora's brother, making him Gloria's great-great-uncle and Aaron's great-great-great-uncle, and he was such a significant figure to the Yandruwandha, so I had assumed they had seen pictures of him. I was able to show them the few photographs of Peter, but unfortunately there is no clear image showing his face. Gloria became emotional, and gently stroked the image of Peter. Gloria did the same thing when looking at many of the photographs and would sometimes look up to the roof as she talked to her ancestors.

Nappa Merrie Peter's Breastplate

It was not until speaking with Aaron that I became aware of the last years of Nappa Merrie Peter's life. According to Aaron, when the Conricks left Nappa Merrie, Peter was removed and sent to Innamincka. Apparently, the partner of the new manager at Nappa Merrie, a woman of Aboriginal and European descent, either had a 'falling out' with Peter or disliked him, so she convinced the manager to 'kick him off the station' to Innamincka.[24] Peter died in Innamincka on 12 December 1957, aged approximately eighty years old. James Vickery, the bookkeeper at Innamincka Station, states Peter had been living at Innamincka for the last twelve months of his life.[25] This suggests Peter was most likely removed from Nappa Merrie in late 1956. In the hours prior to his

[24] Aaron Paterson, interviewed 29 April 2022.
[25] Letter from James Vickery, Bookkeeper of Innamincka Station, to 'Whom It May Concern', 12 December, 1957, provided by Aaron Paterson.

death Peter was in a ‘state of coma and complete physical helplessness’, refusing any assistance. The cause of death is listed as old age, assisted by oppressive heat and dehydration. Vickery, Ronald Absalom (Innamincka Station’s manager) and several station employees, buried Peter in his swag on a sandy riverbed of the Cooper close to Innamincka. The other Aboriginal people at Innamincka were from a different tribe, so were unable to participate in this ritual.[26] Aaron understood this, and explained: ‘he’s from Yandruwandha, they’re not Yandruwandha’. He further clarified when somebody dies their relatives would sing their ‘totem’ or ‘death’ songs, which were usually only known by their kin.[27]

As mentioned in Chapter Three, Nappa Merrie Peter was highly regarded by both the Conricks and the Yandruwandha and was given the title ‘King of Barioolah’. The ‘King’ title was honourific, and its bestowal was a common practice across the pastoral frontier from the mid-1800s to the 1940s.[28] Although some titles were gifted by the government or the commonwealth, the majority were given by station owners and managers as ‘markers of friendship, favour and appreciation’ and used to identify ‘friendly and loyal’ Aboriginal people.[29] The ‘Kings’ were usually leaders amongst their people, who had formed trustworthy relationships with station managers or owners.[30] Anthropologist

[26] Letter from James Vickery, 12 December, 1957; Letter from W.J. Sheehan, Protector of Aboriginals, Nocundra, to the Director of Native Affairs, Brisbane 30 December, 1957, 85/105, provided by Aaron Paterson; Letter from W.J. Sheehan, Protector of Aboriginals, Nocundra to the Director of Native Affairs, Brisbane, 26 February, 1958, 85/105, provided by Aaron Paterson.
[27] Aaron Paterson, interviewed 29 April 2022.
[28] Kate Darian-Smith, ‘Breastplates: Re-Enacting Possession in North America and Australia’, in *Conciliation on Colonial Frontiers*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith and Penelope Edwards (New York: Routledge, 2015), 55.
[29]Kate Darian-Smith, ‘Breastplates’, 55-56
[30] Phil Gordon, ‘Breastplates: An Aboriginal View’, in *Poignant Regalia: 19th Century Aboriginal Images & Breastplates*, ed. Tania Cleary (Glebe, NSW: Historic Houses Trust of NSW, 1993), 17.

David Trigger refers to Kings as ‘brokers’ or ‘middlemen’ between white employers and the Aboriginal population on stations, whilst Jakelin Troy describes the process as seeking ‘influential allies’.[31]

Along with this title, a ‘King’ was often given an engraved breastplate to wear around his neck. Breastplates, also referred to as ‘kingplates’ and ‘gorgets’, can be understood as symbolic of the ‘contact zone’ on the Australian colonial frontier.[32] Chris Healy describes breastplates as neither Aboriginal nor non-Aboriginal, but ‘transactional objects produced in various modes of colonial exchange’.[33] Jack Norris argues that exploring the history and people involved with individual plates allows historians to ‘glimpse the nature’ of ‘colonial interactions’.[34] He states that, although they can represent friendly relations between pastoralists and Aboriginal people and the ‘adaptation and resilience of Aboriginal peoples in the face of British colonisation’, they are ‘objects of cultural imperialism’ and ‘colonial oppression’.[35] Kate Darian-Smith suggests some perceived them as the ‘material embodiment’ of a ‘friendly relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and could be viewed as ‘badges of distinction’.[36]

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[31] David Trigger, *Whitefella Comin’: Aboriginal responses to colonialism in northern Australia* (Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 51; Troy, *King Plates*, 14.
[32] Darian-Smith, ‘Breastplates’, 55.
[33] Chris Healy, ‘Chained to their signs: remembering breastplates’, in *Body Trade: Captivity, Cannibalism and Colonialism in the Pacific*, ed. Barbara Creed and Jeanette Hoorn (Florence: Routledge, 2002): 32.
[34] Jack Norris, ‘Aboriginal Breastplates: Objects and Images of the Colonial Frontier’, *The Artefact: The Journal of the Archaeological and Anthropological Society of Victoria* 42 (2019): 28.
[35] Norris, ‘Aboriginal Breastplates’, 39.
[36] Darian-Smith, ‘Breastplates’, 55, 66.

The story behind Nappa Merrie Peter's plate reveals much regarding the relationship he had with the Conricks. Peter's plate, (Figure 71) is made out of brass in a crescent shape, with the inscription 'Nappa Merrie Peter King of Barioolah Tribe' (Figure 72). On either side of this etching is Peter's totem animal, the '*Palyada*', the stick-nest rat (Figure 73). It is not known whether John Conrick or Ted presented the plate to Peter but it is believed to be made before 1930. We are unable to ascertain how Nappa

Figure 71: Nappa Merrie Peter's Breastplate (held by Aaron Paterson. Photograph © Liam West, Lightly Salted 2022).

Figure 72: Nappa Merrie Peter's Breastplate: Inscription 'Nappa Merrie Peter King of Barioolah Tribe' (held by Aaron Paterson. Photograph © Liam West, Lightly Salted 2022).

Figure 73: Nappa Merrie Peter's Breastplate: Peter's Totem, '*Palyada'* (Stick-nest Rat) (held by Aaron Paterson. Photograph © Liam West, Lightly Salted 2022).

Merrie Peter perceived his plate. As Healy points out, the few recorded reactions of Aboriginal people receiving these plates are generally the interpretations of non-Aboriginal people.[37] However, Peter keeping the plate in his possession throughout his life indicates it held some significance to him.

My parents and my Aunt Cherise, on separate occasions, have told me about Neil's visit to Nappa Merrie in around 1958, where he was informed by the manager of Nappa Merrie of Peter's death but was not told where Peter's grave was. Cherise states one of Neil's life regrets 'was not being there to help bury Peter with the full honour he deserved' for his importance to both the Conricks and the Yandruwandha. Peter was buried on a sandy riverbank, which meant over time the shifting sand would most likely expose his remains to the elements. Cherise mentions how Neil would have loved to have reburied Peter with respect and proper tribal customs, but he did not want to disturb his remains if he was already at rest.[38] According to Julie, Lynton and Cherise, Peter's possessions were returned to Nappa Merrie, and Neil later found them discarded on a pile meant for the rubbish heap. He was devastated by this and 'collected what he had deemed important to him', which included Peter's breastplate. As Julie explains, Neil 'did not want it lost forever' and it remained in his possession until his death in 2015.[39] Neil hoped to one day return the plate to Peter's family, but until then, at least it would be with someone who cared for him. We understood the

[37] Healy, 'Chained to their signs', 26.
[38] Handwritten note by Cherise Conrick to Aaron Paterson, April 26, 2022, original held by Aaron Paterson.
[39] Julie Sallis (nee Conrick) in Madeleine Sallis' interview of Aaron and Gloria Paterson in Rockhampton, Queensland, 29 April, 2022.

breastplate always belonged to Peter, his family and the Yandruwandha, and the Conricks were only ‘safekeeping’ it until it could be returned. Cherise commented how Neil would sometimes look at the plate in his later years and would get misty-eyed, as he felt ‘the weight of responsibility of honouring his memory’.[40]

At the conclusion of our meeting on 29 April 2022, my mother presented Aaron and Gloria Paterson with a blue box containing Peter’s breastplate, accompanied by letters written by Cherise and Julie. Both Aaron and Gloria had no previous indication the plate was in my family’s possession. Julie concludes her note with ‘on behalf of my family, I find it a great honour to return the plate of Nappa Merrie Peter to your family’.[41]

When I unfolded the tissue paper, Gloria let out a surprised noise followed by silence as both Aaron and Gloria began to cry. My parents and I were also unable to remain composed. Aaron stated it was ‘unbelievable’ because they thought the plate ‘was gone, disappeared’.[42] Gloria’s first words were ‘please come to me, thank you’ followed by ‘let me talk to him’.[43] It was an extremely emotional experience, which still brings me to tears every time I reflect on it. Re-listening to the recording was quite difficult for this reason. One of Gloria’s reactions which stood out to me was when she stated the return of this plate was ‘bringing peace for this old fellow’s soul’.[44]

[40] Handwritten note by Cherise Conrick to Aaron Paterson, 26 April, 2022.
[41] Handwritten note by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick) to Aaron and Gloria Paterson, and the Yandruwandha People, 28 April, 2022, held by Aaron Paterson.
[42] Aaron Paterson, interviewed 29 April, 2022.
[43] Gloria Paterson, interviewed 29 April, 2022.
[44] Gloria Paterson, interviewed 29 April, 2022.

Breastplates have a complex and unique place in history, with each plate representing 'different meanings, for different people, across different timespans'.[45] Aboriginal people's perceptions of these can differ, as some could see them as a 'token of status', which enabled them access to the 'white man's world' and its benefits.[46] Nonetheless, others could be ostracised and shamed for 'assisting the white man's never-ending quest for land and control over the land and the Aboriginal people'.[47] Chris Healy describes the plates as a 'burden to be borne as a sign of accommodation' and they 'tell the story of Europe domination and subjugation'.[48] On the other hand, Norris highlights how current non-Aboriginal interpretations and perceptions can differ significantly to those who were involved in the original exchange process. Aaron mentions how many Aboriginal people believe plates like these were seen as 'just a whiteman object', which has no real importance.[49]

Aaron describes the return of the breastplate to the Yandruwandha as a 'relief and pleasant surprise' and means 'a little piece of Nappa Merrie Peter's life with the Conrick's will put him back, at least on paper, where he belongs, at Barioolah Waterhole, on Cooper Creek on Nappa Merrie Station'.[50] This message clearly demonstrates the significance of the breastplates to descendants today, as they can act as a 'mnemonic' object which can create direct links with their ancestors. Michael Aird, Joanna Sassoon and David Trigger highlight how breastplates link particular individuals

[45] Norris, 'Aboriginal Breastplates', 38.
[46] Gordon, 'Breastplates: An Aboriginal View', 16-17.
[47] Norris, 'Aboriginal Breastplates', 38.
[48] Chris Healy, 'Chained to their signs', 25-26.
[49] Aaron Paterson, interviewed 29 April, 2022.
[50] Aaron Paterson, Facebook Messenger conversation, 1 May, 2022.

to certain areas of Country, thus linking their descendants as well.[51] Jack Norris discusses how the plates can then be used to reconstruct the history and identities of the individuals.[52] This is accurate for the Yandruwandha as the etching 'Nappa Merrie Peter King of Barioolah Tribe' links them to both Nappa Merrie and Barioolah. The inclusion of his totem, the '*Palyada*', holds importance, as this is Gloria and Aaron's totem.

However, Aird, Sassoon and Trigger suggest these breastplates often inscribe an individual's European-given name in the historical record and essentially 'erases' any previous traditional names they may have had. They state a 'King' is 'literally chained to a metal plate that fixes a European name to his face, a settler-endowed status as 'King' and a connection to his traditional lands'.[53] Unlike Cora/Nanpika or Nelly/Timpika, who are referred to by both their European and Aboriginal names in written and oral histories, Nappa Merrie Peter's Aboriginal name is not mentioned by either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal Conrick descendants. He is always referred to by, what linguist Michael Walsh calls his 'introduced' name or title ('Peter' and 'King').[54]

Regardless of how Peter's plate has been interpreted in the past, there are signs of its ongoing importance to the current Yandruwandha people. In mentioning how many Aboriginal people believe plates like these were seen as 'just a whiteman object', Aaron

[51] Michael Aird, Joanna Sassoon and David Trigger, 'The White-man calls me Jack: The many names and claims for Jackey Jackey of the lower Logan River, south-east Queensland, Australia', *Aboriginal History* 45 (2021): 5, 12, 22-23.
[52] Norris, 'Aboriginal Breastplates', 30.
[53] Aird, Sassoon and Trigger, 'The White-man calls me Jack', 5.
[54] Walsh, 'Introduced Personal Names for Australian Aborigines', 32.

qualified this by saying, among his family, they ‘know it’s way more than that’.[55] On 26 May, Aaron posted on the Conrick Facebook page two videos and seven photos of a smoking ceremony taking place at Innamincka, to ensure safe passage for their travels on Nappa Merrie. As part of the smoking ceremony, the Yandruwandha people requested Aaron to wear Nappa Merrie Peter’s breastplate in order to have their old people with them.[56] I find it quite emotional to see Aaron wearing his great-great-great-uncle’s breastplate, speaking in his language, performing a traditional ceremony before

Figure 74: Aaron Paterson wearing Nappa Merrie Peter’s Breastplate, Innamincka (post on ‘The Conrick Family’ private group, Facebook, 26 May, 2022).

[55] Aaron Paterson, interviewed 29 April 2022.
[56] Aaron Paterson, post on ‘The Conrick Family’ private group, Facebook, 26 May, 2022.

returning to Country (see figures 74 and 75). Aaron told those present how ‘Peter died alone without his own relatives present to bury him, Nelly and Bob Parker’ and it was ‘appropriate that [they] remember his name and where he comes from and the importance the Conrick family placed towards him by creating this breastplate’.[57]

Figure 75: Aaron Paterson speaking during Smoking Ceremony, Innamincka (post on ‘The Conrick Family’ private group, Facebook, 26 May, 2022).

[57] Aaron Paterson, Facebook Messenger conversation, 27 May, 2022.

There is the question of whether the story told by Neil and his children of how he came across the breastplate is accurate. Healy highlights how the provenance of many plates can be vague and ambiguous, due to a likelihood that some were uncovered due to interfering with the owner's remains.[58] This is due to Aboriginal people usually being buried with their belongings. Aaron confirms this, stating the 'Yandruwandha way' was to be buried with your possessions.[59] However, with Nappa Merrie Peter's breastplate, this did not occur. According to letters written by James Vickery (Innamincka Station bookkeeper) and W.J. Sheehan (Protector of Aborigines, Nocundra) in 1957 and 1958, Peter was buried with his belongings, with 'the exception of his nameplate and Nulla Nulla'. Vickery's intention was to return these two items to Peter's closest relatives. Later letters identified 'Barioolah Bob' (Bob Parker) and Nelly Parker as his nephew and niece.[60] There is no explanation of why the plate was never forwarded to Bob or Nelly, nor how it came to be discarded in a pile, but it does show Neil did not obtain the plate through nefarious means.

Although the meeting between Gloria and Aaron Paterson, my mother and me answered a lot of questions regarding the Conrick family's relations with the Yandruwandha people, this was not the end of the journey. The relationship between Aaron and my family continues to develop and with it the sharing of knowledge. This was merely the first of many meetings which will take place in the future. Since the

[58] Healy, 'Chained to their signs', 28.
[59] Aaron Paterson, interviewed April 29, 2022.
[60] Letter from James Vickery, 12 December, 1957; Letter from W.J. Sheehan to the Director of Native Affairs, Brisbane, 30 December, 1957; Letter from W.J. Sheehan to the Director of Native Affairs, Brisbane, 26 February, 1958.

meeting, my Aunt Cherise has been in contact with Aaron directly, appreciating 'the ability to connect further with the past and to share the stories' of her father's experiences.[61] This paves the way for the creation of a new legacy of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations on Nappa Merrie Station.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of our meeting, Gloria told us 'this is emotional history'. Throughout the day she often repeated Aaron and the Yandruwandha were 'just trying to bring rest to our old people', and this could be done by the continuing to pass on their culture and stories. Aaron is quoted by Sarah Murgatroyd in the notes section of her book on the Burke and Wills Expedition, *The Dig Tree*. Murgatroyd states Aaron and his relatives 'believe that better understanding between black and white will only come with the sharing of knowledge'.[62] The coming together of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Conrick descendants supports Aaron's belief, as the full scope of the Conrick's relations with Aboriginal people would not be complete without the bringing together of knowledge. Through the discussion of the oral histories of Nappa Merrie, the return of photographs and Nappa Merrie Peter's breastplate, and the beginnings of reconciling with the past, a new legacy of these histories has been created, to pass on to further generations.

[61] Handwritten note by Cherise Conrick to Aaron Paterson, 26 April, 2022.
[62] Sarah Murgatroyd, *The Dig Tree* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2002), 362.

Conclusion

This thesis explores the relations between the Conrick family and Aboriginal people on Nappa Merrie Station, and the veracity of stories passed down through the generations. In the process of this examination, the complexities of the Conrick history and its legacies have been revealed. I began this research by investigating the question posed in the introduction: 'Were the Conrick stories of positive relations with, and treatment of, Aboriginal people on Nappa Merrie valid, or was there something more to be found in my family history?'. Historical written records, government correspondence, newspaper articles, reminiscences, oral histories and research undertaken by local historian Helen Tolcher support family stories passed down through both the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal sides of the Conrick family which indicate John Conrick and his descendants were humane and conciliatory in their treatment of Aboriginal people on Nappa Merrie in comparison to others at the time. This evidence of positive cross-cultural interactions is important in ensuring a more nuanced overview of the relationships on the Australian frontier and pastoral stations. The Conricks of Nappa Merrie show, despite a significant number of sources outlining the violence inflicted on Aboriginal people, there is evidence of strong, rich and positive working relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, which are often overlooked or not obvious in the wider historical record.

The Conrick story of positive cross-cultural relations was routinely articulated in the family archives, evident in memoirs, press interviews and articles, and even in family

photographs. However, the meeting with Aaron and Gloria Paterson in April 2022 in Rockhampton was a significant turning point in my research, as the stories of both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Conrick descendants came together to develop a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the family's relationships with, and treatment of, the Aboriginal population on Nappa Merrie. Prior to this, the Aboriginal members of the Conrick family had not been officially recorded in the public historical narrative, and only white people's interpretations were provided.

Helen Tolcher's books, for example, illustrate how John and the Conrick family are represented in the written record, as do the oral histories of Conrick descendants and other non-Aboriginal people in the region, but Aboriginal perspectives are absent. Sharing stories with Aaron and Gloria enabled me to hear an Aboriginal perspective. Aaron confirmed there are no stories of John Conrick harming any Yandruwandha people or requesting the government to remove Aboriginal people from Nappa Merrie. Aaron's statements support and confirm the stories of positive cross-cultural relations passed down by non-Aboriginal Conrick descendants and demonstrates how the perceptions of these relationships were not entirely 'one-sided'. Gloria and Aaron emphasise the need to share stories and knowledge as a means to bring 'rest' to their people and creating understanding between cultures.

While the family story of 'positive cross-cultural relations' is supported by evidence provided by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sides of the family, this thesis has also

highlighted the intricacies of this history's legacies and its continued importance in the lives of descendants.

Throughout the thesis I have examined the veracity and selectivity of social memory and oral histories. By contrasting Conrick family stories with historical records, a more refined account is achieved, and some inconsistencies or absences are revealed. A few examples include John Conrick's name on the 1875 letter calling for police assistance, the stories surrounding John's staghounds and the contrast between John having 'little trouble' and 'no trouble' with Aboriginal people. Unfortunately, it is hard to ascertain exact reasons for these inconsistencies – whether they be due to purposeful admission, the changing of public perceptions of colonisation's effect on Aboriginal populations over time, or they were not deemed important and simply forgotten. Furthermore, by comparing Conrick descendants' oral and written histories with information contained in newspaper articles and other public records, this thesis has tested the accuracy of the family memories and revealed what descendants viewed as important – i.e. Aboriginal people's loyalty to the Conrick family and the focus on particular events rather than on everyday life on the station.

While many inconsistencies are relatively minor, the most significant absence in my family's oral histories was the omission of any reference to the child John Conrick had with an Aboriginal woman, Cora. While the Yandruwandha have always known this, the majority of non-Aboriginal Conrick descendants were unaware of this relationship and child until 2015 when chance meetings between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sides of

the family occurred. The non-Aboriginal side of the family's lack of knowledge or silence regarding their Aboriginal relations reflects past social stigmas and taboos of relationships between Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal men in colonial and twentieth century mainstream society, where there were social implications, leading to social consequences, such as ostracisation. The willingness of current non-Aboriginal Conrick descendants to accept and even embrace the newly discovered Aboriginal relatives shows how perceptions of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal sexual relationships has changed as Australian society's racial ideologies have developed over time.

An important discovery of this research is my forebears' deep relationships with, and sense of belonging to, Nappa Merrie and its Aboriginal population. The Conricks who lived and worked on the land, developed a connection to Country and the local Aboriginal culture, and took pride in this knowledge. This shows how station owners and their children learned and embraced local traditions and languages, and challenge generalisations made by scholars such as Ann McGrath and Dawn May. The Conrick family's links to Nappa Merrie are acknowledged by Yandruwandha man, Aaron Paterson. The title of this thesis draws from a note Aaron wrote to a Conrick descendant in 2015, where he states, 'Your connections to Nappa Merrie is as strong as ours!'. Aaron then reiterated this sentiment by declaring how Nappa Merrie is 'SHARED COUNTRY between the Yandruwandha and [the] Conrick family', and how John is recognised as a person from Country. These are strong and powerful statements, which are of great significance to current Conrick descendants.

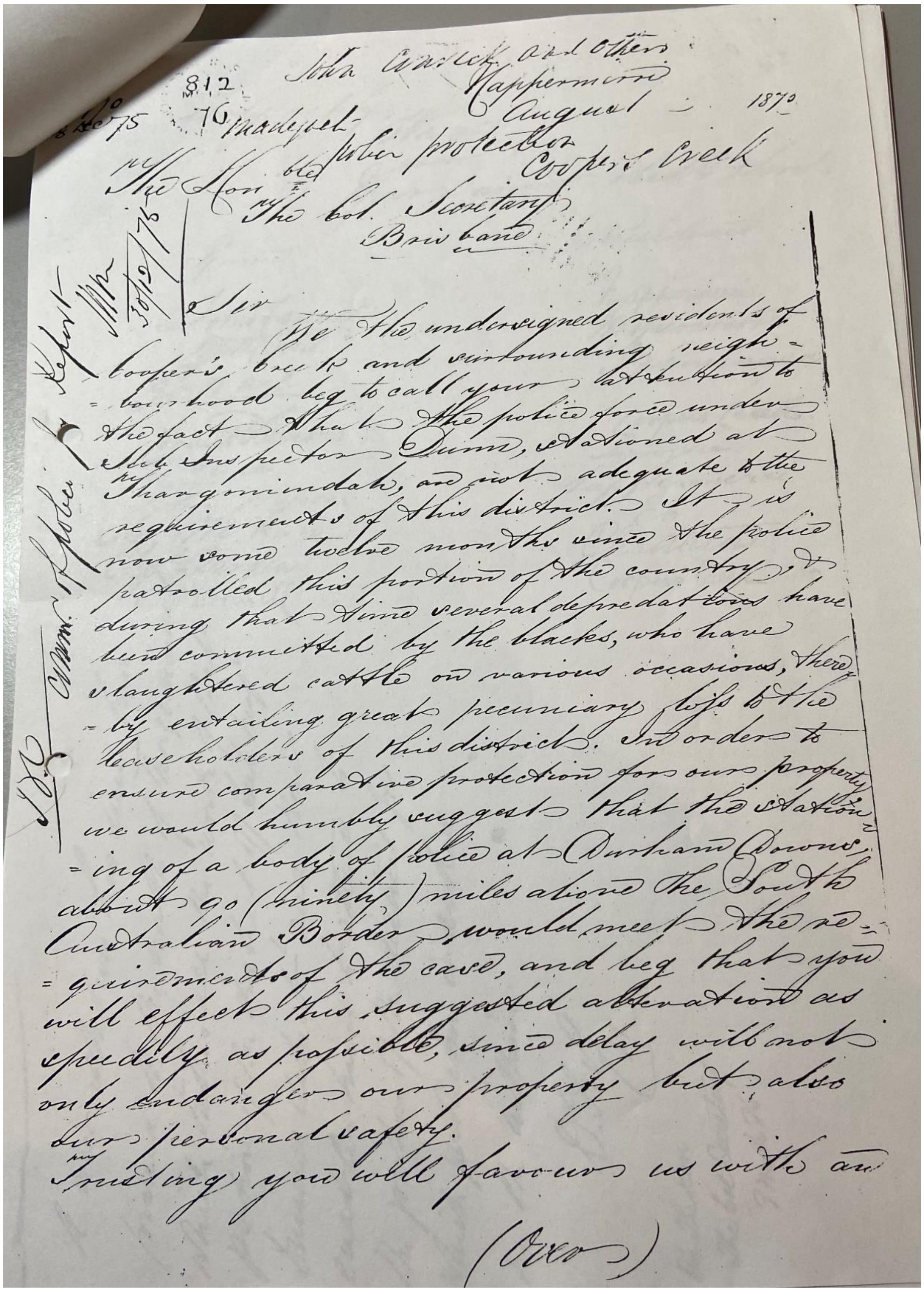
Another unique aspect of this thesis is how, along with oral histories, the rich archive of photographs and written documents held by members of my family. A significant portion of the family archive is the extensive photograph collection, many photos of which have never been seen by current Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal generations. The meeting with Aaron and Gloria in April 2022 concluded with the emotional sharing of photographs and the returning of Nappa Merrie Peter's breastplate, symbolising the beginning of my reconciliation with my forebears' occupation of Aboriginal land and use of Aboriginal people as a cheap labour force. When sharing the photos with Aaron and Gloria, it became apparent neither had ever seen a significant portion of them, including any images of some of their own relatives. The fact non-Aboriginal people took photographs and created records of Aboriginal populations, and it is their descendants who maintain control over this history, signifies a great imbalance of power. My experience emphasises the important role private archives of pastoralist/colonist descendants can play in the reconciliation process, and in connecting Aboriginal people to their ancestors and culture. Similarly, while Nappa Merrie Peter's breastplate was physically in my grandfather and mother's possession, it never belonged to them; they were merely 'safekeeping' the plate to return it to its rightful owners, the Yandruwandha and Peter's descendants. The return of the plate, in Gloria and Aaron's words, enabled 'peace' for Peter's soul, and tied him in the written record to his Country.

Although this thesis follows the 'journey' I have undertaken to date to understand the nature of my forebears' relationships with the Aboriginal people on Nappa Merrie, the journey does not end here. The relationships between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

Conrick descendants will continue to develop, as we proceed with the sharing of stories and photographs and form new legacies of the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships on Nappa Merrie Station.

Appendix 1

Photocopy of Letter to Colonial Secretary of Brisbane from residents of Cooper Creek, c. October 1875, found in Helen Tolcher's notes. Held at South Australian Museum.



John Conlick and others
Kappermurra
August 1875
Cooper's Creek

812
76
8 Oct 75
Inadequate police protection

The Hon. the Col. Secretary
Brisbane

Commr Police for Report
30/10/75

Sir

We the undersigned residents of Cooper's Creek and surrounding neighbourhood beg to call your attention to the fact that the police force under Sub Inspector Dunn, stationed at Thargomindah, are not adequate to the requirements of this district. It is now some twelve months since the police patrolled this portion of the country, & during that time several depredations have been committed by the blacks, who have slaughtered cattle on various occasions, thereby entailing great pecuniary loss to the leaseholders of this district. In order to ensure comparative protection for our property we would humbly suggest that the stationing of a body of police at Durham Downs, about 90 (ninety) miles above the South Australian Border would meet the requirements of the case, and beg that you will effect this suggested alteration as speedily as possible, since delay will not only endanger our property but also our personal safety.

Trusting you will favour us with an

(Over)

early reply. We are,
Sir,
Yours most obed.t Serv.ts

Name	Residence
John Cowriet	Napperwerri.
[illegible]	Napperwerri
Ed. Wall	Iramingea
Frank Dovetow	Coopers Creek.
[illegible]	Iramingea.
John Wilson	Nappermerri
A. McKay	do
Thos. Flargin	Chastleton
W. J. O'Donnell	Coopers Creek

A new station has since been formed to the north of Thorgomindah which takes all the work of that portion of the district off Sub Insp.r Dunnes detach.t and thus enables him to attend to the portion of the district for which protection is asked in the within.

D.G.E.

B/c The Hon
The Col Secretary
9 Mch 76

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Primary Sources:

CONRICK FAMILY ARCHIVE

Photographs

Albums/Folders
‘2002 – Nappa Merrie’. Held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).

‘Aboriginal People/Culture’. Held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).

‘Conrick Family Photos Pre-1950’. Held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).

‘Conrick History Box 1 – Clear’. Held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).

‘E. (Betty) Conrick’s Album’. Held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).

‘E.G. (Ted) Conrick’s Album’. Held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).

‘E.N. (Neil) Conrick’s Album’. Held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).

‘James Conrick’s Album’. Held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).

‘Joe Conrick List Photos’. Held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).

‘Landscape’. Held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).

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Held by Bulloo Shire Council.
Glass slides of John Ware Conrick. Originals held by Bulloo Shire Council. Provided by Ken Conrick.

'The Conrick Family' private group, Facebook

Image from Agnes Jean Telfer's photograph negatives. Post on 'The Conrick Family' private group. Facebook, 6 June, 2022.

Image from the Diary of Agnes Jean Telfer. Post on 'The Conrick Family' private group. Facebook, 12 March 2022.

Paterson, Aaron. Post on 'The Conrick Family' private group. Facebook. 7 December, 2020.

Paterson, Aaron. Post on 'The Conrick Family' private group. Facebook. 2 March, 2021.

Paterson, Aaron. Post on 'The Conrick Family' private group. Facebook. 26 May, 2022.

Sallis Family Home

Photograph of John Conrick, c.1920s. Framed on wall of Sallis Family home.

Video

Sallis, Julie. 'Nappa Merrie 2002'. Home video on VCR. Original held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).

Letters/Notes

Handwritten note by Aaron and Gloria Paterson to Ken Conrick. 2015. In front page of Helen Tolcher's *Seed of the Coolibah*. Original held by Ken Conrick.

Handwritten note by Cherise Conrick to Aaron Paterson. April 26, 2022. Original held by Aaron Paterson.

Handwritten note by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick) to Aaron and Gloria Paterson, and the Yandruwandha People. 28 April, 2022. Original held by Aaron Paterson.

Personal letter from John Conrick to George Ware. 2 May, 1882. Located in 'Conrick Documents Pre-1940' folder. Held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).

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Personal communication, email, Telephone and Facebook messenger communication with Aaron Paterson.

Personal communication with Cherise Conrick.

Personal communication with Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).

Personal communication with Lynton Sallis.

Personal communication with Mary-Jane Stanley (nee Conrick).

Artefacts/Objects

Nappa Merrie Peter’s Breastplate. Held by Aaron Paterson.

Two throwing spears, a spear, six boomerangs, a Nulla Nulla, and a shield. Held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).

Maps

Edward Neil Conrick’s handwriting on map of the Durham Downs area. c.1984. Original map held by Julie Sallis (nee Conrick).

<u>Helen Tolcher’s notes</u>

Interview Transcripts

Transcript of Irene Rowland’s (nee Pope) Interview with Helen Tolcher re Innamincka, 23 April, 1977. Located in Helen Tolcher’s notes. Held at South Australian Museum Archives.

Transcript of Joe Conrick’s Interview with Helen Tolcher, 7 January, 1981. Located in Helen Tolcher’s notes. Held at South Australian Museum Archives.

Transcript of John Andrew Conrick’s Interview with Helen Tolcher, 26 November, 1976. Located in Helen Tolcher’s notes. Held at South Australian Museum Archives.

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