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THE PALMER GOLD FIELD 1873-1883

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March 1984

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Bachelor of
Arts with Honours in the Department of History
at the James Cook University of North
Queensland.

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CONTENTS

	Illustrations and Appendices	ii
	Maps	v
	Abbreviations	vi
	Introduction	vii
Chapter 1	Exploration Discovery and the Initial Rush	1
Chapter 2	Alluvial Mining, Administration and Communications	37
Chapter 3	Reefing	95
Chapter 4	The European Community	129
Chapter 5	The Chinese	168
Chapter 6	Aborigines and Miners	243
	Conclusion	319
	Bibliography	324

ILLUSTRATIONS AND APPENDICES

<i>Old Palmer Song</i>	xvii
Palmer River from Maytown Cemetery	3
Mosman Plateau	5
Hann Expedition 1872	13
Looking towards Laura River	18
James Mulligan	21
Early view of Cooktown from Grassy Hill	28
Howard St George	30
Cooktown, late 1873 early 1874	44
Population on the Palmer Gold Field	55
Philip Sellheim	57
W.R.O. Hill	59
<i>At Work - Palmer, 1876</i>	61
Grave of Laura Sellheim	65
Grave of Jane St George	66
W.O. Hodgkinson	68
Hann Divisional Board Hall	71
Stone Kerbing	73
A.C. Macmillan	75
Cutting at road crossing of Palmer, Byerstown	80
Slate outcrop, Maytown	82
Palmer Coach	86
Laura railway station	89
Laura bridge	91
Mining Statistics	94
Ida Mine	103
"The 'Louisa'..."	107
Comet Mine	108
<i>Gold Mine...</i>	112
Perseverance battery	117
Detail of boiler at Comet	119
Gold battery at the Louisa	128
<i>The Kings of the Palmer in 1876</i>	136

Native Police Detachment, Laura	299
Alexander Douglas Douglas	301
Queensland Native Trooper	303
Native Police Camp, Laura	305
Native Police troopers, Laura	307
Native Police on parade	313
Deaths Attributed to Aborigines	314
Statement of Members of the Expedition	316
Summary of Causes of Death	318

MAPS

Lower Cape York Peninsula, showing Major Rivers, Ports and Mining Towns, 1879-1880	7
Principal North Queensland Goldfields	10
Palmer River Goldfield , Showing Principal Watercourses and Settlements	39
Cooktown - Palmer District, Showing Main Tracks	78
Central Palmer District	98
Reefs Close to Maytown	99
Southern Kwantung Province	173
Aboriginal tribes of the Palmer region	248

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ADB</i>	<i>Australian Dictionary of Biography</i>
AIAS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies
<i>AR</i>	<i>Annual Report of the Undersecretary for Mines</i>
<i>ASR</i>	<i>Australian Shipping Record</i>
<i>BC</i>	<i>Brisbane Courier</i>
BMR	Bureau of Mineral Resources
<i>CC</i>	<i>Cooktown Courier</i>
<i>CH</i>	<i>Cooktown Herald</i>
<i>GA</i>	<i>Golden Age</i>
GSQ	Geological Survey of Queensland
<i>HMN</i>	<i>Hodgkinson Mining News</i>
JCUNQ	James Cook University of North Queensland
<i>JHSQ</i>	<i>Journal of the Historical Society of Queensland</i>
JOL	John Oxley Library
NBA	National Bank of Australasia archives (now National Australia Bank archives)
<i>NQR</i>	<i>North Queensland Register</i>
<i>PC</i>	<i>Palmer Chronicle</i>
PRO	Public Records Office
<i>Q</i>	<i>Queenslander</i>
<i>QGG</i>	<i>Queensland Government Gazette</i>
<i>QGMJ</i>	<i>Queensland Government Mining Journal</i>
<i>QPD</i>	<i>Queensland Parliamentary Debates</i>
QSA	Queensland State Archives
<i>QV&P</i>	<i>Queensland Votes and Proceedings</i>
<i>RSQP</i>	<i>Royal Society of Queensland Proceedings</i>

Note: archival references contain other abbreviations such as Col Sec, Min Works etc., commonly used in the original documents, and whose meaning should be evident to the reader.

INTRODUCTION

The Palmer is a river on Cape York Peninsula which played no significant part in European affairs until the 1870s, when it abruptly became the scene of one of Australia's major gold fields. The field had a short life; although a few miners earned sustenance there as late as the 1940s, its gold production and population had both boomed dramatically and then fallen just as dramatically into decline within ten years of its discovery. This thesis describes the events of that first decade.

* * * *

The Palmer Gold Field was one of the best known in colonial Queensland; its name is familiar to students of Australian history even to-day when the names of most nineteenth century gold fields have been forgotten. Paradoxically, the history of the Palmer rush is not widely understood or has been almost completely misinterpreted. Payable gold was discovered in 1873 and a field proclaimed the following year. It was a rich field in terms of alluvial production, yielding in excess of 1,200,000 ounces, most of which was won during the short boom from late 1873 to early 1876. Moreover, the rush to the Palmer was different in several significant ways from gold rushes elsewhere in Australia. Whereas there were elements in the field's history characteristic of other alluvial rushes, never had they occurred in quite the same combination.

The early reports of alluvial gold sparked off a tremendous population movement: twenty to thirty thousand people made their way to the field or its port of Cooktown in the early years. While far greater numbers had flocked to the New South Wales and Victorian diggings in the early 1850s, the Palmer, unlike most alluvial finds, was situated beyond the frontier of pastoral occupation and far from the seat of government: "a thousand miles away".¹ Thus the European

1. Last line of chorus of the Old Palmer Song. The full song appears as an appendix to this introduction. See Ron Edwards, *The Overlander Songbook* (Holloways Beach 1969), p. 46.

penetration of Cape York Peninsula had important implications not only for the North Queensland mining industry, but for communications, settlement and race relations.

There were no roads, no railways or telegraph, no pastoralists or farmers to provide food, no merchants to distribute it, and no government administration. The entire infrastructure of European settlement had to be provided to serve the gold rush population. On most earlier Australian mining fields, pastoral settlement had displaced or subdued Aboriginal communities long before gold was discovered, but on the Palmer their dispossession was done by miners. Unprecedented as all this was, it was further complicated by the arrival of Chinese, at first from the southern colonies, kindling antipathies long established there, but then in thousands directly from China, to completely dominate the gold field.²

Despite the many distinctive features of the Palmer, it has never been the subject of a thorough historical study. Perhaps the fullest reliable account in print is Geoffrey Bolton's mention of the field in *A Thousand Miles Away*, which devotes about 5,000 words to the subject, in contrast to Geoffrey Blainey's twelve sentences in his history of Australian mining, *The Rush That Never Ended*.³ There has been a popular account of the Palmer rush, Hector Holthouse's *River of Gold*, but it places itself in the category of colourful journalism rather than history in stressing easily-won gold and concentrating on sensational and exaggerated incidents of robbery, murder, prostitution, cannibalism and rioting Cantonese.⁴

2. See population graph in chapter 2 after footnote 70.

3. G.C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away: A History of North Queensland to 1920* (Brisbane 1963), pp. 51-9, 114-15; G. Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended. A History of Australian Mining* (2nd edn., Melbourne 1969), pp. 86-88, 90, 94.

4. Hector Holthouse, *River of Gold: A Story of the Palmer Gold Rush* (Sydney 1967).

There is a wide range of published and unpublished sources describing the first decade of the Palmer from a European viewpoint. Newspapers provide much contemporary information; regrettably the two papers published on the field; the *Golden Age* and *Palmer Chronicle* exist today in only one and two complete issues respectively, with a few additional fragments preserved among archival correspondence.⁵ The coastal newspapers fared better, and the *Cooktown Courier* and *Cooktown Herald and Palmer River Advertiser*, both of which regularly reported on the gold field, survive in relatively complete runs. They are of particular interest because of their differing editorial positions on the Chinese question: the *Courier* supporting the European miner and favouring exclusion, while the *Herald* spoke for the business community and supported employment of Chinese labour. Chinese notices appeared regularly in the *Herald*, as did articles by pro-Chinese spokesmen such as James McHenley.⁶ Further afield, the *Queenslander* published weekly accounts of mining activities throughout the colony.

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- 5 *Golden Age* 29 July 1876 (commemorative first issue on silk held John Oxley Library); *Palmer Chronicle* 24 March 1883, 1 August 1883, and pp. 1 and 2 only of 5 June and 6 June 1889.
6. James McHenley claimed he graduated from the University of St Andrews in Scotland as a linguist, then resided in China for eight years, during which time he qualified at an Anglo-Chinese College as an interpreter/translator (McHenley to Attorney General 25 June 1873, JUS/A 14 QSA). He had experience on several Australian gold fields, including Charters Towers, where he is recorded as having translated the Gold Fields Regulations into Chinese for Gold Commissioner J.G. McDonald (see Chapter 6 for illustration). McHenley gave two public lectures, in Cooktown in May 1875, and over the next two years he regularly submitted letters and feature articles - one series entitled "The Chinese Abroad" - to the *Cooktown Herald* (see CH 19 May, 5, 23 June 1875 and 17, 24, 28 June, 5 July 1876). It is interesting to note that R.B. Walker refers to a J.C. or J.M. Henley, storekeeper and Chinese interpreter, as the only man, other than a policeman, to testify against the rioters at Lambing Flat in 1861 (R.B. Walker, *Another Look at the Lambing Flat Riots, 1860-1861*, JRAHS 56, 3 (1970), pp. 196, 202).

The other printed contemporary source giving regular information is the annual report to Parliament of the Under Secretary for Mines. The Department of Mines was founded in 1874 (although already in train, its establishment was accelerated by the administrative emergency posed by the Palmer rush), and its reports were published annually from 1878 onward in *Votes and Proceedings*. These included the warden's annual report, a useful summary of events on the gold field, in addition to the monthly and quarterly returns by the warden which were often printed in the newspapers. Also in *Votes and Proceedings* are the Blue Books, Statistics of Queensland, and the Censuses of 1876 and 1881, as well as a number of irregular reports from wardens, prospectors, geologists and select committees which provide information on the Palmer.

Few published private accounts or reminiscences describe the Palmer. James Mulligan's *Guide to the Palmer River* of 1875 contained brief comments on roads, health, climate and Aborigines, as well as an appendix chronicling his journeys of exploration in 1873-74.⁷ Thirty years later, Mulligan enlarged on these experiences in a series of newspaper articles,⁸ and other reminiscences of the gold field began to appear in the twentieth century. W.R.O. Hill's *Forty-five Years' Experiences in North Queensland* in 1907 gave a rollicking but not entirely trustworthy version of his term as assistant warden at Byerstown in 1876-77.⁹

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7. J. Mulligan, *Guide to the Palmer River and Normanby Gold Fields North Queensland, Showing the Different Roads to and from the Etheridge River, Cleveland Bay, and Cooktown, with Map of the Palmer River and Adjacent Gold Fields, and Journal of Explorations* (Brisbane 1875).
 8. Q 13 August - 31 December 1904.
 9. W.R.O. Hill, *Forty-five Years' Experiences in North Queensland: 1861-1905, with a few incidents in England, 1844 to 1861* (Brisbane 1907).

Former Sub-Inspector Alexander Douglas Douglas wrote an account of the Palmer in 1909, entitled "The First Chinese Invasion of Australia", but it is little more than a stereotyped denigration of the Chinese.¹⁰ In 1921 William Corfield, merchant and politician, wrote his *Reminiscences of Queensland*, which described his visits to the Palmer as a bullock driver in the 1870s,¹¹ and the following year Robert Logan Jack published the second volume of *Northmost Australia*, largely a chronicle of exploration, but with a detailed description of the Palmer rush, drawing on a first-hand account which flatly refutes the negative findings of an enquiry into reported atrocities by the government expedition nearly forty years earlier.¹² In 1925 there appeared the one published account by a Chinese miner, Taam Sze Pui's brief monograph, *My Life and Work*.¹³ Later came Reginald Spencer Browne's *A Journalist's Memories* in 1927, valuable for its lists of notable personalities, but viewing the Palmer with an urbane detachment from the relative comfort of Cooktown,¹⁴ and J.H. Binnie's *My Life on a Tropic Goldfield* in 1944, relating the impressions of a child - six when he arrived, eleven when he left - growing up at his father's battery on the North Palmer.¹⁵

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10. A. Douglas Douglas, *The First Chinese Invasion of Australia. The Story of the Palmer Gold Diggings Rush in 1874*, *The Lone Hand* (1 November 1909), pp. 90-4.
 11. W.H. Corfield, *Reminiscences of Queensland 1862-1899* (Brisbane 1921), pp. 54-71, and *Reminiscences of North Queensland, 1862-1878*, *JHSQ* 2, 2 (June 1923), pp. 81-96.
 12. R.L. Jack, *Northmost Australia: three centuries of exploration and adventures in and around Cape York Peninsula, Queensland with a study of the narratives of all explorers by sea and land in the light of modern charting, many original and hitherto unpublished documents....* (Vol.2, Melbourne 1922), pp. 375-424.
 13. Taam Sze Pui, *My Life and Work* (Innisfail 1925).
 14. Reginald Spencer Browne, *A Journalist's Memories* (Brisbane 1927), pp. 9-72.
 15. J.H. Binnie, *My Life on a Tropic Goldfield* (Melbourne c.1944).

Other original material remains less known. Hann's diaries and notebooks have only recently been published,¹⁶ and the letters of Charles Bowly, who made a number of droving trips to the Palmer between 1873 and 1878 and left the best surviving unselfconscious firsthand account of the field, will hopefully soon go to press.¹⁷ Unfortunately, the two crucially important administrators, Howard St George and Philip Sellheim, appear to have left no personal papers. Those of A.C. Macmillan and W.O. Hodgkinson touch on many aspects of their careers, but shed little new light on the Palmer.¹⁸ Among other known public figures on the field, only Thomas Tate left a diary, providing yet another source for the copiously documented Hann expedition of 1872.¹⁹ Of the thousands of others who visited the field in its first decade, only two are known to have recorded their experiences privately: Tam Sie, another Chinese miner who settled in Australia permanently, and a European miner, unknown except for his first name, Peter, who kept a graphic diary of the Hodgkinson rush of 1876. Both accounts tell of failure, disappointment and poverty.²⁰

By far the most important unpublished material on the Palmer is the official correspondence and other records in the Queensland State

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16. Joseph and William Hann, Papers 1861-1889, Library James Cook University; W. Hann, *Expedition of Exploration to the Endeavour, Cape York Peninsula, 1872. Reconstructed from his diary and two note books by Harry Clarke* (Townsville 1982).
 17. C.W. Bowly, Letters 1873-78, private collection.
 18. W.O. Hodgkinson, Papers 1876-1900, OM 72-62 and D.A.C. Macmillan, Papers 1865-1881, OM 73-101 John Oxley Library.
 19. Thomas Tate, Diary 26 June - 10 November 1872, microfilm A2.10 John Oxley Library (Original Mitchell Library).
 20. Peter (Surname unknown), Diary 1876-7, unprocessed manuscript John Oxley Library. While the surname of the writer is not known, the names of his three mates are recorded on the first page of the diary: Walter Newman, John Greener and Magness Olsone.

Archives. The wardens' letterbooks from Byerstown and Maytown have survived, although the latter are in extremely fragile condition, as have the records of the Clerk of Petty Sessions and wardens' courts.²¹ Much administrative correspondence relating to the Palmer is also found in the files of the Works Department and the Colonial Secretary's Office.²² Complementing these are the records of the field's largest financial institution, the Queensland National Bank, whose Maytown branch correspondence and half-yearly balance books are held by the National Australia Bank archives.²³

* * * *

This study comprises six chapters of varying length, dealing with six separate aspects of the Palmer's first decade. Chapter one

21. Copies of outward correspondence of the warden at Palmerville and Edwardstown are to be found in Clerk of Petty Sessions, Maytown, Letterbook 4 December 1874-31 July 1876, CPS 13B/G1. The letterbooks of the Mining Warden, Maytown, 7 August 1876-25 July 1884, MWO 13B/G1-4 follow on chronologically. Other QSA series consulted thoroughly include: Mining Warden, Byerstown, Letterbook 10 April 1876-24 June 1879, MWO 13A/G1 and Minutes in the Warden's Court 18 September 1876-27 May 1878, MWO 13A/2; Mining Warden, Maytown, Minutes of Proceedings in the Warden's Court 10 January 1877-30 December 1883, MWO 13B/2-3; Clerk of Petty Sessions, Byerstown, Minutes of Proceedings in the Police Court 10 April 1876-16 April 1879, CPS 13A/P1 and Clerk of Petty Sessions, Maytown, Minutes of Proceedings in the Police Courts 25 July 1874 - 11 August 1883, CPS 13B/P3-5.
22. Works Department, General correspondence records 1873-1884, WOR/A 62-223 and Colonial Secretary's Office, General correspondence records 1872-1883, 1889, COL/A 190-376, 595 QSA.
23. Queensland National Bank, Maytown, Letterbooks 1876-1885, BR/QNB/032 22, BR/QNB/020 21 & Balance Books 1876-1883, C/QNB/304-5 115.

describes the physical setting and early European contact with the area, placing particular emphasis on Hann's expedition of 1872, and Mulligan's the following year, which led to the report of payable gold that initiated the rush. The historical problem evident on many other mining fields, that of giving due credit to the actual discoverer, is the subject of some discussion in this chapter. There seems little doubt that Hann knew he had found a major gold field, but, apparently reluctant to take responsibility for initiating a rush far beyond the frontier of settlement, he left it to Mulligan to seek celebrity and financial reward. The first uneasy months of the rush are described, up to the proclamation of the field, where the narrative sequence is abandoned.

Chapter two assesses the nature of alluvial mining on the Palmer, the problems of administration on a large field with a scattered and mobile population, and the effects of slow and difficult transport methods on settlement and mining. The third chapter describes underground mining: the optimistic companies which installed machinery and sank shafts, eventually yielding a mere six per cent of the Palmer's total gold production at great financial loss. Chapter four concentrates on the European community and its way of life, bearing in mind that from early 1875 the Europeans were a minority group on a Chinese gold field: a rare experience for Europeans in Australia.

The final chapters look at Chinese and Aboriginal involvement in the events of the Palmer's first decade, as comprehensively as is possible from evidence almost entirely European in origin and thus usually hostile, or at best indifferent, toward those groups. Chapter five identifies the two phases of the Chinese rush, the origins of the participants, their mining methods and lifestyle, as well as examining the European reaction both locally and in parliament, and the legacy

of discriminatory legislation which arose directly from the circumstances of the Palmer. The sixth chapter summarizes the little that is known about Aboriginal life on the Palmer before 1873, and describes the initial contacts which shaped the subsequent policies of both Aborigines and Europeans on the field. Violence appears to have been a European initiative; the Aboriginal response, the European counter-response, and the role of the Native Police were to have many repercussions on settlement, transport and mining throughout the decade.

There are disadvantages in abandoning a chronological approach to pursue such topics. One most evident to the reader is that certain sources and events must be mentioned in more than one chapter; Hann's and Mulligan's experiences play an important part in chapters one and six, the wardens recur in descriptions of administration particularly in connection with the Chinese, and the profound impact of the Hodgkinson rush in 1876, re-shaping all aspects of life on the Palmer, is described in every chapter except the first. However, any repetition that arises is inevitable in a thorough analysis of the many effects of those events: the pursuit of narrative probably accounts for the superficial nature of much that has been written on the Palmer in the past.

The Old Palmer Song

The wind is fair and free, my boys,
 The wind is fair and free;
 The steamer's course is north, my boys,
 And the Palmer we will see.
 And the Palmer we will see, my boys,
 And Cooktown's muddy shore,
 Where I've been told there's lots of gold,
 So stay down South no more.

Chorus:

So, blow ye winds, heighho!
 A diggings we will go,
 I'll stay no more down South, my boys,
 So let the music play,
 In spite of what I'm told,
 I'm off in search of gold,
 And make a push for that new rush,
 A thousand miles away.

I hear the blacks are troublesome,
 And spear both horse and man,
 The rivers all are wide and deep,
 No bridges them do span,
 No bridges them do span, my boys,
 And so you'll have to swim,
 But never fear the yarns you hear,
 And gold you're sure to win.

So let us make a move, my boys,
 For that new promised land,
 And do the best we can, my boys,
 To lend a helping hand,
 To lend a helping hand, my boys,
 Where the soil is rich and new;
 In spite of blacks and unknown tracks
 We'll show what we can do.

(Source: R. Edwards, *Overlander Songbook*, p.46).

CHAPTER 1

EXPLORATION, DISCOVERY AND THE INITIAL RUSH

"During the time the billy was
boiling got 4 dwts. of gold"

Mulligan 1873

A "fine wide river bed, with long and deep waterholes", the Palmer was named by William Hann in August 1872 in honour of Queensland's leading statesman of the time, Chief Secretary A.H. Palmer.¹ A tributary of the Mitchell River, the Palmer forms a large and complex river system, with two major branches - the North Palmer or Left Hand Branch,² and the South Palmer - along with a myriad of significant creeks, most notable of which are Limestone, Sandy, Cradle, Butcher's, Dog Leg and Doughboy Creeks. Mining, however, was not restricted only to the Palmer basin itself, for miners moved south to the Mitchell River, along Limestone³ and Fine Gold Creeks, the Little Mitchell and St George Rivers. Exploration in an easterly direction along the main branch of the Palmer eventually led to the inclusion of the West Normanby River as part of the field. Even the watershed of the Laura River, situated between the Palmer and the Endeavour, became the scene of spasmodic mining activity.

The Palmer basin is a broad and shallow valley, minutely creased into steep gullies and ridges, whose surface is everywhere barbed with vertical spines of shale, forming "the most dreadful country that anyone would desire to travel over". Its rugged landscape, "a wretched country of bare slate ridges",⁴ was the result of intensive folding, weathering and river erosion, which in turn dispersed

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1. Diary of the Northern Expedition under the leadership of Mr. William Hann, *QV&P* 1873, p.1050.
 2. It was J.V. Mulligan who first referred to the north branch as the "left hand branch" during his exploration of July 1873, and the name came into common usage during the rush of the following September. Strictly speaking, it was a misnomer, for what was called the Left Hand Branch, was in fact the right hand branch. J.V. Mulligan, *Guide to the Palmer River and Normanby Gold Fields North Queensland, Showing the Different Roads to and from the Etheridge River, Cleveland Bay, and Cooktown, with Map of the Palmer River and Adjacent Gold Fields, and Journal of Explorations* (Brisbane 1875), p.9.
 3. There were two Limestone Creeks on the Palmer Gold Field - one a tributary of the Palmer; the other, which became the centre of a rush in 1874, was a tributary of the Mitchell River, on which Groganville and Harbord were later established.
 4. So severe were the slates, that Hann recommended leather be put under the shoes of horses to protect their hooves. Hann, *Diary, QV&P* 1873, p.1051.

alluvial material, including gold, over a wide area.⁵ However access to the valley of the Palmer was not easy, for in the north and north-east lay the almost impenetrable escarpments of the Conglomerate Range, and in the east the Great Dividing Range. The Mitchell River, massive in flood, forms a boundary to the south, with the Palmerville Fault in the west. Most of this country is covered with sparse, grey eucalypt and ti-tree, with taller forests of ironwood and bloodwood on the sandstone tablelands. Despite the ravages of fires during much of the dry season, swamps and rock outcrops provided a variety of plant food for Aborigines, including pandanus, yams, and fire-resistant cycads, which were easily harvested. These plants supplemented a diet of native animals, birds and fish, abundant during the wet season.⁶

Torrential rain is a feature of the summer months, the season simply known as *the wet*. For much of the period from December to March, land communications are cut, with conditions humid and boggy. The Palmer, a "string of water-holes" during the dry season, is transformed with the onset of summer rains to "a raging river" which causes destructive flooding: Hann, in August 1872, noted that the "flood marks are very high and have the appearance of running very rapidly as all the tree tops in its bed and over its banks are all carried away".⁷ In contrast, the months from April to November are dry, with the total rainfall from 50mm to 75mm.⁸ Much of the land is parched except for waterholes in the major watercourses. While

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5. For technical details of the geological structure see F. De Keyser and K.G. Kucas, *Geology of the Hodgkinson and Laura Basins, North Queensland*, *BMR Geology & Geophysics Bulletin* 84 (1968), pp.141-9.
 6. D.R. Harris, *Aboriginal Use of Plant Foods in the Cape York Peninsula and Torres Strait Islands*, *AIAS Newsletter* 6 (1976), p.22.
 7. W. Hann, *Expedition of Exploration to the Endeavour, Cape York Peninsula, 1872. Reconstructed from his diary and two notebooks by Harry Clarke* (James Cook University Library 1982), pp.70, 27.
 8. *Resources and Industry of Far North Queensland* (Canberra 1971), maps 7, 8 & 9, after p.20.

there is marked thunderstorm build-up in the driest months leading up to the wet, erratic winds blow throughout the year, "ranging from piercingly cold gales to equally piercing but ovenlike hot blasts".⁹ High temperatures remain even in winter, with Palmerville averaging 218 days a year over 32°C.¹⁰ Understandably, European explorers and miners found this environment uninviting, especially during the dry. Camped on the Palmer River in late October 1872, Hann commented on the contrast with the coast: "All remark the differences of temperature on this side of the Dividing Range; on the coast the breezes were cool and refreshing, while here there is very little, and it is at once hot and dry - the pleasing verdure of the coast is also wanting."¹¹

* * * *

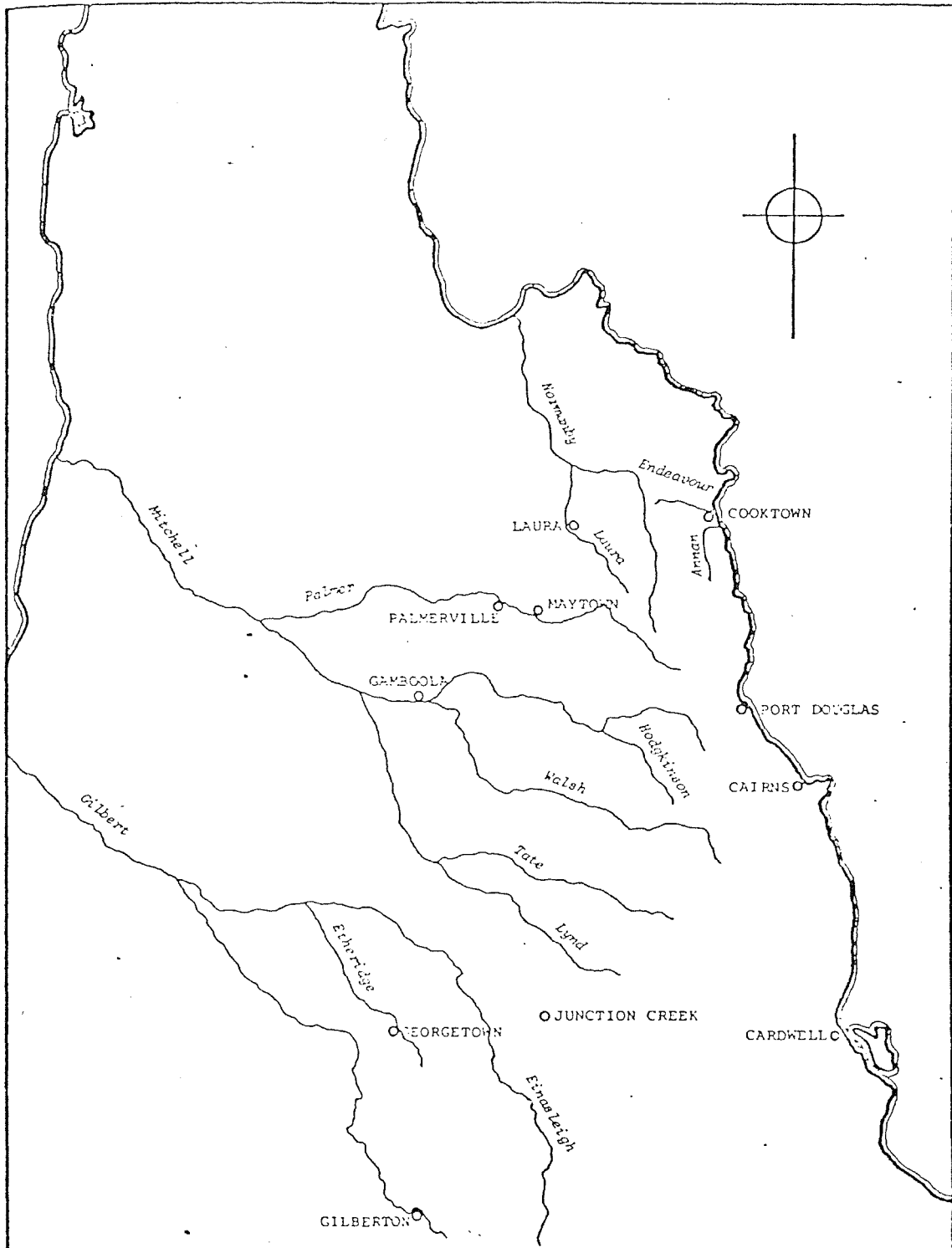
Unlike most other Australian gold fields, where the mining population was supported by an established infrastructure of supply, administration and communications, the Palmer region had not been settled by Europeans before the gold rush began. The nearest pastoral holding was 320 kilometres (200 miles) south. The discoverer of gold, William Hann, was apparently reluctant to initiate movement of miners into such an area, for he gave an oddly grudging report and left it to others to take the credit and the responsibility for the rush. It may seem strange that Cape York Peninsula was still virtually unknown to Europeans in the 1870's, for it was the earliest region of outside contact on the Australian continent, known to Macassan seamen and Torres Strait Islanders, and charted by the Dutch in 1606. The first recorded expedition along the east coast - Cook's in 1770 - was forced to spend 48 days repairing its vessel and making detailed observations at the Endeavour River, later to become the seaport for the Palmer.¹² There was every argument to suggest

9. AR 1881 p.14.

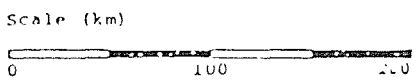
10. *Resources and Industry*, p.25.

11. Hann, *Diary*, QV&P 1873, p.1067.

12. G.C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away* (Brisbane 1963), pp.6-9.



LOWER CAPE YORK PENINSULA,
 SHOWING MAJOR RIVERS, PORTS
 AND MINING TOWNS, 1870-1880



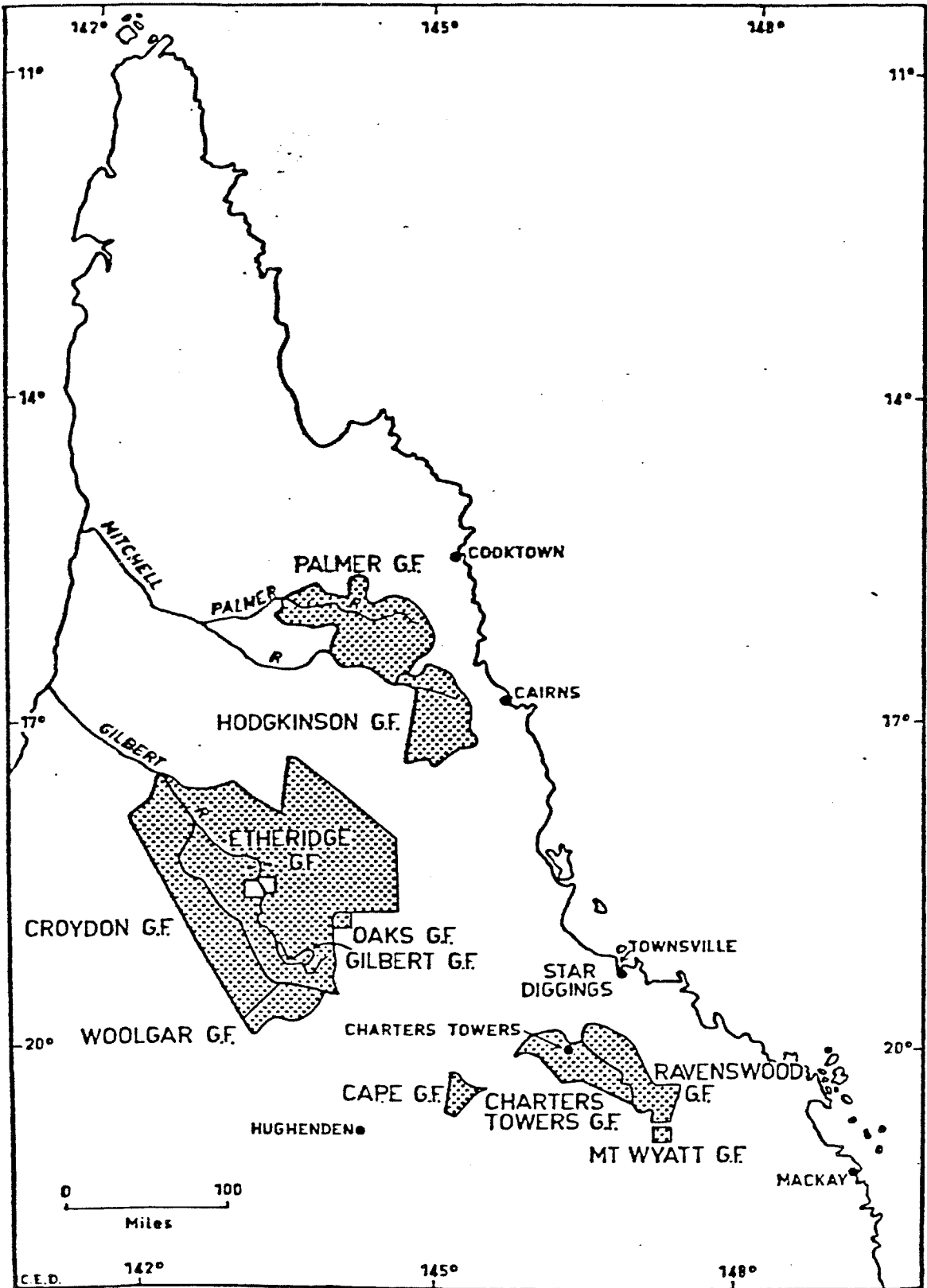
that the peninsula might have been the first settled part of Australia, rather than among the last. But it was not until the establishment of a strategic base at Port Essington in 1838 that northern land exploration was given greater encouragement.¹³ With this outpost as his destination in 1845, Ludwig Leichhardt followed the Lynd and Mitchell Rivers, and passed south of the Mitchell-Palmer confluence. He encountered Aboriginal resistance on the Mitchell and also the Nassau River, where John Gilbert was speared fatally.¹⁴ Edmund Kennedy's expedition of 1848, instructed to survey the coast of Cape York Peninsula in search of an overland route to the Gulf of Carpentaria, did cross the Palmer in September.¹⁵ However, Kennedy's own fragmentary journal contains no distinguishable mention of the area, and in William Carron's published account locations are not clear. His "very fine river with a broad bed", which the expedition crossed on 15 September 1848,¹⁶ may have been the Palmer, but more probably was the Mitchell.¹⁷ The Kennedy expedition was a complete failure, ending with the deaths of ten of the thirteen

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13. See P.G. Spillett, *Forsaken Settlement: An Illustrated history of the settlement of Victoria, Fort Essington North Australia 1838-1849* (Melbourne 1972).
 14. F.W.L. Leichhardt, *Journal of an Overland Expedition in Australia from Moreton Bay to Fort Essington* (Adelaide 1964 facsim 1849), pp.308-312; Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, pp.11-12.
 15. E. Beale, *Kennedy of Cape York* (Adelaide 1970), p.196.
 16. W.M. Carron, *Narrative of an Expedition Undertaken under the Direction of the Late Assistant Surveyor, E.B. Kennedy* (Sydney 1849), p.49. Carron was the expedition's botanist and one of the three survivors.
 17. Until recent revision, it was believed, as Robert Logan Jack had, that Carron's "very fine river" was the Palmer, and was crossed by Kennedy on 15 September 1848. However, Glenville Pike and, more recently, Edgar Beale have identified this river as the Mitchell. Beale maintains that Kennedy crossed the Mitchell on 16 September and the Palmer on 21 September. R.L. Jack, *Northmost Australia* Vol 1 (London 1921), p.216; G. Pike, *The Kennedy Expedition*, *JHSQ* 5, 2 (1954), p.598; Beale, *Kennedy*, pp.194-6.

participants. While Kennedy's fate may have diverted attention away from Cape York Peninsula,¹⁸ the existence of more accessible pastures in southern Queensland and gold rushes in other colonies left little incentive for further investigation of such a remote region.

It was over a decade before self government and George Dalrymple's expedition of 1859-60¹⁹ focussed new attention on North Queensland, with the opening up of the Kennedy district from Bowen. Pastoralists quickly staked out runs,²⁰ occupying land as far north as the Gulf country, where John Macdonald established Carpentaria Downs.²¹ Four years later Alex and Frank Jardine overlanded cattle from Carpentaria Downs to Somerset, encountering fierce Aboriginal resistance, particularly on the Mitchell.²² However, this expedition did not represent

18. R. Cilento and C. Lack, *Triumph in the Tropics* (Brisbane 1959), p.134.
19. The expedition was led by G.E. Dalrymple, and included P.F. Sellheim, later connected with the history of the Palmer Gold Field. For details on the organization of the expedition, see J. Farnfield, *Frontiersman: A Biography of George Elphinstone Dalrymple* (Melbourne 1968), pp.12-25; Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.16. For names of subscribers to Dalrymple's expedition see E. Palmer, *Early Days in North Queensland* (Sydney 1903), p.12.
20. Application for pastoral runs in the district were thrown open from 1 January 1861. *QGG* I, 74 (20 November 1860), p.468. One of the first selections, taken up by P.F. Sellheim, was Strathmore. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.18.
21. Carpentaria Downs was on the eastern bank of the Einasleigh River. A. Allingham, *"Taming of the Wilderness": the First Decade of Pastoral Settlement in the Kennedy District* (James Cook University 1977), pp.29-30, 92, 213.
22. Frank and Alex Jardine were sons of John Jardine, government resident and police magistrate at Somerset 1863-5. The incident known as the "Battle of the Mitchell" was recorded as an instance when Aborigines fearlessly stood up and fought at least until "ten carbines poured volley after volley into them". F.J. Byerley, *Narrative of the Overland Expedition of Messrs Jardine from Rockhampton to Cape York* (Brisbane 1867), pp.35-6. It was popularly believed that fifty Aborigines were killed by the Jardines. Jack, *Northmost Australia* Vol 1, p.336.



PRINCIPAL NORTH QUEENSLAND GOLDFIELDS

(Bolton, G.C., *A Thousand Miles Away* (Brisbane, 1963), p.49)

the beginning of permanent European settlement in Cape York Peninsula. This came only with a new force in North Queensland's economic development in the late 1860s: gold mining.

In 1866, leading citizens of Townsville attempted to rouse the quiescent mining urge, by offering a reward of £1,000 to the discoverer of payable gold in the surrounding hinterland. Some small finds were made; the first full-scale rush did not occur until 1867 when gold was discovered at Cape River south-west of Townsville.²³ The "harbinger of better times for North Queensland"²⁴ in terms of pastoral optimism, business development and government financial assistance, Cape River established a pattern repeated on most North Queensland gold fields of the late 1860s and early 1870s: a few feverish years of amassing wealth from alluvial gold, followed by relative inactivity, partly because of fresh discoveries elsewhere and partly because of an initial reluctance to invest in reef mining. Cape River was succeeded by finds at Ravenswood and the Gilbert (1869), the Etheridge (1870), and Charters Towers (1872), in the space of only four years. Further, these remote North Queensland gold fields were plagued by the closely related problems of poor communications, high rates of carriage, and the extreme cost of provisions. At Ravenswood, the Etheridge and Charters Towers, the existence of reefs permitted the establishment of underground mining, and greater permanency and investment did occur in time after the advent of machinery.²⁵ Even so, the discovery of alluvial gold further north

23. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, pp.44-5. Star River was the first find of payable gold, but because of the limited amount of gold won only £500 was subsequently awarded.

24. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.46.

25. Machinery arrived on the Ravenswood and Charters Towers fields, within twelve months of the initial discoveries, while the Etheridge had crushing machinery by January 1872, the year in which that field was proclaimed. See D.C. Roderick, Ravenswood: Surveying the Physical Evidence, K.H. Kennedy (ed.), *Readings in North Queensland Mining History* Vol 1 (James Cook University of North Queensland 1980), p.40; D. Menghetti, The Gold Mines of Charters Towers, K.H. Kennedy (ed.), *Readings in North Queensland Mining History* Vol 2 (James Cook University of North Queensland 1982), p.22; J. Wegner, The Etheridge. A Study of the History of the Etheridge Shire and Goldfield, 1845-1960 (BEd-BAHons thesis, James Cook University of North Queensland 1980), p.35.

periodically lured population from these seemingly more stable fields, interrupting their development for as long as the alluvial rushes lasted.

Encouraged by the extent of gold finds at the Etheridge and Charters Towers, the government eventually agreed to sponsor an expedition to Cape York Peninsula to be led by William Hann. Friend and partner of former government geologist Richard Daintree, Hann was an established North Queensland pastoralist at Maryvale Station near Charters Towers.²⁶ He suggested an expedition:

to explore the country so little known, and lying to the northland of the Cardwell and Etheridge line of telegraph...also the coast lands between Cardwell and the Endeavour Rivers, where belts of rich agricultural lands would be occupied for cultivation if their character and existence were officially made known.²⁷

The Minister for Works, William Walsh, was lukewarm to Hann's initial proposal to open up agricultural land.²⁸ But, under pressure from colleagues to develop mineral resources, he approved the expedition in a modified form which emphasized mineral exploration. Geologist Norman Taylor was subsequently seconded at the government's insistence, "to examine for probable occurrences of minerals and precious stones".²⁹ Some friction developed over the delay to the expedition brought about by this decision, as Taylor was in Brisbane at the time. Nevertheless Walsh remained firm: "no expenditure will be recognized without the presence of Mr. Taylor".³⁰

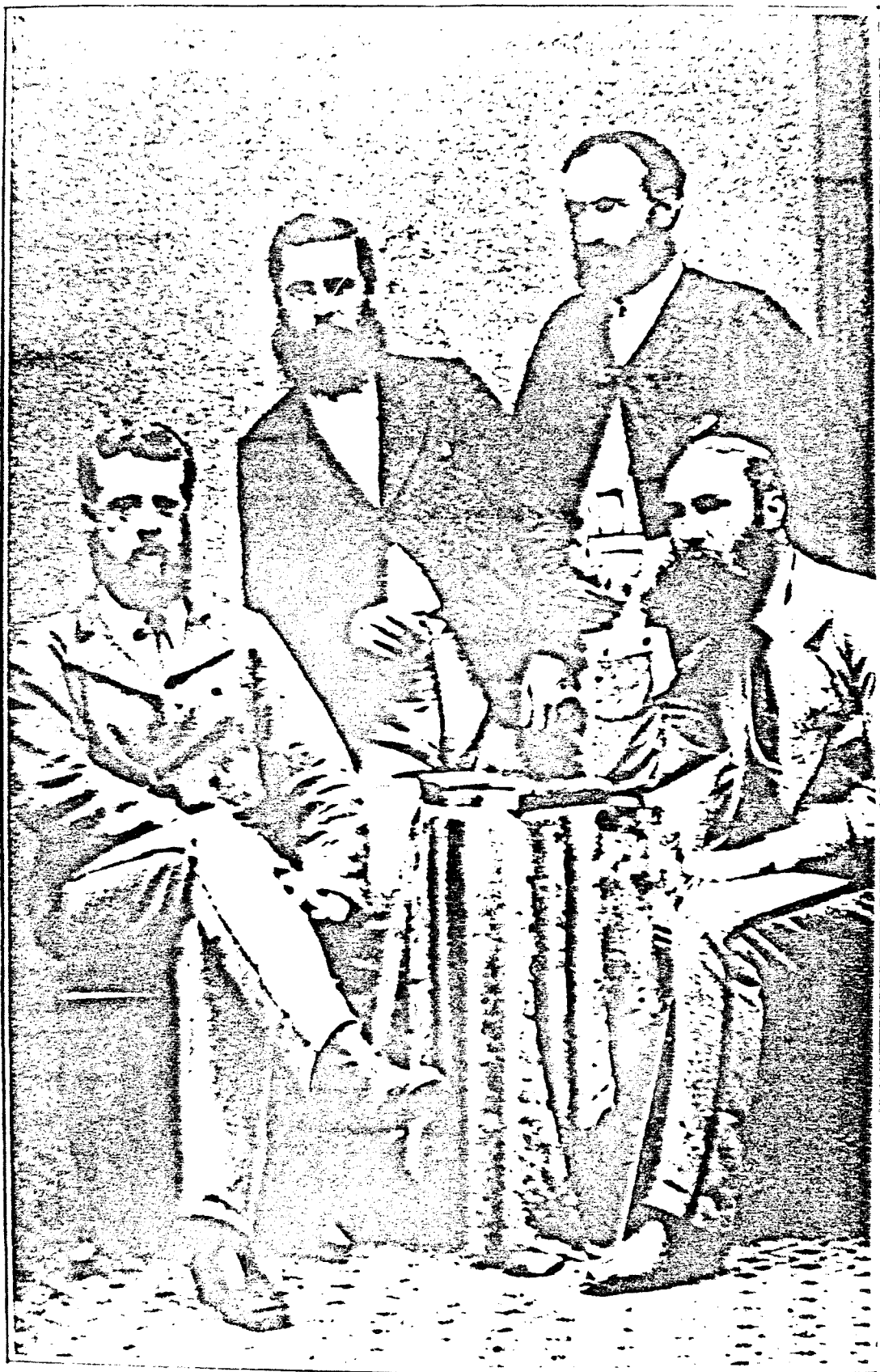
26. Maryvale was one of the properties taken up in 1863 by his father Joseph Hann. Allingham, "*Taming the Wilderness*", p.54.

27. Memorandum Min Pub Works 8 February 1872, 73/864 WOR/A 62 QSA.

28. W.H. Walsh to A.H. Palmer [n.d.], *ibid.*

29. Walsh to government geologist C. Aplin 14 March 1872, *ibid.* The position was offered first to Aplin who declined but recommended Taylor.

30. The government did, however, promise to compensate for such delay brought about by the late arrival of Norman Taylor. Walsh to Hann 25 April 1872, *ibid.*



Hann Expedition 1872: Thomas Tate, William Hann, Frederick Warner Norman Taylor. (Jack, *Northmost Australia* Vol 2, opposite p.384).

Hann eventually left Fossilbrook in late June 1872 and reached the Palmer on 5 August.³¹ A gold discovery by Frederick Warner a day later, twenty-four kilometres (fifteen miles) west of the later settlement of Palmerville, prompted a two weeks search up river. The party prospected at an impressive pace, despite the ruggedness of the terrain and not inconsiderable problems with straying animals. However, Hann's diaries and map³² shed little light on their exact movements. It seems they travelled at least eighty kilometres (fifty miles) upstream from Twelve Mile Creek to a point above the junction of Butcher's Creek, probably Granite Creek, and back to their original camp.³³ And it is surprising that the official *Diary of the Northern Expedition* was not more enthusiastic, for a survey of Hann's unofficial diaries suggest that the party experienced little difficulty in finding gold. Spurred on perhaps by Warner's opinion that his initial find was payable, Hann "tried a few gullies" in the vicinity of camp 20A and "found gold in them all".³⁴ At camp 20B, their luck continued with gold "at any place we like to try".³⁵

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31. The Northern Expedition comprised William Hann (leader), Norman Taylor (geologist), Thomas Tate (botanist), Frederick Warner (surveyor), Stewart, William Nation and Jerry, the Aboriginal tracker.
32. There are four surviving records of the expedition. The James Cook University Library holds Hann's original diary and two notebooks. These three accounts have been published together in W. Hann, *Expedition of Exploration to the Endeavour River, Cape York Peninsula, 1872. Reconstructed from his diary and two notebooks by Harry Clarke* (James Cook University of North Queensland 1982). Hann also wrote an official report - *Diary of the Northern Expedition under the leadership of Mr. William Hann* - which was printed in *Votes and Proceedings of the Queensland Parliament in 1873*, pp.1031-1070, and is hereafter cited as Hann, *Diary, QV&P* 1873.
33. According to Robert Logan Jack, Hann travelled up the Palmer as far as Granite Creek, and then moved from the river due north to Mount Hann. See Map G. Cape Grafton to Weary Bay and Cairns to Palmer Goldfield. Accompanying Jack, *Northmost Australia*.
34. Hann, *Expedition of Exploration* (Diary 8 August 1872), p.25.
35. Hann, *Diary* (10 August 1872), *QV&P*1873, p.1051. Interestingly, Hann also encountered at Camp 20B, fresh cattle dung and "indications of other camps" - whether these were European or Aboriginal is not clear. See also Hann, *Expedition of Exploration* (Diary and First Note Book 10 August 1872), pp.25-26.

However it was at camp 20C that the party came across a most promising find. On 12 August Hann made the following entries in his field diary and notebook:

[Diary]

August 12, 1872

Made an early start and got up the River to where the ranges came in on both sides. I saw at once that I could not take the packs any further so we camped distance 4 miles. We found payable gold in the River.

[First Note Book]

August 12, 1872

...After coming off the hill [Mount Taylor] overtook the pack horses at a gully that Nation had just tried. He found gold. The country here was very good looking and I believe a payable goldfield will be found even if we do not find it.

It is difficult to speculate on the meaning of the last sentence in Hann's Note Book, especially when compared with the entry in his Diary. In the same passage, however, he even went on to admit:

I went on about one mile to where a sandy creek joins the river. As this was a very good camp with plenty of good feed for the horses, we camped and prospected several of the bars which were composed of slate; in one or two places we found gold, the Doctor and Warner say, in payable quantities.³⁶

The use of the word "payable" does not occur in the official *Diary of the Northern Expedition*, Hann's admission of encouraging prospects appearing rather reserved: "results were more flattering than hitherto, in fact I was now in hopes of being on the right track for discovering a gold field".³⁷ Yet it was the opinion of three of his party - William Nation, Thomas Tate and Frederick Warner - that payable gold had at last been found. Two days later, Hann himself provided irrefutable evidence supporting their claims.

[Diary]

August 17, 1872

...Warner, the Doctor and self were prospecting up the River. We washed 20 dishes, in the bar that we last worked, before it was payable.

36. Hann, *Expedition of Exploration* (First Note Book 12 August 1872), p.26.

37. Hann, *Diary* (12 August 1872), *QV&P* 1873, p.1051.

[First Note Book]

August 17, 1872

...Warner, the Doctor and I went up the river to try a certain number of dishes of wash dirt from any of the bars to see if there was gold in payable quantities. We washed 20 dishes from one of the bars, we took it as it came. There was about 2 feet of wash dirt and I should think a party with proper appliances would make about £11 per week a man.³⁸

Indeed, £11 per week was exceptionally high, for an estimate of payability was based on the average wage at the time, and only a small number of Queensland miners could expect to bring in as much as £4 per week in 1872.³⁹ Perhaps the prospect of discovering payable gold was not seen by Hann as the primary objective of the expedition, or maybe he did not wish to take responsibility for a rush to an unsettled area, for Hann cut short their stay on the Palmer, spending little time at any one place to make thorough investigations of gold-bearing potential. That payable gold was found relatively easily without sustained prospecting cannot be questioned.

The Northern Expedition left the Palmer on 21 August, initially heading north-west but changing direction to Princess Charlotte Bay, after encountering obstacles and making discoveries which were relevant for the light they shed on the later history of the area.⁴⁰ Returning south via the Kennedy and Normanby Rivers to the Annan, which was thought to be the Endeavour, Hann proved that access to the Palmer was possible from the coast, although far from being direct. "So far", he announced "the trip has been a pleasure party..."⁴¹ Hann's jubilation, however, was shortlived; very difficult country to the south of the Annan restricted movement either south or east. Dispirited

38. Hann, *Expedition of Exploration*, p.29.

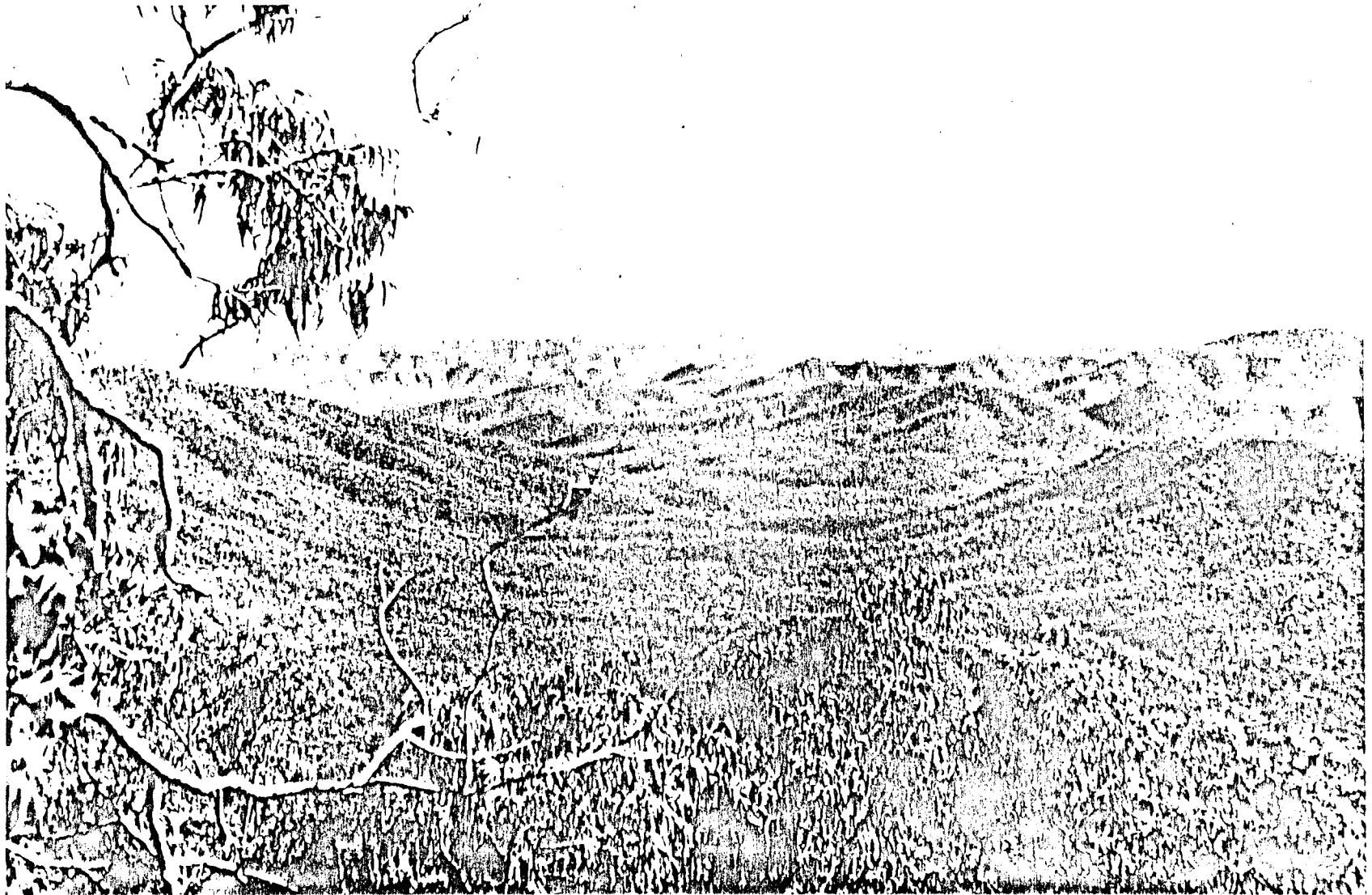
39. See table in R. Daintree, *Queensland Australia* (London [1872]), p.105, which gives a figure of £40-50 per year.

40. References to Hann's movements 21 August-28 October, which appear in the following paragraphs, are from Hann, *Diary, QV&P*, pp.1052-1067, unless otherwise cited.

41. *Ibid.* (26 September 1872), p.1058.

by their slow progress and increasingly anxious about the diminishing provisions and deteriorating condition of the horses, the party trudged reluctantly westward. Personal antagonism, which existed from the very beginning of the expedition was greatly aggravated; Hann accused Tate of gluttony and Taylor of losing valuable equipment.⁴² On 17 October they stumbled upon a tributary of the Granite Normanby River, probably Roberts Creek. The next day they camped on the West Normanby, where the slate/quartz formation aroused among all members of the party recognition of "likely gold country".⁴³ But having lost valuable time, Hann was anxious to push on, hoping to cross the Palmer once again, although realizing that he was now taking a north westerly direction along the banks of the Upper Laura River, first sighting it west of the present Lakeland Downs homestead. Unable to find a passage through the Conglomerate Range, and hemmed in by "forbidding hills" on both sides of the Laura, the party became uneasy when the first heavy rain of the trip fell on 20 October, an indication of an early wet.⁴⁴ Hann decided to leave the Laura Gorge on 23 October; he headed west, crossing with difficulty a ridge running north of the Conglomerate Range to camp on the St George River. Despite some uncertainty about the northward trend of the St George, the party reached the Little Kennedy, making camp near the present Fairlight homestead. With an eye for pastoral country, Hann speculated on the future: "it would make a nice dairy station if the diggings on the Palmer should turn out any good."⁴⁵ When he

42. Hann reprimanded Taylor for "gross carelessness" in allowing horses to stray, and once accidentally setting fire to the camp, burning in the process his gaiters, pistol-case and compass - the latter a serious matter for Taylor was the surveyor. Hann, *Expedition of Exploration* (16 August 1872), p.29; Hann, *Diary, QV&P* 1873, p.1051. However, the relationship between Hann and Tate was much more antagonistic. There are constant references to Tate's eating, Hann once describing him as a "perfect god of dam guts". Hann, *Expedition of Exploration*, p.34. See also *Ibid.*, pp.29-30, 48, 53, 63 & 68.
43. Hann, *Expedition of Exploration* (Diary 18 October 1872), p.65.
44. Hann, *Diary, QV&P* 1873, p.1067.
45. Hann, *Expedition of Exploration* (First Note Book 27 October 1872), p.69.



Looking towards Laura River, along valley of Kennedy Creek, from Hell's Gate, 1970.

finally turned south, good humour was revived by the appearances of old familiar landmarks, particularly the Palmer which Hann reached on 28 October. The expedition spent a day on the Palmer updating charts, which revealed a clearer picture of the area between the coast and their camp, and identified the major obstacles. They left the Palmer on 30 October passing Thompson Range and camping at Mount Mulgrave. Hann's remarks at this stage are most interesting, for not only did he forecast a rush to the Palmer, but also advised on the best route:

A bold and conspicuous range, named by me Thompson Range, commences on the banks of the Palmer, and stretches across the banks of the Mitchell, and forms a remarkable configuration of the country; its direction is north and south, and between it and Mount Mulgrave Range the Palmer can be reached over easy travelling ground. Should any enterprising diggers be disposed to follow up the indications of gold which were met with in this river, they should bear this in mind so soon as they have sighted Mount Mulgrave.⁴⁶

However, in what seems another contradiction, Hann's telegram to Walsh, the Minister for Works and Mines, after reaching Junction Creek, reported the Palmer was "without flattering results" and conceded only that it was "worthy of further prospecting".⁴⁷ In contrast, Taylor was more optimistic, claiming "the discovery of gold on the Palmer River" and indicating the existence of "large areas of probably auriferous country well worth more systematic prospecting than we could do".⁴⁸ Hann did return to the Palmer eighteen months later, not with pick and shovel, but with fat cattle for sale at Butcher's Creek.⁴⁹

46. Hann, Diary, *QV&P* 1873, p.1067.

47. Hann to Walsh 13 November 1872, 73/864 WOR/A 62 QSA; also *QV&P* 1873, p.1051.

48. Taylor to Min Works 13 November 1872 73/864 WOR/A 62 QSA.

49. *CH* 3 June 1874 printed an interview with Hann who had recently arrived in Cooktown from the Palmer, which he had left on 27 May. Hann was again in the vicinity in mid-1875, when he met Mulligan, who reported that he was prospecting the Hodgkinson. Hann to Min Works 16 June 1875, 75/3018 WOR/A 102 QSA.

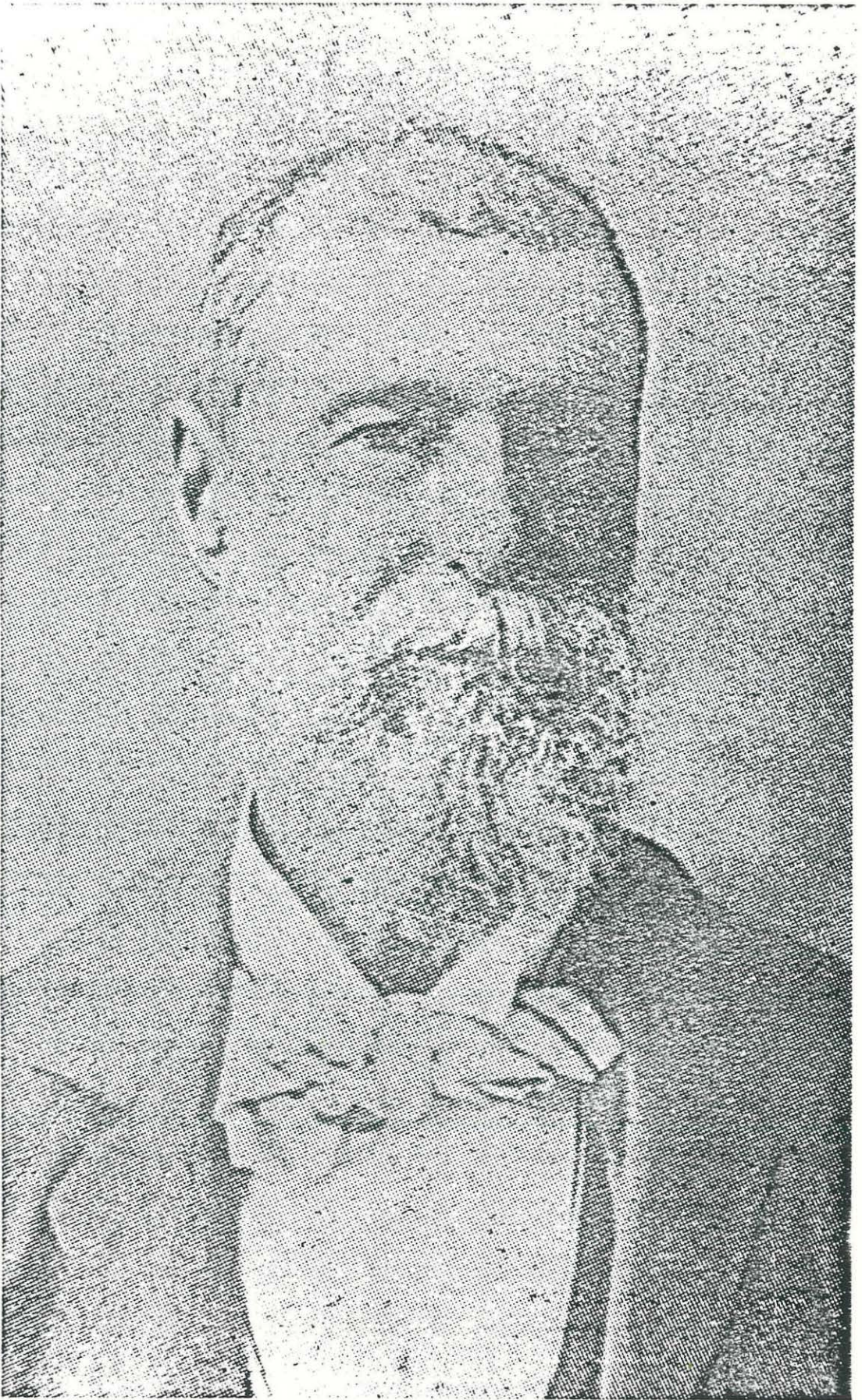
At Charters Towers, news of Hann's expedition aroused the interest of the prospector James Venture Mulligan and his companions Alexander Watson and James Dowdell.⁵⁰ Experienced in mining on the Gilbert, Etheridge and the recent rush to Charters Towers, Mulligan sensed a payable field. Pre-empting the official report of the expedition, he intercepted Hann returning to Maryvale on the Georgetown-Charter Towers road. According to Mulligan, Hann was far from sanguine:

He [Hann] did not give any encouraging accounts, but said he thought they should find gold nearer than the Palmer...[and that] no one would attempt to go so far away to prospect for gold.

Instead he recommended the Tate as a more likely prospect.⁵¹ Mulligan was not easily dissuaded however, and arranged for a copy of Hann's record of the expedition to be sent to Georgetown. On receiving the duplicate of Hann's journal and chart,⁵² Mulligan's party - now increased to six⁵³ - left Georgetown on 5 June 1873.⁵⁴

Mulligan spent but one day prospecting the Tate before pushing ahead towards Mount Mulgrave. On sighting it he heeded Hann's advice and proceeded due north keeping Thompson Range to his east; he reached the Palmer near the later site of Palmerville on 29 June and wasted no time in sampling the river gravels. Next day, three kilometres (two miles) upstream, Mulligan met with instant results: "During the time the billy was boiling got 4 dwts. of gold." The

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50. Reminiscences of J.V. Mulligan appeared in Q 3 September 1904. Mulligan had also been to the New England, Gympie and Kroombit fields prior to this. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.52.
51. Q 3 September 1904.
52. Alexander Watson to William Hann 4 June 1873. Joseph and William Hann, Papers 1861-1889, Library J.C.U.N.Q.
53. Mulligan recruited David Robinson on the road, and two Norwegians, Albert Brandt and Peter Brown (also known as Ableson) at Georgetown.
54. Mulligan, *Guide*, p.5. References to the events leading up to the reporting of a payable gold field are from this source unless otherwise stated.



James Mulligan (Q 24 January 1903).

party could afford to prospect much more systematically than Hann - spending eight weeks on the Palmer compared to Hann's fortnight, and exploring small ravines and gullies. Panning yielded six ounces of gold after one week, the party having only to travel eight kilometres (five miles) from first camp. Although they also observed that the pans were losing extremely fine gold. Mining methods were revised, and a cradle was constructed from local timber from the bank of a creek, named by Mulligan Cradle Creek.⁵⁵ Leaving three of the party to work the cradle, Mulligan then made a quick reconnaissance of Sandy Creek on 13 July and the North Palmer the following day. It was the "coarse shotty gold" of the North Palmer that caught Mulligan's eye: evidence of reefs, to be borne in mind for the future.

Mulligan subsequently rejoined the men at Cradle Creek and returned downstream once again to concentrate on alluvial gold in the vicinity of Fish Creek and Mount Taylor. They remained there over three weeks with only a few excursions away from the river. Anxious to test thoroughly Hann's assessment of the river he interrupted their work briefly to investigate Warner's Gully, the location of the first gold find on the Palmer. Unimpressed, he then moved thirty-two kilometres (twenty miles) away from the Hann prospect back to near his old camp 3, now convinced of the richness of that site. Eight weeks mining had exhausted rations, but not gold, as he later recorded:

Aug. 12th to 24th.-

We remain in this our 13th camp on the Palmer. Here we got payable gold; when it began to get poor we began to ramble about and prospect ravines and gullies, and succeed in finding one or two which show payable prospects, and think of making our permanent camp here, and building a hut to hold our rations on our return, when we can camp and protect the goods from the blacks, getting a little gold at same time, while the others will go out to explore and seek for better gold, until after the rainy season. Resolving this, we buried our tools, superabundance of ammunition, &c., where we hope the darkies will let them rest in peace until we return. Our stock of rations is now getting exhausted.

55. The timber used for the cradle was from a Leichhardt tree, chopped into boards with tomahawks and rasped smooth. *Ibid.* (13 July), p.8.

Under the circumstances, it was Mulligan's intention to replenish stocks and to return immediately to set up a permanent camp from which to work during the wet. He arrived back at Georgetown on 3 September, with 102 ounces of gold and "a few ounces of specimens",⁵⁶ representing an average yield of over two ounces per week per man: a more than reputable result, which he believed could have been trebled if they had done less prospecting and more "work".⁵⁷

Mulligan was unable to suppress the news of his discovery, and, not surprisingly resorted to legal means of securing his interests. He took out a miner's right, and made application to Gold Commissioner William Charters, for a prospecting claim.⁵⁸ Charters in turn informed the Minister for Works and Mines of this development, describing the gold as "splendid":

Alexander Watson, David Robinson, James Dowdell, Albert Brandt, James Mulligan & Peter Browne have this day applied to me for a prospecting claim situated in a gully about sixteen (16) miles north of Mount Mulgrave and two hundred & forty (240) miles nearly due north from Georgetown. One hundred & two (102) ounces of Gold were lodged in the Bank yesterday by prospectors, who report that any man who works can make from good rations to good wages they having prospected over ten (10) miles of the River. I have granted the Prospectors' Protection until such time as a Commissioner is sent out. Watson is a man in whom I can rely having known him on the Cape. The prospectors were only eight (8) weeks in obtaining the above amount of Gold. The Mitchell River was girth deep when crossed. There being no rations with them. The gold is a [sic] splendid being nearly equal to the Cloncurry.⁵⁹

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56. Mulligan gave 3 September 1873 as the date that he and his party arrived back at the Etheridge, although a petition written by prominent residents maintained that the date was 4 September 1873. Mulligan, *Guide* (3 September 1873), p.11; Discoverers of the Palmer River Gold Fields (Petition), 6 March 1874, *QV&P* 1874, 2, p.755.
57. Q 3 September 1874.
58. Watson and Dowdell also took out miners' rights on 6 September. 59202-59204 MWO 14B/Q6 QSA.
59. Charters to Min Works [n.d.], A/13514 QSA. Charters omitted the date from his letterbook entry, although it was probably 6 September.

Meanwhile, any hopes Mulligan may have entertained of curtailing increasing whispers of his gold find circulating Georgetown were lost. Once talk of a rush spread, there was no containing local diggers.

When Mulligan left Georgetown on 13 September he was accompanied by an excited band of no less than 200 miners, some 40 tons of goods and two billiard tables. On the Etheridge, promising claims were abandoned and crushing machines became idle. By 15 September nearly all the population, some 400, had left or were about to leave for the Palmer.⁶⁰ The entrepreneurs of Georgetown also set out to join the rush, knowing that there were just as many rewards to be made supplying the diggers' requirements as there were mining for gold:

Drays conveying swags, provisions, cradles and sundry other essentials for the new rush are leaving every day, charging 6d. per lb. freight; storekeepers are rushing post haste to meet teams originally destined for this place, to turn them Palmer-ward from the turn off near Carpentaria Downs station, about 90 miles away; publicans are joining in the universal skedaddle; sawyers and other tradesmen are packing up the implements of their respective callings; and local stocks of 'Port Mackay' and other stimulants are largely drawn upon, and waggoned off, to meet the anticipated heavy requirements for goods of this description at the new rush.⁶¹

The first arrivals located gold, averaging 1½ ounces a day, with some getting much higher amounts.⁶² With its value per ounce averaging from £4/2/6 to £4/2/9,⁶³ the Palmer rush soon attracted miners from older mining districts; at the same time it enticed inexperienced men from the south. Joining in the euphoria of the rush, Charters

60. Georgetown telegraph 17 September 1873, Q 20 September 1873.

61. Etheridge correspondent of the *Cleveland Bay Express* reporting from Georgetown 15 September 1873, EC 18 October 1873.

62. *Queenslander* correspondent 2 November 1873, Q 13 December 1873.

63. Georgetown telegraph 31 October 1873, Q 1 November 1873.

took it upon himself to christen the new settlement Bramston, after the Attorney General.⁶⁴ However the initial flush of optimism and the gold returns could not obviate the inherent difficulties posed by the location and timing of the rush. The region, having not been settled previously, lacked reliable lines of communication and access for supplies. With summer rains flooding the Mitchell River, total isolation was unavoidable; unless sufficient rations were ensured, deprivation was inevitable. Mulligan cautioned the inexperienced miner not to rush to the Palmer before the wet season, because of the scarcity of rations, consequent high rates of carriage, and sickness which prevailed in the northern bush. An experienced miner as well as a prospector, he warned that several horses and seven months rations were needed before a miner should attempt to travel there.⁶⁵ Anything less would prove disastrous: "If people rush the place without rations, they must perish; for there is no getting back in the wet season, across the rivers which lie between."⁶⁶

By mid-October unfavourable news filtered back from the Palmer with groups of returning diggers, who had left mainly because of the lack of rations and growing distress. Not only did the broken slaty country between the Etheridge and the Palmer render the prospectors' route very difficult for horses and bullocks, but much of the area had been recently burnt, further delaying supplies.⁶⁷ The nearest beef at the start of the rush was located some 290 kilometres (180 miles) away at Cassady's Rosella Plains, and Firth and Atkinson's Fossilbrook

64. Charters to Sec Pub Works 13 September 1873, A/13514 QSA.

65. Georgetown telegraph 21 November 1873, Q 29 November 1873.

66. Mulligan to Robert Bradnell 6 September 1873, BC 6 October 1873.

67. Mulligan, writing from Georgetown 10 September 1873, Q 11 October 1873.

68. Browne to Comm Police 20 October 1873, BC 21 October 1873;
Browne to Comm Police 14 October 1873, Q 18 October 1873.

stations.⁶⁹ By the end of October 1873, no fresh provisions had arrived: fifty head of cattle was the only food available to complement the supplies which miners had brought with them.⁷⁰ Exacerbating these difficulties was the threat of Aboriginal attack.⁷¹ It was soon realized that the most pressing needs of the diggers on the Palmer were a passable road to the coast, a seaport to service the field, and police protection against Aborigines.

Prompted in part by Hann's report on the lower peninsula, the government commissioned a detailed coastal survey from Cardwell to the Endeavour River in 1873. Under the command of George Dalrymple, this expedition was being assembled when word came of Mulligan's discovery of gold on the Palmer. Appreciating the urgency of establishing a sea supply route to the gold field, Dalrymple put forward a plan to open up communication between the Palmer River and the east coast. Approved by the government, it involved the cooperation of Philip Sellheim, who was to start out from Georgetown and mark a dray route to the mouth of the Endeavour River, rendezvousing there with Dalrymple in the first week of November.⁷² No sooner had both men set out on their respective missions than the Secretary for Public Works realized that the increasing size and vulnerability of the population on the Palmer required other immediate government initiatives, especially the appointment of a gold commissioner and a

69. BC 7 October 1873.

70. BC 1 November 1873.

71. Sub-Inspector Browne claimed that Aborigines attacked a party of ten prospectors, wounding two of them, one seriously. Browne to Comm Police 20 October 1873, Q 25 October 1873. The same article also claimed that three diggers were speared: Cornish, Gill and Christie Palmerston, later a prominent explorer.

72. Dalrymple to Sellheim 27 September 1873, 74/1729 WOR/A QSA; G.E. Dalrymple, Narrative of the North Coast Expedition 1873, QV&P 1874, 2, pp.633-5; Dalrymple to Col Sec 3 November 1873, 74/299 COL/A 190 QSA; Farnfield, *Frontiersman*, pp.122-132.

works programme to construct an access road to a surveyed port.⁷³ Accordingly the government independently despatched the Australian Steam Navigation's SS *Leichhardt* from Brisbane, with naval surveyor Lieutenant Connor aboard, to collect enroute at Bowen and Cardwell the Engineer of Roads Archibald Macmillan, and Gold Commissioner Howard St George.⁷⁴

On 25 October, Dalrymple's North East Coast Expedition, camped on the banks of the Endeavour River and unaware of Walsh's actions which in essence abrogated Dalrymple's authority and purpose, was disturbed by the "sudden appearance of the tall masts and yards of a large steamer over the mangrove belt towards the point".⁷⁵ In addition to the official government party, which began almost immediately to build the foundations of the new port, ninety passengers disembarked from the *Leichhardt*. As Dalrymple recorded:

On the day before (Friday) we had sailed into a silent, lonely, distant river mouth, with thoughts going back a century to the arrival of the brave navigator, its discoverer and his people, in knee breeches, three-cornered hats, and small swords, pigtails, and silver shoe-buckles. On Saturday we were in the middle of a phase of enterprise peculiarly characteristic of the present day - of a young diggings' township - men hurrying to and fro, tents rising in all directions, horses grazing, and neighing for their mates, all round us - the shouts of sailors and laborers landing more horses and cargo, combined with the rattling of the donkey engine, cranes, and chains....⁷⁶

Understandably, Dalrymple felt deprived of an important public service;⁷⁷ Sellheim, instructed to return to Georgetown, despite

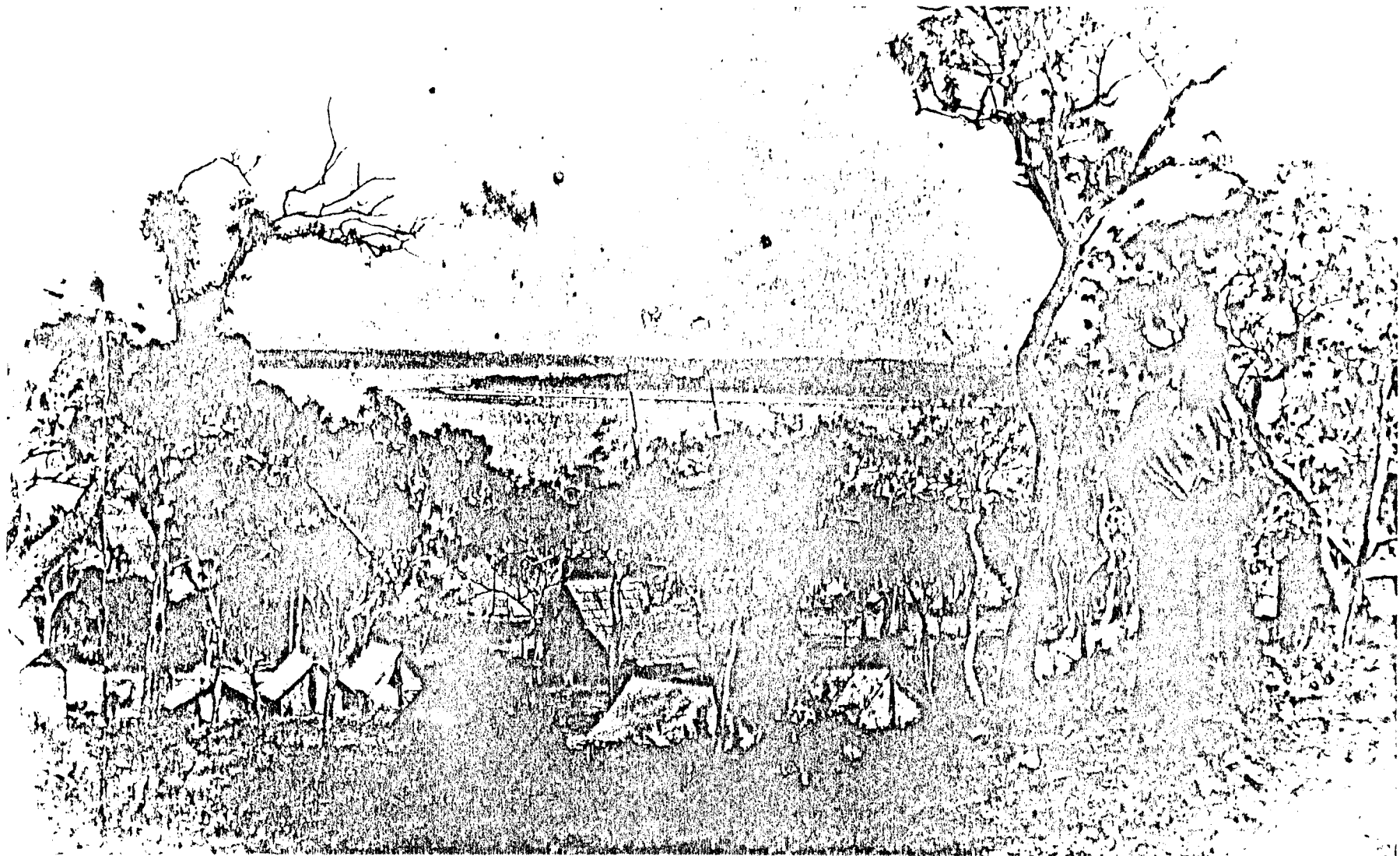
73. There was an attempt to investigate the navigability of the Norman and Mitchell Rivers and suitability of Normanton as a port, but an encounter with Aborigines who were "numerous, muscular, daring and invariably armed" turned back the expedition. Q 25 October, 29 November 1873.

74. Notes from an anonymous journal, Q 15 November 1873.

75. Dalrymple, Narrative, QV&P 1874, 2, p.634.

76. *Ibid.*, p.635.

77. Dalrymple to Col Sec 3 November 1873, 74/299 COL/A 190 QSA.



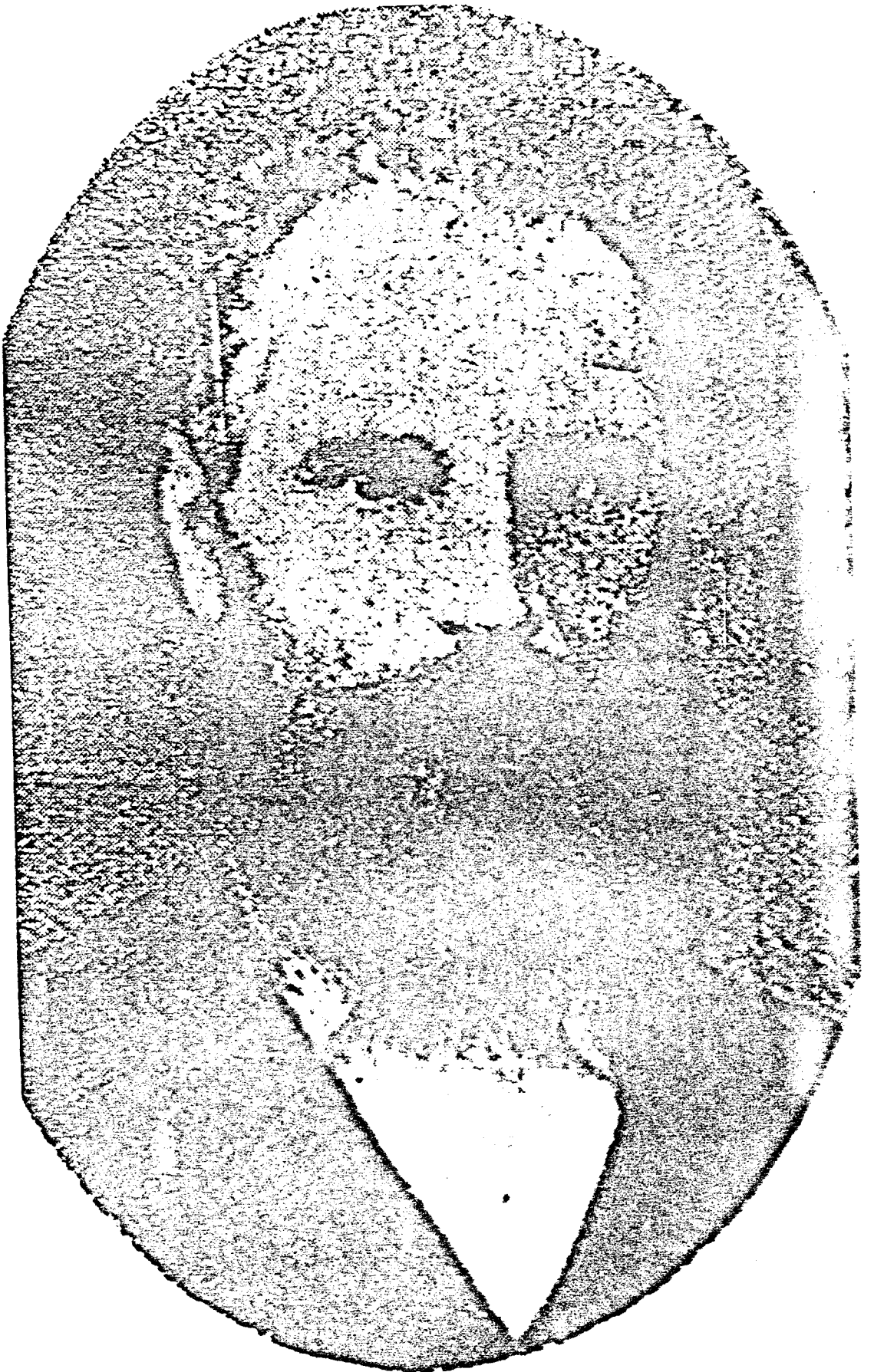
Early view of Cooktown from Grassy Hill, looking west across Endeavour River
c.late 1873-early 1874. Part of a panorama. (Marten Album, Mackay City Council
Library).

expending £850, had to face a disgruntled work gang which attempted to sue for breach of contract.⁷⁸

St George's party, comprising 86 diggers "all on foot and encumbered by heavy swags", reached the diggings safely on 13 November, despite several clashes with Aborigines.⁷⁹ With a track marked along their 225 kilometres (140 miles) route, Macmillan reported that the government's initiative had come none too soon as the field was "now completely out of supplies."⁸⁰ Indeed they were a welcome sight in the "canvass town" without street alignment which had sprung up on the south bank of the Palmer River,⁸¹ and which Howard St George had named Palmerston (later Palmerville) after the Colonial Secretary,⁸² unaware that Charters had already christened it Bramston. St George's first duty was to bring a semblance of authority and order to this settlement, though this could hardly be achieved overnight.

Gold was readily procurable within the immediate vicinity. By 16 November, St George estimated that 200 ounces were held by diggers and storekeepers. With a value of over £4 per ounce, gold became the circulating medium, storekeepers accepting it for payment at £3/10/- per ounce.⁸³ Throughout November 1873, miners extended their activities eastwards along the main branch of the river in

78. Georgetown telegram 5 November 1873, Q 8 November 1873.
79. St George to Sec Pub Works & Mines November 1873, 74/158 WOR/A 77 QSA. The conduct of the expedition became the subject of an enquiry. See 74/701 COL/A 194 QSA.
80. A.C. Macmillan to Col Sec 24 November 1873, Q 29 November 1873.
81. An account of J.J. Cranley's trip from the Endeavour River to the Palmer, accompanying party led by St George, from *Northern Argus* 13 December 1873, in Q 27 December 1873.
82. St George to Sec Pub Works & Mines 16 November 1873, 74/158 WOR/A 77 QSA.
83. One man found 50 ounces in one day, and another made a lucky find of a ten ounce nugget. *Ibid.*



Howard St George (*NQR* 18 July 1921).

search of richer ground, where three German diggers had taken 125 ounces out of a bar 48 kilometres (30 miles) from Palmerville.⁸⁴ Generally, however, prospecting in remote gullies and ravines was avoided for fear of Aboriginal attack.⁸⁵ Mining slackened temporarily during the first weeks of December when the "hot and sultry" weather and the lack of feed halted drays from Georgetown, making rations and mining supplies alarmingly scarce;⁸⁶ "worse than the Gilbert for rations" was one miner's claim.⁸⁷ With much sickness and destitution already apparent, and with Mulligan's forecast of mass starvation during the wet season fresh in the diggers' minds, the immediate outlook for the Palmer was far from rosy. St George thus appealed to the new Secretary for Public Works, J. Malbon Thompson, for more horses, and for the Palmer to be proclaimed a gold field to formalize both his position as gold commissioner and jurisdiction over an array of civil matters. On the eve of an election, Malbon Thompson in turn approved the proclamation of the Palmer Gold Field on 27 November 1873.⁸⁸ Three weeks later the wet began; it persisted for five months.

During the wet season miners were confined to their canvas camps for weeks at a time. Fever and dysentery were rife.⁸⁹ Alluvial mining

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84. Letter 17 November 1873 printed in *Telegraph* 20 January 1874, 74/701 COL/A 194 QSA.
85. St George to Sec Pub Works & Mines 16 November 1873, 74/158 WOR/A 77 QSA.
86. *Queenslander* correspondent 4 December 1873, Q 17 January 1874.
87. Letter from the Palmer River 5 October 1873, Q 6 December 1873.
88. J. Malbon Thompson to A.O. Herbert 25 November 1873, 74/160 WOR/A 77 QSA; the area was defined as "comprising the whole watershed of the Palmer River westward from the coast ranges, to its junction with the Mitchell River, pastoral district of Cook." *QGG* XIV, 114 (6 December 1873), p.2046.
89. St George to Sec Works & Mines 1 March 1874, 74/1365 WOR/A 81, St George to Col Sec 9 March 1874, 74/649 COL/A 193, St George to Sec Works & Mines 15 April 1874, 74/2266 WOR/A 84, St George to Sec Works & Mines 1 June 1874, 74/3129 WOR/A 86, St George to Col Sec 20 April 1874, 74/1030 COL/A 195 QSA.

was severely restricted, with the more productive areas inundated for much of the time. In later years miners would stockpile alluvium in the dry season for washing during the wet, but that had not been possible in the few weeks available in 1873. By mid-April 1874 there was an "almost total cessation" of mining in the bed of the river⁹⁰ and some miners were forced to prospect away from the settlement, particularly along the North Palmer but also southward towards the Mitchell. Those prospectors working away from the main river in waterlogged gullies, were vulnerable to Aboriginal attack, and at least three were fatally speared.⁹¹ Some more experienced miners however had stocked up in anticipation of the wet. In the few dry spells, drays from Georgetown or Townsville and packhorses from Cooktown were sufficient to maintain their supplies; but these provisions were neither predictable nor cheap.⁹² New arrivals from the coast put added strain on the isolated community's logistics, and many of the newcomers were unfamiliar both with mining, and the searing heat of the northern summer.

From their appearance I should say that a large proportion have never been upon an outside gold-field before and many have come up with the exaggerated ideas usually entertained by men ignorant of gold mining, of the facility and ease with which gold can be obtained while the fact is that no other industry exposes those who prosecute it to so many hardships and privations, or is attended with to many risks to life and property, when then they see, men working up to their middles in water, moving immense boulders and prosecuting the severest toil under a burning sun, in the bed of a River when no cooling breeze can penetrate and when the sun's rays are reflected and intensified by the vast sand beds, no wonder they in many instances

90. St George to Sec Works & Mines 15 April 1874, 74/2266 WOR/A 84 QSA.

91. See Chapter 6.

92. Cost per pound weight of basic commodities

<u>Date</u>	<u>Beef</u>	<u>Flour</u>	<u>Tea</u>	<u>Sugar</u>	<u>Salt</u>
15 December 1873	9d.	2/-	7/-	2/-	2/6
15 April 1874	1/-	1/6	6/-	2/-	2/-

St George to Sec Works & Mines 16 November 1873, 74/499 WOR/A 78 QSA; St George to Sec Works & Mines 15 April 1874, 74/2266 WOR/A 84 QSA.

became discouraged and without even trying their luck, turn back in disgust selling their tools and rations for what they will fetch.⁹³

It was not just the Palmer men who suffered during the 1873-74 wet season. A great number of hopeful miners waited out the rain in Cooktown, or were deterred by the long-flooded track and returned there. Many had inadequate capital to tide them over this unexpected delay, and frustration and destitution in Cooktown gave rise to discontent, creating problems for the new administration. While the government did employ some men on small public works projects, the proposition that the unemployed should be utilized in the construction of the dray road to the Palmer⁹⁴ was impracticable owing to the wet conditions. The situation reached a climax on 10 April 1874 when the SS *Florence Irving* was rushed by a mob of desperate men seeking passage south.⁹⁵ The government acted immediately to stem further panic by granting the police magistrate, Thomas Hamilton, the authority to exercise his discretion in providing relief.⁹⁶ By offering free passages to the most distressed diggers, rankling in Cooktown was lessened with each southward-bound steamer.

As the rain eased, alluvial mining on the Palmer progressed with considerable vigour; supplies were delivered with greater frequency. Building materials arrived for a more substantial settlement, and, by May 1874, amenities began to appear:

A considerable number of pioneers still continue to arrive here..., in many instances consisting of entire families, these latter being generally tradesmen mechanics and business people of various kinds, and

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93. St George to Sec Works & Mines 2 April 1874, 74/1925 WOR/A 83 QSA.
94. C. Bouel to A.H. Palmer 14 May 1874, 74/471 COL/A 192 QSA; Homo Mundi to editor, CC 2 May 1874.
95. Thomas Hamilton to Col Sec 16 April 1874, 74/846 COL/A 194 QSA; Inspector McKiernan to Comm Police 10 April 1874, Q 18 April 1874.
96. Col Sec to Sec Pub Lands Charles Graham 23 April 1874, QV&P 1874, 1, p.128.

the place is now fast assuming all the appearance of a flourishing Township and substantial slab buildings are in the course of erection amongst them a Billiard Room where the click of the balls may be heard in the evening.⁹⁷

The first teamsters from the Palmer left Palmerville⁹⁸ on hearing of Inspector Aulaire Morissett's slightly shorter dray route via the head of the Laura River.⁹⁹ To inject further enthusiasm into the opening of communications, a reward was offered for the first loaded team from Cooktown, and Michael Flood and his team arrived at Palmerville on 8 June.¹⁰⁰ With assured transport and increasing prosperity on the field, and news of yet another find in the vicinity of Sandy Creek,¹⁰¹ the early period of hardship passed.

* * * *

Official recognition of Mulligan's party and their contribution to the colony's development was slow in coming. Malbon Thompson, six days before the end of his term of office as Secretary for Public Works, issued a proclamation providing for a reward of up to £1,000 to the discoverers of new gold fields located more than thirty-two kilometres (twenty miles) from the nearest gold workings, and which employed not less than 500 men for six months.¹⁰² The new Macalister Ministry however viewed the proclamation with caution; the Attorney General advised that a reward should not be granted

97. St George to Sec Works & Mines 1 June 1874, 74/3129 WOR/A 86 QSA.

98. The "pioneer carriers" were identified as John Tresize, William Vogue, Jerry Healy, Michael O'Keefe, Billy Peterson, George the Greek and German Charley. Correspondent, Lower Camp, 4 May 1874, CC 16 May 1874.

99. A. Morissett to Col Sec 16 May 1874, 74/1201 COL/A 195 QSA.

100. Col Sec to P.M. Cooktown 2 March 1874, Michael Flood to Fitzroy-Somerset 23 July 1874, 74/4160 COL/A 197 QSA.

101. Described more fully in Chapter 2.

102. By command J. Malbon Thompson 2 January 1874, 74/6209 A/8711 QSA.

"until the gold field was thoroughly established".¹⁰³ Attempts were made early in 1874 on behalf of Mulligan and his party to confer their reward as discoverers of the Palmer Gold Field. William Oswald Hodgkinson, whose electorate of Burke encompassed the field, moved to place upon the 1874 Supplementary Estimates the sum of £2,000 for the practical discoverers of payable gold on the Palmer.¹⁰⁴ The Secretary for Public Works, Thomas McIlwraith, while pointing out that application for rewards could be made under existing legislation, objected to the motion principally on the grounds of prematurity. He claimed that official information from the Palmer was "by no means sufficient to justify the expenditure of £2,000", and successfully argued that the government did not wish to be identified with or further encourage the rush now in progress.¹⁰⁵ Conceding Macalister's point, Hodgkinson withdrew his motion. However, shortly after this, a petition dated 6 March 1874 and signed by 382 people from the Cook district, requested the government to seriously consider granting Mulligan and party "a reward for their indomitable courage and energy displayed in penetrating into a vast territory almost totally unknown, and discovering a country highly auriferous".¹⁰⁶ The petition was tabled and printed; no debate ensued. Finally, on 23 September 1874, Hodgkinson encouraged Mulligan to apply himself to the Secretary for Works and Mines for the reward, the requirements of the regulations having been fulfilled. However in his application he requested a greater sum, arguing:

The grat [sic] extent of country now open as well as the enormous quantity of gold obtained on this field of which we have not participated in owing to the fact of our continually being out side prospecting new country and that too under grat [sic] expense.¹⁰⁷

103. *QPD XVI* (9 April 1874), p.196. The Macalister Ministry was formed on 8 January 1874.

104. *QV&P* 1874, 1, p.75; *QPD XVI* (9 April 1874), pp.194-6.

105. *Ibid.*, p.195.

106. *QV&P* 1874, 2, p.755.

107. Mulligan to Sec Works & Mines 23 September 1874, 74/118 A/8711 QSA; see also Hodgkinson to Min Works & Mines 6 July 1874, 74/3248 A/8711 QSA.

Two months later, in November 1874, £1,000 was granted to the discoverers;¹⁰⁸ it came more than a year after the initial rush to the Palmer, now officially acknowledged as a significant new find, and soon to become the colony's greatest alluvial producer.

108. Memorandum H.E. King 24 November 1874, 74/308 A8711 QSA.

CHAPTER 2

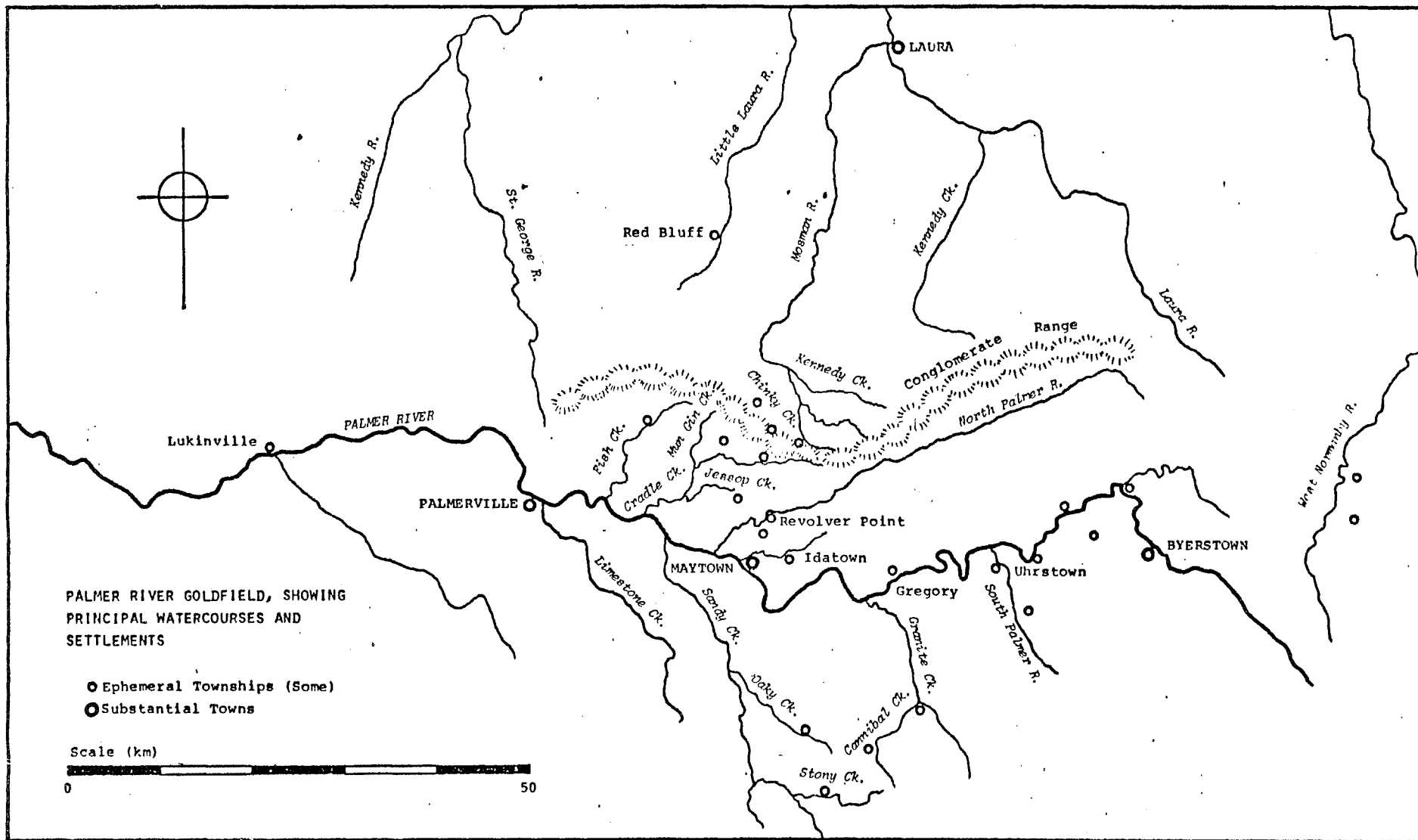
ALLUVIAL MINING, ADMINISTRATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

"the most monotonous life on the globe"

Sellheim 1878.

Fine gold and extensive but shallow alluvial deposits were found in abundance on the Palmer during the early rushes. Mulligan's discovery was one of the largest in area, and one of the richest of Australian alluvial gold finds. The diffusion of high quality gold was due to its geological history. An estimated ninety percent of the gold came from the river and tributaries between Fish Creek (ten kilometres or six miles from Palmerville) and Byerstown.¹ It was derived from the erosion of reefs on the Pre-mesozoic surface and was dispersed by the faulting of the Maytown block, which provided "excellent traps"² for redistributed gold. The origin of the gold in the area of the upper Palmer River, however, has remained uncertain because of the absence of reefs, although it has been suggested that a multitude of thin quartz leaders may have been the source.³ Another characteristic was the fine grainsize of the gold especially downstream from Palmerville, where it had been carried a long distance. Deep leads - the ancient alluvial deposits below the surface so significant on the Ballarat and Bendigo fields - were not apparent on the Palmer, and thus most alluvial mining was confined to the surface. Described by W.O. Hodgkinson, warden of the field from 1881 to 1884, as a "great auriferous basin",⁴ the Palmer yielded nearly £5 million worth of alluvial gold in its first decade, with a peak output of 260,000 ounces in 1875. While official sources at the turn of the century acclaimed the Palmer as having "transcended anything previously or since discovered",⁵ a more recent

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1. De Keyser and Lucas, *Geology*, p.165.
 2. *Ibid.*, p.173.
 3. *Ibid.* According to Robert Logan Jack, reefs did exist under the debris of the weathered escarpments or the "desert sandstone escarpment". *AR* 1887 p.89.
 4. W.O. Hodgkinson to Under Sec Mines 2 June 1881, 81/648 MWO 13B/G2 QSA. Hodgkinson also stated that the uniform value of the gold was unparalleled in mining history: a sweeping claim but one that was indicative of official praise. *AR* 1881 p.14.
 5. Mineral Resource of Queensland: An Immense Field For Investment, *QGMJ* 2 (March 1901) p.20. See mining statistics at end of this chapter for average price per ounce 1874-1883.



geological account has described it simply as "the most prolific alluvial producer in Queensland".⁶

In its alluvial phase the Palmer was an ideal "small man's field", as miners without capital and experience had an opportunity to get rich quickly. Operations were entirely small scale and labour intensive, using only the simplest of materials: pick and shovel (both made smaller and lighter than those employed in other trades, and transported without handles), a panning dish, a bag and a supply of nails to construct a cradle from bush timber.⁷ This form of mining required little outlay, although additional funds were required to cover compulsory charges and supplies while prospecting. For this reason, even two years after the initial rush, the field was still attractive to "fossickers",⁸ as the *Queenslander* recorded:

[The] Palmer happens to be the only gold-field in the colonies where the fossicker can eke out a livelihood with the tin-dish when things are at the worst. He can, therefore, 'hold his own' without diminishing his capital, and is on the ground ready to start at a moment's notice in the event of anything new breaking out.⁹

The possibility of making one's fortune with the discovery of a huge nugget or a rich deposit embedded in a terrace was a constant

6. De Keyser and Lucas, *Geology*, p.152.

7. *CC* 20 June 1874; *CH* 8 July 1874.

8. On the Palmer the term "fossicker" was used to refer to European alluvial miners in general, although according to R. Brough Smyth, the term had a different, rather derogatory meaning in Victoria. "FOSSICKER - Is to the miner as is the gleaner to the reaper. Picks the crevices and pockets of the rocks." R. Brough Smyth, *The Gold Fields and Mineral Districts of Victoria* (Melbourne 1979 facsim 1869), p.612.

9. *Q* 17 July 1875.

lure,¹⁰ initiating rushes to new locations. However, while the numerous alluvial finds indicated early enthusiasm among many prospectors, difficult terrain, scarcity and cost of provisions, and Aboriginal attacks deterred many prospectors from spending prolonged periods away from the main settlements. Accordingly returns in the short term needed to be high to sustain a miner for a long un-productive period of adjustment after a claim was worked out. Indeed it is questionable whether many diggers with a tin dish earned a livelihood much beyond the first year, as occupational statistics indicate. The alluvial miners made up the greater proportion of population throughout the decade, growing in number to 13,070 in 1877 and diminishing to 842 by the end of 1883.¹¹ Their average return during the first year of the rush was over £4 per week,¹² equivalent to an ounce of gold which, on the Palmer was required "to maintain barest necessities",¹³ with prices three to four times those of Brisbane.¹⁴ Although Philip Sellheim noted with some satisfaction in 1878 that the "average cost of living now-a-days need not exceed 25s. per week",¹⁵ most miners were earning only 15/- to £1 a week from 1877 onwards. Clearly their existence was precarious, notwithstanding the total production figures for the field.

10. Nuggets of 30 to 86ozs. were discovered relatively frequently throughout 1873-4. *Q* 7 February 1874; *CC* 25 April & 6 June 1874; *CH* 29 May & 10 June 1874. Even in later years nuggets of 26 and 50 ozs. were found. *CC* 14 April 1877 & 28 May 1879. Individual alluvial miners found patches of highly concentrated gold and accumulated small fortunes. One brought in 16 lbs weight of gold, others returned south with parcels of 300 ozs, 100 ozs, but more common in early 1874, 30-60 ozs. *CH* 17 June 1874, 16 January 1875; *Q* 28 March 1874.
11. *AR* 1877 p.4, 1883 p.20.
12. Calculated from figures provided in table *AR* 1878, p.23. In the first month of the rush, St George estimated that most men were making £1 per day. St George to Sec Pub Works & Mines 16 November 1873, 74/158 WOR/A 77 QSA.
13. *Q* 3 October 1874.
14. R. Tennent Shields to General Manager 17 May 1876, BR/QNB/032 22 NBA.
15. *AR* 1878 p.21.

Panning was not the only form of alluvial working. Other methods were employed on the Palmer and were reflected in geographical names such as Cradle Creek.¹⁶ Cradles varied in sophistication according to craftsmanship and cost. In 1874 the standard price for a ready made cradle was £5,¹⁷ and although some miners could "knock out" eight pennyweights a day,¹⁸ the high cost of living forced most miners to revert to the tin dish. Inevitably, cheaper cradles were fashioned from empty cartons and cases which sold by weight at 9d and 1/- per pound.¹⁹ More systematic work was carried out by a small but relatively consistent number of miners, who took up extended alluvial claims for sluicing for most years except 1876.²⁰ Sluicing, which depended on running water to guide coarser particles of gold down a launder or trough over a series of riffles or strips of wood, was common during the wet season.²¹ Sluice boxes were sometimes washed with the aid of a Californian pump. One party even went to the trouble of laying down a 122 metres (400 feet) tramway to convey dirt to the sluice.²² This method required cooperation, careful preparation and skill; it was, however, more efficient than panning or cradling. In fact, a higher average yield per miner in 1879 over the previous year was attributed to "large gangs sluicing, instead of, as formerly in small parties, cradling".²³ Nevertheless,

16. CH 29 May 1875.

17. CC 6 June 1874.

18. Q 2 May 1874.

19. CC 16 May 1874.

20. Numbers of sluicing claims: 1875 (180), 1876 (38), 1877 (150), 1878 (200), 1879 (216). AR 1878 p.23, 1879 p.19. Figures for 1880-3 unavailable.

21. A Californian visitor to the field in 1876 suggested that hydraulic mining would improve the Palmer's alluvial output. P. Lucien Buddivent "A Californian's Impressions of the Alluvial Diggings of the Northern Gold Fields", CC 3 May 1876. While the visit of Buddivent is significant, the suggestion was hardly possible on a field such as the Palmer, where lack of water was a problem for much of the year.

22. CC 20 June 1874.

23. AR 1879 p.2.

both methods were hampered by the difficulty of finding water in the drier part of the year.²⁴ It was during these months that dry blowing was sometimes practised.²⁵ One other process, considered unique, was known as "Palmer whaling": when the river was in flood, miners with water up to their necks scooped the river bottom with long handled shovels.²⁶

In general, the European alluvial miner who exploited and eventually abandoned the Palmer encapsulated the digger image of an earlier decade.²⁷ This was not entirely accidental, for a small number of miners had worked in New South Wales in the 1860s and on the Victorian fields,²⁸ and a greater number had experience on at least a few fields in North Queensland. Indeed Dalrymple remarked after the arrival of the *Leichhardt* at the Endeavour River on 25 October 1873 that "many familiar faces of old friends, thought to be hundreds of miles distant, peeped in at our tent doors for a morning call".²⁹ On the other hand, descriptions of the ineptitude of "new chums" and the probable attrition in the lifestyle of alluvial miners

24. CH 9 October 1875 & 20 September 1876; AR 1879 p.21.

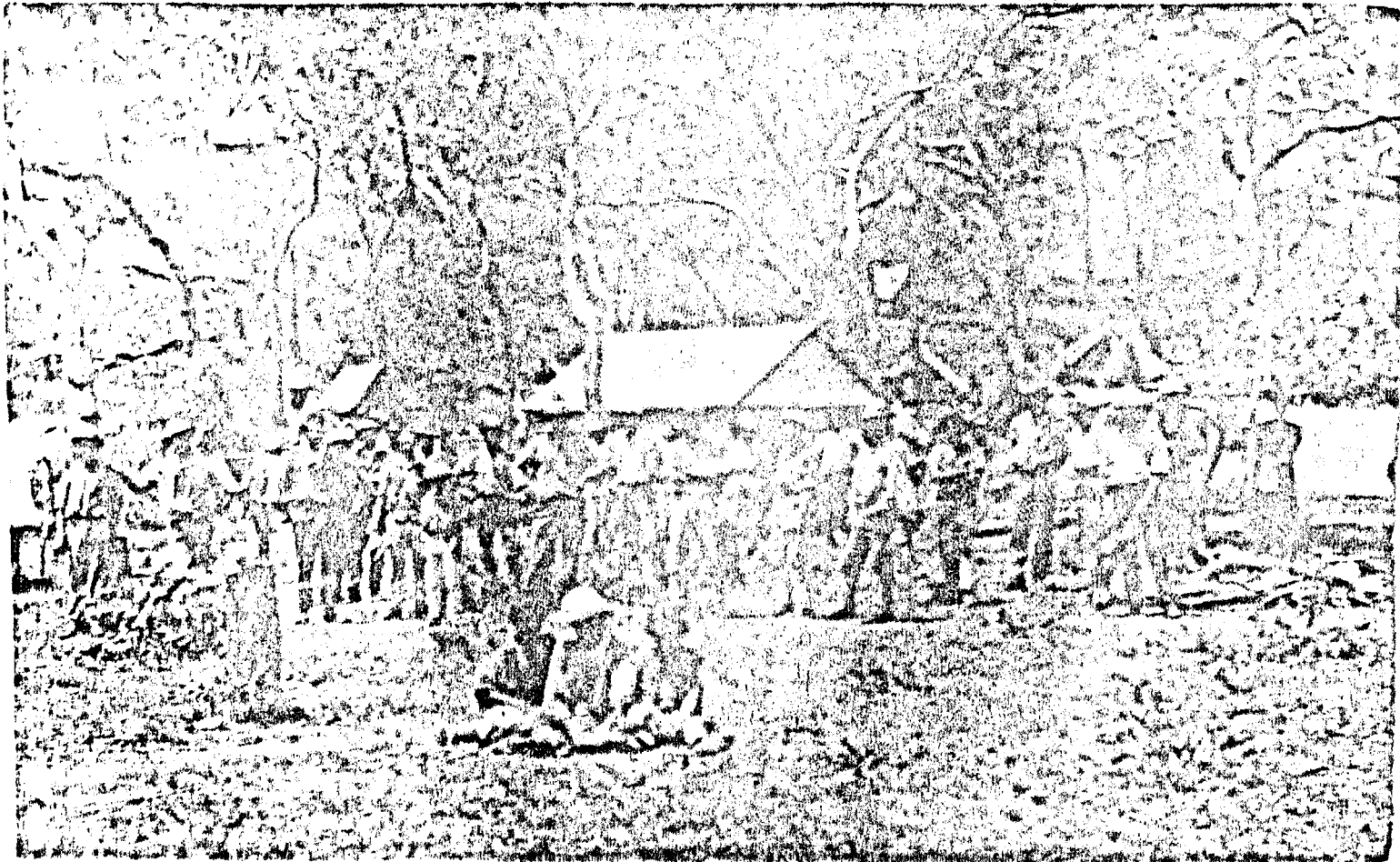
25. CH 4 August 1875.

26. CC 20 June 1874.

27. The European alluvial miner is one of the most fascinating and influential personalities in Australian history, but no historical study yet captures and examines his character, motivations, and experience in any depth. Serle portrays him at work in Victoria in the 1850s, Bolton captures him in North Queensland in the 1870s, and Blainey pursues him everywhere without pausing to record him in detail. See G. Blainey, *The Gold Rushes: The Year of Decision*, *Historical Studies* 10 (May 1962); G. Serle, *The Rush to be Rich* (Melbourne 1971), pp.66-94; Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, pp.50-1.

28. For reference to previous experience see CH 6 February, 21 July, 4 October 1875. W. Rutland, who arrived in Maytown in 1876, was described as "late of Gulgong, Hill End, NSW, and Charters Towers". CH 8 July 1876.

29. Dalrymple, Narrative, QV&P 1874, 2, p.634.



Group of Miners

Cooktown, late 1873 early 1874.

(Marten Album Mackay City Council)

44

suggest that there must have been a steady turnover of their ranks.³⁰ Two points should be noted: the Palmer miner, even if he had not participated in the earlier rushes, was at least conscious of the experiences of the early Australian digger; and inferences drawn about the European miner, based on a twenty year old heritage of alluvial fields, apply equally to the first Chinese miners on the Palmer. The latter too were likely to have had access to a similar fund of mining lore, bushcraft and old racial antipathy, and in some instances even to have personally experienced life on other Australian gold fields.³¹

The austere and primitive life style, the isolation, and the need to journey long distances in search of new finds was characteristic of all Palmer alluvial miners, European and Chinese. Periods of profitable gold extraction were interspersed with extended periods of prospecting, travelling in smaller parties to accumulate wash dirt for the wet season, and bouts of inactivity spent in billiard parlours, shanty pubs, and other places of amusement, which proliferated in the raw settlements. Furthermore the Palmer digger tended to be more transitory than his southern counterpart and less inclined to invest or develop his claim. The yearning for easy gold and the tendency to abandon claims to join a new rush were characteristics which Warden Sellheim clearly discerned:

If the Northern miner has one besetting sin, and, if such a thing is possible, even in a larger degree than his Southern brother - and it certainly proves the existence of, at any rate, a remnant of energy that even the severity of a Northern climate has not been able to deprive him of - it is his readiness at a moment's notice to sacrifice his all,

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30. For comments concerning less experienced miners see Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 10 February 1877, 77/37 MWO 13B/G1, Hamilton to Col Sec 9 April 1874, 74/766 COL/A 194 QSA.
31. The majority of Chinese who arrived on the Palmer Gold Field during 1873-4 came from within Australia. It was not until early 1875 that Chinese emigration direct from Chinese ports began in earnest. For details, see later chapter.

if required, to enable him to hurry off to the scene of some new discovery - good or bad, authenticated or not.³²

Regular small rushes were the established pattern in the early years of the Palmer Gold Field.

The depression and destitution arising from the failed Kennedy rush in May 1874 was eased by another more successful one in June to Sandy Creek (also known as the Mitchell Falls rush), south of the existing diggings in the direction of the Mitchell along Oaky, Stony, Fine Gold and Limestone Creeks.³³ At the centre of the rush, a new settlement on Limestone Creek - Kingsborough - mushroomed and replaced Edwardstown (later Maytown) as the location of the assistant warden's camp.³⁴ The Sandy Creek area was to remain the principal European alluvial workings for almost twelve months, despite the attraction of extremely fine gold during the wet of 1874-5 at the head of the main branch of the Palmer and Normanby Rivers, where the town of Byerstown sprang up.³⁵ Eventually in July 1875 the alluvial at Sandy Creek showed signs of falling off, and panning gave way to cradling and sluicing.³⁶ Soon afterwards, frustration and disillusionment re-emerged with the onset of the dry season and with numerous disputes over water rights. Another rush at the end of August 1875 to the Conglomerate Range, on the

32. *AR* 1878 pp.21-2.

33. *CH* 8 July 1874; *CC* 25 July & 25 August 1874; St George to Sec Works & Mines 13 July 1874, 74/3730 WOR/A 88, St George to Sec Works & Mines 4 August 1874, 74/4212 WOR/A 89 QSA.

34. Located on Limestone Creek, Kingsborough is not to be confused with a later township of the same name on the Hodgkinson Gold Field. Warden Dorsey was stationed there in December 1874. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 4 December 1874, 74/96 & Sellheim to Thomas Clohesy (Inspector of Police Cooktown) 7 December 1874, 74/115 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

35. *CC* 15 December 1874; *Q* 9 January 1875; Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 2 February 1875, 75/34 & Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 15 March 1875 75/79 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

36. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 1 September 1875, 75/275 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

the tributaries of the middle head of the Laura River and Mossman Creek, failed to yield the much anticipated riches and to restore prosperity.³⁷ Unable to fall back on older diggings because of Chinese claims, the European population moved farther away from the Palmer River. Indeed Sellheim had remarked on the lack of systematic work on their part as early as January 1875:

The great extent of this gold field and the good finds occasionally reported at a distance altho' in many cases not even true, militate to a great degree against its prosperity. It keeps the population in an unsettled state perpetually ready to rush away to some other spot and prevents the Miners from settling to work in a systematic and steady manner, which is much required where the gold is so finely divided as in many of the workings on this Gold Field.³⁸

His observations were again vindicated when another exodus of European miners, greater than any previous rush, occurred after the discovery of payable gold on the Hodgkinson River, which James Mulligan and William McLeod's parties had reported to Warden Thomas Coward at Byerstown on 9 March 1876.³⁹ This rush was responsible for altering the character of mining on the Palmer both as an alluvial and a reefing field.

The "new Palmer rush" - as the Hodgkinson discovery was then called - was significantly different from the earlier ones, occurring as it did outside the official Palmer Gold Field. But the miners had no respect for gazetted boundaries and readily overlanded to the new find. By mid-April Sellheim estimated that "about 95% of the Europeans working alluv. have left".⁴⁰ They were joined by over a thousand European miners who had disembarked from coastal

37. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 1 September 1875, 75/275 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

38. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines [n.d. but between 4 & 7 January 1875], 75/3 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

39. Mulligan, Warner, Ableson, Macleod, Kennedy & Crosby 9 March 1876, 76/429 A/8711 QSA.

40. Sellheim to Sec Mines 4 May 1876, 76/98 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

steamers at Cooktown.⁴¹ However, shortage of rations, the absence of permanent administration, and fear of destitution and famine after little gold was won, led to an equally abrupt exodus of alluvial miners from the Hodgkinson. Reefers found future prospects more promising, and remained. A separate Hodgkinson Gold Field was eventually proclaimed in June 1876, and in the months that followed, reefing and dollying started in earnest. Crushing machinery was introduced to the field with impressive rapidity and eight plants were operating within a year.⁴² The demand for goods and services resulted in the opening up of a more direct route, and a more suitable port than Cooktown. Tracks were cut to the coastal settlements of Cairns, White Cliffs, Port Salisbury (Port Douglas) and Smithfield. Port Douglas prospered, as it was preferred by machine owners, and soon rivalled Cooktown.⁴³

As the majority of men who rushed to the Hodgkinson in March-April 1876 were alluvial miners, not reefers, they returned to the Palmer, raising the European population dramatically in June to 3,000, higher even than during the old Palmer rush. Sellheim remarked: "The white population on the portion of the G.F. under my immediate supervision has been largely increased by disappointed diggers from the Hodgkinson, & numerous P.A. have been granted to them".⁴⁴ He had warned 'miners not to come "unless in a position to take up Reefs on their own account."⁴⁵ Now they were unable to regain the alluvial workings which were in the hands of Chinese, and the lack of crushing machinery on the field deterred any reefing.

41. W.R.O. Hill calculated that there were 2,000 on the ground on 19 April. Hill to Min Mines 24 April 1876, 9/76 MWO 13A/G1 QSA.
42. By the end of 1877 there were twelve. CC 2 May 1877; AR 1877 p.11.
43. HMN 3 November 1877.
44. Sellheim to Sec Mines 5 July 1876, 76/142 CPS 13B/G1 QSA. By P.A. Sellheim meant Prospecting Area.
45. Sellheim to Sec Mines 4 May 1876, 76/98 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

Consequently the population started to disperse in the second half of 1876, dropping to 1,500 by the end of the year. Only 200 European sluicers worked the former centres of alluvial operations.⁴⁶

1877 was the Palmer's "great depression". No new alluvial deposits were discovered in the year following the Hodgkinson rush and the number of European alluvial miners dwindled temporarily to a mere 70. The Chinese remained to rework old ground, sometimes for a third time.⁴⁷ Fortuitously, in 1878 the last of the larger alluvial rushes occurred on the lower Palmer at Lukinville, after Chinese prospectors located "by far the most important discovery of the year". While it was shortlived, Sellheim emphasized its significance:

...a regular stampede set in, Europeans and Chinese alike; and at one time there could not have been less than eight thousand men on the ground. Although not up to the expectations of the majority, yet this part of the river did prove a boon after all, for the time being. There can be no doubt now that the discovery occurred just in the nick of time, for alluvial diggings had been almost solely confined to the main water-courses, owing to an exceptionally dry season; and as this ground has done duty on several occasions as a last fall-back, it was difficult to see how large numbers could gain a living there for any protracted period. The new field, fortunately assisted in tiding over the dread difficulty, and for a time even afforded inordinate consolation to some of the hard-up men from Coen.

The Lukinville rush was typical of other Palmer rushes in its effects: the yield was "exceedingly fine" gold;⁴⁸ it relieved disappointed European alluvial miners who had ventured to other rushes, in this case to the Hodgkinson in the south and the Coen to the north, and it set back attempts to establish steady reefing work, even though the Palmer's future was inevitably bound up in the exploitation of reef gold. It differed from most in being discovered by Chinese prospectors.

46. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 10 February 1877, 77/37 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

47. AR 1877 pp.1, 4.

48. AR 1878 p.20.

Alluvial miners who remained after 1877 showed surprising perseverance. A "lost lead" was found by some Chinese and traced to a point in Jessop's Gully, Stony Creek, at which location a shaft was sunk to a level of eighteen metres (sixty feet) yielding a considerable quantity of coarse gold and large nuggets.⁴⁹ While Sellheim believed that as an alluvial field the Palmer had "lost its attraction to the European Miner",⁵⁰ the European "fossicker" did not disappear altogether, and interestingly those who were still managing to eke out a living were "old hands on the field, men with a knowledge of every inch of country."⁵¹ His assessment influenced the Under Secretary for Mines subsequently to conclude that the Palmer could maintain satisfactory returns:

Although there has been a considerable decrease in the quantity of alluvial gold produced, it has not been from the individual earnings of the alluvial miner being less than in the previous year, but from the decrease in the number of that class of miners. There has been more gold produced on the Palmer relatively to the number of miners working during 1879 than there was during the previous year.⁵²

But his comments were transparently misleading, as the population had decreased considerably and returns had fallen substantially; the 1880 returns were only twenty-five percent of the peak year of 1875. The Palmer's days as a significant alluvial producer were over.

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For most of the first decade, the Palmer Gold Field was administered entirely by the authority of the commissioner or warden, who always held the additional office of police magistrate, which conferred extra powers such as some command over police activities. When Howard St George arrived on the Palmer in 1873, he derived his

49. AR 1880 p.17.

50. AR 1878 p.20

51. AR 1880 p.17, 1878 p.20.

52. AR 1879 p.2.

authority from the New South Wales *Gold Fields Management Act* of 1852 and the Amendment Act of 1857, for Queensland had no comprehensive legislation for the management of gold fields.⁵³ However the series of gold discoveries in the late 1860s prompted a Royal Commission into the industry in 1870; this led to revisions in the form of Gold Field Regulations in 1871, and again in November 1873 and January 1874.⁵⁴ These later revisions coincided with the rush to the Palmer. Under the standing regulations, the duties of the commissioner were "to determine the extent and position of the claim to which each person or company is entitled under any miner's right, license, or lease...and to mark such extent". While the regulations did provide guidelines for administering these duties, the commissioner was granted wide discretionary powers "to make such temporary rules or orders...as he may consider necessary and to make any necessary order in any dispute that may arise in any matter connected with gold field management".⁵⁵ On 1 October 1874, the *Gold Fields Act of 1874* came into force: it was the "first really comprehensive piece of mining legislation since separation".⁵⁶ Not only did the Act lay down the basis for gold field administration for the next three decades, but its amendments in 1877 and 1878 were direct consequences of events on the Palmer. The 1874 Act provided for the appointment of wardens:⁵⁷ Philip Sellheim was the first warden on the Palmer under the legislation; he was succeeded by Francis Gill in 1880 and

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53. 16 *Victoriae* 43. *An Act for regulating the Management of the Gold Fields of New South Wales and for raising a Revenue therefrom and for the preservation of order thereon.* [28th December, 1852.]; 20 *Victoriae* 29. *An Act to amend the Laws relating to the Gold Fields.* [11th March, 1857.].
54. *QV&P* 1870, 1, pp.275-284, 1874, 2, pp.669-691; *QGG* XIV, 101 (5 November 1873), pp.1821-1832.
55. *QV&P* 1874, 2, p.369.
56. C.A. Bernays, *Queensland Politics during Sixty (1859-1919) Years* (Brisbane 1919), p.359. For full legislation see 38 *Victoriae* 11. *An Act for the Management of Gold Fields.*
57. Assistant wardens were also appointed. On the Palmer, 1873-1883, there were: Alexander Dorsey 1874-7, Thomas Coward 1874-77, W.R.O. Hill 1876-77, J. Farrelly 1877-78 and L.E.D. Towner 1878-81.

W.O. Hodgkinson in 1881. Further, while the 1874 Act extended the period a miners' right remained in force to ten years and encouraged consolidated miners' rights, the powers of the wardens were still wide, especially in connection with the newly established wardens courts. Gold could be seized for payment; injunctions could be granted for several days without notice; and "any person verbally authorised by the warden" could be called upon to assist the warden in carrying out the Act.⁵⁸ The warden also had to supervise closely the mining process, regulate the use of water, and fine, arrest or imprison for unlicensed mining. However, although comprehensive, the 1874 Act did not lessen the difficulties of administering so vast and isolated a gold field as the Palmer.

The experience and background of gold field officials differed considerably. Some were particularly unsuited to the office; others rose to eminence in the mining industry. It was indeed fortunate for the early diggers on the Palmer that St George, "a man of known integrity and ability"⁵⁹ on the northern gold fields, was appointed to report on the new rush. St George, who had also served in Charters Towers for a few months before he was summoned,⁶⁰ was able to call upon his experience to guide the first expedition through virgin bush and to carry out the onerous duties of gold commissioner during the initial chaos of the following rush coinciding as it did with the 1873-4 wet. Staffing was a major problem. At the beginning of 1874, when the population reached 2,000, St George

58. *38 Vic 11 Cl 70.*

59. *CC 25 July 1875.*

60. Born Ireland c.1825; married first wife Jane Tear 1856 (who died on Palmer 1886); lived in Queensland from 1862; gold commissioner /warden /police magistrate Western Creek 1868-1870, Gilbert 1871-1873, Etheridge March-July 1873, Charters Towers August-September 1873, Palmer 1873-1874, 1884-1891, Cooktown 1874-1883, Aramac 1883-1884, Eidsvold 1891-1895; meanwhile married second wife Marie Tear 1886, presumably sister-in-law; retired 1896; died Brisbane 1897. Death certificate A/40259, General Registry Office, Brisbane; St George to Sec Works & Mines 8 June 1874, 74/3131 WOR/A 86 QSA.

had a staff complement of one assistant commissioner, Alexander Fyfe, three gold field troopers, and two Aboriginal trackers.⁶¹ He had warned the authorities that it would be "very difficult to keep men as Goldfields Troopers at fl1/8/4 per month" when wages of fl per day were being made with a tin dish.⁶² As it eventuated, the attractions of the field did prove too great for the troopers, and there were successive resignations, including Fyfe's, despite St George's attempt to lift rates of pay to compensate for the hardships and frustrations experienced by his subordinates.⁶³ Replacements were hard to find: a vacancy in early 1874 was filled by one, Ah Kim.⁶⁴ St George also discovered that his Aboriginal trackers, new recruits from the Burdekin, were too inexperienced to handle duties assigned to them in the administration of the field.⁶⁵

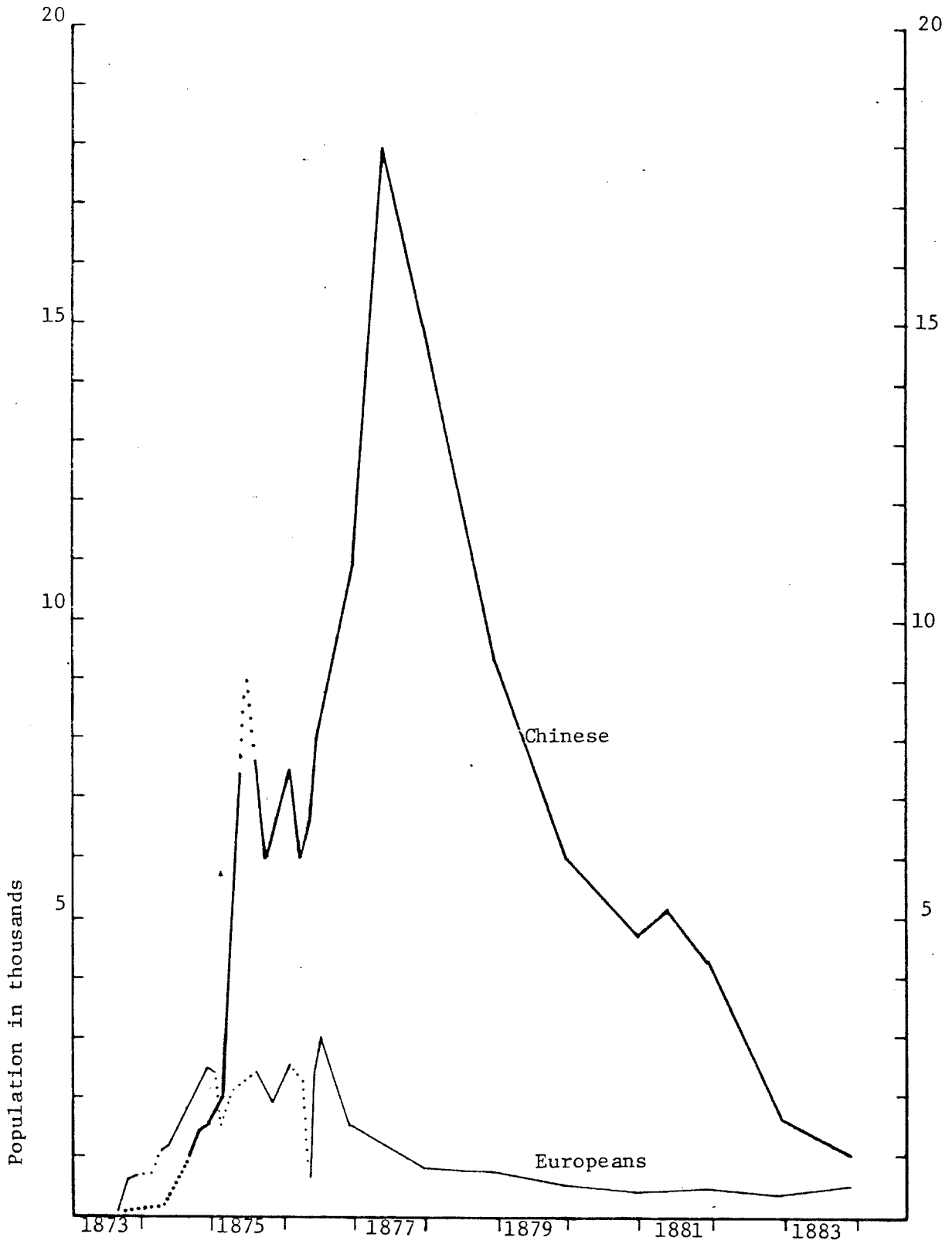
Holding several offices simultaneously, a practice continued by his successors, St George was also police magistrate, registrar

61. St George to Sec Works & Mines 14 April 1874, 74/2265 WOR/A 84 QSA. Three distinct positions are often confused in recent accounts: those of gold field trooper, Aboriginal tracker and Aboriginal trooper. A gold field trooper was a member of the gold field staff, and his duties included the collection of revenue. The position was usually filled by Europeans, but at one time by a Chinese man. Aboriginal trackers also assisted the wardens in carrying out camp duties - fetching water, feeding horses. Both the gold field troopers and trackers were distinct from the Aboriginal troopers of the Native Police whose duties were para-military in nature. However Aboriginal trackers were sometimes attached to the ordinary or white police carrying out basic camp duties. See Report from the Commissioner of Police for the year 1874 *QV&P* 1875, 1, p.617.
62. St George to Sec Works & Mines 16 November 1873, 74/499 WOR/A 78 QSA.
63. Resignations of troopers were reported in the following: St George to Sec Works & Mines 4 January 1874, 74/805 WOR/A 79; St George to Sec Works & Mines 20 July 1874, 74/3929 WOR/A 88; St George to Sec Works & Mines 19 December 1873, 74/122 WOR/A 77 QSA. Alexander Fyfe resigned his position as assistant warden purportedly for ill health, but was soon back on the field to call a public meeting, with a view to establishing a quartz crushing plant at Butcher's Creek. *CC* 11 July 1874.
64. St George to Sec Works & Mines 14 April 1874, 74/2265 WOR/A 84 QSA.
65. St George to Sec Works & Mines 16 November 1873, 74/160 WOR/A 77 QSA.

of births, marriages and deaths for the district of the Palmer, and justice authorized to celebrate marriages within the limits of the Norman Registry District under the provisions of the *Justices Marrying Act* of 1872.⁶⁶ He had to preside over a police court (with neither lock up nor court house),⁶⁷ investigate deaths including spearings, and minister to the sick. A victim of fever himself in June 1874, he wrote to the Under Secretary for Works and Mines requesting "the first vacant situation which may occur upon some of the inside gold fields" in order to be reunited with his family, from whom he had been separated since October 1873.⁶⁸ Before leaving for a new appointment at Cooktown in August 1874, St George brought to the attention of the authorities the urgent need for an additional commissioner, for not only had the rush to Sandy Creek lured the European miners from Palmerville, but the first large influx of Chinese had commenced.⁶⁹

The period 1874-1878 was a critical time for the gold field administrator. The population rose dramatically to around 19,500 in 1877,⁷⁰ and the government sought to control the increase through the *Gold Fields Act Amendment Acts* of 1877 and 1878, for the majority of new miners were Chinese. Charged with attending to the orderly development of the field was a glaringly inexperienced

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66. QGG XV, 23 (31 January 1874), 52 (2 May 1874), pp.220, 876.
67. St George to Col Sec 20 April 1874, 74/1038 & 13 July 1874, 74/1494 COL/A 196 QSA.
68. St George to Sec Works & Mines 8 June 1874, 74/3131 WOR/A 86 QSA.
69. St George to Min Works & Mines 1 July 1874, 74/3704, 6 July 1874, 74/3703, 13 July 1874 74/3730, WOR/A 88 & St George to Min Works & Mines 20 July 1874, 74/3929 WOR/A 86, St George to Min Works & Mines 4 August 1874, 74/4212 WOR/A 89 QSA.
70. See population graph accompanying text.



POPULATION ON THE PALMER GOLD FIELD

(Compiled from various sources, principally the warden's correspondence. Less reliable estimates are shown by dotted lines.)

gold field administrator: Philip Frederic Sellheim.⁷¹ On his appointment he was described as a "man of good sound sense, but no experience as a gold miner."⁷² Sellheim was German born and well-educated: a "Teutonic Gentleman" was one miner's description.⁷³ He had an early association with the Palmer, taking part in the abortive plan of Dalrymple to open up access to the field from the coast. He apparently had a heavy accent for he was described in 1878 as a "Warden to settle gold-fields' disputes and tell men not to make 'swine of demselves' when he is fining them for imbibing too much of the rosy".⁷⁴ During 1874 and early 1875, he had to conduct administrative proceedings from a grass covered tent at Palmerville.⁷⁵ As the canvas of the tent was "rotten" and "in tatters" from fierce winds, Sellheim complained that he was "experiencing the greatest difficulty in preserving Books and papers from destruction".⁷⁶ More secure buildings were eventually built at Palmerville, long after the need had passed, and after Sellheim was removed to Maytown in May 1875.⁷⁷ As new buildings still had to be requisitioned for

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71. Born 1832 in Hesse-Darmstadt; settled in Queensland 1855; manager Banana Station 1855-9; a member of Dalrymple's 1859 expedition; owned Strathmore station 1861-66; naturalized 1862; married Laura Morrisett in 1865 (she died Maytown 26 August 1878); managed Valley of Lagoons 1867-70; involved in abortive scheme with Dalrymple to open up road communications between Palmer & Endeavour Rivers 1873; appointed gold commissioner/warden Palmer 1874-1880, Charters Towers 1880-1887, Gympie 1888-1892; Under Secretary for Mines 1892-1899; died Brisbane 1899. *ADB* 6, pp.101-2.
72. *CC* 8 August 1874.
73. Complaint by a miner named Enright 18 March 1878, enclosed Sellheim to Under Col Sec 30 April 1878, 78/1724 COL/A 257 QSA.
74. *CC* 17 April 1878.
75. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 29 December 1874, 74/154 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.
76. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 21 January 1875, 75/17 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.
77. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 24 May 1875, 75/181 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

Maytown, Sellheim again had to rely on his old tents, the tears now covered up with bark. It was not until the close of 1875 that he occupied his first permanent building, some additions to which were made at his own expense:

The building is weatherboard, 15 feet x 15 & bark roof. The Smallness of the building necessitated by the sum at my command, made it of very little use, & partly for this reason, and on account to protect it from the weather, I have erected a 7 feet Verandah all round & enclosed 3 Skillion Rooms with galv. Iron at my own expense.⁷⁸

His assistant, W.R.O. Hill, was more than adequately accommodated within months of his arrival at Byerstown:

The Gold Commissioner, Mr. Hill, resides above the township on the bank of the river, has a pretty dry camp, and since my arrival, he had a fine six-roomed house built, and built very quickly too, by a very good-looking young fellow, it must be intended for a land office, or court house, but I assure you it is fit for a lady.⁷⁹

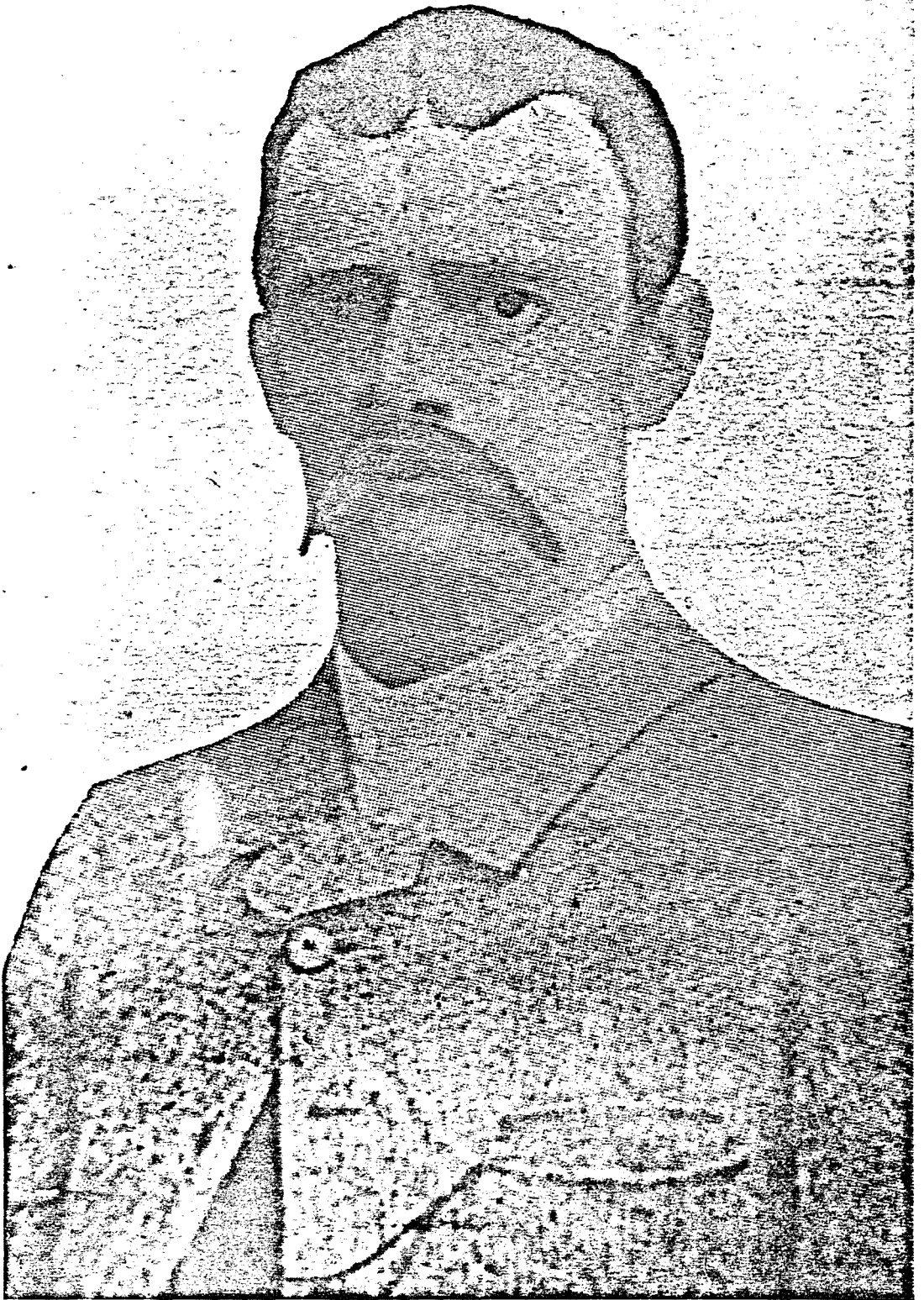
It was no easy life being warden of the Palmer: one contemporary observer described Sellheim as "one of the hardest worked men in the Government".⁸⁰ Notwithstanding the arduous demands made on him, Sellheim cultivated a strong sense of duty, reflected in his insistence on the strict observation of regulations, the wearing of uniforms by gold field officials, and the use of correct forms for receipts and fees; he deplored undignified and neglectful duty by members of staff.⁸¹ Yet at the same time he was quick to defend them. On one occasion, he complained strongly to the Secretary for Works and Mines on behalf of his staff, when it was mooted that

78. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 31 December 1875, 75/393 CPS 13B/G1 QSA. The money allocated was £60, but the actual expense was £70/12/-. The costs were as follows: 32 sheets of iron £31/17/-; 62 sheets of bark £13/12/-; cartage £5; nails and hardware £3/3/- and labour £17.

79. CH 17 June 1876.

80. CC 24 January 1877.

81. For examples see Sellheim to Hill 9 April 1877, 77/80 MWO 13B/G1, Sellheim to Dorsey 23 April 1877, 77/160 MWO 13B/G1, Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 5 March 1878, 78/45 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.



W.R.O. Hill, 1884 (Hill, *Forty-Five Years*, frontispiece)

the ration allowance for gold field troopers was to be withdrawn: "their pay of £13/- per annum would not suffice to purchase even food at the high prices....[B]are necessities of life cannot be purchased under £2:2:0 per week".⁸² A ration allowance of 5/- per day was eventually granted.⁸³

The most onerous duty for the warden and his assistants was to ensure that current miners' rights were held by those engaged in mining, and to collect the 10/- fee from those found to be unlicensed. There were never sufficient men, or time, however, to carry out a thorough inspection of such a transient population, sprawled over a large and undulating area. Also, the work of gold field staff was continually interrupted by the need to follow population movement to new areas or to open up communications. Thomas Coward, for example, spent his first months as warden in late 1874 and early 1875 marking a dray route to Byerstown.⁸⁴ Sickness also reduced Sellheim's manpower, with Coward being granted as much as six months leave from May 1876, and Alexander Dorsey four months in early 1877.⁸⁵ Consequently, during the period of highest population movement, Sellheim could rely on two, but sometimes only one of his three assistant wardens to head field parties, each usually comprising four men: an assistant warden, a gold field trooper or orderly, and two Aboriginal trackers. It is evident that illegal mining was carried on in isolated gullies; that field parties collected even as much revenue as they did was a notable achievement.⁸⁶ However, there were certain

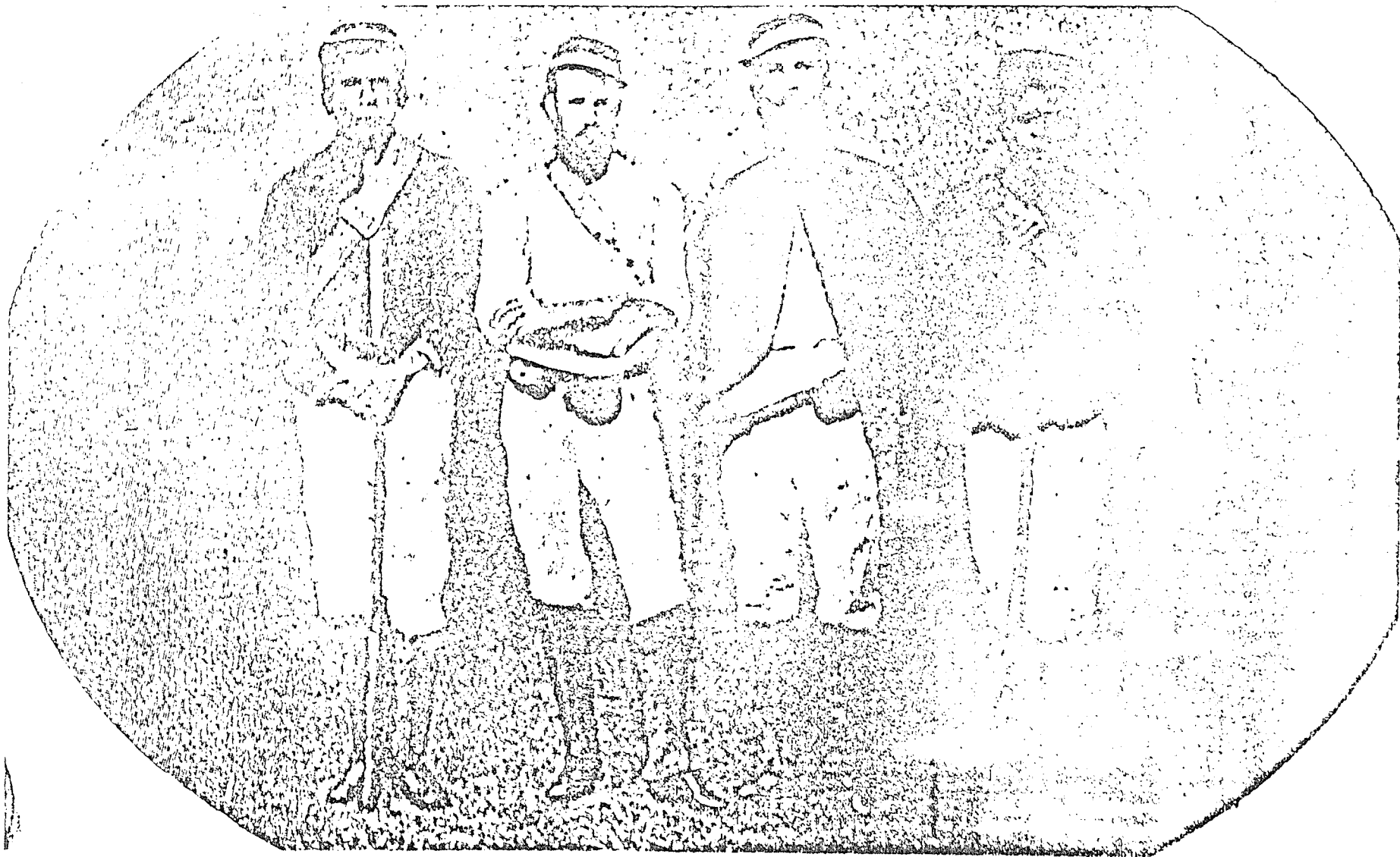
82. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 10 January 1875, 75/13 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

83. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 23 March 1875, 75/77 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

84. Q 26 December 1874.

85. Reference to Coward's illness in *QV&P* 1878, 2, p.281; Sellheim to Dorsey 27 November 1876, 76/258 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

86. While the collections for 1875, 1877 and 1878 were obviously well down, the number of miners' rights issued during 1874 and 1876 exceeded the estimated number of miners on the field at the conclusion of those years. See table of mining statistics at end of chapter.



At Work - Palmer, 1876 Vic, W.R.O. Hill, Norris, Dan (Hill, Forty-Five Years, p.73)

irregularities in the collection of revenue which could have contributed to the miners' resistance to payment. Firstly, officials were not always readily identifiable as some were not in uniform.⁸⁷ Secondly, not only was a rash of irregular forms, issued by Hill as miners' rights during the period of July 1876 to November 1877, quite illegal, but it created unpleasant confrontations between Coward and miners.⁸⁸ No wonder that robbery through impersonation of an officer occurred, euphemistically described as "the commissioner dodge".⁸⁹ It was not until 1877 that the Under Secretary instituted government authorized receipts for payments, and ordered officials to wear a distinguishing cap.⁹⁰

Neither the 1874 Act nor its amendments laid down the procedures that the gold field staff were entitled to use to elicit payment of fees. Poor collections could seriously militate against a warden's career, as Alexander Dorsey discovered when Sellheim reported him to higher authorities.⁹¹ However inclusion of Aboriginal trackers in the field party, dressed in remnants of Native Police uniforms, was

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87. Hill to Under Sec Mines 7 August 1876, 76/61 MWO 13A/G1 QSA.
88. This issue is investigated in greater detail in Chapter 5 on the Chinese.
89. Q 28 April 1877. In one case, an enterprising impersonator called himself Warden Coward. CC 24 March 1877.
90. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 7 April 1877, 77/79, Lukin to Sellheim 24 August 1877, p.376 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.
91. Sellheim to Dorsey 23 July 1877, 77/160 MWO 13B/G1, Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 23 July 1877, 77/158 MWO 13B/G1 QSA. Very little is known about Dorsey, sometimes spelt D'Orsey, on the Palmer. On his appointment, it was noted by the local press that he was the brother in law of MLA and former Colonial Treasurer Joshua Peter Bell. See CH 1 July 1874. It seems that his relationship with both Sellheim and Hill was not entirely cordial. The latter admitted that he was acquainted with Dorsey on Ravenswood and other gold fields, and would "respectfully decline to have anything to do with that officer feeling certain the work in my district would not be benefitted by his assistance". Hill to Under Sec Mines 28 August 1877, 137/77 MWO 13A/G1 QSA.

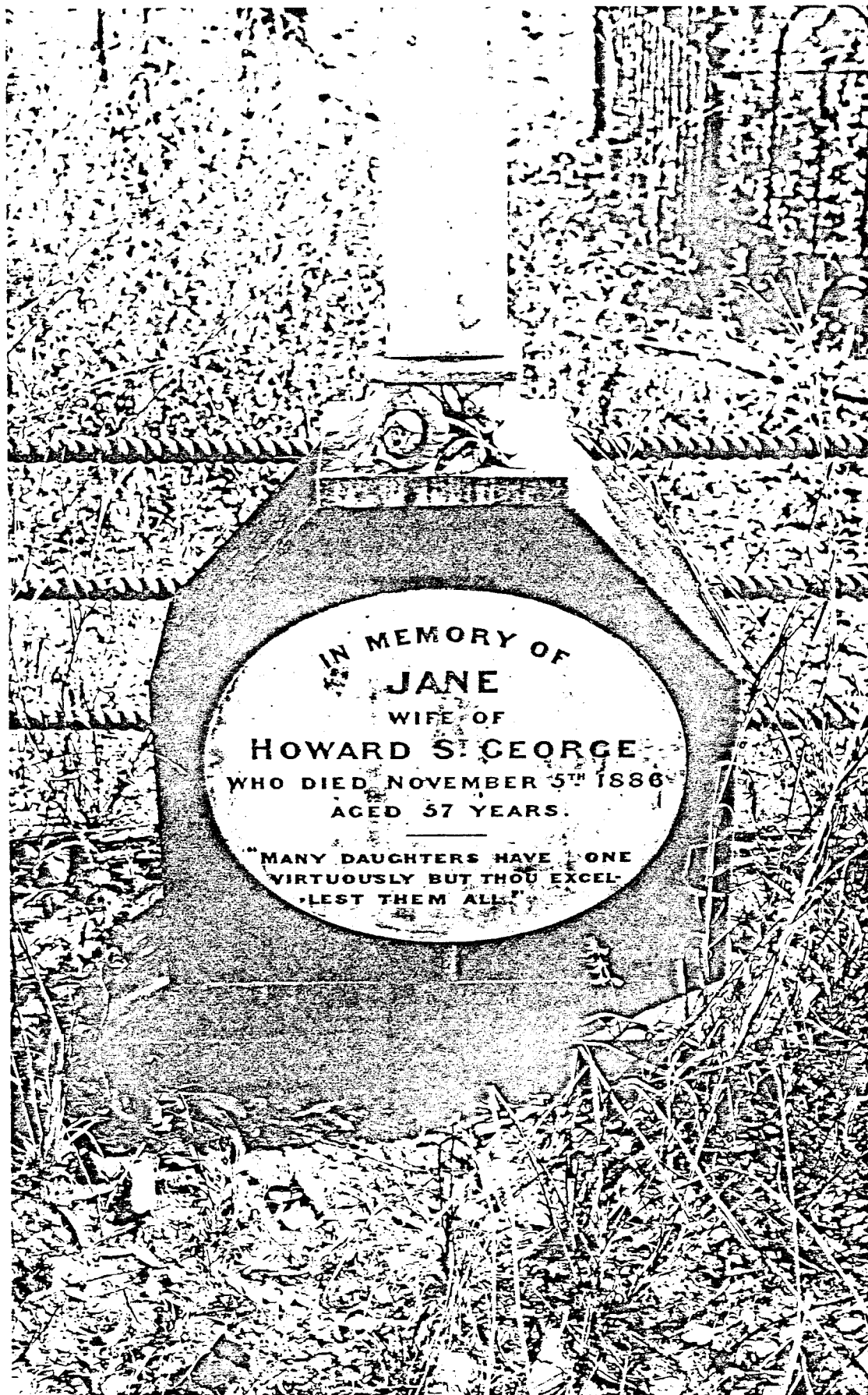
obviously intended to compel payment. Hill and Coward, both formerly of the Native Police, were specifically issued with additional trackers for revenue collection.⁹² Indeed, on some occasions, the Native Police were called upon to assist, with Hill making use of the troopers from the Laura detachment.⁹³ Coward also found it particularly difficult to detach his role from that of an officer in the Native Police. In fact, the quick tempered Coward, with whip in hand, took the opportunity to collect revenue on Sunday, market day on the Palmer, and his use of physical violence and threatening language became a matter for widespread complaint. A public meeting at Byerstown in 1876 considered his conduct "unmanly, tyrantical, and derogatory",⁹⁴ but a board which later investigated the charges found "nothing to Mr. Coward's discredit as a public officer",⁹⁵ and assigned extra trackers to the Byerstown camp.⁹⁶ Criticism of his conduct however did not end with the board's verdict. Four months later, on a visit to the Palmer, the Under Secretary revised his opinion, terming Coward's demeanour as "exceedingly objectionable".⁹⁷ Lukin continued to receive complaints on his return to Brisbane, including one of alleged assault by Coward, who had impatiently concluded an argument with a sharp slap across the complainant's face with a miners' rights book.⁹⁸ Coward was eventually

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92. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 4 December 1877, 77/224 & Lukin to Sellheim 24 August 1877 p.376, MWO 13B/G1 QSA. As both officers dealt mainly with the Chinese the matter of revenue collected will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.
93. W.R.O. Hill, *Forty-five Years' Experiences in North Queensland* (Brisbane 1907), pp.69, 75; A. Douglas Douglas, *the First Chinese Invasion, Lone Hand* (1 November 1909), p.93. See also Chapter 5.
94. Resignation of Mr. Coward, late Warden on the Palmer Gold Field, *QV&P* 1878, 2, p.281.
95. H.H. Massie, W.L.G. Drew & C.J. Graham May 1876, *ibid.* p.288.
96. Geo Lukin to Sellheim 24 May 1877, *ibid.* p.291.
97. Extract from the Under Secretary's Report on the visit to the Palmer Goldfields 18 September 1877, *ibid.* p.290.
98. Lukin to Sellheim 24 August 1877, MWO 13B/G1 p.376, Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 25 October 1877, 77/239 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

dismissed from the service at the end of 1877 as "not fit to deal with whitemen": a transfer back to the Native Police was recommended.⁹⁹ It was probably fortunate Coward was no longer on the field during the nine months from 1 October 1877, when the Chinese were expected to pay increased fees under the 1877 amendment to the *Gold Fields Act*. Of the other assistant wardens, Hill was replaced by John Farrelly at Byerstown, and Lionel Towner arrived in mid-1878 to supervise the Lukinville rush.¹⁰⁰ However, the population of the Palmer had so diminished by 1879 that both the Palmerville and Byerstown camps were broken up, and Farrelly transferred to Gympie.¹⁰¹ Witnessing the decline of the field, and saddened by the death of his wife, Laura, in August 1878, Sellheim described his administration as "the most monotonous life on the globe".¹⁰² Sellheim himself was transferred to Charters Towers in May 1880; his replacement was Francis Gill.¹⁰³

The demise of the Palmer during the years 1880-1883 affected Gill and his successor, W.O. Hodgkinson, in different ways. Gill arrived only to find the camp a "thing of shreds and patches";¹⁰⁴ he also experienced a series of calamities. Faced with the desertion of the trackers and the prolonged absence of his assistant warden - in fact he claimed "there never was one" - Gill found it particularly difficult to cope with revenue collection and office duties. He was suspended in early 1881; later he publicly jibed that he was "jostled

99. Under Secretary's Report *QV&P* 1878, 2, p.290.
100. John Farrelly to Sellheim 26 December 1877, 196/77 & Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 5 August 1878, 78/157 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.
101. Sellheim to Farrelly 21 June 1879, 79/148 MWO 13B/G2 QSA.
102. *AR* 1878 p.22. A photograph of Laura Sellheim's gravestone in the Maytown cemetery accompanies the text.
103. Mines Dept to Sellheim 20 & 21 May 1880, MWO 13B/B1 QSA; *Q* 22 May 1880.
104. Gill to Under Sec Mines 21 June 1880, MWO 13B/G2 p.394 QSA.



Grave of Jane St George, Maytown Cemetery, 1979.

out" to make way for Hodgkinson.¹⁰⁵ Warden from 1881 to April 1884, Hodgkinson's reputation as a celebrated explorer, journalist, politician and mining administrator¹⁰⁶ was highstanding in colonial Queensland. On the Palmer he combined both his mining and writing skills to produce thoughtful and analytical reports on its decline, which he also sought to arrest. He encouraged both outside investment in mining and improvements in education. Hodgkinson was popular, but the field was no longer suited to his energy or ambitions. He subsequently re-entered parliament and served as Secretary for Mines from 1887-1888 and 1890-1893. The experienced and pragmatic St George succeeded him as warden in December 1884, remaining on the Palmer for another seven years.¹⁰⁷

In addition to the gold field administration, there were two divisions of the police force on the Palmer Gold Field, officially referred to as the ordinary, or white, police and the Native Police. They made an impressive showing, and were regarded with awe by one observer:

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105. Evidence of Francis Gill 21 August 1884, Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Select Committee on Report on the Palmer River Gold Field by Warden Hodgkinson *QV&P* 1884, 3, p.274.
106. Born 1838; came to Australia in 1851; on various Victorian gold fields until 1854; returned to England in 1854; back in Australia 1859, joined staff of *Melbourne Age*; involved in early stages of Burke & Wills' expedition 1860 & McKinlay's relief party 1861; editor of Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin*, founded *Mackay Mercury* 1866; established first battery on Ravenswood field 1870; gold commissioner/warden Etheridge 1870-73, 1878-81 Palmer 1881-84 Gympie 1885-86; leader of North Western Expedition 1876; reported on sites for central sugar mills 1886; MLA Burke 1874-75, 1887-93 (portfolio mines & works, & mines and public instruction); represented English mining syndicate in Western Australia 1895-97; to Sydney until appointment as editor *QGMJ* in 1899. Died Brisbane 1900. *ADB* 4, pp.405-5; Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away* p.48 fn; *QGMJ* 1; 3 (15 August 1900), p.87; W.O. Hodgkinson, Papers 1876-1900 OM72-62 JOL.
107. Separated from his family during his first years of the Palmer 1873-74, St George was faced with the death of his wife within two years of his second appointment to the field. The grave of Jane St George lies alongside that of Laura Sellheim in the Maytown cemetery. See accompanying photograph.



W.O. Hodgkinson (JOL).

There are two large tents on the banks of the river, where I often see gentlemen in blue parading, cleaning armoury, catching fine-looking cavalry horses, &c.. At first I thought they were some new style of white, black troopers, but I have since heard they are the police, and d-m smart-looking cuts amongst them....¹⁰⁸

Despite this disciplined, almost military aura surrounding the camp at Byerstown, the police as a whole were generally dissatisfied, as they received little or no compensation for the high costs of provisions and the difficulties they faced.¹⁰⁹ Further the force attracted some recruits whose conduct and mental health were questionable.¹¹⁰ Throughout the decade there were consistent complaints that police numbers were inadequate to oversee the mining population. Sellheim complained in his capacity as police magistrate:

The white police are distributed amongst three different stations and consist of one Sergeant, two Senior - and five ordinary Constables....[and] are insufficient to keep the Peace, prevent Crime, escort Prisoners and perform the other multifarious duties devolving on Constables, on a Goldfield extending over perhaps a thousand square miles of ground.¹¹¹

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108. *CH* 17 June 1876. In this chapter, the term "police" refers to white police, unless otherwise stated. Native police are discussed in a later chapter.
109. In fact there seems to have been a steady decrease in police pay. At the beginning of the rush the police received the same pay as their counterparts in the south, with an allowance of 5/- per diem. However, the allowance was reduced even further. In July 1877 the Cook District Progress Association formed a committee to look into the matter, after six constables had resigned and others threatened to leave. Although representation was made to the Colonial Secretary, there was very little improvement. For discussions of police rates of pay see *CH* 24 June 1874; 18 July & 8 August 1877; *CC* 12 July 1874, 4 July 1877.
110. Sub-Inspector Dyas ran a rather lucrative business using government horses to convey goods for his own profit. Sub-Inspector Ferrall suicided after incurring gambling debts, and Constable Weale was charged with passing valueless cheques. James Swainson to editor *CC* 11 July 1874; Fair Play to editor *CC* 25 July 1874; *CH* 28 July 1877; *CC* 16 October 1878.
111. Sellheim to Col Sec 23 March 1875, 75/1091 COL/A 208 QSA.

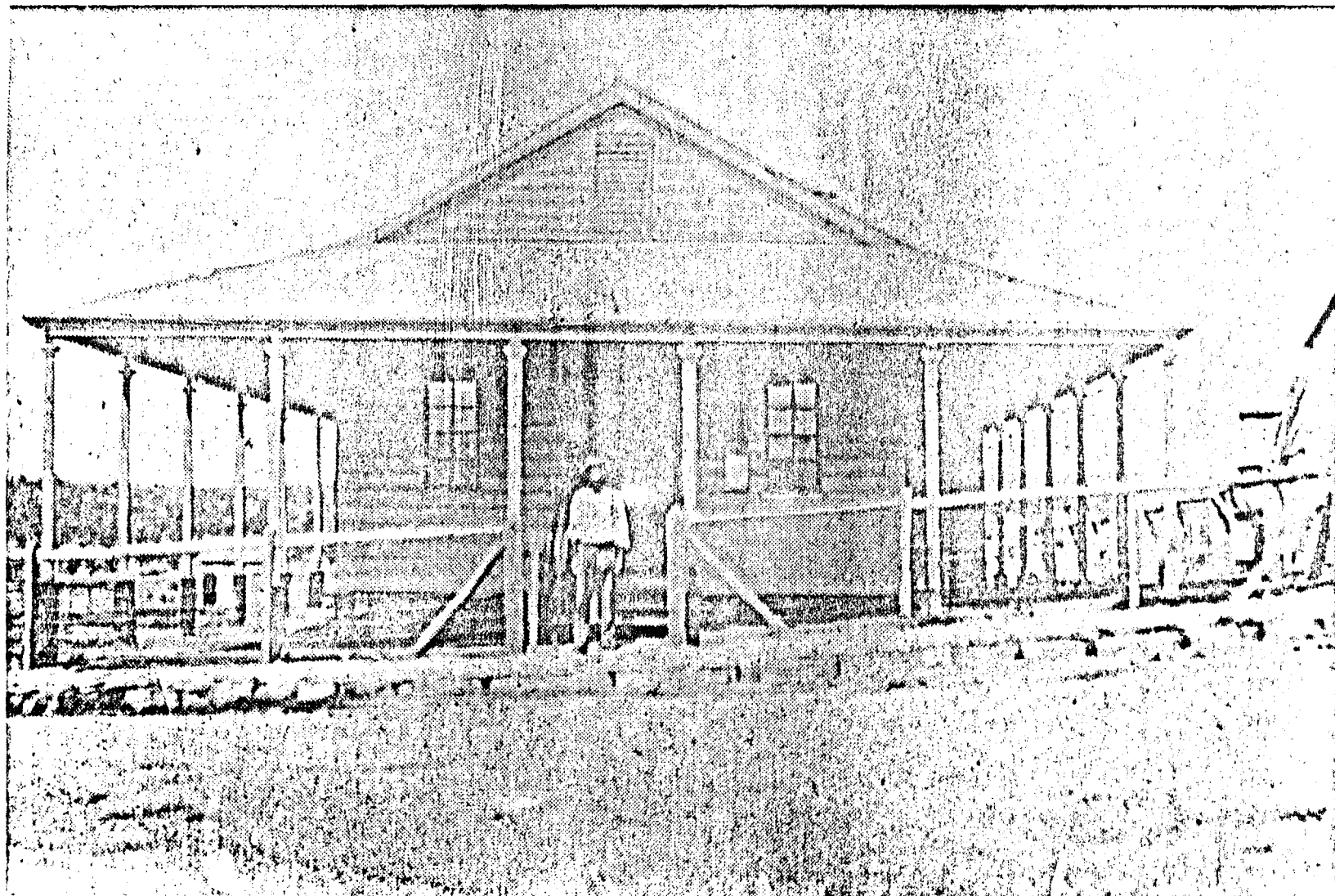
There seems to have been a discrepancy between the actual number on the field and the figures supplied by the Police Commissioner's office. While Sellheim observed only eight members of the police force stationed at three localities, Police Commissioner D.T. Seymour maintained that the police strength in April 1875 was seventeen located at five stations, at Palmerville, Normanby River, Maytown, Kingsborough and the Normanby diggings, in addition to two Native Police detachments.¹¹² The figure given by the Police Commissioner indicates that a further twenty-seven men were stationed at Cooktown itself, making the official police strength for the district forty-four. Two years later, the numbers on the field had declined even further; and the disproportion between them and the number of police located at Cooktown was much greater. Of a total strength of forty-five, twenty-nine were stationed at Cooktown. Of the remainder, which in that year included officers of the Native Police, two were at Oaky Creek, five at Maytown, and three each at Laura, Byerstown and Palmerville.¹¹³ This certainly indicates that few police were actually available for crime prevention and patrols, and of them an unspecified number were involved in Native Police work. Two-thirds of the force in the Cook Police district were thus involved in the gold escort or tied to clerical duties in Cooktown.

No form of local administration other than that of the warden existed on the field until 1880, when under the *Divisional Boards Act* of 1879, the Hann Divisional Board was created. A "most remarkable division", embracing areas from Thursday Island to the Palmer district, its office was in Maytown.¹¹⁴ The Hann Divisional Board, with two standing committees on finance and improvement, was concerned almost entirely with transport and health: the provision of roads and bridges, and the mitigation of disease and public

112. D.T. Seymour to Col Sec 16 April 1875, 75/1111 COL/A 208 QSA.

113. Figures on strength of police, D division, 30 September 1877, 77/5869 COL/A 250 QSA.

114. Q 15 January 1881. See also QGG 11 November 1879.



Hann Divisional Board Hall, Maytown, 1902, with Isaac Brown, clerk. (NQR 14 January 1933)

nuisances.¹¹⁵ It carried out the draining and stone kerbing of Maytown's streets, but its activities had little influence on the progress of the gold field. Poor communications during the vital first years, which the Divisional Board sought to improve after 1880, had already had its effects in hindering development of the field. The largest of Queensland's divisional boards, it was also one of the poorest with only 363 ratepayers out of 10,167 inhabitants, thus throwing the expense of road making on a small fraction of the population.¹¹⁶ Coming late in the decade, it probably slightly improved the quality of life in the Palmer's declining years, and relieved the wardens of some tedious duties.¹¹⁷

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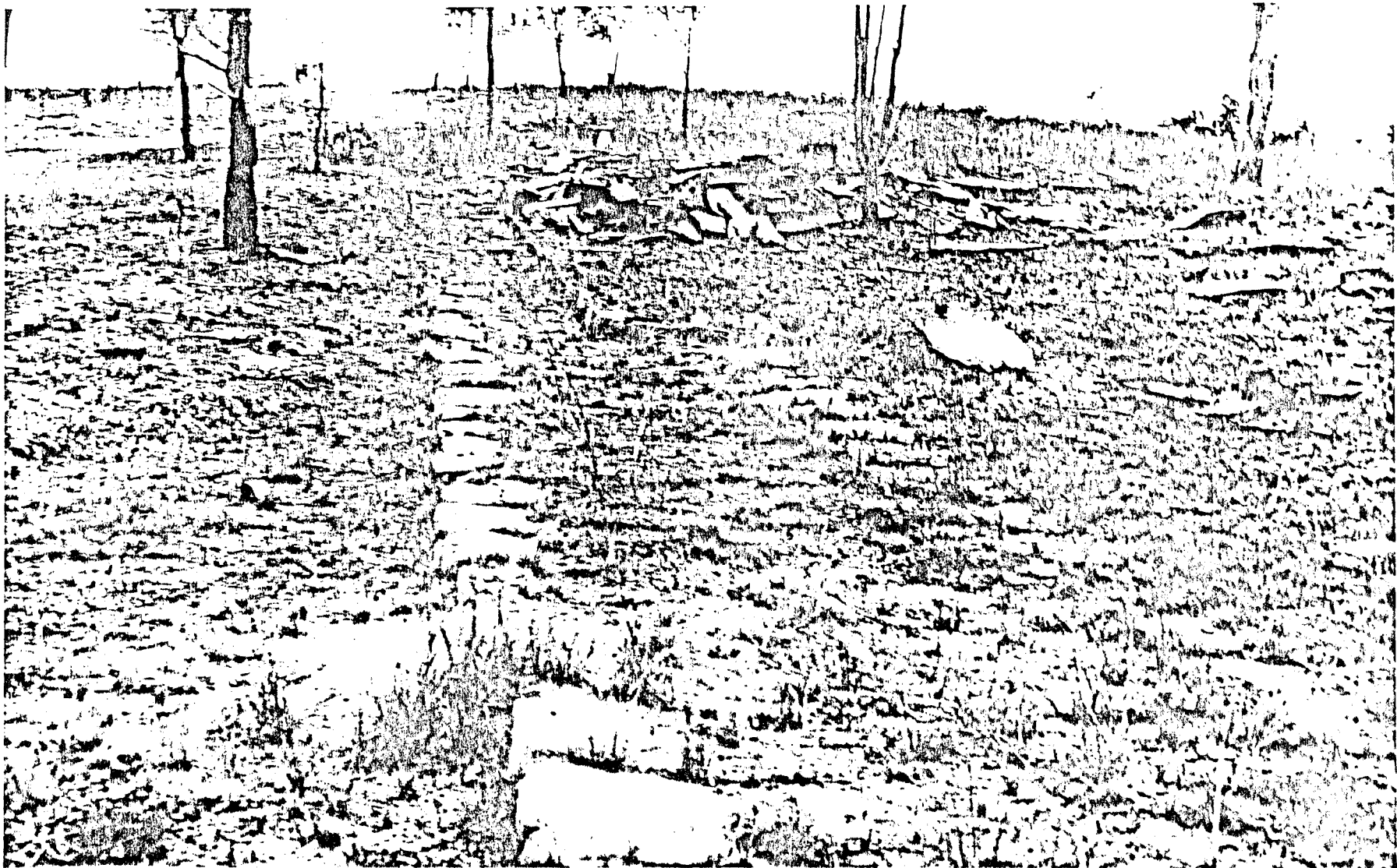
The success and indeed the very existence of the Palmer Gold Field always hinged on the adequacy of communications. During 1873-1874 carriers and miners travelled the road to the Palmer from the Etheridge via Ezra Firth's Mount Surprise Station, the route of Mulligan's prospecting party. Close to 380 kilometres (236 miles) from Georgetown with a major crossing at the Mitchell River, the road traversed inhospitable country where slate needles protruded from the surface. The ruggedness often injured valuable horses:

The country is frightfully bad for horses feet and it is impossible for them to go even a short distance without shoes. The two horses which Mr. Charters sent without shoes are not fit to be worked yet, the two

115. Each sub-division had an "Improvement" sub-committee, which dealt with all matters concerned with public buildings and repairing roads. *QGG* 26 (1 May 1880), p.1041. Notices regarding the by-laws were printed in the local press. For example see *PC* 1 August 1885.

116. S.J. Denny, Hann Divisional Board Chairman, to Min for Works 27 April 1880, 80/2237 WOR/A 190 QSA. The board did receive grants from the government; for example £500 to complete work on Robinson's track.

117. Hann Divisional Board became the Hann Shire 31 March 1903. The Hann Shire was abolished 18 January 1919 and became part of Cook Shire in amalgamation with Daintree Shire. Local Authorities Index JOL. The original Hann Divisional Board Hall was only removed from its location in Leslie Street in 1946.



Slate kerbing at site of Prince of Wales Hotel, Maytown, 1979.

which had to [be] left behind will I fear from
 what I hear be of very little use for the future,
 one had lost his hoofs.¹¹⁸

Nevertheless, it remained the only dray road to Palmerville until mid-1874. The official road financed by the Government followed the circuitous route of the first expedition north of the Conglomerate Range to Palmerville, covering a distance of 217 kilometres (135 miles). Referred to as Macmillan's or the Palmer road, it was for the first half of 1874 merely a pack track. Progress with road making was slow. Macmillan,¹¹⁹ the Engineer of Roads for the Northern Division, had a large area to supervise, and the Palmer presented particular problems because of its remoteness and the absence of European settlement prior to the rush. In addition to road formation, Macmillan and his staff were expected to survey town lots, mining claims, and the route of the telegraph line.¹²⁰ His road party was continually plagued by the shortage of European labour, having at times to rely on the Chinese.¹²¹ During the wet season when mining was suspended, so too was road making, and an absurd but unavoidable surplus of labour existed. Also Macmillan lost many of his senior staff for reasons of ill-health or their inability to cope with the isolation and the climate.¹²²

118. St George to Sec Works & Mines 4 January 1874, 74/496 WOR/A 78 QSA.
119. Educated as a civil engineer in Scotland; arrived Queensland 1863, & took up appointment as Engineer for Public Roads for the Northern Division; resigned 1879; involved in floating Burdekin Delta Sugar Coy in 1881 and consequently manager of Airmillan Estate; first chairman Ayr Shire Council; died 1905. J. Black (comp), *North Queensland Pioneers* (Charters Towers 1932), pp.70-1.
120. Under Sec PMG to Under Sec Works 24 September 1874, 75/5708 WOR/A 109, H.E. King to J. Reid 30 November 1875, 75/6102 WOR/A 110 QSA.
121. James Mackenzie to St George 27 April 1876, 76/1090 COL/A 221
 Macmillan to Under Sec Works 1 August 1877, 77/3775 QSA; CC 4 December 1875.
122. Surveyor G. Rieck returned home to Germany. Reick to Min Works 6 March 1876, 76/1616 COL/A 223 QSA; District Road Inspector James Mackenzie resigned after contracting severe fever. Macmillan to Under Sec Pub Works 7 May 1877, 78/517 WOR/A 145 QSA; District Inspector Robert Jamieson was an alleged alcoholic & shot himself when he heard news of his suspension. Under Sec Works to Macmillan 10 December 1877, 78/517 WOR/A 145 QSA.



A. C. MACMILLAN.

(Cummins & Campbell's Monthly Magazine June 1934, p. 11)

In time, however, with each early rush came an eastward movement of population along the river away from Palmerville, the terminus of the road. It became increasingly clear that the surveyed route no longer led to the centre of the gold field. Complaints were levelled at Macmillan: "how could he make the track so long and get down to the Palmer some 15-20 miles too far".¹²³ One attempt was made by the Native Police under Sub-Inspector Alexander Douglas Douglas¹²⁴ to carve a shorter track across the Conglomerate Range from Maytown. However the Douglas, or Hell's Gate track, while only 185 kilometres (116 miles) from Cooktown to the upper camp, travelled through rugged, inhospitable country, boggy during the wet season but with little water and grass during the dry.¹²⁵ Tales of robbery and murder were attached to this gloomy route, which was used regularly for only one year, and was impassable to wheeled traffic. A useful short-cut for travellers on foot or with packhorses, the Douglas track was not a viable alternative to Macmillan's road. Accordingly James Mulligan described the road situation in 1874: "Douglas's marked tree-line to Cooktown is certainly no credit to him; McMillan's is considered a wonderful roundabout, but Douglas's is both roundabout, boggy and rough".¹²⁶ Moreover, floods also cut Macmillan's road at the Laura, Normanby, Kennedy and Palmer crossings, at which ferries were eventually

123. *Mount Perry Mail* 12 February 1874, enclosed 74/2761 COL/A 202 QSA.

124. Born St Helier Channel Islands 1843; served in army during Tientsin campaign & Taiping rebellion; migrated to Queensland 1865, worked as teamster & drover; an officer in Native Police on Palmer 1873-75, Hodgkinson 1876-78, & from 1879-98 was stationed variously at Jundah, Biboohra, Herberton, Mourilyan, Townsville, Roma Georgetown & Normanton; police inspector for northern district at Townsville 1898; chief inspector of police 1900; returned to England 1905; died 1914. *ADB* 4, pp.88-9.

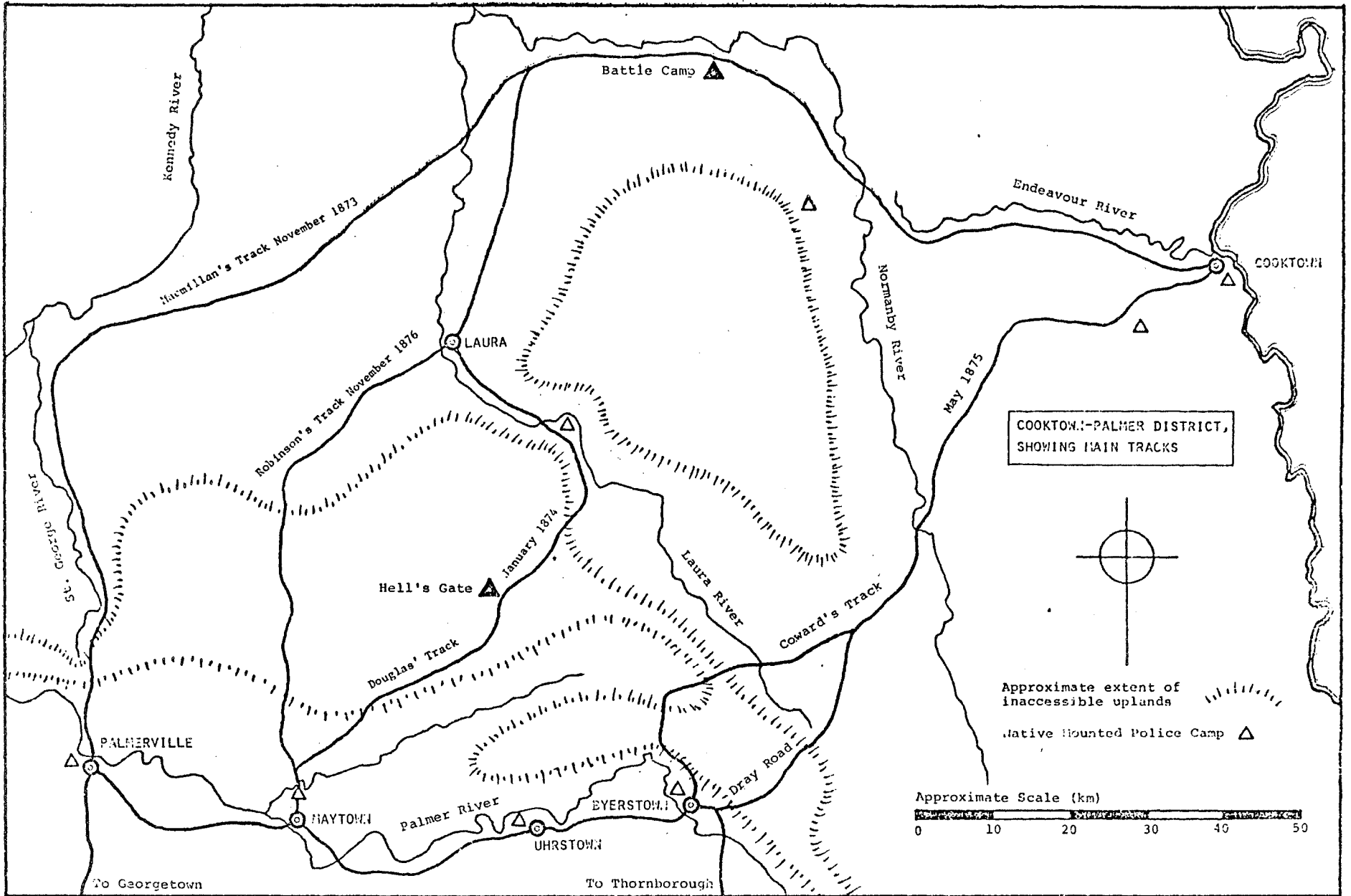
125. For Douglas' report of the new track with sketch map, see Douglas to Morissett 24 January 1874, 74/345 COL/A 192 QSA.

126. *Q* 14 March 1874.

installed.¹²⁷ Shorter variations to the original track were discovered during 1874 by Inspector Morissett and T.R. Boulton, however, Palmerville was still their terminus.¹²⁸

Despite its inconvenience as a transport node, Palmerville was more accessible than the population centres to the east, and it was here that the first wheeled traffic from the coast arrived in July 1874, perhaps because Macmillan's original plan had become fixed as government policy, regardless of the newer needs of the field. As late as October 1874, he reported that "Palmerville appears to be the only suitable Depot for the numerous workings among the Reefers and is likely to be the permanent Township of this District."¹²⁹ A rush in late 1874 attracted a large body of miners to the Normanby River and to the upper Palmer,¹³⁰ approximately halfway back towards Cooktown from Palmerville. With the rationale for an alternative route now clearer, the Palmer Road Committee offered a £200 reward to the first party to mark, by 1 January 1875, the most practicable and direct dray road to the upper Palmer not in excess of 170 kilometres

127. For Macmillan's request 5.48 x 1.5m (18' x 15') boats with a capacity of 18, for each of the crossings, see Macmillan to A.O. Herbert 8 September, 17 October 1874, 75/5708 WOR/A 5708 QSA. The four boats arrived in December. CC 12, 26 December 1874.
128. In March 1874, arrangements were made between P.M. Hamilton and Inspector Morissett to send an exploring party to find a shorter dray route. Apparently Boulton and Morissett entered into an agreement, from which, it is alleged, the latter withdrew after the expedition had started. Details of Morissett's track, claiming to be 241 kilometres in length, are unknown. Hamilton to Col Sec 12, 24 March, 29 April 1874, 74/471 COL/A 192, Hamilton to Col Sec 9 April 1874, 74/796 COL/A 194 QSA; T.H.R. Boulton to editor CC 25 April 1874; John Little to editor CC 2 May 1874; T. Boulton to Col Sec 21 April 1874, 74/899 WOR/ A 84 QSA. Boulton made another attempt in late 1874 marking a dray road of 293 kilometres & published the distances in CH 2 January 1875. Neither Morissett nor Boulton's alternatives was adopted.
129. Macmillan to Herbert 7 October 1874; F. Byerley to Min. Pub Works 22 September 1874, 75/5708 WOR/A 109 QSA.
130. Report dated 26 November, CC 5 December 1874; Q 9 January 1875.



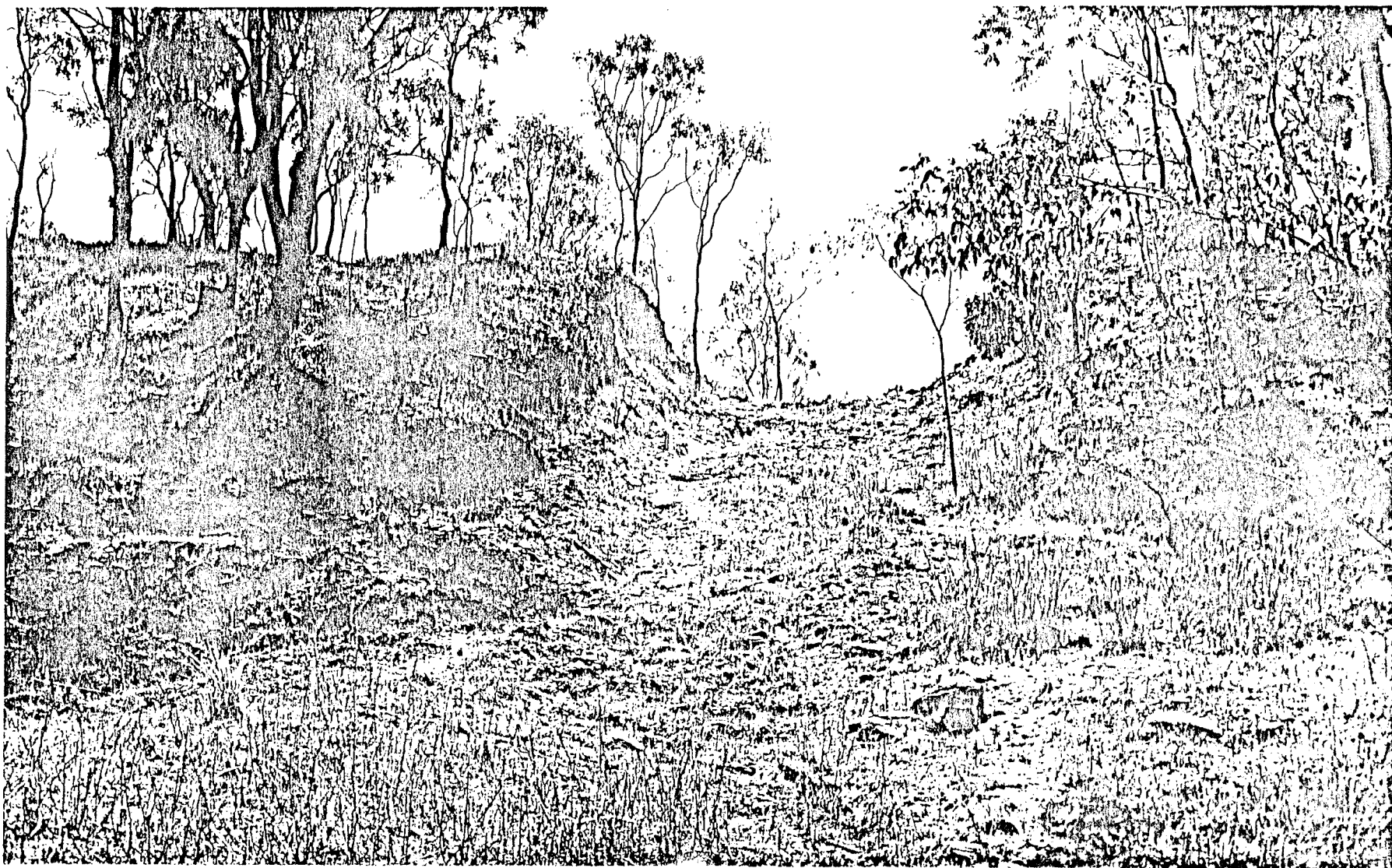
in length.¹³¹ However, the government had already taken the initiative by ordering a surveyor, James Reid, and the newly appointed assistant warden, Thomas Coward, to undertake a topographical survey of the same area. In February 1875, Coward and Reid reported marking a potential dray track from Cooktown to Maytown, a distance of only 160 kilometres.¹³² The new track followed a completely new route - the most sensible yet found - crossing the main range near the head of the Palmer, and travelling directly to Cooktown across flat country: the modern Cairns-Cooktown road follows much of the same route. Coward's track, or the Byerstown road, received enthusiastic approval from Macmillan, and work was ordered to commence in June. Satisfactory progress was made on the formation, which by November had been completed as far as Byerstown. Mulligan was quick to point out: "there cannot be a nearer road got into the Palmer from any other part...".¹³³ But Mulligan had more than the welfare of the field in mind. He was already at work prospecting the river systems south of the Palmer, and had almost certainly discovered the rich deposits which the following year would become known as the Hodgkinson gold field. Coward's track not only shortened the distance to the Palmer, but was also the most direct route from Cooktown to the Hodgkinson find. Work began on the new road, and by November 1875 it was open as far as Byerstown, roughly equidistant from Maytown and Mulligan's new prospect. Macmillan had intended to resume work on the Byerstown-Maytown section after the wet,¹³⁴ but troubles lay ahead.

131. The members of the Palmer Road Committee consisted of H.E. King, Brodziack & Rodgers, David Reid, William Rumble, John Walsh, F.J.W. Beardmore & Allan Gray. *CH* 16 December 1874.

132. *Q* 26 December 1874; James Reid, Report on Proposed Road to Palmerville 8 February 1875, 75/1509, Macmillan to Under Sec Works 3 April 1875, 75/1669 WOR/A 98, Macmillan to Chief Engineer of Roads 14 May 1875, 75/5708 WOR/A 109 QSA.

133. Mulligan to W.H. Walsh 16 June 1875, 75/3018 WOR/A 102 QSA.

134. Macmillan to Insp Gen of Roads 6 November 1875, 75/5708 WOR/A 109 QSA.



Cutting at road crossing of Palmer River, Byerstown, 1979.

Work on the Byerstown-Maytown section proved exceedingly difficult and quickly drained the finances allocated to it, obliging Macmillan to petition for additional funds:

Between Byerstown and Edwardstown (or Maytown) the country is exceedingly Broken and great difficulties at construction exist much of which have already been overcome and although this Section of the road must always remain steep in many places, it will unquestionably become a fair dray road after the further expenditure of £5000 proposed by me on the Loan estimates for its Completion.¹³⁵

However, progress on the section was still unsatisfactory: a new arrival on the field compared the track to "a series of ladders at an angle as nearly to the perpendicular as is possible - the traveller going up one and down the other".¹³⁶ But improvements were not immediately forthcoming, for demands to have the Cooktown-Byerstown road extended to the newly discovered Hodgkinson field now competed for funds, jeopardizing the whole planned works programme for the Palmer. A petition from the residents of Byerstown and vicinity, with the signatures of Mulligan and Christy Palmerston also attached, urged the services of the road party "be immediately employed, in making the Road from here to the Hodgkinson River Gold Field, in order that Teams may be enabled to land, with the least possible delay".¹³⁷ Understandably, Maytown residents were displeased by the thwarting of a more direct link with Cooktown. They protested against "an undue expenditure upon the Byerstown road, such unnecessary outlay being an injustice to our portion of the district...":

A judicious expenditure of money upon the worst portion of the road would enable coaches to convey passengers direct to Maytown, thus doing away with the inconvenience of riding on horseback from Byerstown as at present, over the worst road on the Palmer. Your petitioners would point out for your consideration, the advantage of a good road; and the reduction in the price of carriage thereon, thus

135. Macmillan to Insp Gen of Roads 25 April 1876, 76/174 WOR/A 116 QSA.

136. CC 17 April 1878.

137. Petition to C.F. Macdonald 24 April 1876, 76/2029 WOR/A 116 QSA. See also M. Walsh, B. Davison & W.J. Hartley to Sec Pub Works 31 March 1876; 76/1657 WOR/A 115, Macmillan to Under Sec Works 8 May 1876, 76/2029 WOR/A 116 QSA.



Slate outcrop, Maytown. These steeply dipping metamorphic rocks confounded all attempts at road making on the Palmer. Photograph taken 1979.

reducing the cost of living, and making payable, mining properties hitherto neglected.¹³⁸

Maytown feelings were mollified somewhat by the discovery in 1877 of Robinson's track, off the old Palmer road. Expenditure on the Byerstown road was halted to develop this track, which ran south from Laura, down the Little Laura River to cross the Conglomerate Range north of Maytown. Although the residents of Byerstown were hardly delighted with this development,¹³⁹ Maytown was at last made accessible to wheeled traffic, with ferries at the Normanby and Laura Rivers:

It is now nearly four years since the Palmer gold-field was proclaimed and Cooktown founded and we are yet without a road, except the original track, by which the distance to Maytown is about 210 miles, and which is not passable during the wet season, nor for some weeks after the rain ceases, while by the expenditure of about £3000 a good road can be made by Robinson's Track, shortening the distance to about 100 miles.¹⁴⁰

However, wheeled traffic sliced through the soft sandstone descent of Robinson's track down the Conglomerate Range, making it unsafe after rain. Macmillan sought to arrest further erosion by easing gradients and by building a retaining wall on the most dangerous section.¹⁴¹ Improvements, with the assistance of the Hann Divisional Board, had progressed sufficiently by May 1880 to support the

138. Petition to Min Works May 1878, 79/1106 WOR/A 164 QSA.

139. Francis Bell to W.E. Murphy MLA 15 May 1877, Murphy to Min Works 21 May 1877, 79/1106 WOR/A 164, John Langtree *et al* to John Walsh MLA 20 October 1879, 80/3956 WOR/A 196 QSA.

140. CC 5 September 1877.

141. Macmillan to Under Sec Works 28 October 1879 & J.J. Volker to Under Sec Works 3 December 1879, 79/6468 WOR/A 180 QSA.

inauguration of a regular Cobb coach service; an arch of welcome was constructed across Leslie Street for the occasion.¹⁴²

The state of the roads also affected the conveyance of mails. Short-term, irregular packhorse mail services operated from Cooktown to the Palmer from April 1874,¹⁴³ with post offices being established at Palmerville and Maytown, in May and June respectively.¹⁴⁴ However, as tenders for the mail service were called on a weekly basis, experienced mailmen were only attracted to such an unsatisfactory and temporary arrangement with offers of high rates of pay.¹⁴⁵ In August, after a public meeting to review the postal situation, a petition of complaint was forwarded to the government.¹⁴⁶ A fortnightly service to the upper Palmer via Douglas' track and returning via Macmillan's road was finally accepted; even so, it was for a shorter period than

142. *Towers Herald* 19 May 1880. Continued responsibility for the section of road between German Bar and Maytown, however, became a matter of dispute. District inspector for roads, C.H. Macdonald, believed it was the duty of the Hann Divisional Board, while the Board sought compensation for money expended on this section, arguing that it was a main road along which the mail coach travelled. C.H. Macdonald to Under Sec Works 17 July 1880, 80/3221 WOR/A 194, Hann Divisional Board to Col Sec 28 August 1880, 80/4289 WOR/A 197 QSA.
143. *CH* 29 April, 20 May 1874; *Q* 2, 30 May 1874.
144. For a list of post offices and post masters see J. Frew, *Queensland Post Offices 1842-1980 and Receiving Offices 1869-1907* (Brisbane 1981), pp.342, 386.
145. Mails despatched from Cooktown to the Palmer between 1 April & 19 August 1874, numbered 20. The dates, contractors & costs were as follows:- 12 April, Beardmore, £40; 19 April, Hogsfleisch, £40; 18 April, Robinson, £35; 3 May, McDonald, £35; 10-22 June, Stanbridge, 7 mails £35 each; 28 June, Powell, £34; 6 July-9 August, Powell, 6 mails £25 each; 18 August, Martin, £30; 19 August, Eager, £30. Total cost £632. Mails received from the Palmer from 24 April to 15 August numbered 16. *CH* 19 August 1874.
146. *CC* 15 August 1874. While tenders for the conveyance of mails on a one or two year basis had been called as early as January 1874, none appears to have been accepted. See *QGG* XV, 21 (24 January 1874), p.200.

originally specified in the original tender.¹⁴⁷ Within two months, the Inspector of Post Offices, on a visit to the Cook district, confirmed John Hogsfleisch in the position of mail contractor of a revised fortnightly service, his instructions being to leave "Cooktown on Monday, arriving at Palmerville on Friday, stop a day, leave for Maytown, and stop there a day returning on Tuesday, and reaching Cooktown on Friday".¹⁴⁸

Mails continued to be carried entirely by packhorses until early 1876. By then, additional post offices were required at Kingston and at Byerstown.¹⁴⁹ In April that year, Emmanuel Borghero began a coach service along Coward's track to Byerstown, the rush to the Hodgkinson River having created an additional demand. The Royal Mail coach would normally reach the Byerstown terminus at the Cosmopolitan Hotel, in thirty hours; sometimes it was delayed by rain.¹⁵⁰ Although Borghero ran a reliable line of coaches for almost three years, with packhorse services from Byerstown to Palmerville, Maytown and Hodgkinson, the undertaking was not entirely profitable, because of high costs on the Palmer, and the loss of valuable and expensive horses:

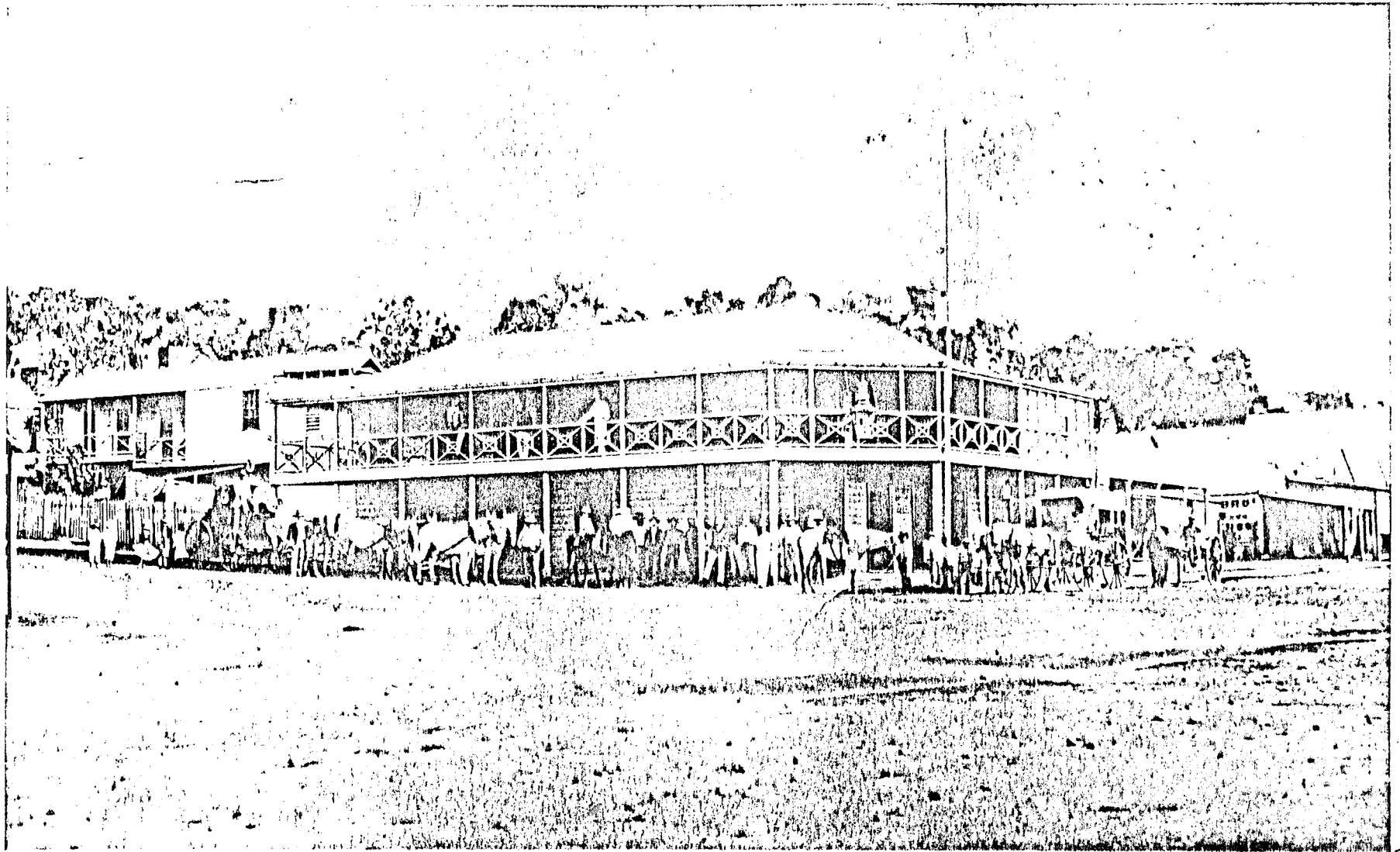
The paltry amount by Mr Borghero for his arduous task in carrying out the mail service, has but barely recouped him for the loss of horses alone - speared

147. To operate between 24 August & 31 December 1874, this fortnightly service was initially contracted to Charles Powell. The mail left Cooktown on every second Monday to arrive at Maytown, via Douglas' track on Friday. The contractor would leave Maytown for Palmerville on the following Monday to arrive Cooktown on Friday via Macmillan's road. *CC*. 22 August 1874.

148. *CH* 8 October 1874.

149. The post office at Kingston was short-lived. It was opened in 1875 and closed 1876, re-opened February 1877 only to close again later that year. The Byerstown office was opened 1 April 1876, reduced to a receiving office in 1883, however closing the following year. Frew, *Queensland Post Offices*, pp.319, 220.

150. Borghero had acquired his first coach in May 1875, however for twelve months this travelled only the 29 km between Cooktown & the Big Oakey. *CE* 1 May 1875.



Palmer coach leaving Cooktown (JOL)

by niggers in one instance to the tune of £300 - and what with the enormous expense of horse feed and wages, double the mail amount of last year will barely repay him.¹⁵¹

Cobb and Company took over the contract from 1 January 1879.¹⁵² On the field itself, mails were still conveyed by packhorses,¹⁵³ although the number of postal centres had increased.¹⁵⁴ It was not until after a series of public meetings and petitions that Cobb and Company eventually accommodated Maytown residents, re-establishing at first a packhorse service direct to Maytown from Cooktown in December 1879, and extending their coach service to Robinson's track in the following year, almost seven years after the initial rush.¹⁵⁵

The construction of the telegraph line between Junction Creek and Cooktown was a significant development, for not only did it improve communications between the port and the field, but also it linked Maytown and Palmerville with Brisbane. While the telegram was to become the most direct means of conveying information from the field, there were doubts about its practicality. Deliberating on the route of the telegraph line, W.J. Cracknell, the Superintendent of Electric Telegraphs exasperatedly declared: "If we could form some ideas to where settlement will permanently take place, it would greatly simplify matters."¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the line was commenced in late 1874 by extending the Junction Creek line north to meet a new line

151. *CH* 19 September 1877. The rate per annum paid by the Government for Borghero's service, which included a coach & packhorses, was £1,600. *QGG XXI*, 109 (29 September 1877), p.1472.

152. *CC* 28 December 1878.

153. John Hogsfleisch operated a mail packhorse service once a week from Byerstown & Lukinville, via Maytown & Palmerville, *QGG XXIII*, 18 (14 December 1878), p.1263; *CC* 2 December 1878.

154. Post offices were established at Gregory & Lukinville in 1878, & at the Ida & Cannibal Creek in 1880. Frew, *Queensland Post Offices*, p.61.

155. Mails left Cooktown on Saturday, arriving Maytown on Monday, leaving Maytown on Wednesday & arriving Cooktown on Friday. *CC* 31 December 1879; *Towers Herald* 19 May 1880.

156. W.J. Cracknell, Superintendent of Electric Telegraph to Under Sec PMG's Office 13 June 1874, 75/5708 WOR/A 109 QSA.

from Cooktown at Palmerville. The section from Cooktown to Maytown was completed 25 April 1876, with the telegraph office at Palmerville being opened a fortnight later. A horse express relayed messages from section to section prior to the linking of the Junction Creek and Cooktown circuits on 1 July 1876.¹⁵⁷ The telegraph was enthusiastically greeted by the *Cooktown Courier* with the announcement that Cooktown "will be able to send messages to all parts of the world."¹⁵⁸ But its coming did not end the Palmer's isolation, as flood, fire and Aborigines interrupted continuous operation. The Superintendent of Electric Telegraphs was forced to comment in his 1876 annual report that while few interruptions to lines throughout the colony had occurred during the year, "three times within the last two months, the line near Cooktown was injured by the blacks".¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, messages continued to be sent along the original line until 1888, when the Cooktown-Laura section was dismantled and relocated along the railway.¹⁶⁰

Railways to mining fields were a burning political issue for many decades in colonial Queensland. A line to the Palmer was no exception. When W.E. Murphy, the Member for Cook, first introduced a proposal for a railway survey between Cooktown and Byerstown in late 1876,¹⁶¹ there was a mixed reaction. Brooks Clay, Cooktown's Town Clerk, argued that roads and punts should have precedence over the survey, the suggested route of which the editor of the *Cooktown Courier* criticized as "impractical".¹⁶² Supporters of a railway envisaged further mining and agricultural development, and even

157. Report from the Superintendent of Electric Telegraphs on the working of his Department during the year 1876, *QV&P* 1877, 3, p.745.

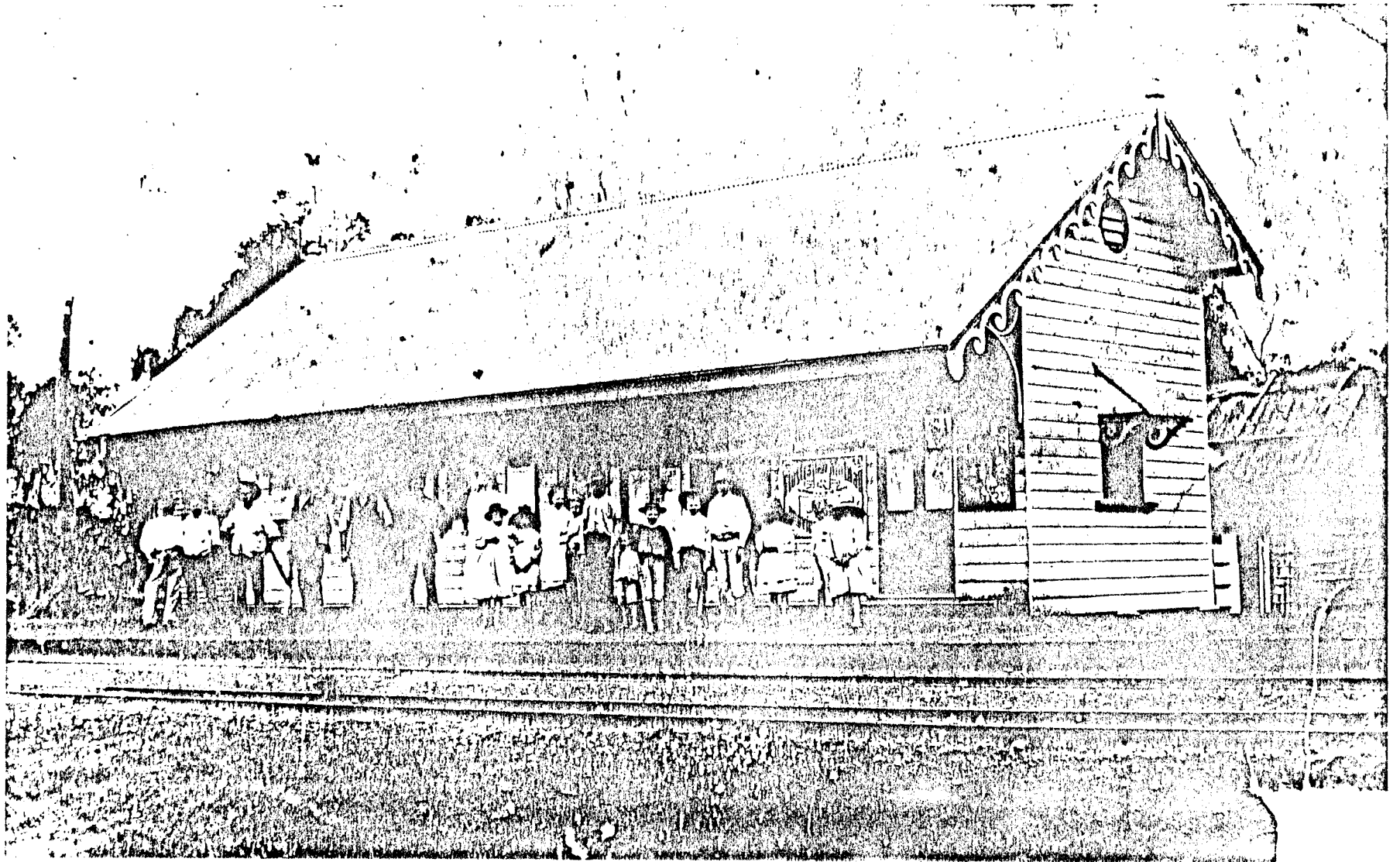
158. *CC* 19 January 1876.

159. *QV&P* 1877, 3, p.746.

160. P.J. Gribble, *What hath God Wrought. The Story of the Electric Telegraph - Queensland* (Brisbane 1981), p.447.

161. *QPD* XXI (22 November 1876), p.1396.

162. *CC* 30 September 1876.



Laura railway station (Col Bax, West Coast Hotel, Cooktown).

suggested a network of railways traversing the north to strengthen its economic infrastructure.¹⁶³ Neither side was surprised, however, when Murphy withdrew his motion.¹⁶⁴ In June 1877, the subject was again broached and a public meeting adopted the following resolution:

That in the opinion of this meeting the time has arrived for railway communication with the gold-fields, and that the Government be requested to place upon the estimates a sufficient sum for an immediate survey of a line of railway between Cooktown and Byerstown.¹⁶⁵

Murphy successfully moved for a sum of £3,000 to be placed on the estimates for a survey. However, only £1,500 was eventually voted.¹⁶⁶ The proposal was viewed with scepticism on the Palmer Gold Field, as the dray road had not yet been extended beyond Byerstown, the intended terminus of the railway. A line was not viewed as improving access, as the Palmer correspondent remarked: "The Railway Survey via Byerstown, meets with very little favor here. What we want and must have, is a good road for drays, by the nearest possible route."¹⁶⁷ In Cooktown, rail transport became an almost obsessive preoccupation of the Progress Association and Railway League, forming a powerful lobby which called meetings and stimulated debate in the newspapers.¹⁶⁸

The survey, eventually approved in July 1877, took five years to complete, during which time a new route to Maytown via Laura and Lone Star Gap was devised. Tenders for the first section to Laura were finally called in August 1883, and work on the line commenced in the following year.¹⁶⁹ On the Palmer, W.O. Hodgkinson facetiously commented

163. *CH* 23 September 1876; Princeland to editor *CH* 11 October 1876; Advance Queensland to editor *CH* 14 October 1876.
164. *CH* 2 December 1876; *CC* 16 December 1876.
165. *CC* 13 June 1877.
166. *QPD* XXIII (24 July 1877), pp.517, 584-5.
167. *CC* 7 July 1877.
168. *CC* 6, 20 June 1877, 27 April 1, 5, 8, 12, 15 & 22 June 1878, 22 March, 19 April, 25 October 1879; 14 October 1882; *BC* 25 April 1883.
169. J. Kerr, North Queensland Mining Railways, Kennedy (ed), *Readings*, Vol. 1, p.277.

that the only light on the general dullness of the field in 1884 was the "faint pulsation of excitement attendant upon the commencement of the local railway."¹⁷⁰ However by the time the first section of railway was opened in 1888, mining had waned, and the line was terminated at Laura. Of the second section, only the bridge was built, used primarily by teamsters to convey goods to and from the Laura railway station.

The sheer ephemerality of early settlement on the Palmer Gold Field not only contributed to the inadequacy of communications, but also to the high rates charged by carriers to transport goods to new mining camps. While in February 1874 carriage from Cooktown to the Palmer was over £200 per ton, by August 1880 it had been reduced to £9 due to the construction of Robinson's track. However at the beginning of 1876 when mining optimism was at its highest, rates of carriage were still as high as £75 per ton, partly because there were never sufficient teams on the road and partly because teams were expensive to equip.¹⁷¹ Indeed, Warden Sellheim calculated in late 1874 that a population of almost 4,000 required 200 teams: in that year there were only 70.¹⁷² Tolls also had to be paid on the numerous ferry crossings amounting to 10/- for an empty dray or waggon with a 5/- loading for each ton carried. The scale for a foot passenger with swag was 2/6, and if he had a dog that was an

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170. Hodgkinson to Under Sec Mines 10 April 1884, MWO 13B/G4 p.350 QSA.
171. Variations in costs of carriage per ton, reported in the newspapers, are listed as follows: £200 (Q 28 February 1874), £120-140 (CC 10 October 1874), £130 (CC 8 August 1874), £40-60 (CC 12 December 1874), £70 (CH 24 November 1875), £68-70 (CH 8 December 1875), £30-35 (CH 30 August 1876), £9-10 (Q 7 August 1880), £18 (25 December 1880); £14-15 (16 December 1882): A team of bullocks required considerable outlay, valued at £300-350, with draft horses £35-40 each. Q 22 April 1876.
172. Estimate attributed to Sellheim in Macmillan to Herbert 7 October 1874, 75/5708 WOR/A 109 QSA. Chief foreman of works D.F. Longland, was also of the same opinion, blaming "insufficient number of teams", rather than the condition of the road, for the high cost of provisions. Longland to Herbert 28 September 1874, 74/4965 WOR/A 91 QSA.

additional 3d.¹⁷³ Little wonder that the cost of living and working on the Palmer field was a long-standing grievance among the European miners, especially the reefers in whose hands the future of the field rested after 1876.

173. Other toll charges included : horse & rider, saddle & swag 5/-; every horse, ass, mule, bullock or cow 5/-; every sheep, goat or pig 3d; carriage or buggy with two horses 13/- & coach with four horses £1. CC 30 May 1877.

Mining Statistics Palmer Gold Field 1873-83

At 31 December	1874	1875	1876	1877	1878	1879	1880	1881	1882	1883
Quartz Crushing Machines	...	1	7	7	8	8			6	7
Heads of Stampers	...	10	65	65	70	70	65	65	40	70
Horse Whims	...	...	1	1	1	...	1			
Whips	...	...	...	2	3	5	6			
Miners Working Quartz	50	160	600	180	150	120	140	120	101	98
Miners Working Alluvial	2500	8000	9300	13070	8730	5100	4000	4367	1336	938
Miners' Rights Issued	2976	4102	10131	9187	6048	5013	3960	3425		
Business Licences Issued	129	240	477	474	441	410	392	210	85	
Estimated Population	3000	9000	12500	15800	10000	6500	5159	4777	1996	1440
Quartz crushed (tons)	...	...	4766	4949	4061	4814	3016	3170	2704	2702
Gold sent by Escort (ozs)	9528	24090	41495	52077	46644	31687	25686	22355	11812	
Estimated Yield of Alluvial Gold (ozs)	150000	250000	185000	167760	112000	80333	58514	45172	33192	21172
Estimated Yield of Quartz Gold (ozs)	200	400	15000	11811	8233	10001	6921	6788	4247	2917
Average Price per Ounce of Total Yield	£4	£4/2/6	£4/2/6	£4/3/-	£4/2/6	£4/2/6	£4	£4	£4	£4
Number of Escorts run	3	4	6	8	7	5	5	4	3	
Number of Auriferous Reefs	15	37	69	104	112	119	124			126
Number of Reef Claims at Work	26	69	137	88	48	18	20		24	14
Sluicing Claims	...	180	38	150	200	216	300			
Total Revenue Collected	£2584/7/6	£4232/6/4	£8872/8/9	£9955/1/6	£9037/4/11	£5867/13/11	£4924/17/3	£254	£3480	£1902/0/9
Deepest Shaft on Goldfield (ft)	40	95	105	150	180	180	280			
Number of Gold Mining Leases	...	...	...	21	21	45	18			
Number of Homestead Selections	...	...	...	...	...	6	7	7	2	
Number of Mining Accidents	...	...	...	...	...	2	9		4	
Greatest width of Reef Worked (ft.)	1	1½	2	6	2	2				

(Source: Reports of Department of Mines, Queensland, for the years 1878-1883)

CHAPTER 3

REEFING

"a painful record of insufficient capital, ill-judged enterprise, extravagant expenditure, and gross mismanagement."

Hodgkinson 1882

Underground mining was practised on the Palmer from 1874 until 1897, and sporadically revived until as late as the 1940s. But the output of reef gold never vindicated the promise of the alluvial rush, accounting for only some six per cent of total gold production.¹ In the decade to 1883, underground mining concentrated on the reefs immediately north and east of Maytown, but operations were hampered by several problems from the outset. The small size of the gold-bearing reefs made for uneconomical working, and there was little incentive or capital for improving mining and treatment plant, so that the methods adopted remained primitive and inefficient. Further, lack of road transport for machinery, high working costs and shortage of labour, were major handicaps to reefing.

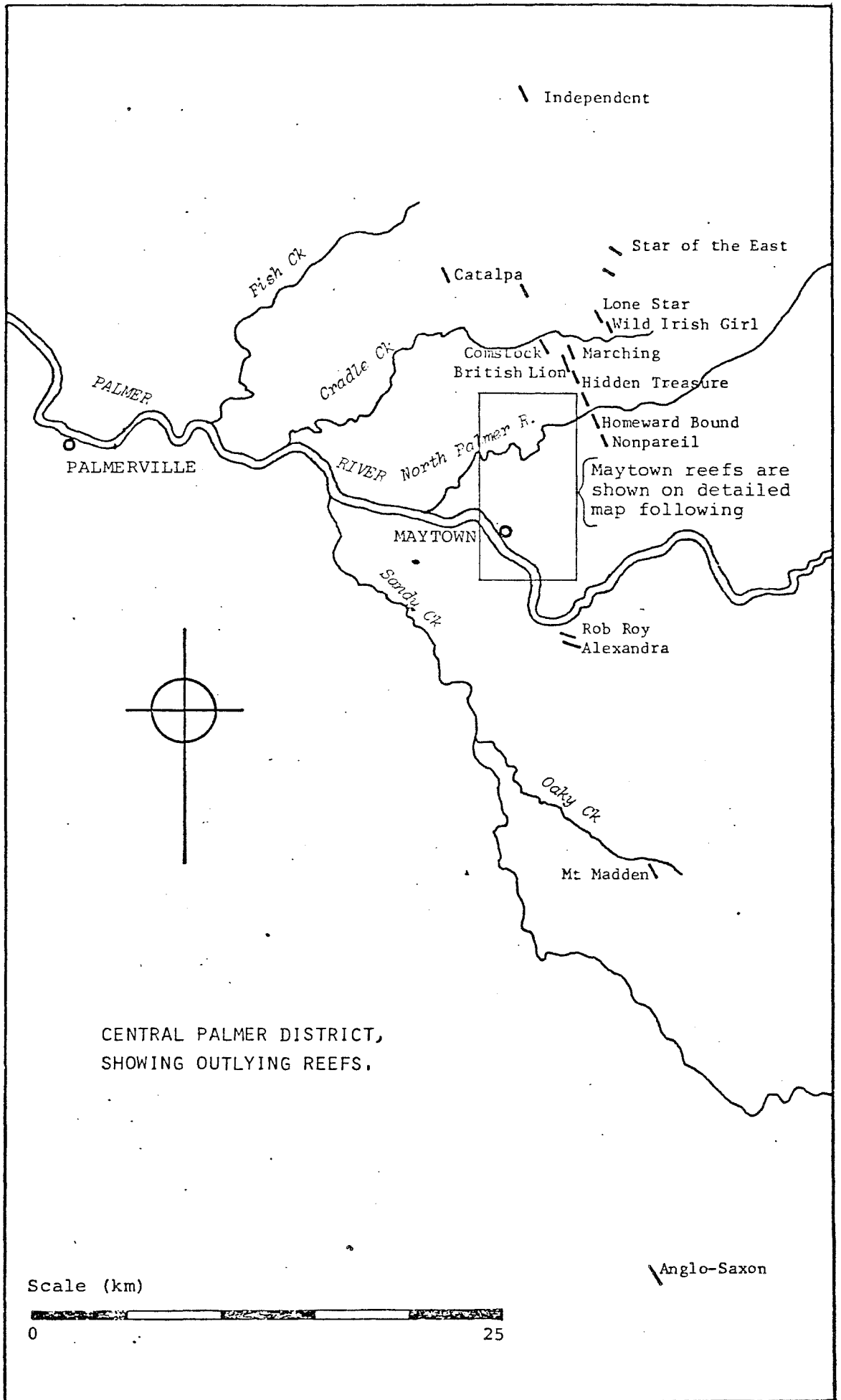
The exploitation of the reefs near Maytown was a logical development from the alluvial rush. It was expected that some of the first miners would re-invest in the district, and that prospecting for reefs would be undertaken in anticipation of a further stage of quartz mining.² However reef mining and ore treatment required sizeable capital outlays, metallurgical knowledge and considerable experience, and such capital and experience generally had to be attracted from outside a new gold field, often involving intercolonial or foreign investment. Sometimes gold mining companies were formed, to carry out the various capital intensive operations required for quartz mining, but interested, independent investors also contributed. On fields such as Charters Towers where the reefs showed great promise, capital investment was injected promptly: there, several mills were crushing quartz within the first year of discovery. In turn, reefing and machinery were invariably interpreted as heralding a period of permanency and prosperity.

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1. B. Dunstan, *Queensland Mineral Index and Guide*, GSQ *Publication* 241 (1913), p.814.
 2. Smyth, *Gold Fields*, pp.78, 238-351. For a useful, apparently sequential list of methods of extraction see p.78.

On the Palmer, reefs or lodes appear as thin lenticular gold-bearing quartz veins, varying in thickness from a few millimetres to sixty centimetres (up to two feet); these accompanied igneous intrusions mainly in sandstone and slates. The Maytown reefing district was conveniently divided into five sub-divisions: Butcher's Creek, Gregory's Gully, German Bar, Revolver Point and Cradle Creek.³ The reefs in this district strike north-west or north-north-west, and dip steeply to the south-west.⁴ The reefs in the Normanby reefing district, which also came under the jurisdiction of the Palmer Gold Field administration, run north-east and east-south-east.⁵ (Another distinct network of reefs in the Limestone district, worked to considerable depth but not discovered until 1887, are outside the scope of this study.)⁶

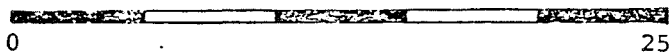
Very few of the early diggers had sufficient capital to invest in long term reefing operations on the Palmer. Yet by May 1874 as many as ten lines were laid off anticipating the advent of capital for raising and crushing stone.⁷ Two months later, amid predictions that the Palmer would develop into a "new Bendigo", a meeting of businessmen was convened to discuss the urgent need for machinery.⁸ It came to nothing. Local apathy, delays in company formation, reconsideration by potential investors and the greater short-term attraction of the alluvial prospects caused all reefing to be

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3. W.O. Hodgkinson, Palmer River Gold Field (Warden Hodgkinson's Report Upon), *QV&P* 1884, 3, p.249.
 4. De Keyser & Lucas, *Geology*, p.172.
 5. R.L. Jack, Report on a Visit to the Palmer Gold Field, *GSQ Publication* 144 (1899), p.16.
 6. K.R. Levington, A Survey of the Geology and Mineralisation of North Queensland Mining Fields, Kennedy, *Readings* Vol. 1, pp.10-11. The most important was the Anglo-Saxon which was worked to 600 feet and produced 30,000 ounces of gold.
 7. *CC* 18 April, 16 May, 20 June 1874; *CH* 1 July 1874.
 8. See *CH* 10 June, 8 July 1874; *CC* 11 July 1874.



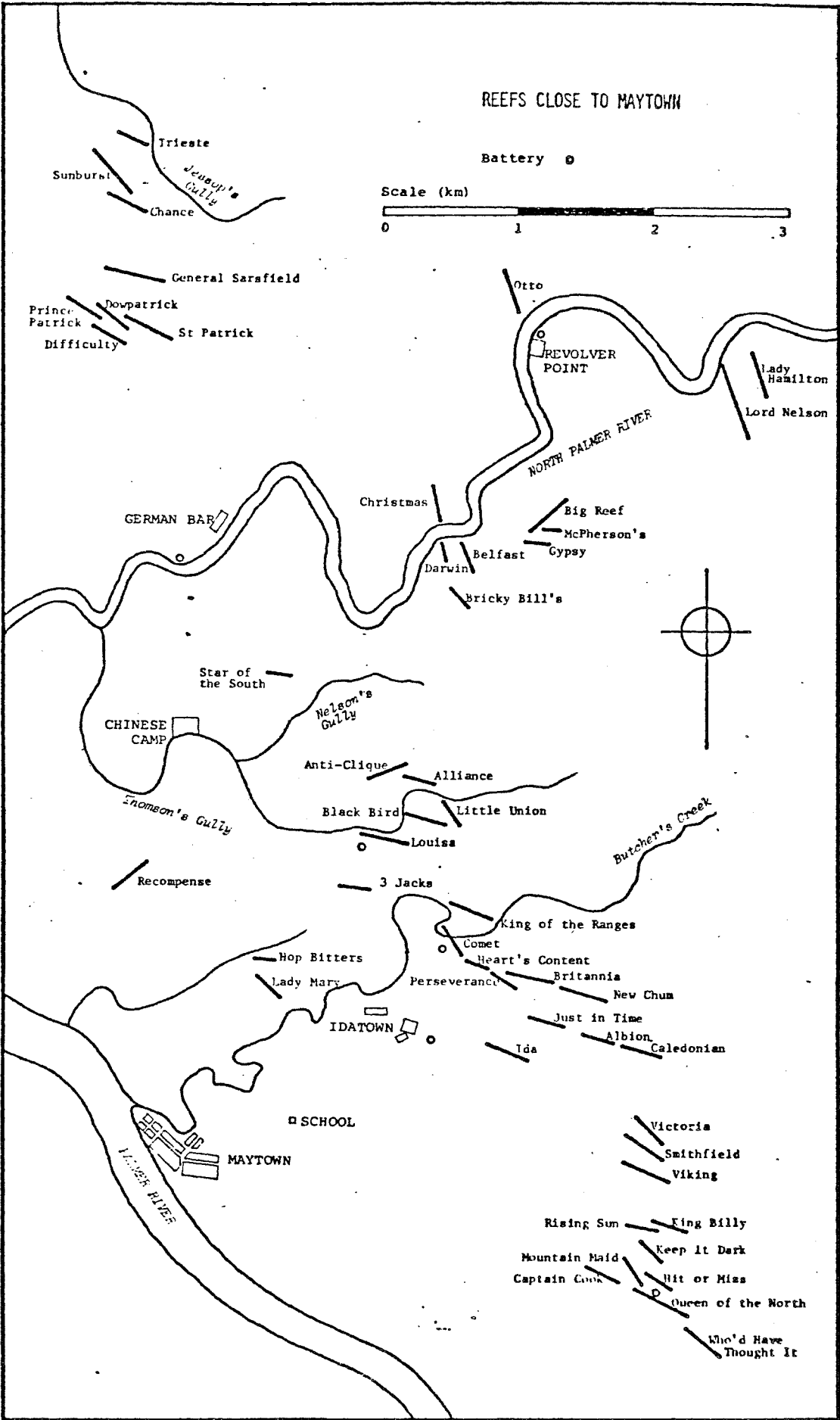
CENTRAL PALMER DISTRICT,
SHOWING OUTLYING REEFS.

Scale (km)



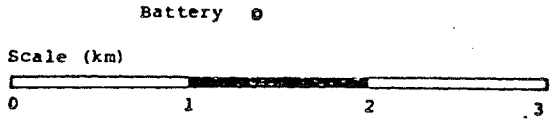
Anglo-Saxon

REEFS CLOSE TO MAYTOWN



Trieste
Sunburst
Chance

General Sarafield
Prince Patrick
Dowpatrick
Difficulty
St Patrick



OTTO
REVOLVER POINT
Lady Hamilton
Lord Nelson

GERMAN BAR

Christmas
Big Reef
McPherson's
Gypsy
Belfast
Darwin
Bricky Bill's

Star of the South
CHINESE CAMP

Nelson's Gully
Anti-Clique
Alliance
Black Bird
Little Union
Louisa

Recompense

3 Jacks
King of the Ranges
Comet
Heart's Content
Perseverance
Britannia
New Chum
Just in Time
Albion
Caledonian
Ida

Hop Bitters
Lady Mary

IDATOWN

SCHOOL

MAYTOWN

Victoria
Smithfield
Viking

Rising Sun
King Billy
Mountain Maid
Keep it Dark
Captain Cook
Hit or Miss
Queen of the North
Who'd Have Thought It

suspended by the end of the year.⁹ Interest in reefing was renewed in 1875 following an inspection tour by investors from Victoria and Charters Towers; soon afterwards fifteen auriferous areas were identified and fifty miners were working some twenty-six claims.¹⁰ Stone was systematically stockpiled with the more energetic miners noisily hand-dollying the quartz, while awaiting the arrival of machinery. The deepest shaft was down twenty-nine metres (ninety-five feet), but prospects remained uncertain.¹¹

The first mill reached the field in July 1875. This was the Edwardstown Machine Company Limited¹² battery at Butcher's Creek, financed by many local shareholders, though primarily on the initiative of Jack Edwards and D.M. Jones. However operations were delayed by the high cost of carriage and scarcity of teams to convey timber. When eventually it was completed crushing was delayed because of the shortage of feed for horses which transported the quartz to the machine yards. As the *Cooktown Herald* explained, any mill at Edwardstown would "not be able to start work till the grass starts growing."¹³ The first crushing by the Pioneer ten stamp mill of stone from the Alliance reef near Thompson's Gully was jubilantly publicized in late January 1876.¹⁴ However, optimism soured the following month with the rush to the Hodgkinson River.

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9. CC 26 December 1874, 23 January 1875. Among the investors who promised machinery was H.E. King, Secretary for Public Works and Mines. CC 20 June 1874. For further details see footnote 72.
10. AR 1878 p.23.
11. Some of the early reefers were from Gympie. Even with the most primitive form of dollying, a miner was able to extract 4 oz of gold from 2 cwt of stone. CH 14 July 1875 and 26 February 1876. By dollying, the estimated yield from quartz in 1874 and 1875, prior to the arrival of machinery, was 200 and 400 ozs respectively. AR 1878 p.23.
12. The Edwardstown Machine Company Limited was registered 9 July 1875 with a capital of £4,000 and a total number of 800 shares. It was eventually struck off the register in January 1894. Book 1 No. 143 COM/1 QSA.
13. CH 9 October 1875.
14. CC 5 February 1876.

The Hodgkinson discoveries interrupted the development of reefing at a vital time dashing plans for the erection of more machines. Skilled miners moved south; with them went the capital intended for the Palmer as investors and reefers found the new field more attractive because of its proximity to ports and lower cost of carriage. By August 1876 Sellheim described conditions as the "dullest in mining since opening the field", and five months later commented on the "unsettled state of mind" which afflicted the remaining businessmen and European miners.¹⁵

Discoveries of auriferous reefs were made annually, and a total of 145 had been located by the end of the first decade.¹⁶ However, most of these were thin and relatively poor; there was little capital for development and equally little experience among the miners.¹⁷ Conventional vertical shafts were possible because of the steepness of the dips of the reefs. At the beginning, reefing appliances were primitive; water control was confined to a tin dish for bailing.¹⁸ Sinking became easier with depth, despite the scarcity of powder and lithofracture, the ore coming off freely, and when the 180 feet (54.8 metres) level was reached in 1878, Sellheim announced that "there is no falling off, either in the quantity of or the quality of gold distributed through the quartz".¹⁹

In the lull of the Hodgkinson rush there were renewed rumours of additional machinery which in turn encouraged earnest prospecting

15. For details, see Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 4 September 1876, 76/173 10 February 1877, 77/37 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.
16. *AR* 1884 p.21. In comparison, 322 distinct lines of reef had been laid off on the neighbouring Hodgkinson gold field by the end of its second year in 1877. *AR* 1877 p.12.
17. According to one account, there "were very few practical reefers ...in a position to devote their time to prospecting on account of the exorbitant prices demanded for provisions". William Irving to editor *CW* 10 June 1874.
18. *CC* 21 November 1874.
19. *AR* 1878 p.21.

in reefs,²⁰ although Sellheim insisted as late as 1880 that "no portion of the field has been thoroughly prospected, and there is an immense tract of country unprospected which abounds in quartz reefs".²¹ In addition to protection areas and reward claims, reefs were worked by taking up quartz claims or gold mining leases. Shareholders in claims were generally working miners with some capital. They were required to maintain the continuous working of the mine and periodically re-apply for further occupation of the claim. Leases gave greater security and more land, made provision for exemption from work, and were usually applied for on a speculative basis.²² However, the number of registered operations was relatively low even in the years of maximum activity, with 137 claims in 1876 and thirty-four leases in 1882.²³

In the decade, 32,084 tons of stone were crushed, and the gold yield was 68,411 ounces valued at over £4 an ounce, equivalent in quality to the alluvial gold.²⁴ The richest mines were on the Queen of the North, Ida, Louisa and Alexandra groups of reefs. The yield was high, averaging around two ounces per ton; stone from the Hit or Miss and the Alexandra mines yielded over six ounces per ton, but the latter was worked to only thirty metres or one hundred feet, raising a mere 180 tons, in contrast to the Queen of the North and Ida crushings of over 7,000 tons for yields of 15,167 and 13,264 ounces

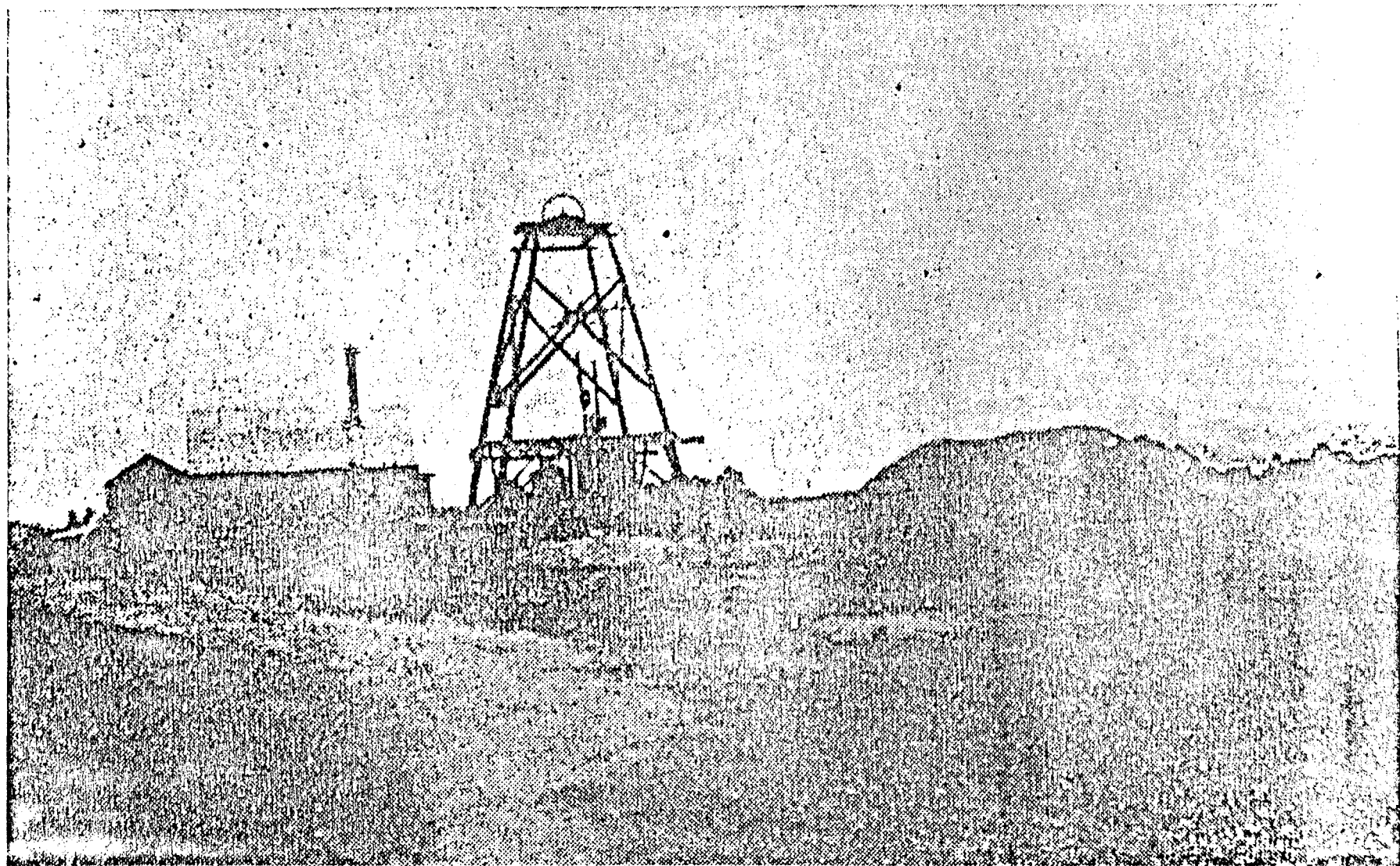
20. CH 30 September 1876.

21. AR 1880 p.18. In this year there were only fifty-eight prospecting claims on the Palmer.

22. According to Sellheim most gold mining leases were "originally taken for speculative purposes". AR 1879 p.6. For details of requirements see General Regulations 54-7,81-91 *Gold Fields Act of 1874*.

23. AR 1878 p.23, 1882 p.15.

24. Calculated from AR 1878-1884, *passim*.



Ida mine from north (QGMJ March 1901)

respectively, and shaft depths in excess of seventy-six metres (250 feet).²⁵ These two mines were the deepest that available capital and labour could manage in the development of the Maytown district reefs in the decade to 1883. This was despite the fact that the Ida reef, averaging 45 centimetres (eighteen inches) in which gold adhered freely, was believed to be similar geologically to the Gympie reefs.²⁶ Likewise, the Queen of the North was once considered the "grandest property in Queensland",²⁷ and the mining methods used were described by the Inspector of Mines in 1884 as "superior to that witnessed elsewhere in the North".²⁸

Of the other significant mines, the Louisa P.C. and No. 1 West, on which a total of fifteen shafts were sunk, raised 1,295 tons for 1,846 ounces of gold, an average of an ounce and nine pennyweight from a depth of thirty metres (100 feet). Important in its development was the discovery at the ninety feet (approximately 27 metres) level of very rich shoot, up to sixty centimetres (two feet) wide, which continued horizontally for 122 metres (400 feet). Another rich but undeveloped mine was the St. Patrick, worked to the water line (at twenty-four metres or eighty feet) and driven almost continuously for a distance of about 91 metres (300 feet) during 1878 to 1883. In addition to £800 worth of nuggets picked up at the surface of the St. Patrick, the return showed 1,003 tons for 1,099 oz of gold.²⁹ However, with perhaps the exception of the Queen of the North, the

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25. The Ida yielded close on 2 ozs per ton, the Comet and Queen over 2 ozs, the Louisa 1 oz 9 dwt. and the Alexandra 6 oz 17 dwt per ton. R.L. Jack, Notes on the Palmer As a Reefing District, *GSQ Bulletin* 5 (1897), pp.6-7. See also appendix to Jack, Report on a visit, pp.17-28; for reference to Hit or Miss P.C. see CC 7 December 1878. According to the *Cooktown Courier* of the same date, the Alexandra P.C. had at least one crushing of 8-9 ozs per ton.
26. Hodgkinson, Report, *QV&P* 1884, 3, pp.249-50.
27. CC 9 July 1879.
28. Report by the Inspector of Mines for the Northern District, AR 1883 p.73.
29. Jack, Notes, p.7.

Palmer mines were notable more for the brevity of their exploitation. After thirteen years of mining, the Queen of the North closed, in spite of the confidence expressed in its future by the Inspector of Mines. The Alexandra, whose average yield was impressive, was worked for only two years. The Ida, described by Robert Logan Jack as "the premier mine on the field", ceased operations in June 1883,³⁰ only seven years after it was opened. In the light of these short working periods, a cautionary comment must be made about the reported richness of many of the Palmer reefs. The crushings from several mines gave yields which appear breathtakingly high when compared with contemporary returns from Charters Towers or Gympie, and seem irreconcilable with the short life and eventual failure of the Palmer mines. However, transport difficulties and water shortage caused lengthy delays at the mills, and ore often remained at the mines for long periods. It is highly probable that much Palmer ore was laboriously hand-picked before milling, and the crushing yields are therefore not a true indication of the value of run-of-mine ore.

There were many obstacles to the continuous working of the mines. As local timber was scarce and of poor quality, the framing of some shafts was not always sturdy or secure. In 1879, Sellheim described many claims as "decidedly unsafe" and called for judicious legislation compelling claimholders "to timber their workings in a much more solid and workmanlike way than they have been in the habit of doing hitherto".³¹ Admittedly there were very few mining accidents on the Palmer, though the number of reefers employed underground was low. It is interesting however to note that all accidents reported in 1882 (including a fatality) occurred in a mine described by the Inspector of Mines as in need of "safety repairs".³² But improvements in the timbering of mines were dependent on lower costs of carriage and improved communications.

30. Hodgkinson to Under Sec Mines 9 June 1883, MWO 13B/G3 p.468 QSA.

31. AR 1879 p.18.

32. AR 1882 p.16, 1883, p.73.

Moreover, the working of reefs at depth was hampered by seepage and rushes of water at shallow levels. Heavy water, which Hodgkinson explained meant "heavy for the primitive bailing appliances at hand",³³ was associated with those reefs lying in synclinal troughs, but nearly all claims and leaseholds tended to be flooded during the wet season. The bailing appliance first adopted consisted of a greenhide bucket with a rope attached to a winch, windlass, or in a few cases a horse whip or whim. Its use was time-consuming and inadequate at deeper levels. As early as 1876 it was acknowledged that a whim could not cope with the water at the Louisa,³⁴ but lack of capital for pumping machinery forced its tributors to persevere for another two years: for a brief time, they worked below the water level with "the assistance of six horses," and day and night shifts", hauling out only twelve gallons each lift.³⁵ When a labour shortage occurred after the rush to Lukinville, it was decided finally to purchase pumping machinery.³⁶

Some claimholders with capital and richer ground improved operations by acquiring steam pumps. In fact, the western claimholders of the Queen of the North line found it impossible by 1879 to continue with the aid of whips, and decided that amalgamation into a company to work all properties economically and efficiently by steam power was the only solution.³⁷ The Louisa's single action pump, with eight inch (20 centimetres) pipes, had proved to be inadequate below twenty-four metres (eighty feet), and was replaced by two Tangye pumps and a compressing engine.³⁸ Even some of the larger mines, with poppet heads and hoisting and pumping machinery, still experienced

33. Hodgkinson to Under Sec Mines 2 June 1881, MWO 13B/G2. p.648 QSA.

34. CH 8 July, 27 September 1878.

35. CC 23 January, 24 April 1878.

36. CC 22 June 1878.

37. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 5 September 1879, 79/212, Hodgkinson to Under Sec Mines 2 May 1881, p.624 MWO 13B/G2 QSA.

38. Hodgkinson to Under Sec Mines 2 April 1883, MWO 13B/G3 p.376, Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 5 September 1879, 79/212 MWO 13B/G2 QSA.



" The 'Louisa,'...has recently commenced pumping with a 'Tangye,' the first imported into this district" (AR 1881 p.14). Detail of Tangye pump at Louisa, 1979.

difficulties.³⁹ The winding gear and small engine initially bought for the Ida P.C., one of the earliest mines to erect such machinery, was not powerful enough to keep the water down, and a replacement had to be ordered from Sydney with an overdraft on the Queensland National Bank.⁴⁰ The Bank, which was heavily involved in financing mines, was critical of the ways in which some claimholders dealt with the problem of heavy water. According to the Manager of the Maytown branch, a "good deal of money was wasted in experiments, with different kinds of machinery".⁴¹ Indeed many claims with primitive pumping equipment, including the promising Alexandra mine, were closed after 1879 because the owners did not have "the means themselves or the assistance of outside capital to procure the requisite machinery to develop reefs below the water".⁴²

Not all mines were worked co-operatively or efficiently. There was no relationship between the development of a reef, the capacity of the machinery erected, and output. The shareholders of the St Patrick No. 1 North were at "loggerheads with each other" over the priority of machine purchase, shaft sinking and crushing targets. The Queensland National Bank, with its financial support, not unexpectedly gave preference to an immediate increase in the tonnage to be treated.⁴³ The Louisa Gold Mining Company subsequently bought a great deal of machinery, only to find it unsuited to requirements. The result was that a large amount of capital was expended to little purpose, necessitating eventually a cessation of operations. The lesson was not lost: the manager of the Maytown branch of the Queensland National

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39. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 4 August 1877, in *CH* 12 September 1877; *CC* 27 March 1878, 9 July 1879.
40. T.C. Davy to Acting Manager 6 January 1879, BR/QNB/032 22 NBA: Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 7 March 1878, 78/48 MWO 13B/G1, Gill to Under Sec Mines 8 March 1881, MWO 13B/G2 p.599 QSA.
41. Confidential letter, Alford to John Souttar 3 June 1883, BR/QNB/032 22 NBA.
42. *AR* 1880 p.17.
43. Davy to General Manager 9 December 1878, BR/QNB/032 22 NBA.

Bank recorded that such expenditure discouraged further outside capital.⁴⁴ In addition, although nine engines with a total of 112 horsepower were used for winding, pumping and crushing by 1878, steam engines usually had to drive both winding and pumping gear. In the Ida, such arrangements affected the rate of mining, to the extent that three feet per fortnight was considered good sinking.⁴⁵ Another problem was created by the cessation of work in other mines, whereupon pumping a whole line of reef could fall on one claim holder.⁴⁶

Claims experiencing difficulties with water, and those awaiting the arrival of suitable machinery, had to register for exemption from mining under general regulation 13 of the *Gold Fields Act*. In fact, the long wait for the arrival of machinery had been responsible for the suspension of reefing in 1874-5. However Hodgkinson disapproved of the exemption provision; he attributed the inactivity in reefing to "the stereotyped process of registration which so greatly retarded the progress of the field".⁴⁷ Miners were working claims to the water level but rarely re-investing in further development, content to lock-up the mine from other potential operators. Hodgkinson elaborated his attitude in his report to the Under Secretary for Mines:

In most cases the gold readily won from the upper levels has been recklessly squandered and proprietors of ground now find themselves compelled to face an expensive control in a penniless condition. Registration has been the ready alternative and one of the most disheartening features of the field on my arrival was and is the numerous claims idle under one or other pretext. Arrivals from other quarters attracted by the high average yield per ton on the Palmer quartz go away disgruntled

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44. Alford to John Souttar 3 June 1883, BR/QNB/032 22 NBA.
45. Jack, Report on a Visit, p.10.
46. Apparently some owners did manage to accrue revenue from the drainage of neighbouring claims: Hodgkinson to Under Sec Mines 3 August 1885, MWO 13B/G4 p.60 QSA; Hodgkinson, Report, QV&P 1884, 3, p.250.
47. Hodgkinson to Under Sec Mines 1 July 1881, MWO 13B/G2 p.677 QSA.

with their inability to approach known payable ground and deter others from visiting the place by reporting that the reefs are closed to all. ⁴⁸

Hodgkinson was not alone in his criticism. Other wardens blamed the miners as well as the regulations for slow development. Sellheim boldly stated:

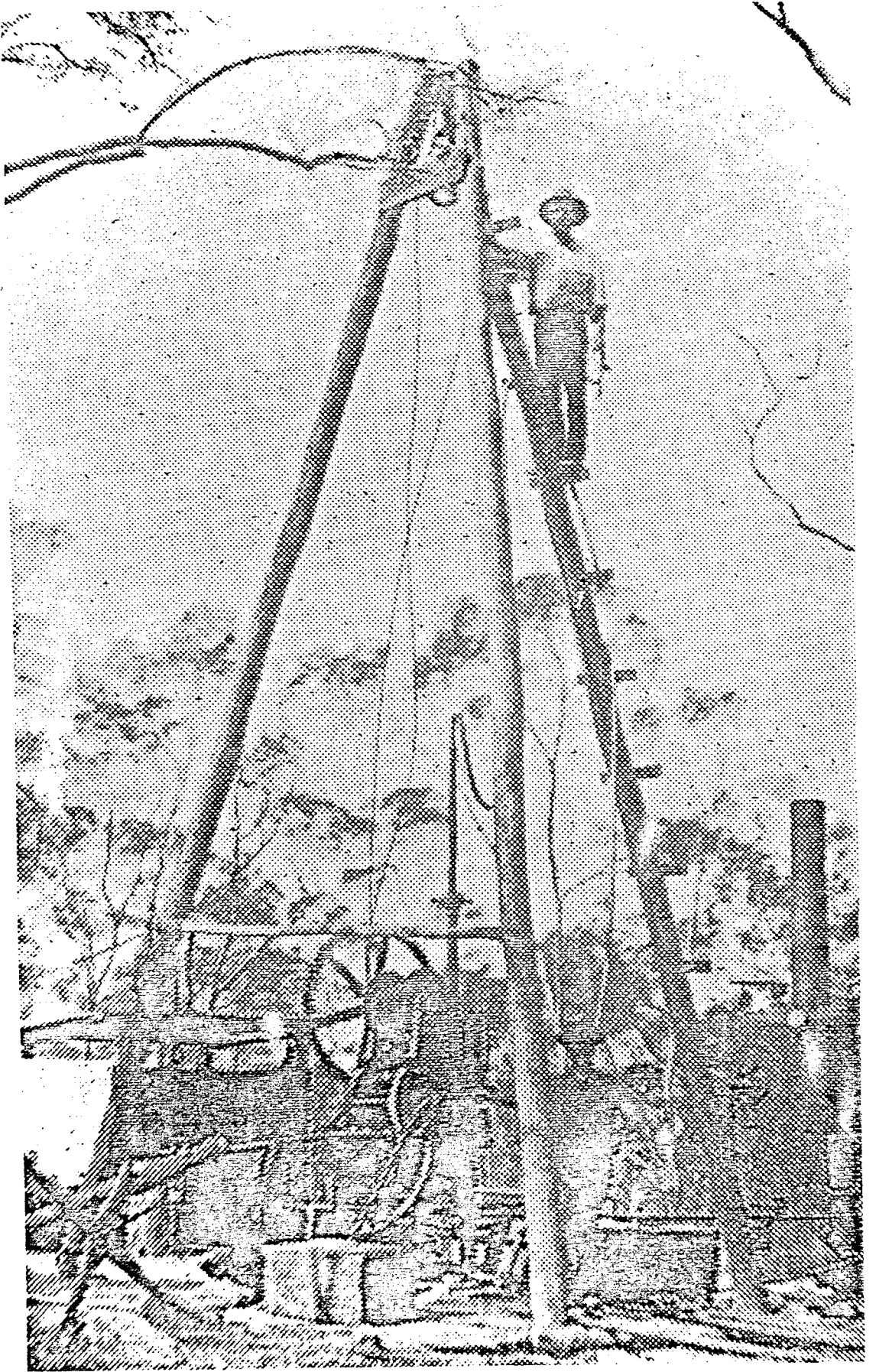
...only those few claims that can be possibly assisted by local capital are worked with anything like energy at all....Numerous claims, after having yielded fair crushings, though not up to the mark of the owners at the time, are thus thrown up. They are then re-applied for, time after time, small crushings are got out by following shoots of gold in their erratic course, and as the whilom owner has no interest in the future of his claim, it is mullocked up and the ground is destroyed. Such a style of working would be made an impossibility if capital and intelligence went hand in hand, and would prevent the incalculable mischief caused by getting valuable claims and making them next to worthless for such after-comers as would be prepared to extract the gold from them in a legitimate way.⁴⁹

Not all capital was utilized intelligently or legitimately. The Ida was laboriously worked by underhand stoping, and levels driven in at vertical intervals of twenty and thirty feet (6 to 9 metres). As it was the accepted practice to place levels at one to two hundred feet (30 to 60 metres), the decision to make the interval between levels much smaller, could be interpreted as recklessly optimistic, or simply reflect the primitiveness of the equipment. Also it seems that underground mining was not strictly supervised, and that a certain lack of fundamental skills was displayed by miners and claimholders. For instance the shaft of the Ida was made too narrow and too near the reef, passing through it at 60 metres (200 feet) and thereafter becoming progressively further from the reef, necessitating longer crosscuts.⁵⁰ To blame the reefer solely for inadequate mining knowledge would be unfair, as at least one manager of the Maytown

48. Hodgkinson to Under Sec Mines 2 June 1881, MWO 13B/G2 p.648 QSA.

49. AR 1878 p.22.

50. Hodgkinson, Report, QV&P 1884, 3, p.249.



Gold mine on the Palmer River (Walkabout October 1961)

branch of the Queensland National Bank discouraged development by advising claimholders "to knock down and raise what stone there is in sight and get another crushing out as speedily as possible",⁵¹ advice that was the antithesis of sound mining practice. Labour was also a complex question. Hodgkinson was concerned about a shortage of skilled miners:

Managers, engineers, and expensive surface hands were actually more numerous than underground men, and thus each really productive agent, the pick, was saddled with a costly and unnecessary burden of non-productive agents.⁵²

Sellheim too blamed inefficiency, but attributed this shortcoming to the unsettled nature of the reefing population. He observed that the reefers had characteristics similar to the alluvial miner and described them as belonging to a "floating population, who only work for the immediate necessity of the hour, who in fact are only the analogue of the alluvial fossicker".⁵³ However there were differences. The number of reefers was never very high: although in 1876 there were as many as 600, for most of the decade the average was between 100 and 180.⁵⁴ Despite their numbers, the quartz miners received average earnings of over £200 per annum for the years 1877-83, with the return of production for 1879 per man being £330.⁵⁵ Few mine owners could have made profits on this margin, after outlays for explosives, plant, carting, crushing and other charges.

51. Davy (Acting Manager) to General Manager 18 November 1878, BR/QNB/032 22 NBA.

52. Hodgkinson, Report, *QV&P* 1884, p.249.

53. *AR* 1878 p.22.

54. Quartz Miners on the Palmer Gold Field 1874-1883

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Number</u>
1874	50	1879	120
1875	160	1880	140
1876	600	1881	120
1877	180	1882	101
1878	150	1883	98

AR 1878-83 *passim*.

55. *AR* 1878 p.4; 1879 pp.4 & 7, 1880 p.4, 1881 p.13, 1882 p.14, 1883 p.21.

Most quartz miners worked for wages, and, as skilled labour was always in short supply, they were well paid.⁵⁶ Moreover, they were in a position to resist attempts to lower wages. In 1879 there occurred what Bolton has described as one of the "earliest recorded strikes" in North Queensland, arising from wage cuts on the principal claims and employers' threats to import Victorian miners. The strikers resisted, formed a league, and demanded the restoration of a wage of £4 per week. The mine owners claimed that the cost of carriage and pumping machinery required the lowering of wages. Many of the better miners left the field or took up their own claims, rather than submit to any wage reduction, but in time the remaining miners capitulated.⁵⁷ Sellheim, in an attempt to refute any ideological inference, concluded that "it was not a matter of dispute simply between capital and labour, as nearly all claimholders here are working miners themselves".⁵⁸ Davy of the Queensland National Bank acknowledged that scarcity of labour was in the strikers' favour. According to his estimation: "The majority of the miners in the district are far from being experienced in quartz reefing and...are not worth £3-10 but the claimholders are obliged to them because labor is scarce."⁵⁹

However, the labour shortage and maintenance of a more or less steady wage level, did not guarantee continuity of employment, and when gold mining leases were granted exemption, a number of men (usually half the workforce) were laid off.⁶⁰ It is significant

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56. The reefers were generally paid at a rate of £4 to £5 per week for eight hour shifts which increased overheads. See AR 1877 p.10. Miners in the colony received an average wage of £2/10/- per week in dry ground, and £3 per week in wet ground.
57. For details see, Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.187; CC 5, 12 November 1879.
58. AR 1879 p.18.
59. Davy to General Manager 20 October 1879, BR/QNB/032 22 NBA.
60. For discussion of the miners' opposition to exemption on the grounds that it caused unemployment, see Alford to General Manager 11 June, 23 June 1883; 28 April, 10 June & 7 July 1884, BR/QNB/032 22 NBA.

that Hodgkinson undertook to recommend forfeiture of the Louisa Gold Mining lease when the lessee (Queensland National Bank) applied for exemption from labour conditions, on the grounds that it threatened the livelihood of the miners. The manager of the Maytown branch of the Queensland National Bank responded indignantly that the warden had "exceeded the bounds of duty and shut his eyes to equity of the matters brought-before him" and "deliberately ignored the other interests to attain if possible, a settlement of the claims for wages".⁶¹ With uncertainty ever present, it is not surprising that skilled men were continually leaving the field after 1883 for more permanent reefing fields or a lucrative alluvial rush.

Crushing techniques were almost as primitive as mining machinery. Once raised and stacked, quartz ore on other fields was steadily reduced by a variety of processes involving crushing, grinding and concentrating. While it was possible for a mine to have its own machine, the cost and area required limited the number of machine sites to centralized positions on major groups of reefs. Before crushing, it was normal practice to break quartz down, either with hammers and picks or with the aid of a rockbreaker, to relatively uniform lumps of no more than seventy-six millimetres (three inches) in diameter, to ensure a regular feed of material through the crushing machine. The stone was sometimes graded into batches. Gravity stamp mills crushed parcels by means of heavy iron cylinders raised mechanically and allowed to fall onto ore in a steel mortar, with water and mercury: some of the gold would amalgamate with the mercury to be retrieved later. When sufficiently fine, the ore slurry was splashed through screens by the agitation of the stamps. Ground material was sometimes further treated by fine grinding in a Wheeler pan or by a ball or drag in Berdan pans, into which lime was fed.⁶²

61. Alford to General Manager 7 July 1884, BR/QNB/032 22 NBA.

62. D. Clark, *Australian Mining & Metallurgy* (Melbourne 1904), pp.256-9; A.M. Gaudin, *Principles of Mineral Dressing* (New York 1939), pp.43-6.

As rockbreakers seem not to have been used on the Palmer, much of the arduous, pre-crushing work was done manually which encouraged the practice of hand-picking. While this artificially raised the mill yields, lack of hand-breaking caused the mills to run inefficiently because of uneven stone, and was the subject of criticism in reports by Sellheim and Hodgkinson.⁶³ Gravity stamp mills were situated by creeks at each major group of reefs: the Pioneer and Mabel Louise on Butcher's Creek, the Gang Forward at German Bar, the Live and Let Live at Gregory's Gully, the Helena at Cradle Creek, and the Ida, Louisa and Queen machines at the mines of the same names. There was also the Endeavour at the Normanby group of reefs. These were not, however, permanent sites. Some mills were dismantled and carted to other locations where demand was greater: the Pioneer was transferred to the Louisa line of reefs in 1878 and the Gang Forward was divided into two distinct batteries of five head each, one being moved to the Lone Star Gold Mining Lease and the other to the Lord Nelson Extended claim.⁶⁴ Mills required permanent water for steam raising and for the treatment process. Millers sometimes sank wells to tap underground supplies and towards the end of the dry season were even forced to suspend crushing.⁶⁵ The greatest number of mills operating at one time was eight, with between five and fifteen stamps apiece, with a total of seventy stamps.⁶⁶ As there was no local manufacturer of mining machinery, representatives of southern and British firms conducted the business of importing mining machinery, advertising their relative ease of packing and shipment.⁶⁷

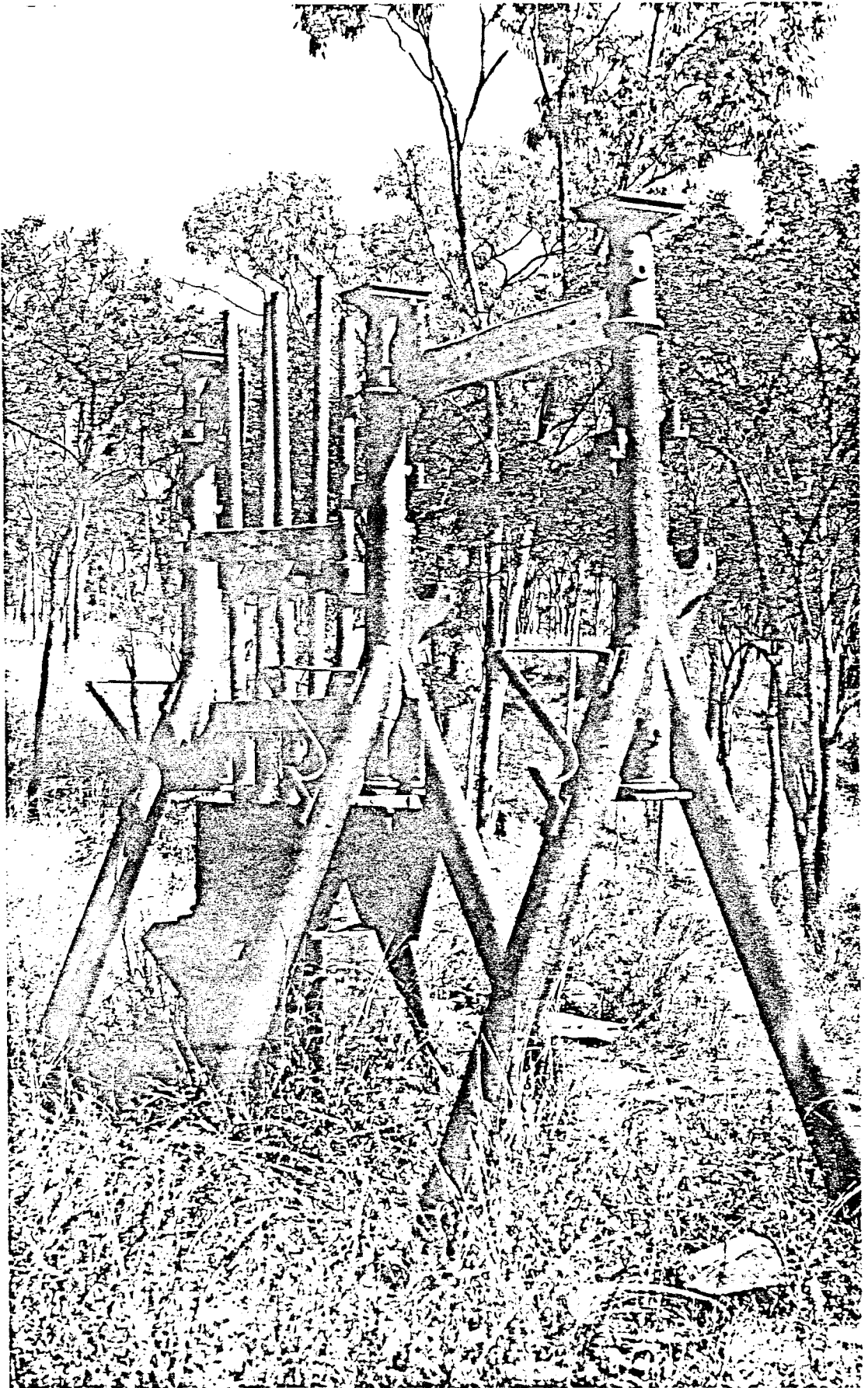
63. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 30 June 1879, 79/164 MWO 13B/G2 QSA; AR 1882 p.14, 1883 p.21.

64. CC 24 April, 22 June 1878; AR 1878 p.21.

65. The proprietors of the Live and Let Live and Butcher's Creek machines did manage to sink and strike permanent water. CC 23 June, 12 September 1877; CH 13 June, 7 July 1877.

66. This was in the years 1878 and 1879. AR 1879 p.19.

67. Messrs Span & Company started in mid-July 1877. A Sydney firm which a Mr Klappe represented, was "quite able and willing to erect a crushing machine on the Palmer, but previous to doing so they, like sensible men, want to find out the prospect of being recouped for their outlay." CC 21 July 1877; CH 27 January 1875, 16 January 1878.



Perseverance battery, erected by Cyril Denman in 1937, incorporating machinery from the nearby Mabel Louise. Photograph 1979.

One battery at the Comet was manufactured by Langlands Foundry Limited of Melbourne.⁶⁸ Boilers, which supplied the motive power in the stamp mills, were manufactured by Robey (Lincoln), Tangye (Birmingham), Langlands, J.W. Sutton (Brisbane) and John Walker and Sons (Maryborough).⁶⁹

While shipment of mining machinery by steamer as far as Cooktown was a viable proposition, conveyance to the field was not as easy. At least two sturdy bullock teams were required to deliver the heavy loads to machine sites that were not generally accessible.⁷⁰ With the imminent arrival of the Gang Forward, Andrew Binnie employed Chinese to put through a track, as quickly as possible, to Revolver Point.⁷¹ Further the rate of carriage, as high as £120 per ton, effectively deterred many attempts to introduce machinery.⁷² One carrier even found himself in possession of the very machine he had contracted to haul for a defaulting Melbourne owner.⁷³ In addition, cartage from mines to machine yards was as high as 50/- per ton-mile. Carriers demanded such high charges because of lack of competition,

68. The name plate of Langlands Foundry is still on the mortar box at the Comet. Also the ten stamp Gang Forward machine came from Melbourne, and the machinery at the Queen from Sydney. A Langlands' Foundry machine was brought to the Left Hand Branch in 1877, this was presumably the Helena at Cradle Creek. *CC* 9 September 1876; *CH* 19 May, 17 February 1877.
69. These makers' names appear on boilers on the Palmer today.
70. The Pioneer machine was conveyed by two bullock teams, with sixteen bullocks each. *CH* 10 July 1875.
71. Originally, the European miners of Revolver Point had agreed to assist in making a track. The employment of Chinese incurred "the miners' utmost displeasure", but even the *Cooktown Courier* was unsympathetic expressing the view that "they punish themselves by retarding the erection of the battery." *CC* 25 November, 2 December 1876.
72. In 1874 H.E. King left Cooktown to make arrangements for the immediate erection of a quartz crushing machine, to which he wanted miners to contribute to the carriage. The attempt was unsuccessful. *CC* 8 August 1874; *CH* 30 August 1876.
73. W. Parsons was the carrier. *CH* 30 September 1876.



Detail of boiler at Comet battery, 1979.

shortage of water for six months of the year, and the high cost of feed. To avoid the impost of the carriers, some miners packed their own horses or mules, and even employed Chinese with carrying poles.⁷⁴ At times all expedients failed, and carrying ceased entirely; local mining lapsed into frustrated inactivity, with the mills hung up while the claimholders stockpiled ore.⁷⁵

Most stamp mills were available for custom crushing, but costs were quite high on the Palmer, fluctuating seasonally from 18/- to £1/15/- per ton.⁷⁶ Sellheim believed that £1 to £1/10/- per ton was reasonable, especially as in 1876 it was double that amount, and that the cost was due to the irregular supply of quartz from the reefs:

These rates may be viewed remarkably reasonable when it is taken into consideration that reefers have supplied the mills with only two months' full work out of twelve, and that they cannot well look forward to any reductions in mill charges unless they are prepared to keep the machines running all the year round, night and day.⁷⁷

However, not all machine owners were unsympathetic to the plight of the miner. In fact, the miners at Revolver Point managed to negotiate a reduction in the rate of crushing to enable the poorer reefs to pay.⁷⁸

74. AR 1877 p.10. In 1876 the cost of feed was high. Horses carting stone to machine had to be fed maize at £3 per bushel, bringing the cost of carriage to £3 per ton. CH 19 February 1876. At Revolver Point, claimholders used Chinese to pack stone to the Gang Forward which was a "cheaper mode than horses", and in one month they could carry 150 tons over ½ mile. CC 3, 17 October 1877.
75. In 1877 there was a particularly severe drought and machine stoppages were frequent, owing to the scarcity of carters. All machines were idle at least once during the year. CH 23 January, 8 March, 30 May, 23 July, 12 September & 20 September 1877; CC 3 February, 17 March, 7 April, 12 May, 9 July, 5 & 19 September, & 10 October 1877.
76. See AR 1877 p.6, 1878 p.10, 1879 p.18, 1880 p.8. In 1876, the sole operating machine crushed at £2 per ton. CC 1 March 1876.
77. AR 1878 p.21.
78. Andrew Binnie reduced rates from £2 to £1/10/- per ton. CC 10 March 1877.

It is difficult to estimate the profit made by individual machine owners. With a monopoly over crushing throughout 1876, the Pioneer machine treated an average of 100 tons per week for twenty-seven weeks, at a rate of £2 per ton, earning a very high £200 per week.⁷⁹ By 1878, the earnings of the eight individual machines had declined considerably, and as wages had to be paid to machine labour working day and night shifts, attending the stamps, tables, pans and boilers, machine owners were struggling, more so because periods of inactivity would have left a very small margin indeed.⁸⁰ Moreover, the cost of firewood and its carriage further raised the millers' overheads, and the prevalence of custom treatment of small ore parcels also reduced the efficiency of the mills, as each batch had to be treated and cleaned up separately, impeding the steady flow of operations which made for greater economy. In the face of these problems the Rigby brothers, proprietors of the Endeavour machine at the Normanby River, provoked a public outcry in 1877 by refusing to crush stone from certain claims. This brought them little relief, as they were forced to sell out the same year.⁸¹

Despite the rapid turnover and generally poor supervision of mill hands, there was surprisingly little theft of amalgam or mining apparatus containing trapped gold. However, in mid-1877, two machines became the subjects of controversy, when the plates of the Pioneer were stolen and, at the Helena, a large quantity of amalgam was found hidden under the tables.⁸² Far more gold was lost through technical shortcomings. There was general reluctance to introduce machinery for the treatment of quartz tailings, because the stone was "so clean and free from base metals of any kind, that it is generally considered that the old gold-saving appliances are so far amply

79. CH 9 August 1876.

80. Andrew Binnie of Revolver Point employed Chinese, as cheap reliable European machine labour was not forthcoming. CH 9 December 1876.

81. CH 24 March, 28 July 1877; CC 1 December 1877.

82. CH 21 April, 2, 9 May, 28 July 1877. In the case of the Pioneer it was rumoured that some Chinese miners were the culprits.

sufficient".⁸³ The Pioneer machine was the first to introduce gold saving devices, and became "one of the most complete plants" in the colony.⁸⁴ In addition to its ten stamp battery, it had Wheeler and Berdan pans, a concentrator, and pumping machinery to the value of £9,000. Only two other mills, the Mabel Louise and the Louisa, acquired equipment to concentrate and grind the fines, the latter having transferred machinery from the Pioneer site in 1878.⁸⁵

The Palmer did not readily attract large sums of capital. The finds of the first lucky alluvial diggers were "expended in opening other gold fields", and poor communications deterred investment from outside sources.⁸⁶ Even so, the first successful company, the Edwardstown Machine Company Limited, was notable in being entirely a product of local enterprise. Early attempts by Cooktown businessmen to float companies were not as lucrative. The St George and Albion Quartz Mining Company Limited, registered in October 1875, was forced into liquidation within six months, the promoters having failed even to establish their machinery on the Albion reef.⁸⁷ Similarly, the Palmer Quartz Crushing Company which advanced to the stage of transporting a crushing machine to the Palmer River opposite Edwardstown,

83. AR 1877 p.10.

84. CH 22 August, 12 September 1877.

85. Return of the Number, Description, and approximate Value of Machinery Employed on the Palmer Gold Field during the Year 1882, AR 1882 p.16. The Gang Forward at German Bar is listed as having blanket tables, the Mabel Louise at Butcher's Creek had a Berdan pan and the Louisa 4 Wheeler and Berdan pans.

86. AR 1878 p.22.

87. The St George and Albion Quartz Mining Company Limited was founded with a capital of £10,000 and 1,000 shareholders, and aimed to work the Albion prospecting claim with machinery. Among the provisional directors were P. & J. Walsh, F.J.W. Beardmore, R.S. Cummings, W.H. Bailey and L. Severin. In December 1875, the shareholders claimed that the promoters had failed to pay £200, and had not placed any machinery on the Albion P.C. CH 25 September, 8 September, 6 October 1875, 12 February 1876; CC 8 September, 25 December 1875; Book 1 No. 152 COM/1 QSA. Another company which mined the Albion reef, the Albion Gold Mining Company Limited, was formed in June 1876, Book 1 No. 155 COM/1 QSA.

was served with a writ by the carrier because of non-payment of carriage. The machine was stranded there because of "mismanagement and neglect, or shortage of funds".⁸⁸ The shareholders of the company in turn threatened to sue the directors.⁸⁹ Meanwhile the machine remained idle, attracting jibes from the *Cooktown Herald*: "It seems as if the North Queenslanders, that is, men of means, lack that spirit of enterprise and pluck so characteristic of the go-ahead capitalists of New South Wales and Victoria."⁹⁰ The Live and Let Live, as the crushing machine became known, was re-erected by new owners at Gregory's Gully, and eventually crushed its first stone in March 1877.⁹¹ The Cooktown Quartz Crushing Company Limited, seemingly confident in setting up the Mabel Louise plant at Butcher's Creek, began to wind up its operations in late 1878, only two years after registration.⁹² The Lord Nelson Gold Mining and Quartz Company Limited, troubled by the withdrawal of support by important investors, enlisted the backing of the Queensland National Bank to ensure its tenuous survival.⁹³

In the years 1877 to 1879, no new mining or crushing companies were registered, although several were mooted.⁹⁴ In one case, a private arrangement concerning the Aurelia claim proved mutually

88. CH 22 January 1876.

89. CH 24 June 1876. The Palmer Quartz Crushing Company had a starting capital of £3,000. Its directors were J.C. Baird, J. Walsh, Mr. Ah Shew, M. Brodziack, Mr. Love, B. Matthews, P. Corbett. CH 2 October 1875.

90. CH 1 March 1876.

91. CC 6 January 1877; CH 14, 24 March 1877.

92. Book 1 No. 168 COM/1 QSA; CH 21 April 1877; CC 19 June, 6 July, 14 December 1878.

93. Book 1 No. 167 COM/1 QSA; CH, CC 6 September 1876.

94. In September 1877 interest was shown in the St. Patrick reef by the Sandhurst and Maytown Company and/or the Shamrock Gold Mining Company. Neither company was ever registered. CH 12 September 1877; CC 26 September 1877.

agreeable, with the investors promising to supply a machine on condition that the claimholders forfeited to them one-fifth of the claim and seventy-five per cent of the crushings, until the plant's purchase price was fully paid.⁹⁵ But it too was a victim of the rush to the Hodgkinson. Similarly, even the businessmen of Cooktown were distracted by prospects on the neighbouring field. As the *Cooktown Herald* noted: "They now seem too engrossed in the Hodgkinson".⁹⁶ There was evidence for the newspapers claim: the machinery of the defunct St George and Albion Quartz Mining Company was put to use on the Hodgkinson reefs.⁹⁷ Endeavouring to explain the failure of the Palmer companies, Hodgkinson wrote:

The history of mining companies on the Palmer is, so far, a painful record of insufficient capital, ill-judged enterprise, extravagant expenditure, and gross mismanagement. Cliquism is rampant, and the outside investor is regarded as a providential zoophyte to be squeezed as much as possible. It is sufficient to state that no record of a dividend-paying mining company has been brought under public notice to date.⁹⁸

By 1881, only two registered gold mining companies were operating on the field: the Louisa Gold Mining Company Limited and the Queen of the North Gold Mining Company Limited. These two companies, plus several claims, relied heavily on credit from bankers. As Bolton aptly suggested, "the Queensland National Bank found itself the sole prop of a number of semi-derelict mines, many of which required constant pumping to keep them from becoming water-logged."⁹⁹ The role of the Queensland National Bank in sustaining reefing on the Palmer was crucial. It readily issued advances in the dry season, and

95. CH 30 September 1876.

96. CH 9 September 1876.

97. CC 26 February 1876.

98. AR 1882 p.21.

99. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.115.

directed mining operations.¹⁰⁰ While some miners resented the Bank's involvement,¹⁰¹ it was acknowledged that "many now wealthy reefers would have had to find but a basic existence were it not for the readiness with which assistance has been given them by the National Bank".¹⁰²

When Hodgkinson assumed the wardenship in April 1881 and studied the field's fortunes, he decided to arrest its decline. He identified natural hazards - water, climate and the rugged terrain which hindered mining and communications, and other shortcomings - a want of capital, skilled labour and technology.¹⁰³ He attempted to remedy some of these problems by drawing public attention to one particularly promising mine on the Palmer, but soon found his career jeopardized as a result of his intervention. In 1884, his administration was the subject of a select committee of inquiry. Briefly, Hodgkinson had furnished a report in response to instructions by the acting minister, Thomas McIlwraith. Its contents however provoked a charge of alleged bribery, levelled by the Under Secretary for Public Works and Mines, William Miles, who accused Hodgkinson of intending "to ruin the public". Hodgkinson maintained that he was only carrying out his duty "to draw attention to opportunities for investing capital". That McIlwraith's name was linked with Edward Robert Drury's, registered owner of the Ida P.C. Auriferous Lease No. 61 and manager of the Queensland National Bank, had all the ingredients of a first rate scandal to which Hodgkinson was party. In fact Miles labelled the report as "more like a shareholders' prospectus for the purpose of floating a company to buy

100. In fact the Queensland National Bank increased the number of advances in the dry season. W.H. Kent to General Manager 10 December 1877, BR/QNB/032 22 NBA. The bank also advised on mining, exemplified in 1878 by the permission given to the miners of the Queen of the North P.C. to proceed with the main level. Davy to General Manager 30 December 1878, BR/QNB/032 22 NBA.

101. The non-payment of wages owing to the impending registration of the Louisa claim, led to the decision of miners to take possession of the mine and threatened to sue Mr. Drury, the general manager of QNB, being the registered lessee. The warden decided in favour of the men, recommending forfeiture and payment of wages. Alford to General Manager, 5, 6, 10, 13, 16, 17 June, 2, 16 June, 7 July 1884, BR/QNB/032 22 NBA.

102. CH 24 March 1877.

103. AR 1881 pp.14-15.

a mine", but, fortunately for Hodgkinson's reputation, the Committee found no evidence that it was prepared specifically to ruin the public.¹⁰⁴ However the Palmer River Mining Company was also registered under Drury's name, and its Gold Mining Leases 63 and 65 (Just in Time and Albion), were not scrutinized by the select committee.¹⁰⁵

By the end of the first decade gold reefing had given way to tin mining, with the Cannibal Creek Tin Mining Company Limited being registered in 1883. While most of the tin ore at Cannibal and Granite creeks was mined by Chinese using only the simplest alluvial methods,¹⁰⁶ almost a third of the total number of hard-rock miners' on the field in 1882 were also involved in working the tin lodes.¹⁰⁷ The company erected a "splendid plant" and started to build a tramway to the mine. However, the operation folded abruptly, and all tin mining was suspended. As the warden wrote in 1883: "With the collapse of the Cannibal Creek Tin Mining Company, tin-lode mining - or, more truthfully, tin-lode speculation - has died out, and Cannibal Creek is nearly deserted".¹⁰⁸ The company's collapse reflected the fortunes of the whole field which by 1884 was experiencing "a period of very considerable depression."¹⁰⁹

In so few years, the Palmer had run full cycle from a booming European alluvial field, through a period of Chinese dominance to a

104. For details see Report from the Select Committee on the Report on the Palmer Gold Field by Warden Hodgkinson, *QV&P* 1884, 3, pp.241-99.

105. Drury and Party Lessees of G.M. Leases 63 and 65 4 April 1883, MWO 13B/G3 p.381 QSA; Statement of Securities June and November 1883, C/QNB/305/115 NBA. Thomas McIlwraith had also invested in the company.

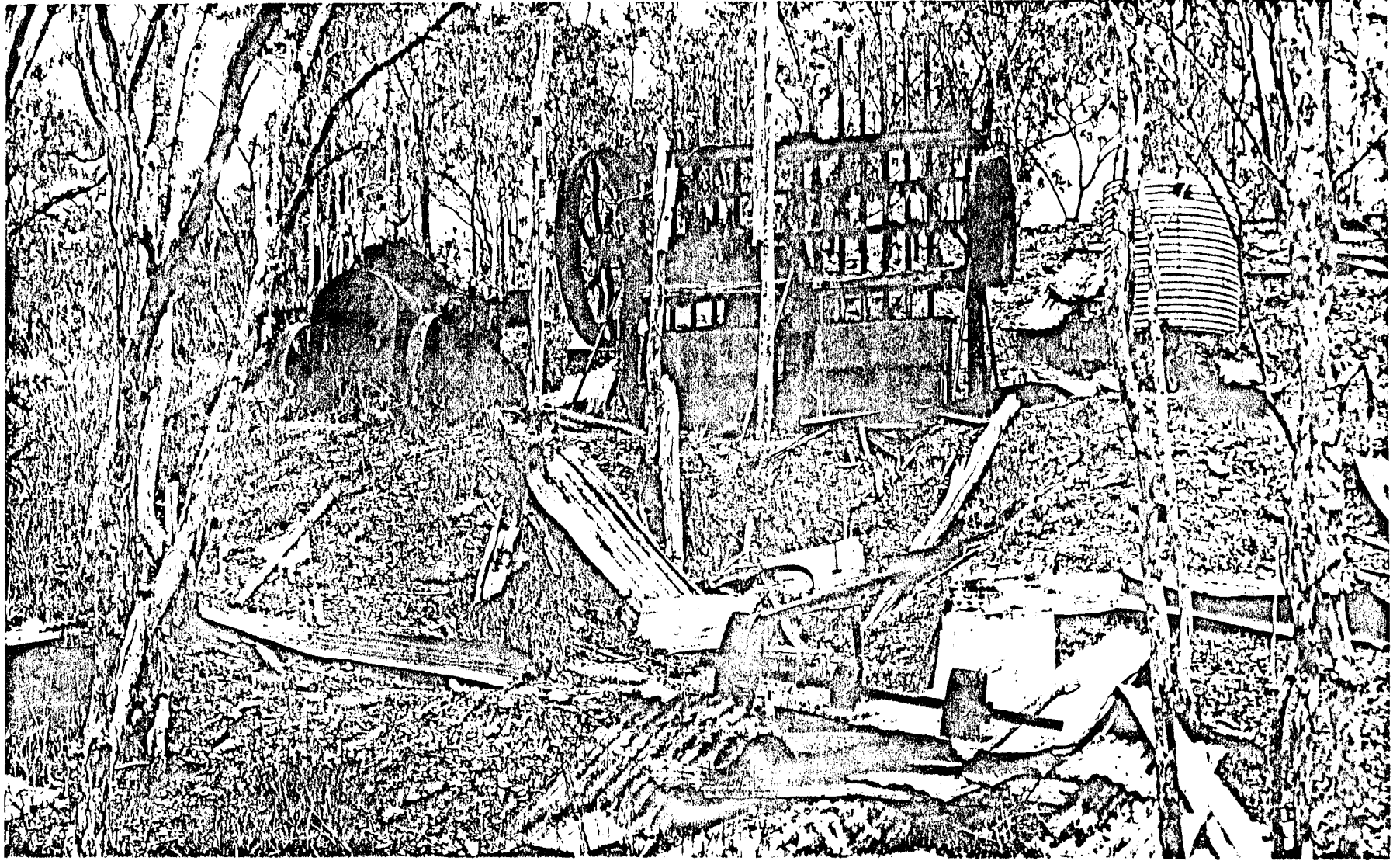
106. *AR* 1883 p.21.

107. *AR* 1882 p.14. The editor of the *Cooktown Courier* encouraged tin mining in the wake of the decline of alluvial mining and the lack of interest shown in tin. *CC* 4 August, 27 October, 31 October 1877.

108. *AR* 1883 p.22.

109. *AR* 1884 p.21.

struggling European reefing field. The alluvial phase was prolonged by the unprecedented quality and quantity of easily-won gold. This suited the aspirations of miners without capital, who, on the whole, were not interested in local investment or reefing, and who seemed only too anxious to follow the Hodgkinson rush. The result however was that reefing on the Palmer was trapped in an embryonic state from which it never emerged. The quality of Palmer gold was not in doubt and an unknown quantity remains in the flooded mines, never likely to be exploited. Near Maytown, the raised stamps of the battery at the Louisa, overlooking the silent mine site with its rusting Tangye pump, to this day poignantly symbolize the potential and the hope, the hardships and perseverance, and the disillusionment and eventual abandonment of the Palmer. Best remembered as a gloriously rich "poor man's field" in its early alluvial years, it was a sink for misdirected and hardwon capital in its reefing phase.



Gold battery at the Louisa mine, 1979.

CHAPTER 4
THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

"Edwardstown is very prosperous....I
should think about 30 public houses"
Bowly 1876.

Contrary to popular impression, the European population on the Palmer was never large. It did not exceed 2,500 before 1876, and at its peak reached only 3,000 immediately after the Hodgkinson rush. By 1877, it was approximately 800.¹ This European population was predominantly male, British-born averaging between 25 and 40 years in age, and in 1877, made up but 5% of the total population.² The Palmer was never the complete domain of the European; that claim belonged to the Chinese beside whom Europeans dwelt in the ephemeral settlements.

There were probably less than twelve settlements on the Palmer which could be described as towns. All were centres of intense mining activity, although not simultaneously. The pattern of settlement was made cohesive only by the presence of government officials, successful businesses, or accessibility to the main lines of communication. Palmerville was the first substantial town, the terminus for Macmillan's road and the location of the gold commissioner's camp. With a post office, court house, and business houses built in slab, its permanence seemed assured.³ At the close of 1874, despite the rush to Sandy Creek, the population of Palmerville still numbered 400.⁴ However with the decision to remove the gold field administration to Maytown, the town was quickly vacated leaving it by May 1875, the month during which Sellheim shifted camp, with "the appearance of a deserted village".⁵ Palmerville had a population of only 80 by November of that year.⁶ Charles Bowly, who visited Palmerville in December 1876, commented:

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1. Sellheim to Sec Mines 5 July 1876, 76/142 CPS 13B/G1 QSA; *AR* 1878 p.23.
 2. Information regarding parents of children born on the Palmer Gold Field 1874-1883 from register of Births in the District of Palmer in the Colony of Queensland, Court House Cooktown. Hereafter cited as Palmer Birth Register.
 3. Macmillan in particular assumed the permanence of Palmerville. See Macmillan to A.O. Herbert 7 October 1874, 75/5708 WOR/A 109 QSA.
 4. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 4 December 1874, 74/96 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.
 5. *CH* 29 May 1875.
 6. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 1 November 1875, 75/339 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

I only wish I could send photos of this part of the world; the main street here would amuse you. The place is falling into ruins rapidly and now there are only a few stores and public houses left, and these in rather a state of delapidation.⁷

The outlying camps spread from Cradle Creek, Jessop's Gully and Lone Star Creek in the north, to the Laura and Normanby watersheds in the east, and south to the Mitchell. Few of them survived for long, and today only a few colourful place names on the topographical maps evoke that first euphoric expansion: Cradle Point, Dirty Dick and Greasy Bill's Creeks. Even the camps of the assistant wardens proved to be as ephemeral as those of the mining population: Sellheim was optimistic about the future of Kingsborough on Limestone Creek, a tributary of the Mitchell. In December 1874, he wrote: "To this place there is a good dray road, and a Township is springing up rapidly, and there can be little doubt that it will be a place of some importance for some time to come".⁸ Kingsborough was then outstripping the growth of Edwardstown (later Maytown): the assistant warden was transferred there, and was directed to conduct a warden's court. In a letter to Inspector Clohesy of Cooktown, Sellheim requested the establishment of a police camp, explaining: "I have found it necessary to shift Warden Dorsey to the new Township at Limestone Creek "Kingsborough" on being the most central place and offering greater facilities for keeping horses".⁹ A native police camp was subsequently established.¹⁰ However, within twelve months, Kingsborough had lost its prominence; Dorsey was removed in late 1875 to Kingston on Frenchman's Gully, generally known as Oaky Creek.¹¹ However, Kingston, a gold administration

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7. C.W. Bowly 1 December 1876. C.W. Bowly, Letters 1873-1877, private collection. Copies of letters and typescript forwarded to James Cook University and John Oxley Libraries for copying.
 8. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 4 December 1874, 74/96 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.
 9. Sellheim to Insp T. Clohesy 7 December 1874, 74/115 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.
 10. D.T. Seymour to Col Sec 16 April 1875, 75/1111 COL/A 208 QSA.
 11. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 7 November 1875, 75/365 & Sellheim to Dorsey 12 January 1876, 76/2 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

and postal centre,¹² survived only to December 1876. A new camp was later established on Fine Gold Creek under Warden Thomas Coward,¹³ though it too did not last long because of the mobility of the mining population. Fine Gold was to be replaced in quick succession by gold field administration camps at Stony Creek and then another at the Springs during 1877.¹⁴

Alluvial mining communities tended to congregate around successful businesses to which a network of tracks were rapidly defined, especially along the main river. Butcher's camps, such as those of Wentworth D'Arcy Uhr and the firm of John Byers and the Little Brothers at Uhr's Camp and Byerstown respectively, provided service nodes for mining communities. Uhrstown and Byerstown both benefited from their location with tracks leading not only to Edwardstown but to Sandy and Oaky Creeks. Byerstown, in particular, flourished with the formation of Coward's track to the headwaters of the Palmer River, as Sellheim has described in his annual report for 1875:

During the year a new township, which promises to become one of some importance, has sprung up. It is situated on the Main-River, 40 miles above Edwardstown, it is called Byerstown. This is the terminus at present of the new road from Cooktown, the track being open to wheel traffic so far, & does monopolize the packing trade to the Sandy Uhr & Mitchell-Water camps.¹⁵

Byerstown was further boosted by the discovery of gold on the Hodgkinson River; for a time it was the road junction for traffic from Cooktown to either gold field. At Byerstown, European settlement was situated on the north bank of the Palmer River: there

12. Frew, *Queensland Post Offices*, p.319.

13. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 13 January 1877, 77/16 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

14. Reference to the move to Stony Creek is in Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 31 May 1877, 77/118 MWO 13B/G1 QSA. Coward was at the Springs by the end of August. See G. Lukin to Sellheim 24 August 1877, MWO 13B/G1 p.376 QSA.

15. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 12 January 1876, 76/12 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

was a variety of businesses, but the Europeans were not completely independent of the Chinese:

The town is divided by the main Palmer River, the largest division being north Byerstown, the other south; almost all the inhabitants on the south side are Chinkies, and the north consists of Paddies, Natives and Yankees, so I'll commence at the north side, or as Paddy says (the head). There are five large calico European stores (but our late arrival Mr. Gibson, can boast of possessing the only galvanized iron store in the town), and six or eight Chinese stores, all of whom seem to be doing a good business. There are six or seven hotels, but I am very sorry I can't give the names of the worthy hosts and hostesses of more than two....There are four bakers' shops, and one blacksmith, who is doing so well, that he has also become sole proprietor of a very fine hotel all galvanized iron, and lately arrived....Then our worthy butchering establishment and patent slaughter yard (whose names I can give), the great firm of Little Bros. and Byers, the first men who resided here and formed the township, from whom it derived its name.¹⁶

A European butcher and blacksmith were situated on the south bank described as "low swampy boggy and the place of Chinamen".¹⁷

The sites of crushing machinery, necessarily near a reliable water supply, also provided impetus for settlement. The batteries near Ida and Gregory, at the Ida and the Queen of the North mine sites, and the town of Echo at Revolver Point, naturally encouraged closer settlement, including public buildings.¹⁸ The one stable and well-built town on the field was Maytown, whose location was determined by a combination of natural and artificial influences. Located at the junction of the Palmer River and Butcher's Creek, where permanent water was available, the town grew out of the early settlement of Upper Camp or Edwards' Gully, so named because it was centred around Edwards' butchery. Edwards' Gully had rapidly grown in

16. CH 17 June 1876.

17. CH 8 July 1876.

18. Frew, *Queensland Post Offices*, pp.289, 301.

size during the first half of 1874, becoming the centre of the assistant commissioner's district, and at one time known as Upper Commissioner's. As the *Cooktown Herald* recorded in late May 1874, the "great body of the population of this field is to be found in the vicinity of Edward's Gully the Upper Township as it is called".¹⁹ The Upper Township was roughly surveyed by Howard St George and became known as Edwardstown, after Jack Edwards, the butcher.²⁰ However its continuation as the largest settlement on the Palmer was not at this stage a foregone conclusion. With the rush to Sandy Creek in mid-1874, and the rise of Kingsborough on Limestone Creek, Edwardstown's population dwindled to 50 by the end of the year.²¹ During this uncertain period of Edwardstown's existence, a post office - recommended when the town comprised more people - was established and named Maytown.²² The *Cooktown Courier* notified its readers of the change in its issue of 29 September 1874: "MAY TOWN. - Our readers will wonder where the place is situated, that rejoices in the euphonius [sic] name of May Town, and for their information we beg to inform them that it was lately known as Edwardstown or the Upper Palmer, and has been changed into the pretty name of May Town, by Mr Dorsey the Commissioner, who for the first time headed his mail bills with it last mail". Surveyor James Reid, having marked a dray route from Cooktown via Byerstown terminating at Maytown late in 1874 or early 1875, was also ordered to re-survey town lots, thus altering the original survey of Edwardstown carried out by St George.²³

19. CH 29 May 1874.

20. In one resolution of a public meeting held at Maytown in 1876, it was stated that "the township [Edwardstown] was laid off by the Gold-fields Commissioner, Mr. Howard St. George". Q 29 April 1876.

21. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 4 December 1874, CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

22. Frew, *Queensland Post Offices*, p.342. A postmaster, T. O'Leary, was appointed 17 June 1874.

23. H.E. King to J. Reid 30 November 1875, enclosed 75/6102 WOR/A 110, Reid's report 8 February 1875, 75/1509 WOR/A 98 QSA; Q 29 April 1876.

Sellheim, on receipt of instructions to move from the much larger Palmerville to Edwardstown in January 1875, displayed understandable reluctance, pointing out that Oaky Creek (Kingston) or Purdie's Camp were more central to mining operations and also had more grass.²⁴ The Mines Department could not be dissuaded from the original decision, and Sellheim eventually formed a "permanent camp about a couple of miles above Edwards!" in late May.²⁵ However, Sellheim continued to cite Edwardstown as the location of the warden's office until June 1876.²⁶ Meanwhile, as the mining population returned from the rushes to Sandy and Oaky Creeks and the Normanby River, there were complaints concerning the position of the post office and police station two miles (3 km) from Edwardstown.²⁷ It appears that a conspicuous group of businessmen, who strongly supported Jack Edwards, actively campaigned for the re-gazettal of the post office name to Edwardstown and even sent a petition to the government dated 27 October 1875: "That in due respect to the Pioneer John Edwards....It is the unanimous wish of the inhabitants that the 'Town' should be gazetted 'Edwardstown', and the Post Office called the same, as it is more generally known under this appellation".²⁸ But John McDonnell, the Under Secretary for the Postmaster-General's Department was adamant that no alteration to the name be made, the post office having "been called Maytown for upwards of twelve months"; besides, he grumbled, the date stamps had already been struck.²⁹

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24. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 21 January 1875, 75/17 & 22 March 1875, 78/185 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.
25. Sellheim left Palmerville on 15 May and arrived at Edwardstown on 24 May. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 15 May 1875, 75/173 & 24 May 1875, 75/181 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.
26. Sellheim to Col Sec 2 June 1876, 76/3487 COL/A 231 QSA. However, there is no mention of Edwardstown in the Mining Warden's Office Maytown Letterbooks which commenced 12 August 1876. See MWO 13B/G1 QSA.
27. Q 5 June 1875.
28. Inhabitants of the Palmer to Legislative Assembly of Queensland 27 October 1875, 75/2973 COL/A 214 QSA.
29. John McDonnell to Under Col Sec 16 December 1875, 76/4089 LAN/A 51 QSA.



The Kings of the Falmer in 1876: Jack Edwards, Tom Leslie and Jack Duff. (NQF 18 July 1921)

Nonetheless, the move to retain the name Edwardstown continued: the first issue of the *Golden Age* on 29 July 1876 not only bore the subtitle *Edwardstown and Palmer District Mining Journal* but was pulled from the press by Edwards himself. There was even a public meeting which agitated for compensation from the government for buildings removed from their former sites because of Reid's new survey.³⁰ When three competing banks arrived on the field in May 1876, the problem was highlighted. A branch of the Bank of New South Wales was at first sited at Edwardstown only to be removed closer to the government offices later that year.³¹ The Bank of New South Wales now called its branch Maytown, while the Queensland National retained the name Edwardstown. In order to resolve the issue, Henry Abbott of the third bank, the Australian Joint Stock, wrote to the Colonial Secretary complaining of the inconvenience that such inconsistency caused. The Colonial Secretary acted promptly on this occasion, and government departments were informed that the official name was indeed Maytown; Edwardstown ceased to exist in name.³³ By May 1878 even the most fervent supporters of Edwards had finally accepted Maytown as the name for the "capital" of the gold field.³⁴

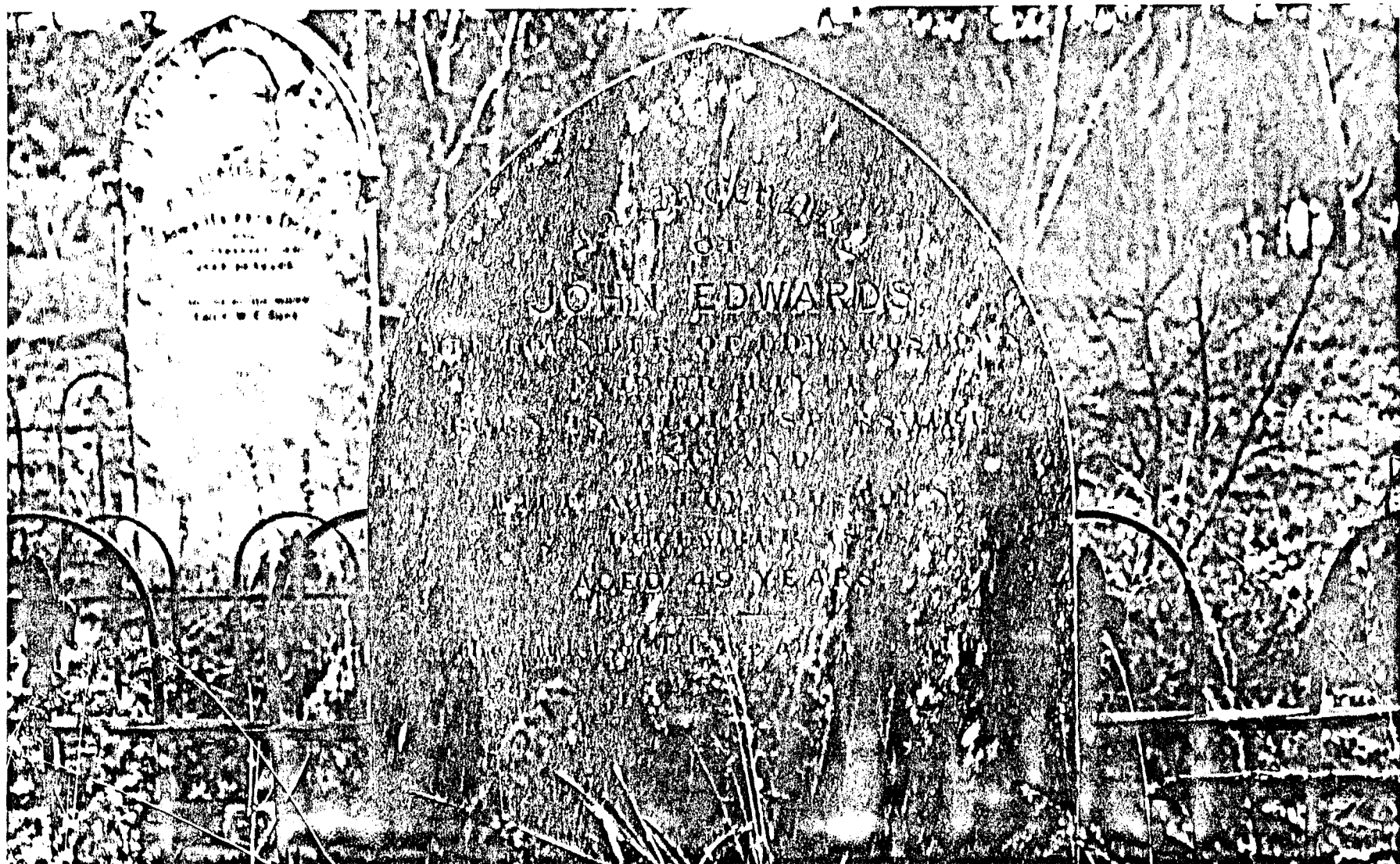
30. The resolutions of the public meeting were listed in Q 29 April 1876.

31. The branch closed 28 November 1874, & "re-opened 3 or 4 miles south" at Maytown the following day. Information supplied by the Bank of New South Wales Archivist, Patricia Quinn, 8 February 1977.

32. The QNB's first manager on the field, R. Tennent Shields, called the branch Edwardstown, but had noted that the AJS named it Maytown. He had been assured by Sellheim that the government would alter the name to Edwardstown. Tennent Shields to General Manager 17 May 1876, BR/QNB/032 22 NBA.

33. H. Abbott to Principal Under Secretary Col Sec's Office 23 May 1876, Under Sec Pub Lands Memorandum 26 November 1875, 76/4089 LAN/A51 QSA.

34. Maytown appeared as the address against most names in a petition from the Palmer in May 1878; Edwardstown did not appear. Residents of the Palmer to Min Works May 1878, 79/1106 WOR/A 164 QSA. Jack Edwards, after whom Edwardstown was named, died 2 December 1878. CC 4 December 1878; see also inscription on gravestone in photograph accompanying text.



Grave of John Edwards, Maytown Cemetery, 1979.

In 1874, Maytown was inhabited by a population of alluvial miners and a small number of entrepreneurs, the duration of whose stay appeared to be temporary:

As it now is, the digger is dependent on a few packers and shanty keepers, scarcely one of whom has the slightest knowledge of business - parasites who have made a rich harvest out [out] of the Palmer diggers on a capital of perhaps a couple of mules, or three or four broken winded horses, or a couple of gallons of Port Mackay rum. 35

However, after the Hodgkinson rush in 1876, the structure of the European population was significantly different, comprising a core of reefers and non-miners, the latter including carters, labourers, tradesmen, merchants and their families. The establishment of banks and telegraphic communications in fact buffeted Maytown against the prevailing notion of instability. In June 1876 Sellheim observed:

The population remains about the same as last, though there is a perceptible increase in Business places. Several buildings of a very substantial nature are in course of erection at Etown & the opening of the Telegraphic and Banks has had the effect already of drawing a good deal of trade from the scattered camps to this centre.36

The business and professional sector formed an inter-dependent network supplying goods, providing services and maintaining the flow of all commercial activities. There was a high degree of specialization by a number of individuals and small companies with considerable capital invested locally. Many developed a financial and personal commitment to the area, giving Maytown greater permanence than was likely in the earlier phase dominated by alluvial miners, when fewer goods and services were available. Despite its isolation, drapery and mining requisites and even crockery and sewing machines could be bought locally. The European community seemed well provided for, with several stores, three bakeries, two hairdressing salons and a lemonade manufacturer.

35. CC 3 October 1874.

36. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 10 June 1876, 76/139 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.



Maytown 1876-77. Engraving entitled *Edwardstown, Palmer River Goldfield (Town and Country Journal 2 June 1877)*.

There was even a firm of solicitors and a barrister.³⁷ The commercial infrastructure was not unreasonably large for an isolated community of 1,500 Europeans, suggesting that during the decade, the Chinese remained distinct as a commercial force. Maytown was described in flattering terms in the first issue of the *Golden Age*:

We can boast of having three banks, a lawyer, telegraph and Post-Office, a new Court-House, and Warden's and C.P.S.'s office, three medical men, two chemists, twelve hotels, eight large stores, and a number of Chinese and European small stores, three first-class bakery establishments, the largest butchering establishment in the north, one wholesale wine and spirit merchant, two first-class billiard salons, two circulating libraries, two first-class hairdressing establishments; and though last not least, our noble selves.³⁸

An impressive list for such a small European community. However the costs of isolated living were high, for rates of carriage were not significantly reduced until Robinson's track was built in 1879. Even as the field became more settled during 1874-5, basic necessities such as flour were sold at high prices, 1/3 to 2/- a pound, with "famine prices" prevailing at times, forcing the commodity up to 4/- a pound.³⁹ During 1876, prices were reduced considerably with flour as low as 7d a pound or £5/15/- to £6 a bag, which was still twice the estimated colonial average.⁴⁰ Beef on the other hand was always more reasonably priced in comparison, but also well above prices elsewhere, fluctuating between 9d and 1/- per pound, but sometimes as

37. *Pugh's Almanac* 1878 p.435, 1879 p.441, 1880 pp.465-466, 1884 p.400; *PC* 1 August 1885. M. Haynes was the name of the barrister & Street & Jacobs the firm of solicitors.

38. *GA* 29 July 1876.

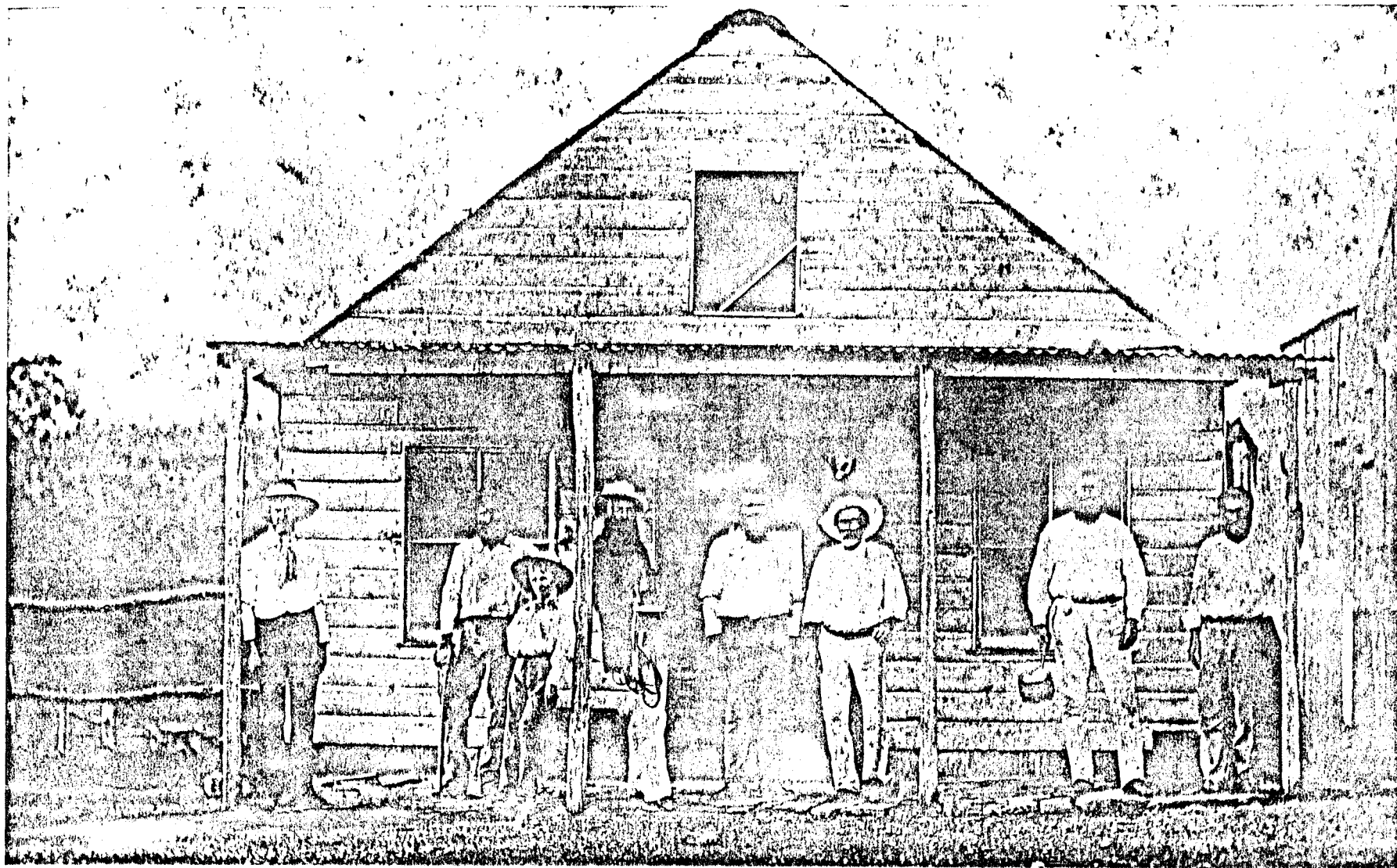
39. Flour at Upper Camp (Maytown) was 2/6 per lb in April 1874 & 2/- in May 1875. *CC* 16 May 1874, 22 May 1875. Famine prices of 3/- to 4/- per lb for flour existed in September 1874. *CC* 26 September 1874. Corfield, a carrier, claimed he sold a 200 lb bag of flour for £200 at Purdie's Camp. W.H. Corfield *Reminiscences of North Queensland, 1862-1878*, *JHSQ* 2, 2 (June 1923), p.88.

40. *CH* 8 July 1876; *GA* 29 July 1876. See also prices quoted for Queensland immigrants in *Australian Handbook and Almanac and Shippers' and Importers' Directory for 1876*, p.74.

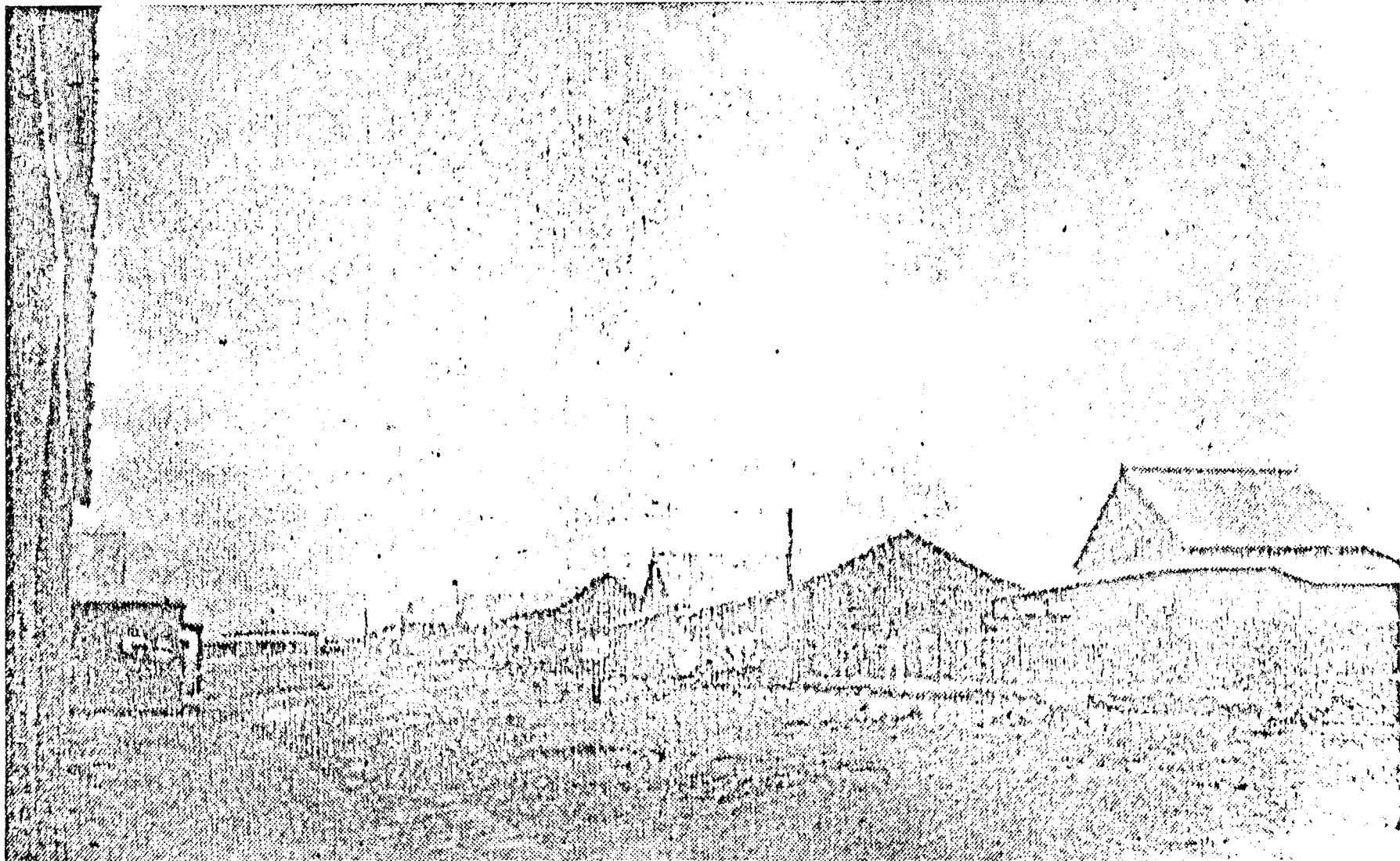
low as 4d.⁴¹ Although a reefer could earn £4-5 per week and carpenters £1 per day, high living costs, which possibly included board of £2/15/- a week, left only a small profit margin;⁴² this in turn had an effect on all aspects of life, especially the physical appearance of settlements, for even corrugated iron was a luxury at £1 per sheet, over four times its price in Brisbane.⁴³ In the eyes of one visitor, Maytown was still very much a "bush township", four years after it was established: "Maytown is not the most imposing-looking place in the world. There are the usual concomitants of a bush township - bark, galvanized iron and policemen."⁴⁴

In contrast to Georgetown, Charters Towers and Ravenswood, Maytown was never very large, its buildings lining both sides of the only major street - Leslie Street - for a distance of about 500 metres. Initially most of the buildings were constructed of canvas and locally cut bark. The first conventional buildings to appear were government offices - post office, court house, police station - which were prefabricated and of timber and iron.⁴⁵ The banks reflected the degree of sophistication in Maytown's architecture, for banking chambers have always attempted to express confidence and stability. Yet at Maytown the directors of the Queensland National Bank would not commit themselves even after two years on the field to more than a "galvanized iron building which could be removed at any-time".⁴⁶ And yet, the Queensland National's building was one of the largest and most imposing

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41. The following quote prices between 9d to 1/- a lb of beef: St George to Sec Works & Mines 15 April 1874 74/2266 WOR/A 84 QSA: CC 20 October 1875; GA 29 July 1876. During 1878-9 the price was reduced to between 4-6d a lb. CC 28 September 1878, 7 June 1879.
42. GA 29 July 1876. See also clipping from GA 9 September 1876 enclosure 76/4652 WOR/A 124 QSA.
43. P. Bell, *Houses in North Queensland Mining Towns 1864-1914*, Kennedy, *Readings* Vol 1, p.323.
44. CC 17 April 1878.
45. See entries in Works Dept Loan Expenditure Ledger 1865-1876, A/13141 QSA.
46. Board Minute Book 6 June 1878, A/QNB/301 91 NBA.



Store, Maytown c.1883 (probably T.Q. Jones' store). Senior Const. John Hamilton, John Reilly, unidentified boy, J.D. Gibson (journalist), T.Q. Jones (storekeeper), John Davis (hotelkeeper), Andrew Irvine (carpenter), N.M. Smith (hotelkeeper) (NBA)



Leslie Street, Maytown, from north-west (QGMJ March 1901)

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13
14

in the town, costing £650 to buy from the Australian Joint Stock Bank.⁴⁷ In a well established coastal town it would have been regarded as a shed. Nevertheless, the appearance of Maytown did change as bark buildings were steadily rebuilt in iron as they aged. In 1880, Warden Sellheim described the erection of two new shops in Maytown as "both being large and substantial buildings of sawn timber and iron...".⁴⁸ By the late 1880s, the buildings were predominantly iron.

Banks played an extremely important role in the commerce of the mining field both in converting gold to a circulating medium at a reliable exchange rate and in providing credit for underground mining and other business operations. Before the banks were established, most exchange was done in pure gold.⁴⁹ One reason for the prominence of Edwards and Company, was its involvement in gold buying,⁵⁰ as coin, both gold and silver, was very scarce. With few assay facilities there was an element of risk in accepting payment in gold, for which merchants compensated by paying below the standard gold price.⁵¹ However, this did not seem to curtail miners transacting gold for coin, as one visitor recorded:

Maytown is the best place that I have yet seen in the North - for the main thing: money. Everybody complains of the dull times here, but I have seen more money change hands, and more spent over the bars, at a bob a nobbler, than I have seen in any other town in the North - and I have visited them all - Island Point and the famous Hodgkinson included.

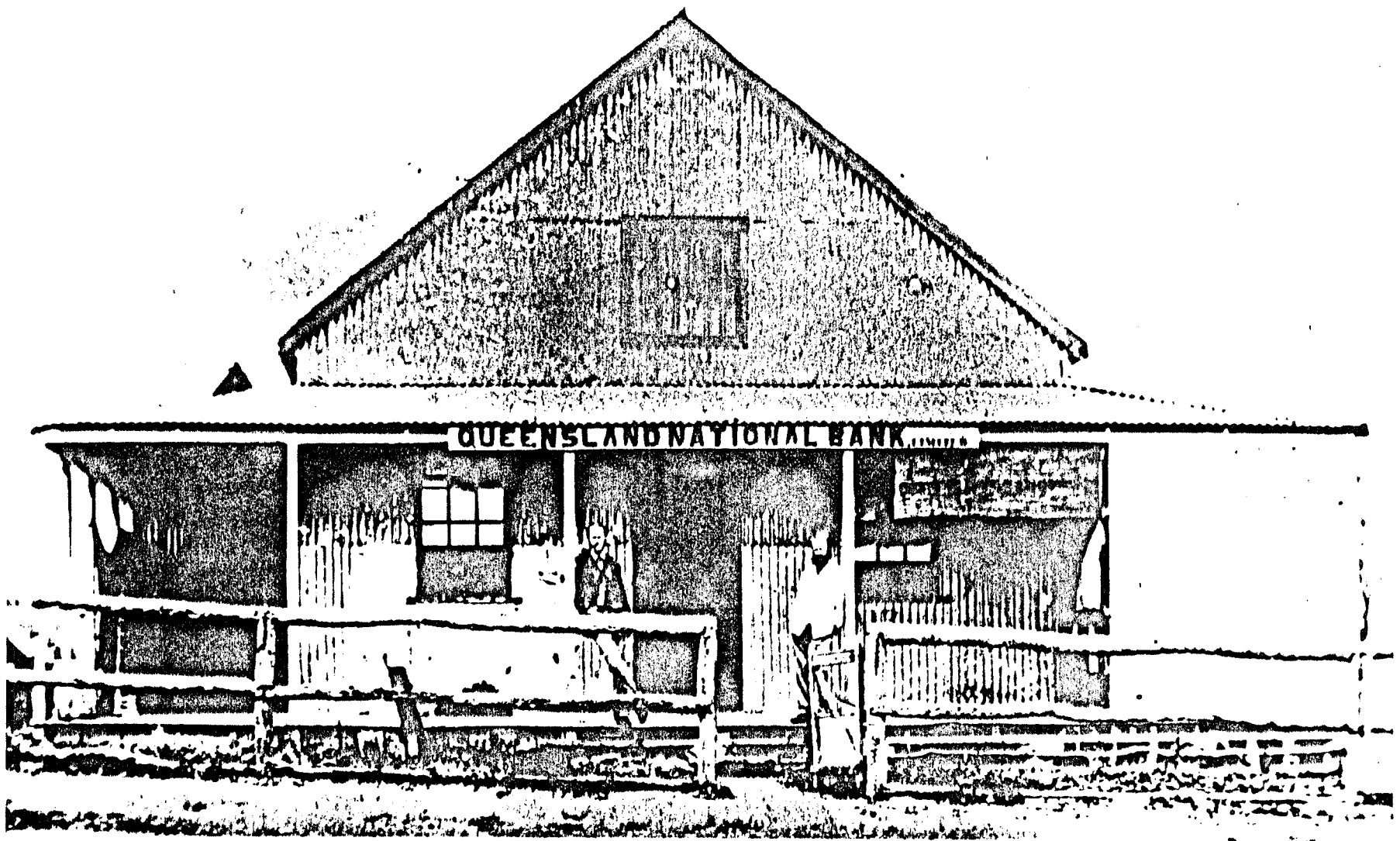
47. *Ibid* 11 July 1878.

48. *AR* 1880 p.17.

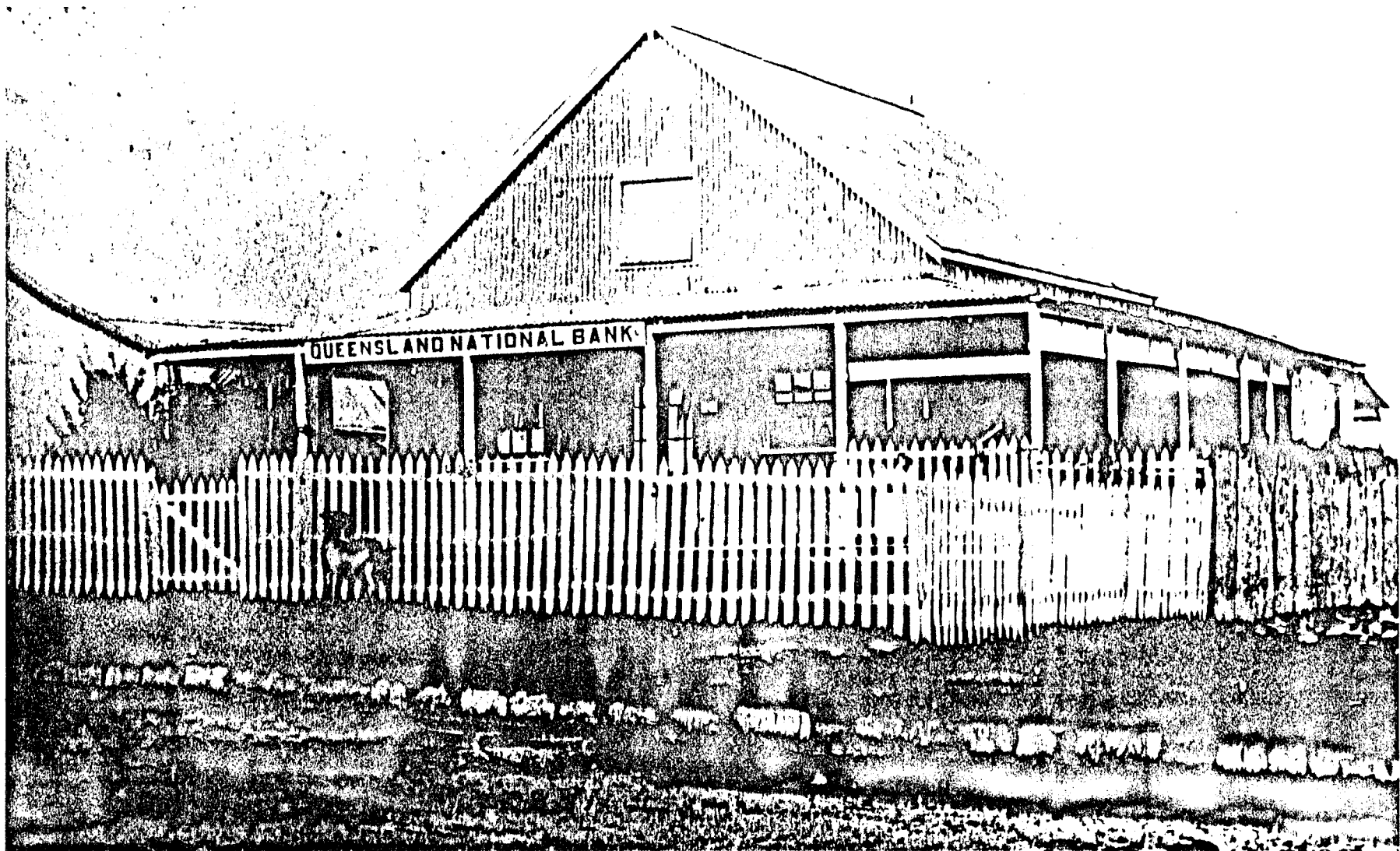
49. St George to Sec Works & Mines 16 November 1873, 74/158 WOR/A & 1 June 1874, 74/3129 WOR/A 86 QSA; *CC* 4 August 1875.

50. *CC* 4 August 1875.

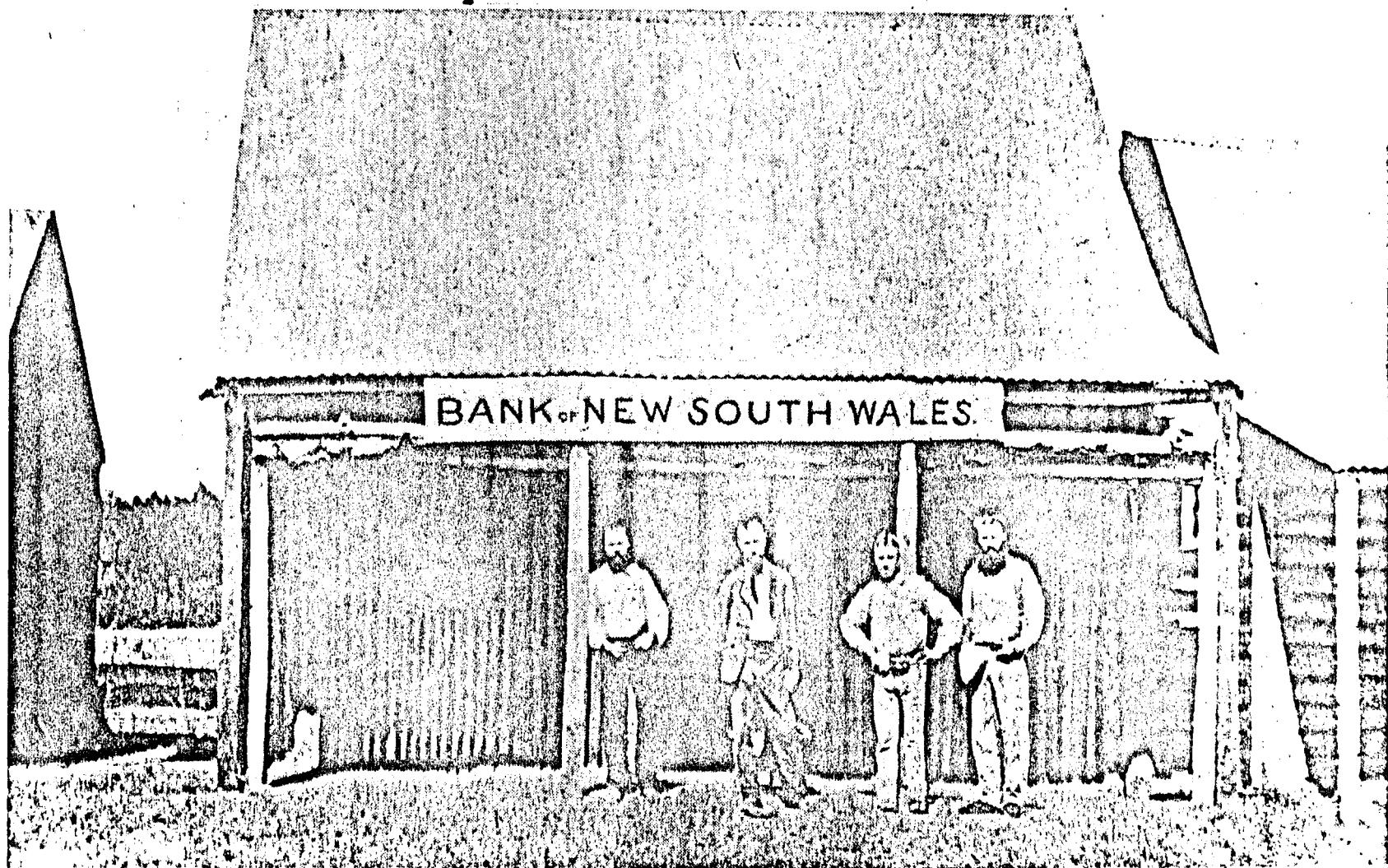
51. According to Gold Commissioner St George, storekeepers took gold in payment for goods, the rate being less than the assayed value of the gold. In one instance gold worth £3/17/- an ounce was passed over the counter for goods at the value of £3/10/-. St George to Sec Works & Mines 16 November 1873, 74/158 WOR/A 77 QSA.



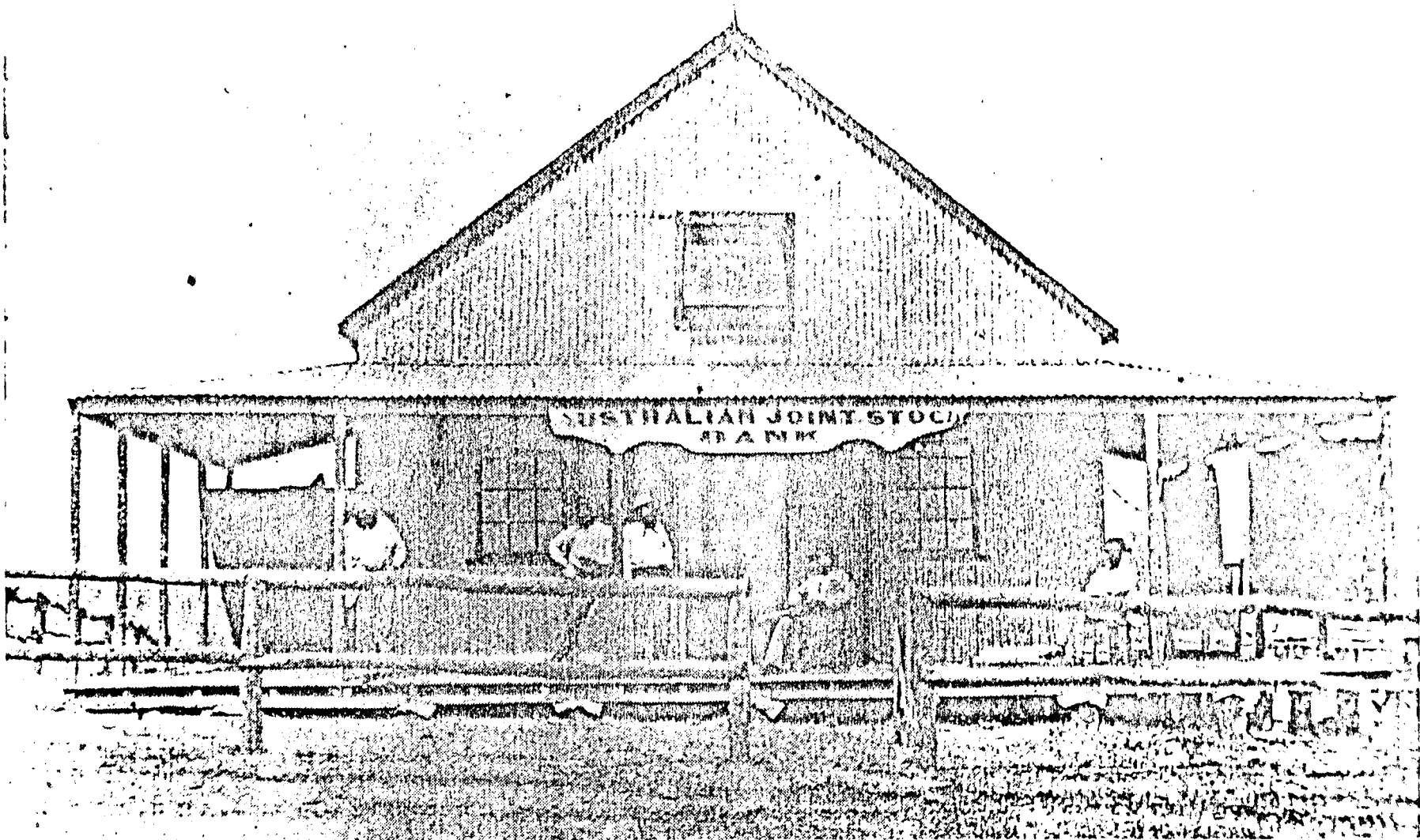
Queensland National Bank, Maytown, between 1878-1893 (NBA).



Queensland National Bank, Maytown, between 1878-1893 (NBA).



Bank of New South Wales, Maytown, between 1876-1884 (NQR 18 July 1921).



Australian Joint Stock, Maytown, between 1876-1878 (NQR 18 July 1921).

Branches of "a variety of banks and their aristocratic-looking clerks in snowy moleskins and paper collars"⁵² were eventually opened in Maytown in May 1876 almost simultaneously by the three banking firms most active in provincial Queensland: Australian Joint Stock, Queensland National, and New South Wales. The "bank rush" may have been influenced by the commencement of reef mining and crushing a few months earlier. However the banks' arrival coincided also with the exodus to the Hodgkinson, and banking in Maytown thereafter never justified the attention of three competing companies. The Australian Joint Stock closed its office in 1878 and the Wales followed in 1884, leaving the Queensland National the sole major bank on the field.⁵³ Its business principally involved granting credit in increasingly hopeless circumstances, and within a few years it had become the major owner of underground mines and commercial firms in the area, remaining viable only through the deposits of one or two successful Chinese merchants.⁵⁴ The branch closed, as did the warden's office, in 1893 when underground mining in the Maytown area had all but ceased.

A succession of newspaper proprietors were also as initially optimistic about the Palmer's future as a reefing field as the bankers. However, despite its enthusiastic launching in July 1876, Richard Morrissey's *Golden Age* folded after only fifteen months, and the *Palmer Chronicle*, which bought the *Age*'s press to print its first issue on 27 October 1877, was no more able to sustain publication than its predecessor, suspending operation after only four months.⁵⁵

52. CC 17 April 1878.

53. An agreement had been entered into by all three banks to the effect that no new branch would be opened without giving 21 days mutual notice of such intention. The QN & NSW banks opened 16 May 1876. Meeting of Directors 19 March 1874, A/QNB/301 91, Tennent Shields to Gen Mgr 17 May 1876, BR/QNB/032 22 NBA; information on NSW & AJS banks from BNSW Archives.

54. Chinese custom with the banks is described in more detail in chapter 5.

55. The plant of the *Golden Age* formerly belonged to the *Etheridge Courier*. It was sold in December 1876, but continued to print the *Age* until October 1877. The *Palmer Chronicle* which succeeded it was described as a "well written, well arranged journal" by the *Cooktown Courier* 3 November 1877. See also *GA* 29 July 1876; *CH* 16, 30 December 1876; *CC* 3 November 1877, 16 February, 6 March, 6 April 1878.

The Golden Age

Published for the Proprietor by J. H. ...

Subscription price, per annum, in advance, \$5.00.

Single Copies, 10 Cents.

Entered as Second-Class Matter, July 29, 1876.

Postoffice at ...

Acceptance for mailing at ...

Authorised by Act of Congress, ...

P. TIMONY

Editor of the Golden Age

Dear Sir,

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your issue of the 29th inst., and to thank you for the same.

Very respectfully,

D. M. JONES

Editor of the Golden Age

Dear Sir,

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your issue of the 29th inst., and to thank you for the same.

Very respectfully,

Taken up by J.D. Gibson in early 1879, it seemed that the newspaper's prospects had improved with the formation of a company later that year resurrecting a second series of the *Palmer Chronicle*.⁵⁶ But the clatter of type was still only intermittently heard in Leslie Street, for proprietors Gibson and later Francis and Frederick Hodel, easily found more attractive presses in Cooktown and Townsville.⁵⁷ While Maytown newspapers reflected a small, but committed European community providing its own justification for permanency, the inability of the proprietors to sustain publication suggest that there were difficulties. The enticing advertisements on the front page of the *Chronicle* could not hide the obvious decline in reefing, and the very serious health problems that the small community faced, to which the obituaries and wardens' reports could testify.

Although Mulligan's *Guide to the Palmer River* described the district as "healthy", he added that "there have been extremely bad cases of dysentery and fever, which in most cases have been brought on by privation or excessive indulgence".⁵⁸ Despite Mulligan's moral strictures, it was infectious disease that exacted the greatest toll on the gold field population. The descriptions used in the official local register of deaths 1873-1883,⁵⁹ do not permit the diseases to be identified accurately: those most frequently employed were: "fever" and "dysentery". "Fever" embraced a range of conditions, including malaria, known to be transmitted by insects which flourished

56. CC 6, 10 September 1879.

57. Gibson moved on to edit the *Cooktown Herald*, returning briefly to the *Palmer Chronicle*, but leaving the field in 1887 for Croydon, to publish the *Mining News*; the Hodels formerly of the *Cooktown Courier*, left for Townsville in 1882 to run the *Northern Standard*. J. Manion, *Paper Power in North Queensland. A History of Journalism in Townsville and Charters Towers* (Townsville 1982), pp.120-1, 206, 209-13.

58. Mulligan, *Guide*, p.4.

59. Register of Deaths in the District of Palmer in the Colony of Queensland, Court House Cooktown. Hereafter cited as Palmer Death Register. Information on deaths in the following paragraphs has been extracted from this register, unless otherwise stated. Causes of deaths on the field 1873-1883 have been summarized in a table at the end of chapter 6.

in poorly drained areas, with the mosquito the most common vector. "Dysentery" did not necessarily mean the disease known by that name today, but certainly implied forms of gastric infection, typhoid among others,⁶⁰ and in all probability was transmitted by faecal contamination of water supplies. Sanitary conditions in the ephemeral alluvial camps are not described in contemporary sources, but were almost certainly poor.

On a field with marked seasonal fluctuations, insect borne diseases spread rapidly during the wet when gullies were continually worked and watercourses diverted. Gastric complaints were rampant during the dry when water was scarce. Accordingly, reports of sickness were confined to particular periods of the year, as is indicated by the alarmed tone of wardens' reports referring to the coming of "the fever season".⁶¹ The concern was real. At least fifty-five Europeans died of dysentery in the first year of the Palmer rush and twenty-seven of fever. These diseases were to claim another 120 Europeans in the decade to 1883. In addition the death register reveals that a further sixteen died of diseases of the digestive system or urinary tract which probably were directly related to insanitary conditions. Some of the victims received medical attention from itinerant doctors - Gustavus Borck, H. Korteum, John Hamilton and J.S. Vining - and from pharmacists who accompanied the mining population to new rushes.⁶² The warden at times dispensed medicines

60. The deaths of at least two miners, one in 1874, the other in 1882, were specifically diagnosed as enteric and typhoid fever.
61. Sellheim reported for May 1876, as if common knowledge, that it was fever "as usual at this season". Sellheim to Sec Mines 4 June 1876, 76/133 CPS 13B/G1 QSA. Other specific references to persistent fever are listed below: St George to Sec Works & Mines 1 June 1874, 74/3129 WOR/A 86, Sellheim to Col Sec 16 April 1875, 75/130 COL/A 209, Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 14 May 1875, 75/172 CPS 13B/G1, Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 11 April 1878, 78/80 MWO 13B/G1 QSA; AR 1877 p.313, 1879 p.18, AR 1881 p.12.
62. These itinerant doctors are referred to in the following: CH 20 May 1874; St George to Sec Works & Mines 1 June 1874, 74/3129 WOR/A, Sellheim to Sec Qld Medical Board Immigration Office 16 November 1877, 77/271 MWO 13B/G1 QSA. Also their names appear periodically in the Palmer Death Register as informants.

out of relief funds.⁶³ Self administered remedies were also believed to bring relief and were popular; they ranged from a pannikin of gum leaves tea to a bottle of Hop Bitters.⁶⁴ The effectiveness of such concoctions defies speculation. It is evident, however, that many of the victims of fever and dysentery died without any medical care. Occurring sometimes in combination with fever or dysentery was death from exhaustion, prostration or debility; this accounted for a not insignificant percentage of European deaths (7.8%).

A monotonous diet of beef and damper may have contributed to the prevalence of illness. Hard up miners were often reduced to damper, tinned butter and Lee and Perrin's Worcestershire sauce.⁶⁵ Despite the range of goods offered by businesses in Maytown, essentials were scarce in outlying areas during and immediately after the wet. Fresh and tinned vegetables or fruit were always in short supply and considered luxuries. As J.H. Binnie, who lived at Echo on Revolver Point, explained: "there were no luxuries in the way of fruit and vegetables and no bread or cakes - only damper. Tinned fruit was a real luxury and seldom obtainable in any town."⁶⁶ Bread at least was available in Maytown, with its two bakeries in 1878.⁶⁷

63. St George to Col Sec 20 April 1874, 74/1030 COL/A 195, Sellheim to Col Sec 16 April 1875, 75/130 COL/A 209 QSA.

64. Hop Bitters, a compound of hops, mandrake, dandelion, malt & buchu, was advertised as a general cure. *PC* 1 August 1885. The following cures for intermittent fever and dysentery were published by E. Myers MD in *CC* 27 November 1875. "INTERMITTENT FEVER - A handful of gum leaves in a quart of water; drink a panikinfull, hot or cold, three or four times a-day. It may be sweetened with sugar, if so preferred. Is very effective, and in constant use at the fever hospital in Berlin. DYSENTERY - A moderate-size piece of the inner-bark of the gum-tree, bruised and boiled in a quart of water, adding the juice scraped off the wood from whence the bark was taken. It should be drank cold, three or four times a-day. Equally effective as last".

65. Binnie, *My Life on a Tropic Goldfield* (Melbourne c.1944), p.13.

66. *Ibid* p.12. Howard St George grew the first oranges in Cooktown in 1878, which was seen as a notable feat locally. *CC* 13 July 1878.

67. M. Hynes & F. McKee, *Pugh's Almanac* 1878, p.435.

The scattered nature of the population impeded attempts by the Palmer River Hospital Committee, under its president Warden Sellheim, to raise a subscription.⁶⁸ When a hospital was eventually built in February 1876, it catered for ten patients at the most, and was visited periodically by Joseph Picot (formerly French Imperial Army). Shapland Newell was later appointed to the permanent position of surgeon.⁶⁹ Even so, as late as 1878, Sellheim reported that there were as many cases of sickness as in 1874, although the death rate compared "favourably with most other portions of the colony."⁷⁰ It was not until 1879 that Sellheim was able to claim that there had been "no excessive amount of sickness, when compared with former seasons, and the death rate amongst the Europeans has moderated."⁷¹ Still, fifteen Europeans died that year directly from fever and dysentery. The following year, in 1880, the Hospital Committee moved to erect a more spacious building. However, as the population had declined dramatically, Warden Hodgkinson put a damper on the project, declaring that there was "no pressing necessity at all for the erection of a hospital for half a patient a week".⁷²

J.H. Binnie was rather proud of the fact that his mother had given birth to three children "in this wild bush country with the aid of a neighbour's wife".⁷³ Indeed the majority of the 108 deliveries during the decade were performed by an identifiable group of midwives,

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68. Sellheim to Col Sec 16 April 1875, 75/130 COL/A 209 QSA; for list of members see *Pugh's Almanac* 1878 p.435, 1879 pp.441-2, 1880 pp.465-6
69. Sellheim to Col Sec 20, 30 November 1875, 75/2868 COL/A 214 & 10 February 1876, 76/32 CPS 13B/G1 QSA; *CH* 10, 19 April 1876; *GA* 29 July 1876; *Pugh's Almanac* 1879 p.442, 1880 p.46.
70. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 11 April 1878, 78/80 MWO 13B/G1 QSA; *AR* 1877 p.313.
71. *AR* 1879 p.18.
72. Hodgkinson to Sec Hospital Committee 1 March 1882, MWO 13B/G2 p.107 QSA. See also T. Barclay-Miller, Sec Palmer River Hospital Committee to Col Sec 19 July 1880, 80/4184 COL/A 297 & Palmer Hospital Committee to Under Col Sec 5 October 1883, 83/5725 COL/A 372 QSA; *BC* 3 March 1883; *Q* 23, 30 August 1884.
73. Binnie, *My Life*, p.30.



Maytown (QGMJ May 1902)

mothers themselves and wives of longer term residents of the Palmer. Despite the widespread existence of infectious diseases, puerperal fever caused only one death: the woman, who resided in an outlying mining camp, had neither doctor or midwife in attendance, only her defacto husband who was likely to have come into contact with infection while mining. In the cases of eight children who died in early infancy on the field, exhaustion or convulsions were determined as the cause. Only one child, who had travelled with his parents from another North Queensland field, died of dysentery. The number of births, although not large, did increase steadily each year, with nineteen during 1883. The children, with the exception of four illegitimate births, belonged to families committed to the field for institutional or financial reasons - the fathers' occupations embracing the gold field administration, banking, quartz mining, hotel and storekeeping. These families are significant - at least twenty five families had two or more children born on the field - and, as a result, recurring attempts were made to establish educational institutions to cater for their needs.⁷⁴

Prior to 1881, children received either no or little education, or were boarded in Cooktown, a growing educational centre for far North Queensland. A provisional school was opened in February 1877, but closed in July, less than six months later, because the number of children attending declined to four.⁷⁵ However, with a significant increase in the proportion of children in the early 1880s, there were moves to re-establish the school. The warden, Hodgkinson, argued that "equity demands a liberal extension of educational privilege to the pioneers of the great industries".⁷⁶ The school at Maytown was reopened in 1882 and seemed a stabilizing influence on the small

74. Palmer Birth Register 1874-1883.

75. M.A. Simeon was the first teacher. E.C. Masters, Hon Sec Maytown School Committee to Sec Educ 24 October 1876, 76/3934 & Masters to Sec Pub Instruction 30 July 1877, 77/3478 EDU/Z 1729 QSA; see also CC 4 November 1876, 3 February 1877; CH 28 October 1876, 28 July 1877.

76. Hodgkinson to Under Sec Pub Instruction 13 May 1881, MWO 13B/G2 p.640 QSA.

European community.⁷⁷ Soon afterwards, however, it was again in difficulties: the teacher Edith Hodgkinson, daughter of the warden, resigned over her salary in June 1883. In supporting his daughter's claim, Hodgkinson explained to the Under Secretary for Education that her salary of £60 per annum would mean that "a School Teacher would have to go into debt or evade the cost of the necessaries of life".⁷⁸ The school was eventually re-opened, the new teacher John Hassell managing to claim a salary of £240 per annum by threatening to resign.⁷⁹ The vast area of the field meant that some children did not receive an education. Binnie, the son of a machine owner, reflected on his childhood at Echo:

There were no children and no school within five miles of our home; consequently we lost five and a half years of schooling. Father taught us reading, writing and arithmetic, but, being a busy man, he was unable to spare time to give us further attention.⁸⁰

There existed simultaneously a School of Arts in Maytown, a Mechanics' Institute at the Ida, and a Miners' Institute at Gregory. The precise function and scale of the latter two is not clear but all involved libraries.⁸¹ The Miners' Institute at Gregory was established in 1877 and in the estimation of the Committee: "We can fairly claim that our 'Institute' has done hitherto, and is likely to continue to do much good, we have a valuable library which is about being

77. AR 1883 p.23.

78. Hodgkinson to Under Sec Education 27 March 1882, CPS 13B/G1 pp.444-6 QSA.

79. The school was opened & closed twice in 1882. See Chas Kimble to Sec Educ 10 March 1882, 82/388, 4 October 1882, 82/4249 & 1 September 1882, 82/3727 EDU/Z 1729 QSA. The school was finally closed in 1925.

80. Binnie, *My Life*, p.38.

81. See Proposed Mining Institute (Maytown) Committee to J. Macrossan 30 May 1878, 78/2512 COL/A 261; Alex Reid, Sec School of Arts Maytown to Col Sec 15 July 1878, 78/2778 COL/A 262 & Extracts from report on public accounts Maytown c.30 October 1883, 83/5725 COL/A 372 QSA. It is interesting to note that J.W. Brooks was secretary of both institutes. PC 1 August 1885.

supplemented by a large addition from Melbourne".⁸² Money was easily collected for the construction of a School of Arts in Maytown which was completed in May 1878. By 1880 it had acquired 250 volumes.⁸³ According to one correspondent it was a "great boon to residents who see no fun in getting drunk".⁸⁴

In contrast to educational facilities, there seemed no pressing need for a church building on the Palmer. In a conscious effort to establish some religious observance, Warden Sellheim founded a Church of England Committee, and the first Anglican service was conducted in June 1876 by a visiting minister from Cooktown, who held divine service in Con's Billiard Room.⁸⁵ Yet at the end of the decade there were still neither a church building nor permanent clergy, although by then the area was also visited irregularly by a Roman Catholic priest from Herberton.⁸⁶ The miners, it seems, preferred outlets less spiritual.

After the close of the working week, Maytown became "alive with diggers", as Sunday was market day.⁸⁷ Weekend community pursuits included cricket matches, shooting and musical entertainment.⁸⁸ Three annual sporting events were maintained. These were the St Patrick's Day and Christmas sports, the latter being held during the official gold field holiday period, and the annual race meeting, the principal

82. Proposed Mining Institute (Maytown) Committee to Macrossan 30 May 1878, 78/2512 COL/A 261 QSA.

83. *Pugh's Almanac* 1879 p.441, 1880 p.465.

84. *CC* 17 April 1878.

85. Rev Mr White gave the first Anglican divine service. *CH* 3, 10 June 1876; *GA* 29 July 1876.

86. *BC* 24 May 1882.

87. *CH* 9 October 1878.

88. There were 2 cricket clubs & the Excelsior Rifle Club. *CH* 10 April 1876; *PC* 1 August 1885.

event being the Edwardstown Handicap, a two mile event.⁸⁹ Complementing the race meeting was non-competitive horse-riding: "Sunday riding [is] all the rage".⁹⁰ There was evening entertainment at billiard rooms and hotels, which varied in refinement. While "the best brands of wines" and a "First Class Table" were available at more respectable hotels such as Maria Seibel's *North Star*, the *Carrier's Arms* promised "the best glass of Grog in Edwardstown."⁹¹

Back in 1874 Howard St George had viewed alcohol as a serious problem, attributing most deaths to "having been the result of drink",⁹² thus suggesting a high consumption of alcohol. Indeed, publicans were quick to join the rush, with forty-one retail spirit dealer's licences issued at Palmerville during the first eighteen months, along with unknown transactions in the sly-liquor trade.⁹³ However, as the population of the first settlement on the field dwindled, so did the number of hotels: publicans transferred their trade to Maytown. There, business flourished, as Bowly's impression of Maytown in 1876 indicates:

Edwardstown is very prosperous....I should think about 30 public houses and of course an awful amount of drinking, etc. I meet with some rough characters in places but all seem kindly disposed and afford the best hospitality they can.⁹⁴

Bowly's estimation was fairly accurate for there were at least eighty hotels operating under retail licences during the 1876-7 licensing year, most issued at Maytown: a ratio of sixteen European males to

89. *CC* 6 January, 17 March 1877; *PC* 24 March 1883. To conclude St Patrick's Day, there was a ball at night.

90. *CH* 12 August 1876.

91. *GA* 29 July 1876.

92. St George to Sec Works & Mines 3 January 1874, 74/495 WOR/A 78 QSA.

93. *QGG* XV, 53 (9 May 1874), p.919, 140 (7 November 1874) p.263; *QGG* XVI, 39 (10 April 1875), p.747.

94. Bowly Letters 1 December 1876.

each hotel.⁹⁵ Even at the conclusion of the decade under study there were still fifteen hotels on the field, which Warden Hodgkinson calculated as being "1 licensed house to every 14 and a fraction of European males."⁹⁶ While the consumption of alcohol is difficult to quantify, its cost was frequently described as exorbitant, most likely to compensate for high rates of carriage and a small European drinking population, with beer 6/- a bottle,⁹⁷ and spirits much dearer still, as one not-so-coherent miner discovered while waiting for a companion at Byerstown:

There are six or seven hotels...but I find nobblers are one bob here, and I can't afford to pay twelve bob (of course I shout for the landlord) to ask them kindly for their respective names, baby's names, &c., and in one of them I spy a very good-looking barmaid in blue, and that place would be three lovely bobs....[Burr's Hotel] seems to be the leading one of the town, all the swells go there and they say he keeps rattling fine tack too. It is nearly all three star is drank there....11p.m. - I have just taken a nip of three-star, with an old friend, and by jove t'was the most sensible four bob he ever spent, and I'd strongly recommend every digger, packer, or loafer to go to Bird and Hervey for the real ding-dong....⁹⁸

Undoubtedly some miners recklessly squandered hard won gold during drinking sprees, prolonging their stay on the field: one miner lamented having to raise "a few Yellow Boys to square his grog score."⁹⁹ Indeed Warden Hodgkinson identified alcohol as even economically detrimental to reefing, alleging that capital for mining investment was "frittered away in deleterious liquor."¹⁰⁰ There were also serious

95. Liquor retail licences listed in *QGG* XIX, 13 (29 July 1876) p.196, 23 (2 September 1876) p.406, 30 (30 September 1876) p.601, 50 (4 November 1876) p.929, 68 (6 December 1876) p.1204. The population of European males at the close of 1876 was 1,300.

96. *AR* 1883 p.23.

97. *CH* 14 June 1876.

98. *CH* 17 June 1876. A nobbler is a small glass of spirits.

99. Johnny Smoker to editor *CC* 10 October 1877.

100. Hodgkinson to Under Sec Mines 2 June 1881, MWO 13B/G2 p.648 QSA.

social ramifications, as alcohol related crimes were conspicuous in the small European community.

Over a hundred drunkenness related charges were brought to court in Maytown during the decade, very few of which were dismissed. These charges made up over a third of all European cases for the period: most were associated with obscene language, exposure of person or general disorderliness.¹⁰¹ The offences, however, were spread evenly over the decade, evidently unrelated to fluctuations in population numbers and revealing a small group of habitual drunkards. Prohibition orders were taken out against some to prevent publicans and others from supplying them with alcohol. As one wife pleaded: "I pray for a prohibition preventing all licensed publicans Spirit dealers and others from supplying any Spirituous liquor to my husband who is injuring his health wasting his estate and neglecting his family by excessive indulgence in drink".¹⁰² Contributing to the high consumption of alcohol was the illegal but "often shamless [sic]" sly grog selling carried on in outlying areas.¹⁰³ Little is known of this practice although the illicit forms of the trade varied from kegs swung from saddles on packhorses to established shanties, some in major settlements. From her Palmer Street house in Palmerville, Jane Mahoney sold gin in lemonade bottles, and as one miner remarked after her second conviction for sly grogging: "Anyone is always sure of a nobbler at Jane Mahoney's house when the Public houses are shut up."¹⁰⁴ Sly grogging generally was difficult to detect, with rough bough shelters being hastily thrown together on routes to new rushes, easily abandoned when a new area was favoured.

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- 101 Survey of cases recorded in Minutes of Proceedings in the Police Court and other local courts, including Licensing Courts 1874-1883, CPS 13B/P3, CPS 13B/P4, CPS 13B/P5 QSA.
102. Bodella Graham 18 April 1882, CPS 13B/P5 p.129 QSA.
103. Sellheim to Sec Mines 4 November 1876, 76/241 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.
104. Case of Jane Mahoney 26 January 1875, CPS 13B/P3 pp.76-9 QSA.

A miner travelling to the Hodgkinson rush in May 1876 described one such shanty south of Byerstown:

...there is four forks sunk in the ground and two poles put from fork to fork and then cross pieces and then it is covered all over with bushes and sides also there is a counter made of long-poles and there is a little tent under this for the owner to sleep in there.¹⁰⁵

Only fifteen charges of sly grog selling were brought to court during the decade; of these four were withdrawn.¹⁰⁶ This perturbed Sellheim who claimed that both the police and gold field administration had insufficient numbers to end the traffic; he suggested that plain clothes detectives should be employed.¹⁰⁷ It was also alleged that some outlets were run by "women of worst character."¹⁰⁸ Yet, only four charges of sly grogging involved women: one was dismissed, while another was charged twice for the same offence. There was no suggestion in the evidence that these women were prostitutes.¹⁰⁹

Despite the modern popular belief that the mining community was characterized by lawless and violent behaviour, the reports of the wardens of the Palmer Gold Field provide grounds for quite a different

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105. Peter (surname unknown), Diary 1876-7, unprocessed manuscript JOL.
106. CPS 13B/P3 QSA. Note, no use of sly grog selling appeared in police court minutes January 1877-December 1883.
107. Sellheim to Col Treas 4 September 1876, 76/194 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.
108. Q 7 August 1875.
109. This is hardly surprising for prostitution, in particular, would have been extremely difficult to prove especially if an income was derived from another source e.g. the sale of alcohol. There was, however, one case that was conspicuous. Not charged with sly grog selling although this was brought up in the evidence by the police, one woman did receive a rather harsh six months sentence for being an "Idle and disorderly person", presumably a euphemism for prostitution, for it was alleged by one of several male witnesses that "She drinks heavily. I see frequently men going into her place. I don't know how she lives." Case of Rosanna McGuire alias Mathews, CPS 13B/P4 pp.178-180 QSA.

impression. Uniformly, they described the population as "perfectly orderly" in 1874, "very orderly" in 1878 and "remarkably good" in 1884.¹¹⁰ The Minutes of Proceedings in the Police Courts for Maytown and Byerstown also suggest that serious crime of any kind was not common on the Palmer, that violent crime was very rare. Indeed, the majority of offences for which Europeans appeared before the Maytown court were trivial breaches of the peace: drunkenness, disorderly conduct and petty theft. In the entire decade, only twenty-seven charges resulted in Europeans being convicted or remanded for more serious offences at Maytown. These were twenty-four for assault, one for arson, and two for grievous bodily harm.¹¹¹ Two charges of highway robbery led to no conviction; no European was charged with murder.

However, the nature of the available evidence and its limitations must be considered. While the police court proceedings provide the most complete record of unlawful activity, these obviously were confined to cases where a prosecution was initiated. The statements in wardens' reports, which tended to emphasize the orderly progress of the field, often were contradicted by recurring demands for more frequent and thorough police patrols to facilitate detection of crime, implying that the wardens were aware of activities which were never the subject of prosecution and not represented in court records. Sellheim wrote in 1877, when the population was at its peak:

The population has been always thoroughly orderly, and, when taking into consideration the scattered state of the population, smallness of the police force, and facilities that naturally exist to make a detection impossible, the amount of crime committed here has been wonderfully small.

Yet he went on to reveal:

I regret, however, to report that three atrocious murders have been perpetrated during the year, and in each case for the sake of plunder.¹¹²

110. St George to Sec Works & Mines 1 June 1874, 74/3129 WOR/A 86 QSA; AR 1878 p.22, 1884 p.21.

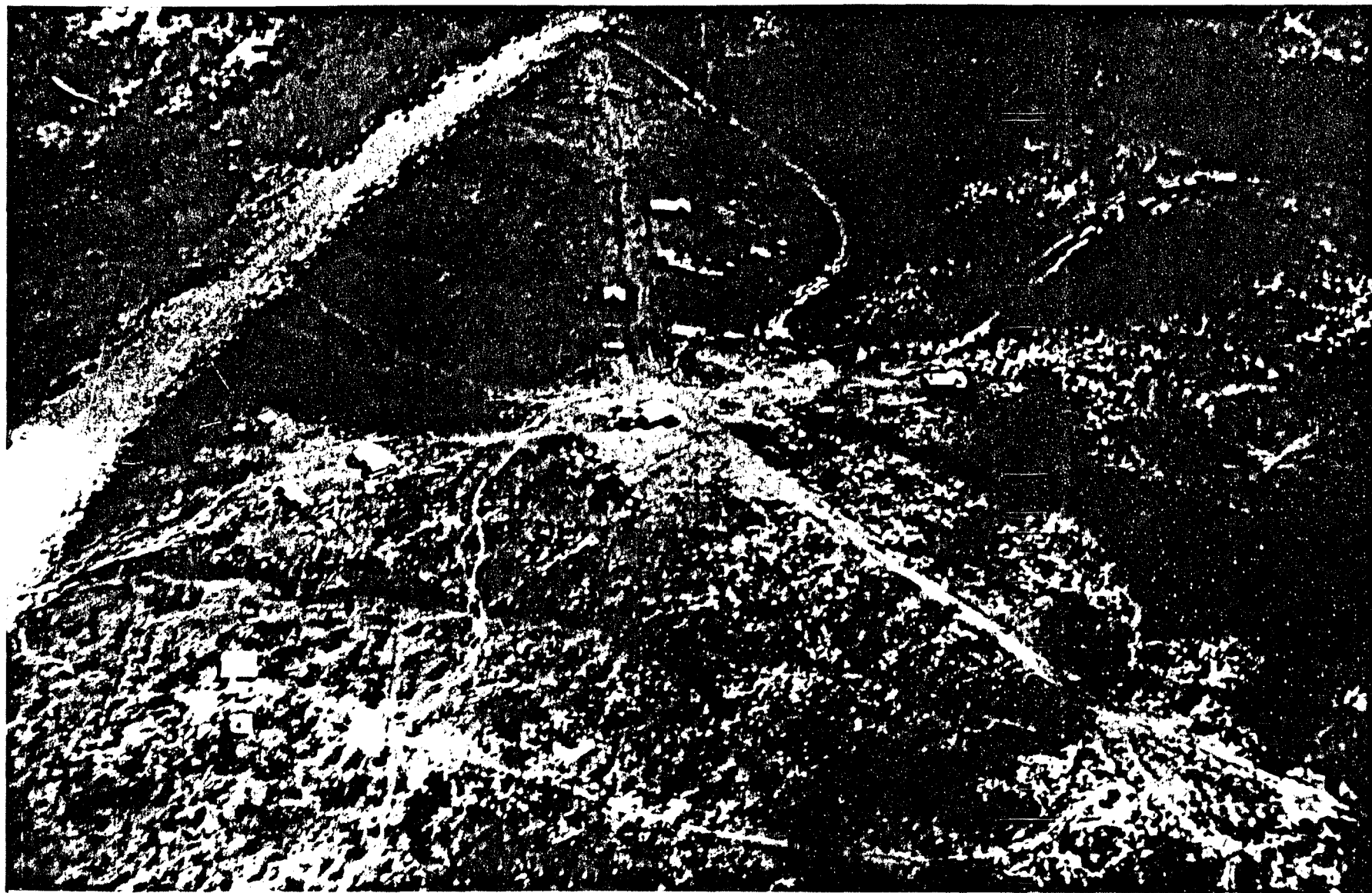
111. Figures extracted from CPS 13B/P3, CPS 13B/P4, CPS 13B/P5 QSA. Prosecutions against Chinese dealt with in next chapter.

112. AR 1877 p.11.

Thus three different sources give varying accounts of the level of violent crime on the field: the court proceedings imply there was very little, the warden admits that other serious crimes occurred without resulting in prosecutions, and the register of deaths gives "murder" as the cause of death in instances not mentioned in the other records. The death register, which suggests more violent deaths, lists only thirteen homicides, including five Europeans, in the decade. Two of these appear in the court proceedings, resulting in the conviction of a Chinese; the other eleven apparently went unsolved.¹¹³ But even this highest count of murder within the mining community suggests an average rate of only slightly more than one per year, in a population which fluctuated between one and nineteen thousand.

In retrospect, the European community was not characterized by any extraordinary degree of violence. True, there was a high consumption of alcohol, particularly in the first years of the rush, which did lead to anti-social behaviour of a kind where charges were laid for minor breaches of the peace. However, that the field's inhabitants were mostly orderly was the conclusion of official reports. After 1876 the population stabilized. With the erection of three banks, telegraphic communication and the first crushing machinery, small businesses in Maytown flourished; there was optimism over the Palmer's future as a reefing field. By then, the European community was made up of reefers and non-miners, with very few alluvial miners. But the reefs proved to be disappointing and the steadily diminishing European population remained isolated, not only because of poor roads and high costs, but also because it was surrounded by a large Chinese population, which at one time was eighteen times that of the European minority.

113. Palmer Death Register 1873-1883.



Aerial view of Mavtown from south-east, 1934 (J. C. Ball collection, 101)

CHAPTER 5
THE CHINESE

"There would never have been a Chinese question in Queensland had it not been for the discovery of the Palmer River Goldfield."

J.M. Macrossan 1883

The Chinese influx to the Palmer occurred in two phases. Early in the rush, there was a steady arrival of Chinese from other parts of Australia, many of them old hands from southern gold fields. Suddenly in 1875 a damburst of immigrants direct from China occurred, utterly overwhelming the European miners and the gold field administration. While the Chinese were familiar and contentious figures on many Australian mining fields, never before had they achieved such complete or sudden dominance, and their presence not only impinged on the conduct of affairs on the Palmer, but also on colonial policy-making in both Brisbane and London. Their influx was one of the most dramatic episodes in the history of immigration on the Australian continent, although the evidence stemming from it is slight, comprising only two first-hand accounts by participants, and a farrago of unsympathetic and condemnatory statements by Europeans. Even at the time, their impact on both Queensland legislation and folklore was recognized. As J.M. Macrossan told the Legislative Assembly: "There would never have been a Chinese question in Queensland had it not been for the discovery of the Palmer River Goldfield."¹

When news of the Palmer rush broke late in 1873, a correspondent to the *Queenslander* confidently forecast that it would be the "best Field ever opened in Queensland for Chinese."² His comments implied that the patchy but extensive alluvial find would suit the careful methods of the Chinese; it was also widely rumoured, however, that violence would erupt if they came. The mood of the European miners concerned Howard St George: "I have heard that some Chinese are on their way here and I fear if they intend to dig that there will be a disturbance between them and the European miners."³ The Chinese came, but the anticipated violence did not. At first their numbers were few, mostly gardeners.⁴ But as the Europeans moved to a new ground on Sandy Creek and the Mitchell Fall in June 1874, a Chinese rush

1. QPD XLI (13 February 1884), p.357.

2. Q 13 December 1873.

3. St George to Sec Works & Mines 19 December 1873, 74/122 WOR/A 77 QSA.

4. A Chinese gardener had already planted vegetables on the banks of the river by November 1873. Palmer correspondent 2 November 1873, Q 13 December 1873.

began in earnest to those places where gold was first discovered: the main riverbed east from Palmerville, and up the Left Hand Branch to German Bar.⁵ Chinese tin-miners from Stanthorpe clambered on trains for Brisbane to join a north-bound steamer,⁶ and Wing On and Company of Townsville and the Etheridge extended their trading services to the Palmer.⁷ Cooktown, in particular, felt the effects of the incoming Chinese rush with the arrival of Chinese doctors, hoteliers, store keepers and merchants.⁸ Chinese business prospered in the major settlements on the Palmer and by October 1874 there was even a Chinese temple presided over by Dr. King Chong.⁹ Another exodus by Europeans to the Normanby River late in 1874 had opened up other areas to the Chinese, at Stony, Fine Gold and Sandy Creeks. By the end of the year there were 1,500 Chinese on the Palmer, almost 40 per cent of the field population.¹⁰

A new phase in the Chinese rush came with the arrival in Cooktown of steamers from overseas ports. The Queensland government had entered into a contract establishing a regular steamship service from Singapore, to be run by the Eastern and Australian Mail Service Steamship Company (E & A Line). Its first scheduled service coincided with the initial rush to the Palmer. E & A then extended the north-bound route through Cooktown and to Hong Kong.¹¹ However before the

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5. St George to Min Works & Mines 6 July 1874, 74/3803 WOR/A 88 QSA.
 6. Q 8 August 1874.
 7. CH 8 July, 5 August 1874.
 8. Chinese advertisements in the Cooktown newspapers from May to August 1874 indicate the momentum of the rush.
 9. Q 3 October 1874.
 10. QV&P 1876, 2, p.338; CC 21 December 1874.
 11. In April 1873 a contract for a steamship service to operate from Brisbane was signed by the government and the following signatories: James Henderson of Bright Brothers and Company of Brisbane and Melbourne; James Guthrie of a Singapore merchant house; William McTaggart and P.F. Tidman of McTaggart, Tidman & Company. ASR 2, 3 (1971) pp.71-2. For correspondence on the establishment of the Torres Strait Mail Service see: 74/516 & 74/612 COL/A 193 QSA.

first E & A steamer berthed in Cooktown, the ASN *Victoria* arrived from Hong Kong under charter on 30 January 1875 with two hundred Chinese passengers. The *Victoria* was closely followed by the E & A *Singapore* and the P & O *Adria* in March, bringing Chinese numbers from overseas ports to almost two thousand within two months.¹² The Chinese population on the Palmer swelled to over 9,000 in July 1875, dropping to approximately 6,000 just prior to the wet season.¹³ Early the following year Sellheim was advised that "6 large steamers"¹⁴ had taken on passengers from Hong Kong, including one steamer belonging to the Hopkee (Coalition) Company which was planning to run a monthly service between Cooktown and Hong Kong. The first Hopkee vessel steamed into Cooktown on 14 March,¹⁵ just as news of the discovery of payable gold on the Hodgkinson was filtering through. As the Hodgkinson rush caused the Palmer to be largely abandoned by Europeans, one writer recommended facetiously that the latter field should be

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12. On 20 March *Singapore* and *Adria* berthed simultaneously bringing another 800 Chinese. The *Namoi* and *Egeria* arrived in early April, with a total of 1,272, followed by the *Japan* and *Scotland* in early April, with another 2,190 Chinese. Q 20 February, 27 March, 2 & 17 April, 8 May, 17 July 1875; see also CC 27 March 1875 & CH 10 April 1875. All steamers, except the *Singapore*, were under charter. The Hong Kong firm, G.R. Stevens and Co., had chartered the P & O *Adria* and possibly the *Victoria*. The principal charterers were to the account of Chinese merchants in Hong Kong and Canton, but were arranged through British merchant houses in the Far East. The *Egeria* was German owned. ASR 2, 4 (1971) pp.112-3. However Sing-Wu Wang has claimed that no Australian or European capitalist was connected with Chinese emigration. See Sing-Wu Wang, *The Organization of Chinese Emigration, 1848-1888*, with special reference to Chinese emigration to Australia (MA thesis, Australian National University 1969), p.113.
 13. Sellheim estimated that the maximum total population during June-July 1875 was "probably not less than 12000". Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 12 January 1876, 76/12 CPS 13B/G1 QSA. See also CH 18 August 1875 & Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 1 November 1875, 75/339 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.
 14. Sellheim to Sec Mines 12 March 1876, 76/59 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.
 15. Q 8 January, 18 March 1876; CH 8 January, 8 March 1876. The firm Hopkee (Coalition) was largely dependent on the support of Chinese businessmen in Australia. Sing-Wu Wang, *Organization of Chinese Emigration*, p.102; K. Cronin, *The Chinese in Queensland in the Nineteenth Century - A Study of Racial Interaction* (BA Hons thesis University of Queensland 1970), p.137.

renamed "New Canton" or "New Hong Kong".¹⁶ Chinese immigration gained momentum from this chain of events, and steamers now began to arrive weekly: the E & A line put into service a new and powerful steamer, the *Queensland*.¹⁷ A little over a year later there were approximately 18,000 Chinese on the Palmer.¹⁸

The majority of Chinese were from different districts in south Kwangtung province, speaking either Sze-Yap or Sam-Yap dialects.¹⁹ Most were from agricultural communities: farmers, gardeners, labourers, butchers, and a few scholars.²⁰ The rural provinces of southern China were not traditionally outward-looking, but over several decades had come to accept a social pattern of short-term emigration cut across older practices of kinship obligation. Historians have identified political unrest and natural disasters as the stimuli behind the diaspora of Cantonese to the mineral fields of Malaya, North America, and Australasia in the second half of the nineteenth century. For alluvial mining was an ideal industry, offering lucrative returns for labour-intensive production methods, and requiring little initial capital. However, participation in overseas mining was not intended to lead to permanent population movement; it was tolerated in Kwangtung within the tenets of family responsibility which demanded

16. CH 26 April 1876.

17. Q 8 April 1876.

18. AR 1877 p.9.

19. C.R. May, *The Chinese in Cairns and District 1876-1920* (PhD thesis, James Cook University of North Queensland 1977), p.17; C.A. Price, *The Great White Walls are Built* (Canberra 1974), pp.219-221; C.Y. Choi, *Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia* (Sydney, 1975), pp.78-80 and A. Huck, *The Chinese Settlement in Australia* (Croydon, 1968), pp.5-24. Taam Sze Pui and his family came from Ny Chuen in Namhoi, a Sam Yap district. Taam Sze Pui, *My Life and Work* (Innisfail 1925), p.44; Chinese with names such as Wong, Ching, Chong, and Liu, would have been associated with Sze Yap immigrants. Choi, *Chinese Migration*, pp.78-80.

20. James McHenley, who went to school in Honan, met a Chinese miner who had been a classmate of his, and another, by the name of Wong, who had received a Master of Arts degree from the University of Canton, and was an expert on comparative government systems. CH 21 June, 5 July 1876.

K W A N T U N G

Kao-yao ●
 Kao-ming ●
 Hoiping ●
 Yanping ●
 Toishan ●
 Sunwei ●
 Namhoi ●
 CANTON ■
 Punyui ●
 Shuntak ●
 Tungkuan ●
 Chungshan ●
 Macao ●
 HONGKONG

C a n t o n e s e
d i a l e c t s

Southern Kwantung Province,
showing boundaries of:

Sze Yap (Four districts) - - - -
 Sam Yap (Three districts) ······

(Price, C.A., *The Great White Walls are Built* (Canberra, 1974), endpapers.)

that the miner return with his earnings to support his relatives.²¹ Impoverished farmers, such as Taam Sze Pui, were easily tempted by emigration agents who described the Palmer as a place where gold was "inexhaustible and free to all."²² Queensland after 1873 offered an added incentive insofar that there was no longer an export duty on gold.²³ The Chinese came mostly in kinship groups; only a few came individually, or as contract labourers. It has been frequently claimed that the Chinese were subject to coercive indentureships, but James McHenley, an Anglo-Chinese linguist at Cooktown and the Palmer in 1875-6, rejected any suggestion that they were not free agents:

...the great majority of Chinese are not peons or tributers, but working for themselves. There are a number who have been brought here by their friends under agreement to work for a certain time to pay the expenses incurred.²⁴

They were, however, bound by social obligations centred on family loyalty and ancestral worship, and were expected to send profits home, then ultimately to return themselves.

Newcomers were both excited and bewildered on their arrival: "A hundred voices began to ask many questions about the 'gold hills' which is the name they give to the Palmer gold-fields viz. Kim San."²⁵ Away from their families, Chinese immigrants relied on members of kinship and district groups for mutual aid.²⁶ J. Dundas Crawford, a visitor to

21. Taam Sze Pui described the devastation brought about by floods in Kwangtung province: Taam Sze Pui, *My Life*, p.2; James McHenley claimed that sheer hunger had led others to emigrate: *Q* 22 May 1875. For further discussion of the background to Chinese migration see Cronin, *Chinese Question*, p.15 and May, *Chinese in Cairns*, pp.96-99.
22. Taam Sze Pui, *My Life*, p.9.
23. See Schedules of Taxes, Duties, Fees, Rents, Assessments and all other Sources of Revenue, tabulated in *QV&P* 1874, 2, p.11. The Colonial Treasurer was reluctant to reintroduce this duty, as it was opposed by miners, who saw it as a discriminatory "class" tax. Col Treasurer *QPD* XX (9 August 1876), p.466.
24. *CH* 19 May 1875.
25. *CH* 18 June 1876.
26. May, *Chinese in Cairns*, p.111.

Cooktown in September in 1877, noted the existence of "mining captains" who supervised the purchase of equipment, and "guides" who directed new arrivals to accommodation-houses run by different organizations, including the Sheathed Sword Society, or to a camp outside of town known as "Chinatown".²⁷ At a more formal level mutual aid took the form of either social guilds or voluntary groups which extracted a levy for benevolent purposes. The objectives of one guild operating in Cooktown in 1875, passed on from previous experience in Australia and California, were as follows:

1. To secure passages to and from the gold fields of Australia and California.
2. To build club-houses at the seaports and inland, where required.
3. To pay the passages of members to China, when unable to work through sickness or accident.
4. To bury the dead who die without the means to defray the expenses of burial.
5. To purchase mining property.
6. To pay the expenses of lawsuits where the interests or honor of the guild is concerned.
7. To pay for repair of club-houses.
8. To pay incidental expenses.²⁸

The most conspicuous building in Cooktown's Chinese quarter in 1877 was the "Garden of Gold Valleys" hall, which, according to Dundas Crawford was "kept by Nampan citizens". It not only provided lodgings but also entertainment: "From 10 to 12 at night its doors are thronged with orderly silent crowds. Five to six zittars and drums give theatrical music gratis."²⁹ But there were few regulars in the listening crowds, for most arrivals left as soon as they could for the diggings.

In groups and generally in single file, the new-chum Chinese miners made the journey to the Palmer on foot, their equipment and provisions strung on poles or shovels across their shoulders:

Starting from Cooktown for the Palmer, some hundred of the new arrivals were travelling thither, each

27. J. Dundas-Crawford, Notes on Chinese Immigration in the Australian Colonies, part 2, pp.27-28, enclosure FO 17/891 PRO.

28. Listed by James McHenley, Q 22 May 1875.

29. Dundas-Crawford, Notes, p.29, FO 17/891 PRO.

marching in succession one after the other, in like manner to China, where the roads are narrow, and not used by wheeled vehicles. Notwithstanding the breadth of the dray road, one seldom sees them marching abreast. The bamboo-carrying-poles are in most places discarded, and their places supplied with long-handled shovels; some are carrying loads of provisions, some carrying tools, some carrying fowls, while four of the crowd were carrying in baskets a number of little pigs, who were asking if they were to be kept any longer than a "week" in their cages. 160 pounds weight was the average load, carried by each individual, though some had more, one of which I weighed at Mr Christesen's store, at the Four-mile Camp, and found it 255 pounds. What loads for single individuals, to carry such long distances, and over such rough roads? And yet they managed at times to travel upwards of thirty miles in a day and to beat our pack horses.³⁰

Taam Sze Pui's first trip to the Palmer was very long and harrowing indeed, and it seems probable that his group became lost, for it took them a month to go 83 kilometres. The party was in constant fear of an attack by cannibalistic Aborigines: "The fear of such a fate kept one and all together and no one dare tarry behind to rest or to regain his breath." Experiencing almost unbearable heat, they eventually arrived on the field exhausted and completely out of provisions. Lacking also the necessary knowledge to carry out mining, Taam Sze Pui's party had to turn to a more experienced compatriot, Kwok Lung, who instructed them how to make a living. Indeed, Taam gave several instances where kinship support was forthcoming. When illness beset the party, one Chan Poon came to their aid. Then when the cost of treating Taam's father exceeded their savings, a relative mortgaged the family house and remitted the amount (£32) through Man Chuen's pearl shop in Canton, which was passed on to Man Chuen On in Cooktown to be collected.³¹

30. CH 21 June 1876.

31. Taam Sze Pui, *My Life*, pp.12, 14, 16-21.

仕沛仁兄先生真贊

卓哉此翁藹然有容其志則壯其氣則雄操猗頡之琳乘

宗懋之風周歷

海國攻寶林金

穴而克奏其

功頁益勞而

心益泰業日

盛而德日崇

資富能訓立夏

規懿則傳之無

窮瞻雍雍之辭色識落落之淵衷高山仰止景行行止咸

知所宗



增城賴際熙題撰

The Chinese miners worked with determination and intelligence. Because systematic working of large areas, and communal pooling of earnings, served to insulate the Chinese from the notoriously irregular returns, which made alluvial mining so unpredictable a livelihood for individual European miners, a large group of Chinese diggers working cooperatively and living frugally could be assured of a long period of production in almost any part of the Palmer. It also afforded them the luxury of more leisurely prospecting, which in turn often led to rewarding finds. Their methods, described as the "safest and surest",³² were characterized by co-operation, thoroughness and physical mobility. Individual Chinese could work towards securing "a fair share", permitting them "to resist more strongly a run of ill-luck than the Europeans."³³ When beset by a bad return, the poorer miners would then rely on "the most fortunate of their countrymen for support",³⁴ with subscriptions sometimes being collected and relief kitchens being set up.³⁵ Of mining methods, co-operative cradling was preferred, with two digging, two carrying washdirt, two cradling and the remainder bagging gold. At night, blowing and weighing would conclude the daily routine.³⁶ The whole area of the claim was scoured, and re-worked three to four times,³⁷ unless a more profitable find was located. European observers dismissed the success of this patient and logical approach as "luck". One newspaper correspondent noted:

The Chinese are everywhere...and as by their system of work, they take everything "on the face", instead of only working the most likely spots, as is the case of Europeans, their

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32. Q 29 March 1879.
33. Q 9 October 1875.
34. Farrelly to Under Sec Mines 7 January 1879, 79/5 MWO 13A/G1 QSA.
35. CH 31 June 1876; Q 11 September 1875.
36. Q 29 March 1879.
37. Continual references were made to re-working. See AR 1877 p.1; Sellheim to Sec Mines 10 February & 1 March 1877, 77/37 & 77/46 MWO 13B/G1 QSA; Q 26 February 1876, 17 March 1877.

perseverance is naturally rewarded - in an essentially patchy diggings - with an occasional lucky find. There is an impression on the field that at least three fourths of the gold falls to the lot of Chinamen.³⁸

During the drier part of the year the Chinese dammed gullies and drained waterholes for washdirt,³⁹ as well as resorting to dry blowing.⁴⁰ At first the Chinese were content to work only those areas abandoned by Europeans but, during 1875, Chinese prospectors ventured into unexplored country and made payable discoveries. In late July-August 1875, there was a rush to the Kennedy Fall of the Conglomerate Range, initiated by Chinese. While traces of gold in the area were believed to have been found by Europeans, it was Chinese prospectors who first realized payable gold.⁴¹ This success encouraged further prospecting, and good finds by Chinese miners kept gold buyers busy.⁴²

To carry out their ventures, some Chinese miners relied on credit. Under the creditor-debtor system that developed, in which kinship or district allegiances also played a part, a Chinese businessman would provide a miner with equipment on credit, as well as acting as his gold-buyer and supplier of provisions. One Lukinville storekeeper supplied the capital required for a whole party of

38. Q 26 February 1876.

39. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 4 October 1877, 77/208 MWO 13B/G1 QSA; Binnie, *My Life*, p.35.

40. Q 2 October 1875.

41. Fagan and party were apparently the discoverers, but found the overlying sandstone too difficult to penetrate, and, it was claimed, sold out to the Chinese miners for £60. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 12 January 1876, 76/12 CPS 13B/G1 QSA; See also CH 22 September 1875 & Q 28 August 1875.

42. After only a few months, during late 1875, some Chinese miners were able to make a "few hundred ounces" of gold, and one firm of gold buyers alone received 400 ounces in one week. The *Fyen* and *Brisbane* left for Hong Kong in early October 1875, with gold amounting to 14,000 ounces and one eighty ounce nugget on board. Q 25 September, 16 & 23 October 1875; CC 9 October 1875; CH 15 August 1876.

miners to pump out the waterholes in the river during the dry season.⁴³ In depressed conditions, storekeepers even paid for the licence fees of reliable customers until mining conditions improved.⁴⁴ Once a miner had obtained enough gold to cover expenses it would be exchanged by the storekeeper, who as unofficial banker, received large amounts of gold in exchange for merchandise. However, these systematic methods only served to intensify the resentment among European miners of the Chinese presence on the field.

There were several early attempts in mid-1874 to "excite the miners to violent resistance" against the Chinese working the Left Hand Branch and beaches downstream from German Bar to Palmerville. However Howard St George reported that "the miners have taken no notice of the illegal councils of these men, and the goldfield continues in its usual peaceable state...".⁴⁵ When the rush to the Normanby River petered out about March 1875, Europeans returned to Sandy Creek, and again tried to jostle the Chinese out. A sign was nailed to a tree at Sandy Creek, with the warning: "Any Chinaman found higher up this creek will be instantly seized and hanged until he is dead."⁴⁶ Sellheim reported two "collisions" between two different parties, but commented at the time that he did not expect any further trouble as long as he was "successful in keeping the two interests separate."⁴⁷ When Chinese prospectors initiated the rush to the Conglomerate in July 1875, they were promptly joined by 1,000 Europeans, who, under the circumstances made no attempt to wrest claims from the discoverers. Nevertheless, by late 1875, Sellheim could sense a dangerous level of antagonism on the part of European miners:

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43. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 30 June 1879, 79/164 MWO 13B/G2 QSA.
44. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 7 March & 2 May 1878, 78/48 & 78/95 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.
45. St George to Sec Works & Mines 13 July 1874, 74/3730 WOR/A 88 QSA.
46. Communicatee to editor, CC 22 May 1875.
47. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 4 April & 14 May 1875, 75/125 & 75/172 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

...the very strong feeling that exists here against the Chinese, and the intensity of which is increasing daily at the same rate as this class of population is flocking-in. I am only too sensible to the fact, that any day some trifling event may fan the smouldering fire into a blaze, and in such a case the want of an experienced officer in charge of Police would be felt very much.⁴⁸

A major cause of Sellheim's anxiety was the re-distribution of the population. To the end of September 1875, there had been "a strict line of demarcation" between Chinese and European miners, with Oaky and Sandy Creeks predominantly European workings.⁴⁹ However, in September and October, a number of Europeans left the field, either to follow a hear-say rush near Cooktown, or to retire from the Palmer permanently, as the field was no longer able to offer an easy profit. As claims were taken up by Chinese in the vicinity of Oaky Creek, Sellheim's worst fear was about to be tested, for both groups were now "indiscriminately mixed up in all directions."⁵¹ During November, the Chinese slowly penetrated the Sandy Creek watershed, where six months earlier a sign had banned their entry. Opposition was minimal; the Chinese were careful of confrontation: "In the few instances where they were opposed by Europeans, & ordered off by them, the Chinamen retired without any resistance."⁵² By mid-March 1876, most of the Palmer proper was in the hands of Chinese: the primary concentration of European miners had moved to the vicinity of Fine Gold Creek and the Little Mitchell River. Reviewing the situation on the Palmer Sellheim suggested that a new gold field be established in order to supervise the European population, now distant from Maytown:

The portion nearest to Edwtown is very nearly worked out, as far as Europeans are concerned,

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48. Sellheim to Col Sec Works 23 March 1875, 75/1091 COL/A 208 QSA.
49. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 12 January 1876, 76/12 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.
50. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 1 October & 1 November 1875, 75/304 & 75/399 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.
51. Q 11 December 1875.
52. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 14 December 1875, 75/376 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

Gold Fields Regulations Gold Fields Act.

By Order
of the Commissioner
J. G. M. Donald Esq.
Charles Jones

Translated by
James McHenley
Anglo-Chinese Linguist

曉諭華英人等知悉今時英國新立規矩善美俱全本惠愛為
 以均平為治誠恐知識者稀以致爭端多事故將各規例開列于后
 ○規例取泥皮金並做佛勞取金每人限管地方四十尺四方○規
 例有水地方係二人合伴限管地方一百尺長五十尺濶三人合伴限
 管地方一百尺長七十尺濶四人合伴限管地方一百尺四方○規
 例有水坑底每人限管地方三十尺四方○規例取白石地方每人
 限管地方四十尺長三百尺濶○規例有人開出新坑係石湖金官
 府另賞人情多與二十個人地方○規例有人流長槽取金官府另
 賞人情築塞水塘○規例取爛泥地方任從官府定奪長短多寡
 ○規例做坭口若係停功限期三日三夜如若過期有人爭奪衙門
 不理○規例做坭口人等若遇夥伴有病不能番功祈報官府出不
 情帛張掛方無爭奪○規例做石湖規矩一人管得二人地方二人管
 得四人地方皆因有夥伴往做中石功夫不得藉斯爭奪○規例大凡地
 方有木園的係人家稅地千祈不可入內鋤窟如有不遵拿到衙門從重
 究治○規例唐番人等須要認順帛如無查出罰銀從重施行決不輕恕

Gold Fields Regulations 1873, translated into Chinese by James McHenley. McHenley was on the Palmer Gold Field 1875-76 (JOL)

& before long will be entirely in the hands of the Chinese. The white population is daily drawing out farther towards Mitchell waters, & when you may consider it necessary to divide the present P.R.G. into separate Fields, I would have the liberty to point out to you that Fine Gold Creek, or the Little Mitchell will be more convenient as a central position for the camp of the Warden of the new G.F.⁵³

A new gold field was eventually established, not on Fine Gold Creek, but on the Hodgkinson, to where almost all of the European alluvial miners had moved within the month.

After the first flush of excited activity on the Hodgkinson, a large number of returning Europeans attempted to hunt Chinese off their claims on Sandy, Fine Gold and Stony Creeks by finding loopholes in the mining regulations. As Sellheim wrote:

Some little difficulty has arisen in few instances during the month between returned European diggers and the Chinese. The latter very rarely have any pegs in, and Europeans wishing to take any advantage of this Breach of the Regulations, have been prevented from doing so by numerical supremacy of the Chinese. I do not however anticipate any serious difficulties on this account, as the exemplary punishment of few of the offences, will teach the Chinese that they cannot commit any Breach of the Regulations with impunity.⁵⁴

Sellheim's adherence to the letter of the law, far from harassing the Chinese, served ultimately to entrench them in their new districts, for in making the Chinese more aware of the necessity of marking claims clearly, Sellheim unconsciously eliminated the only means by which many returning Europeans could reclaim ground. In carrying out the regulations, the gold field administration was bound to protect the Chinese miner, a development which a correspondent to the *Queenslander* recorded:

The Chinese, who have now occupied the pick of the field, have not only possession, which is nine-tenths of the law, but they are absolutely

53. Sellheim to Sec Mines 13 March 1876, 76/70 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

54. Sellheim to Sec Mines 5 July 1876, 76/142 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

and incontestably within their lawful rights.... the arm of the law, even if it is not raised to support them, cannot at any rate smite them; that in fact it will not be they who are law breakers, but those who annoy and disturb.⁵⁵

However, there was one instance of conscious discrimination on Sellheim's part. As the gold field administration was seriously understaffed, he attempted to lessen the likelihood of disputes among Chinese. Using his discretionary power as warden, he decided to restrict Chinese to ordinary claims, reasoning that extended claims, if granted, would lock up the ground and become the basis of disputes. His advice to Dorsey on extended claims was:

I have not considered it advisable to grant any to Chinese for many reasons as these claims so far were only granted to Europeans. I have set my face against making any formal transfers to Chinese, & as far as I am concerned shall uphold the same rule hereafter. With the number of Chinamen at present on the field, I would consider it most unwise to lock up the ground.⁵⁶

The object of Sellheim's action was to keep the peace. He was adamant that no other restriction should be imposed on the livelihood of the Chinese. When Dorsey proposed a restriction on water rights, Sellheim pointed out in strong terms that the "only difference as between Europeans and Chinese, ever authorized by me, is the refusal of extended claims to the latter." However, as Europeans began to leave the field during the latter part of 1876, some Chinese miners came into extended claims. This they did, warned Sellheim, "at their risk".⁵⁷

By far the most pressing problem facing the gold field administration was the collection of payments for miners' rights. Sellheim came under a great deal of pressure from Under Secretary Lukin to "use every exertion" to keep revenue collection in proportion to the incoming Chinese population: 8,000 in May 1876. In conveying this instruction to an assistant warden, Sellheim patiently explained: "I have there-

55. Q 11 December 1875.

56. Sellheim to Dorsey 24 May 1876, 76/119 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

57. Sellheim to Dorsey 6 November 1876, 76/243 & 13 November 1876, 76/253 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

fore to ask you to be good enough to use all time that can possibly be spared from other duties, in looking up the Chinese, and particularly in the more distant camps from Oakey Creek."⁵⁸ A year later, when the Chinese numbered between 16,000 and 17,000, Lukin was still urging that even more time be spent collecting revenue, adding that this was to be done "without undue violence".⁵⁹ It was up to the individual warden how he interpreted this instruction.

The gold field staff found it difficult to keep pace with the rapid increase in the Chinese population, especially the years 1876-1877. Some of the newcomers evaded payment of miners' rights, but in this respect, Sellheim opined, the Chinese "don't differ vastly from the Europeans."⁶⁰ Admittedly, the language barrier was a problem, although translations of the *Gold Fields Act* were displayed periodically.⁶¹ More serious, however, was the existence of a blatant breach in the issue of miners' rights to Chinese which remained undetected for several months and no doubt contributed to Chinese resistance to and distrust of the revenue collection system. At the height of Chinese immigration, Sellheim was appalled to discover that Hill had issued mere slips of paper to Chinese instead of prescribed forms for miners' rights, and strongly reprimanded the assistant warden for the carelessness of his action.

As the practice of issuing such slips of paper is against the spirit of the Audit Act & in direct contradiction of especial instructions on the subject, & as it may be means of defrauding the Revenue by orderlies, or in fact any body outside the Gold-fields Service, I request that on no account hereafter any such receipts for "money-forms to issue" may be given by you or those under

58. Sellheim to Dorsey 6 May 1876, 76/106 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

59. G. Lukin to Sellheim 24 May 1877, *QV&P* 1878, 2, p.291.

60. *AR* 1878 p.17.

61. See Hill to Insp Mines 1 May 1876, 76/21 MWO 13A/G1 & Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 4 November 1876, 76/241 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

your orders, as the Chinamen presenting them are evidently under the impression that the Documents, per se, are Miner's Rights.⁶²

The gross irregularity of this practice led to serious confrontations between other gold field staff and Chinese, the latter believing they were legally licensed.

Faced with official pressure to improve revenue collection, some wardens began to rely more and more on Aboriginal trackers to collect revenue from Chinese. Hill admitted to using his trackers to "run them down", in addition to recruiting Native Police to join the field party.⁶³ Former Sub-Inspector Douglas was later to confirm that his detachment was used to "draft" out Chinese.

The procedure was for the gold-warden to apply to the officer in command of the nearest native police detachment for the services of his troopers; and the combined forces of the warden, consisting of himself, two white orderlies, two or three trackers, and the native police officer and his troopers, would divide forces and sweep down certain creeks and gullies, meeting at some fixed camp of the Chinese, where a drafting would take place. Those Chinese without licences were separated from those with; but all the gold found on either party was collected and marked - that found on the delinquents being made to pay first for the miners' rights required, together with a fine of £1; but if sufficient gold was not found on them the remainder had to be made up by their comrades, any balance in either case being handed back to the owners or bosses, who really were the culprits, and who could, therefore, settle the matter as they liked.⁶⁴

How widespread this use of terror tactics is unknown, however neither Hill nor Douglas were condemned for their actions, although Native Police were not sanctioned to carry out gold field duty. When agents

62. Sellheim to Hill 17 July 1876, 76/156 CPS 13B/G1 QSA. Hill was questioned regarding other aspects of his work in relation to Chinese: neglecting to inquire into deaths, levying excessive fines, and impounding property for non-payment of fees. See variously, Sellheim to Hill 20 September 1877, 77/193 MWO 13B/G1, Hill to Sellheim 3 October 1877, 77/170 & Hill to Under Sec Mines 1 March 1877, 77/22 MWO 13A/G1 QSA.

63. Hill to Under Sec Mines 18 April 1877, 77/53 MWO 13A/G1 QSA.

64. Douglas Douglas, First Chinese Invasion, p.93.

for Sun Yee Lee complained to the Colonial Secretary that Chinese had been assaulted by Native Troopers collecting revenue, the matter was dismissed on the grounds that "no native police [were] employed under the Gold Fields Wardens in collecting fees or in any other way."⁶⁵

More conspicuous in his treatment of Chinese was Thomas Coward. He carried out Lukin's instruction to an extreme degree, and was "universally hated by the Chinese".⁶⁶ A junior colleague of Coward's, Senior Sergeant Devine, claimed officially that "Mr Coward thinks nothing of knocking down an unfortunate Chinaman, and commits actions not all according to Law."⁶⁷ Coward was senior enough for Devine's comments to be dismissed. However, his conduct became so oppressive that it was eventually the subject of two government inquiries, in early 1876 and late 1877.⁶⁸ In the first inquiry specific cases of assault, unlawful imprisonment, excessive fining, and obvious neglect of Chinese under Coward's supervision were cited. Among them was the case of a Chinese Storekeeper named Louis, who, without provocation and guiltless himself of any crime, had been beaten with a whip handle, and on another occasion handcuffed to a tree, whipped and released only on payment of £10. Louis described this and other incidents as typical of Coward's general behaviour towards the Chinese; Coward however was absolved of these charges.

65. Annotation of J.C. Hodel for Sun Yee Lee & other Chinamen Storekeepers to Col Sec 18 October 1877, 77/4973 COL/A 246 QSA.

66. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 28 October 1877, 77/248 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

67. Devine to Comm Police 9 February 1876, 76/560 COL/A 219 QSA.

68. Resignation of Mr. Coward, Late Warden on the Palmer Gold Field, *QV&P* 1878, 2, pp.281-93.



Tam Sie (Page (ed) *Cane Jubilee* 1930 n.p.).

It was Coward's ill-treatment of Europeans which assisted in bringing about a second inquiry, the following year. Professional and business Chinese claimed that Coward harassed newly arrived immigrants and coerced them into renewal of unexpired miners' rights: some of which were the slips of paper supplied by Hill. Furthermore, he forced other Chinese miners to pay for the licences of their companions, wilfully destroyed the property of defaulters, and physically assaulted several Chinese, in some cases cutting off their traditional queue, or pigtail. European businessmen complained to the inquiry that "the Chinamen take their custom to other places, or, in fact, shift to other portions of the goldfield." This time Coward was found unsuitable for the post of Warden, and dismissed. The decision was by no means unanimous, for Thomas McIlwraith was later to praise Coward as "the only warden who did his duty in collecting revenue from the Chinese."⁶⁹

The removal of Coward nonetheless highlights a measure of support from some sections of the European community for Chinese businessmen, no doubt due to the commercial interests they represented. Because of their wealth, Europeans tended to confer upon them a greater degree of respect and status than they did on the Chinese miner. Quong Nam Chong, the owner of one of the largest businesses on the Palmer, is a case in point, for he amassed an average of £400-500 a week.⁷⁰ Tam Sie, who arrived on the field in 1875, had £15,000 in cash and £500 in assets by the time he left the Palmer four years later.⁷¹ Chinese had early maximized their financial security with a monopoly over coin; they even set up their own bank.⁷² When European banks were later established, the Chinese divided their custom between the two main

69. *QPD* XXXIII (4 November 1880), p.1317.

70. J.W. Elcoate to General Manager 23 August 1880, BR/QNB/032 NBA.

71. Tam Sie, *Memoirs*, Document 1532 ML.

72. *CC* 4 August 1875. It was Tennent Shields who established the Queensland National Bank's branch on the Palmer early in 1876 and noted the existence of the Chinese bank on his arrival. Tennent Shields to General Manager 1 June 1876, BR/QNB/032 NBA.

branches, the storekeepers preferring the Queensland National and the butchers the Bank of New South Wales.⁷³ The Q.N. considered its Chinese customers "perfectly safe" and up to 1882, readily gave advances to them.⁷⁴ The value of these customers was evident in the suspension of an acting manager, W.H. Kent, for indiscreetly inducing a Chinese storekeeper to remove his account.⁷⁵

All major settlements on the Palmer after 1874 were dominated by Chinese businessmen. While there were herbalists, opium-dealers, and gambling-housekeepers who catered for Chinese specifically, most Chinese businesses duplicated services already provided by their European counterparts. There were Chinese butchers, cooks and bakers, along with blacksmiths and carpenters. There were even publicans who accommodated the Chinese by selling opium as well as alcohol. In Maytown, there were as many stores run by Chinese as there were by Europeans, but not surprisingly, fewer hotels.⁷⁶ While this apparent duplication of business operations suggests that there was a demand for separate services, it also indicates that there was very little that was distinctly Chinese in either the physical appearance or business structure of settlements on the Palmer. A description of the southside of Byerstown, which was the Chinese sector, illustrates this point, the gambling houses being the exception:

The town consists of nine or ten Chinese stores built of bark, with the exception of one large galvanized iron one lately erected, and kept by

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73. Elcoate to General Manager 20 September 1880, BR/QNB/032 NBA.
74. Advances were readily given to expanding businesses, for example a store-keeper or butcher going into gold buying. Elcoate to General Manager 20 September 1880, BR/QNB/032 NBA. After 1882, advances were more difficult to obtain, but this was also the case with Europeans. Over the period 1876-1884 the QNB had only one Chinese defaulter and an insolvent. Elcoate to General Manager 24 October 1881, 13 & 25 November 1882, BR/QNB/032 NBA. By 1883, a Chinese businessman was the bank's "only security". Alford to General Manager 3 June 1883, BR/QNB/032 NBA.
75. Minutes of 343rd meeting of the Directors of the Queensland National Bank 31 December 1878, A/QNB/301 pp.606-7 NBA.
76. General references to the type of Chinese businesses appear in the following sources: *AR* 1879 p.17; *CC* 8 July 1876; *CH* 21 July & 27 October 1875, 17 June & 8 July 1876; *Q* 6 March 1875, 21 December 1878.

a strong, respectable firm, who evidently saw better days in their native land than the majority of their countrymen we daily see. There are two butcher's shops, one the property of Chinese.... Then there are two Chinese hotels, but unless their inward appearance exceeds the outward, they are not worthy of comment. On the right hand side of the street there is one blacksmith's shop...[and] close to him Chinese gambling houses and a few more Celestial residences....⁷⁷

Yet across the river on the north side, the Chinese had another eight stores, catering it seems solely for the European community. While there were Chinese carpenters, they obviously built in bark and iron and the style of building differed little from that of European tradesmen.⁷⁸

Although large Chinese firms such as Wing On and Company employed teams to convey goods to the field, Chinese packers were also a significant economic force. They operated with very little capital, usually on an individual basis, and could carry average loads of 90 kilograms on bamboo carrying-poles at lower freight rates than horse or bullock teams.⁷⁹ They were also highly reliable: they endured seasonal changes better than horses and bullocks, eliminated the high cost of fodder during the dry season and were less affected by boggy conditions during the wet.⁸⁰ Once having undercut the teamsters, they then began to buy them out. By the end of 1876 Chinese packers were the principal purchasers of horses;⁸¹ they established large camps, such as the one at the second crossing of the Palmer beyond Byerstown.⁸² However, some packers were hawking their wares without licences and Chinese

77. CH 17 June 1876.

78. It is known that at least three Chinese carpenters worked in the European sector of Byerstown in mid-1876. CH 17 June 1876.

79. This was the estimate of Chinese storekeepers. CH 13 September 1876; CC 17 November 1877.

80. AR 1877 p.10; Q 11 September 1875, 1 July 1876.

81. Q 16 September 1876.

82. CC 28 July 1877.



Chinese oven, Byerstown, 1979.

storekeepers viewed their competition seriously, complaining of "the injury they [the storekeepers] sustain by their country men packing up goods to the various diggings and being able, having no licence to pay, to undersell the storekeeper."⁸³ Despite complaints of this kind, hawking continued, as undercutting was of advantage to the consumer on a field with such a high cost of living.

Because of Chinese gardeners and butchers, the diet of the average Chinese miner was more balanced than that of most Europeans, at least during the first two years of the rush. The Chinese diet included small quantities of beef and pork, which kept butchers busy. One European described the situation at Byerstown:

The Chinese butchers have a fine slaughter yard, capable of holding eighty head of bullocks; also a large piggery, in which reside over sixty head of these useful animals, two or three of which are killed every Sunday morning and quickly disposed of at the block, porkey being Mr. Chinkey's principle hobby.⁸⁴

The meat was sometimes salted, cut into long strips and dried.⁸⁵ Gardens flourished early in the history of the field, in isolated patches along the river banks, with a success that reflected the agricultural background of the immigrants. Again at Byerstown, there were, in addition to the butchers and piggery, "three fine gardens well attended to by the Chinese, and a constant supply of fresh vegetables of all kinds are always on hand, from the Irish spud to a Yankee water melon, and sold at a very reasonable price..."⁸⁶ The Chinese also attempted to grow bananas, pineapples, sugar cane and corn, a crop for the dry season for both human consumption and fodder.⁸⁷ Produce from the gardens was sold at market on Sundays.⁸⁸

83. Hill to Under Sec Mines 4 September 1876, 76/70 MWO 13A/G1 QSA.

84. CH 17 June 1876.

85. Binnie, *My Life*, p.28.

86. CH 17 June 1876.

87. Q 1, 17 January 1877, 9 October 1878; AR 1879 p.19.

88. Q 31 March 1877.

As the Palmer's population expanded, cultivation of crops along the river eventually brought agriculture into competition with mining. Gardens were disturbed, and fresh vegetables became scarce and costly. In June 1876, McHenley described the decreasing use of fresh vegetables among Chinese at Revolver Point, to which he attributed a rise in the prevalence of scurvy:

The people of China live principally on vegetable food, the insipid rice demanding savoury condiments, salted vegetables, eggs and fish, are in every day use, and on the diggings the condiments used were shark fins, caviar, skate, shrimps, beech-de-mer, eggs and vegetables, all salted in China and brought here for daily use. The vegetables grown in gardens, being scarce and dear, were not much used.⁸⁹

The government had exacerbated this situation by an increased duty on rice, the Chinese staple food. As a result rice became scarce with merchants less willing to ship it to the field. The poorer diet in consequence weakened the constitution of many Chinese, and there are references to swollen limbs and other signs of malnutrition, although only two Chinese deaths were linked directly to malnutrition during the decade.⁹⁰

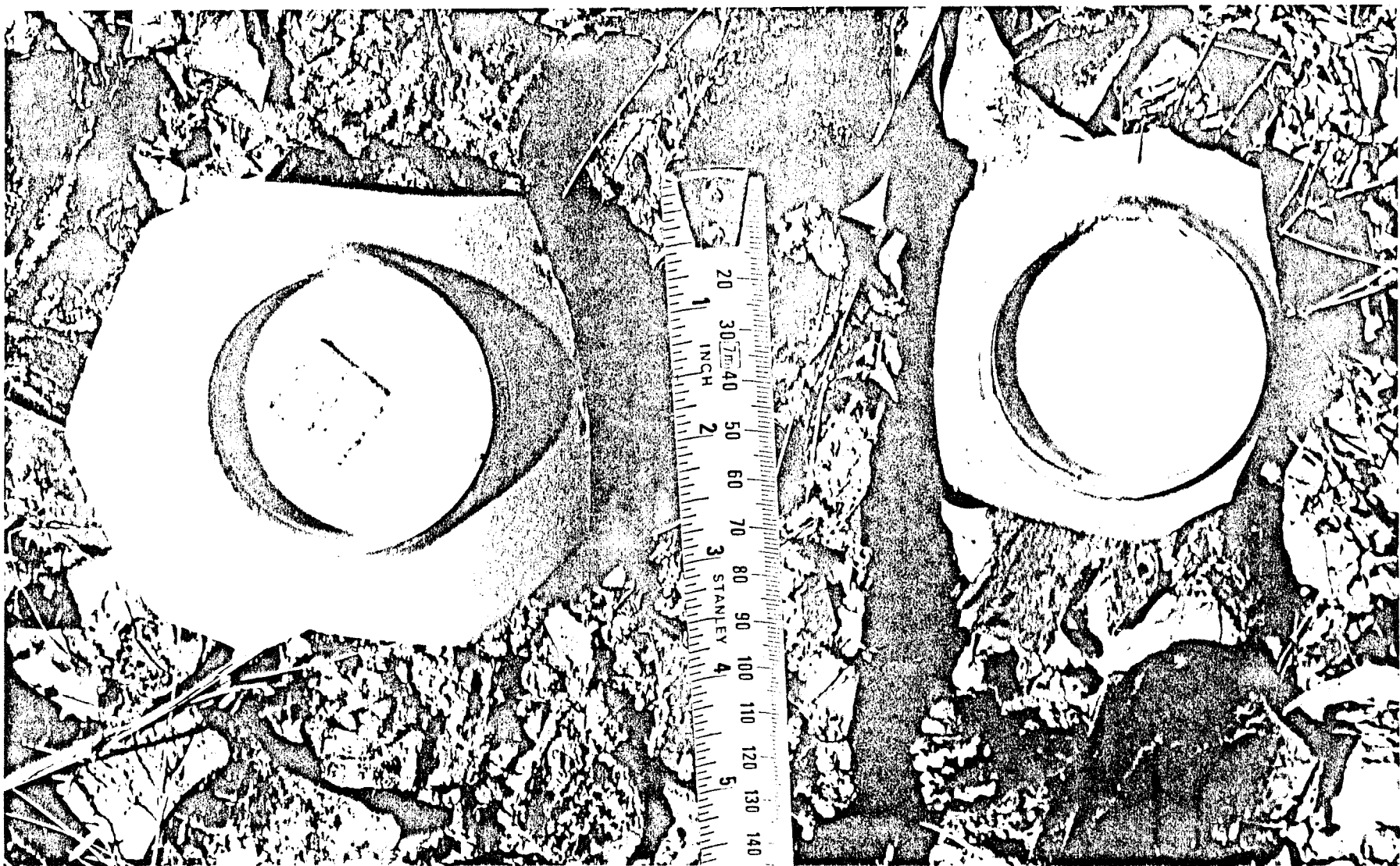
Sickness was rife among the Chinese, as was the case among Europeans. While Chinese doctors and herbalists practised on the field, caring for patients on a kinship or district group basis,⁹¹ there was little they could do to treat infectious diseases which exacted the heaviest toll. The Chinese believed that "vapours from damp ground" were responsible for illness.⁹² Fever, as it was

89. *CH* 21 June 1876.

90. The complications brought by discriminatory legislation will be discussed in more detail further on in the chapter. The symptoms of malnutrition were the swelling of the whole body, paralysis, and a quick death. Descriptions can be found in the following references: *CC* 15 September 1875; *CH* 15, 22 September 1875, 8 January 1876; *Q* 6 November 1875.

91. For example at Stony Creek in November 1875, two separate groups each had a doctor. Two doctors were Pan On Chong and Bo Wha Hong. *QV&P* 1878, 2, pp.283, 290. Other doctors in Cooktown treated only returned Chinese from the Palmer: *Q* 4 December 1875. Other references to medical care are in *CH* 21 July 1875, 8 July 1876.

92. Dundas-Crawford, Notes, p.23, FO 17/891 PRO.



Bases of Chinese rice bowls, Byerstown, 1979.

generally known, was by far the main cause of death, claiming the lives of 62 Chinese in the decade - 41 per cent of the total Chinese deaths - most occurring in 1875 and 1876. Many of the fever victims had been in the colony only a few months, one having arrived in Cooktown two weeks previously; one had survived twelve years in the colony only to die on the Palmer.⁹³ Fever came in epidemics, and it is probable that the graves at Revolver Point which caused McHenley to ponder Chinese dietary deficiency, were actually the result of an identifiable fever outbreak in July-August 1875, which claimed seven lives. However, dysentery and other diseases of the digestive and urinary tracts, which were rampant among the European community in the first years of the rush, did not affect Chinese to the same degree. This was attributed to the sanitary habits of the Chinese, whose cleanliness was often noted. Of leprosy, a disease much feared by European propagandists, there was only one confirmed case on the Palmer.⁹⁴

Nor were violent deaths among Chinese excessive. There were eleven fatal accidents,⁹⁵ including two mining accidents, both involving falls down shafts. Six died by suicide, five of these after 1879 when the field's returns had fallen far below even humble expectations. Two of the victims had been separated from their families for many years. Eight Chinese were murdered, three of them in 1877, and only one, Ah Que, was convicted of murder - a double murder - in 1881.⁹⁶

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93. The following data regarding deaths has been extracted from the Palmer Death Register 1873-1883 unless otherwise stated. In most cases the duration of the Chinese immigrant in the colony was not indicated as known by the informant. Twenty fever cases for 1875-76 do have this information, and it is on this sample that this comment is based.
94. Ah Lum was the first and only case of leprosy confirmed on the Palmer 1873-83. He was a miner and died 12 October 1875. Sellheim to Attorney General 25 October 1875, and Sellheim to Col Sec 23 October 1875, 75/2862 COL/A 214 QSA. Six cases, however, were reported in Cooktown during the same period. See 77/5080 COL/A 247 QSA; CH 17 October 1877; Q 6, 27 October 1877, 1 October 1880; 82/3631 COL/A 340 QSA.
95. This calculation includes deaths from drowning and snakebite. See Summary of Causes of Death at end of Chapter 6.
96. Cases of Ah Que 23 & 29 August 1877, CPS 13B/P5 QSA.

Hardened criminality did not characterize Chinese life on the field. Over two hundred Chinese faced police courts, but one in three was discharged.⁹⁷ While Sellheim suspected that there were professional criminals at work, he also admitted that he had no proof, for it was "next to impossible to detect crime amongst the Chinese."⁹⁸ Inspector Thomas Clohesy, having inspected all camps at the peak of Chinese immigration, was less suspicious and reported that there was "no reason for alarm [as] they are well Disposed if let alone".⁹⁹ In the police courts, the majority of cases in which Chinese appeared involved assault of or petty theft from other Chinese. Although 52 convictions for assault resulted, the seriousness of the charges was diminished somewhat by the lenient sentences passed: ten were fined, another ten sentenced to fourteen days in the Maytown lockup, and one bound over to keep the peace. Most of the larceny charges - 53 in all - involved stealing food. Some of the cases seem trivial, yet in the years following the increased duty on rice in 1876, theft of a bag of rice was not regarded as such. Indeed, where the value of a bag of rice was between £1/5/6 and £2, the penalty was 6 months imprisonment in Rock-hampton gaol. In comparison, the apparently more serious offence of stealing a revolver (valued at about £3) received a £5 fine. Even charges for tin stealing ranged from one to three months gaol.

Aside from assault and petty theft, most convictions recorded against Chinese were linked with gambling. Games of chance were an important social diversion for Chinese miners: probably their principal form of entertainment. Gambling houses were numerous in the major settlements on the Palmer: Fan Tan and Pak-a-pu were regularly attended, and for the lucky, Mai Pen Shei signs hung outside some stores

97. Statistics and references to Chinese crime in the following paragraphs are from CPS 13B/P4, CPS 13B/P5, & CPS 13A/P1 QSA.

98. Sellheim to Col Sec 7 May 1877, 77/101 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

99. Clohesy to Comm Police 6 September 1877, 77/4398 COL/A 244 QSA.

to publicize the chance at lottery.¹⁰⁰ While many Chinese were habitual gamblers, they were not rash, one observer noting that the individual "seldom mortgages his capital beyond his position to pay sixpence or a shilling" before retiring.¹⁰¹ However innocent these social outings, they were still illegal in Queensland. But the law was not often invoked, for of the 45 convictions in the decade for gambling-related offences, the great majority arose from only two raids on gambling houses, one in Byerstown in 1876, the other at Maytown over five years later. Most likely, the police were reluctant to carry out raids where they were outnumbered and where the Chinese could readily escape.

Minor breaches of the peace were also the subject of police action, their nature if anything underscoring the general orderliness of the Chinese population. Ten were charged with disorderly conduct (including a case of discharging fireworks), nine for indecent exposure (most while bathing in the river), and two were found guilty of abusive language. While two charges of sly grog selling were brought against Chinese, no equivalent restriction applied to the sale and use of opium, which was quite legal. The only two opium-related crimes reported by the courts involved the theft of opium, pipes and scrapers from other Chinese. However, very little is known about the use of opium on the field, except that it was easily procurable from dealers or Chinese hoteliers and that the more successful businessmen may have grown wealthy from this source.¹⁰² Hodgkinson observed that the average Chinese was "not an habitual smoker," the drug, he considered, holding "the same moral relation with the alien as that of spirits does with the European."¹⁰³ Nonetheless, the opium smoker's outlay was between 6d to 3/- per day, which probably was a drain on the

100. *CH* 18 June 1876.

101. *PC* 24 March 1883.

102. One of the most successful storekeepers was Quong Nam Chong who was also an opium dealer, with opium being kept in a bank safe. Elcoate to General Manager 28 August 1880, 21 November 1881, BR/QNB/032 NBA.

103. *AR* 1881 p.12.

pocket of the out-of-luck miner.¹⁰⁴ Of other social activities among the Chinese, very little is known. A few drank alcohol, some at European hotels.¹⁰⁵ Some participated in the annual St Patrick's day sports;¹⁰⁶ but all celebrated the Chinese New Year.

The Chinese brought their religious beliefs with them, erecting a temple in the vicinity of Palmerville by August 1874.¹⁰⁷ Other temples were constructed as new areas were opened up to Chinese,¹⁰⁸ watched over by keepers.¹⁰⁹ Again little is known of the forms, fittings or rituals conducted in these buildings; presumably joss sticks and paper were burned in urns surrounding Chinese religious idols, but only the ornate gong of the last surviving "joss" at Maytown exists today.¹¹⁰ The Chinese New Year was regularly observed with much feasting, entertainment and music, over two days, for which there was a complete cessation of mining by the Chinese.¹¹¹ The New Year celebrations of 11-12 February 1880 tempted at least one European miner to appeal to the warden that the Chinese claims were abandoned; the case was thrown out of court.¹¹²

104. AR 1881 p.12.

105. The records of the police courts reveal that a minority of Chinese drank alcohol, some to excess. Drunkenness led to one charge of drunk and disorderly conduct (Ah Yum), and assault of a police officer by Ah Yah. Tommy Ah Bin was charged with drunkenness. See cases of Ah Yah 30 October 1876, CPS 13B/P3 and Tommy Ah Bin 7 February 1881, and Ah Yum 22 September 1881, CPS 13B/P5 QSA. A reference was also made to the drinking of individual Chinese in the case of Berry v Stein 30 March 1883, CPS 13B/P5 QSA. Johnny Ah Sing had visited a European hotel at the time of his assault by a European drunk on 29 December 1874, CPS 13B/P3 QSA.

106. PC 24 March 1883. There was a special Chinese event.

107. Q 3 October 1874.

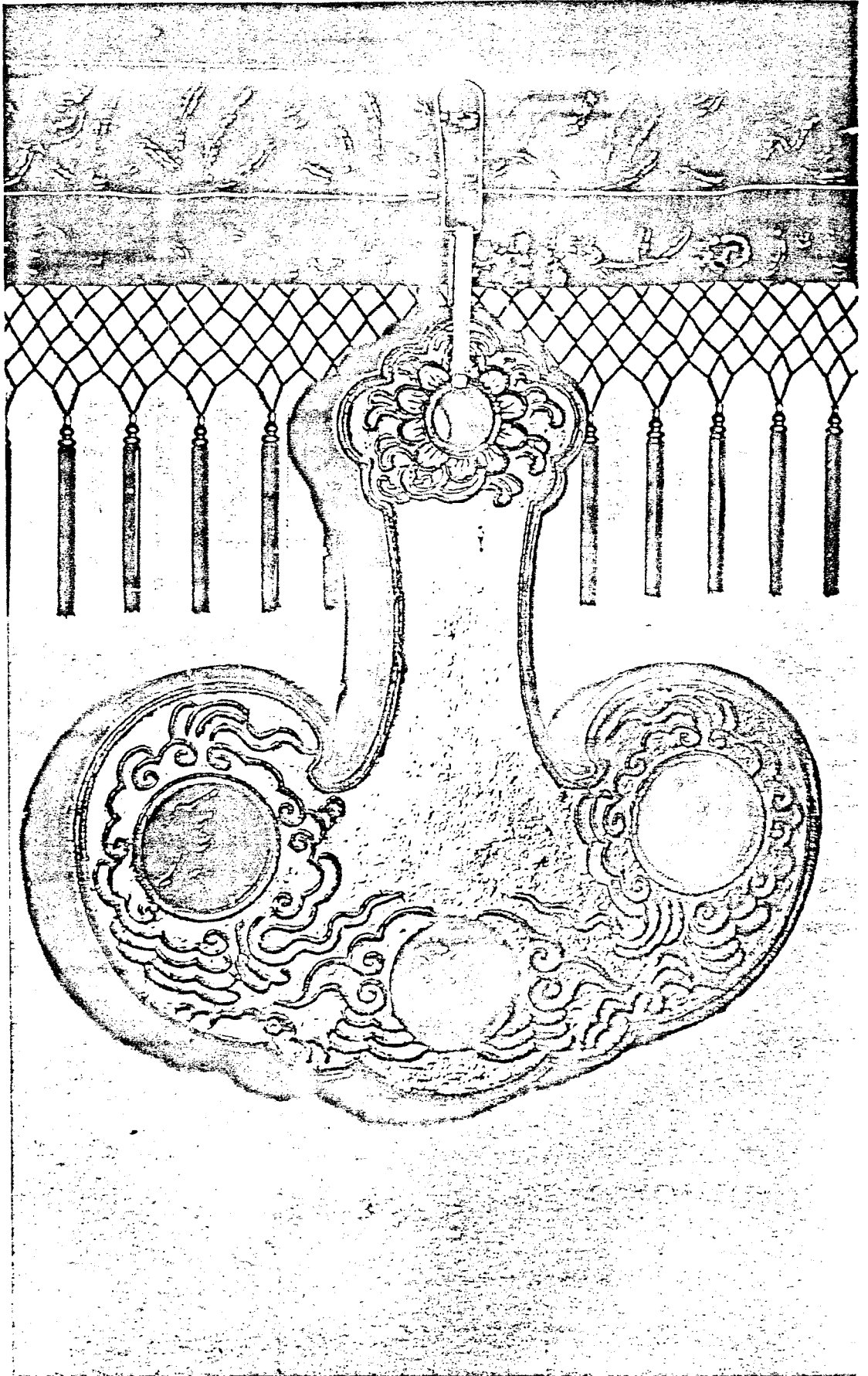
108. Q 21 December 1878.

109. A "joss" was still operating in Palmerville as late as 1879, with Ah Sing as keeper. Low Leong v Ah Sing 10 April 1879, CPS 13B/P4 QSA.

110. Located at the James Cook Historical Museum.

111. Celebrations included a fireworks display. Binnie, *My Life*, pp.36-37; W.O. Hodgkinson to Under Sec Mines 2 March 1882, MWO 13B/G2 QSA.

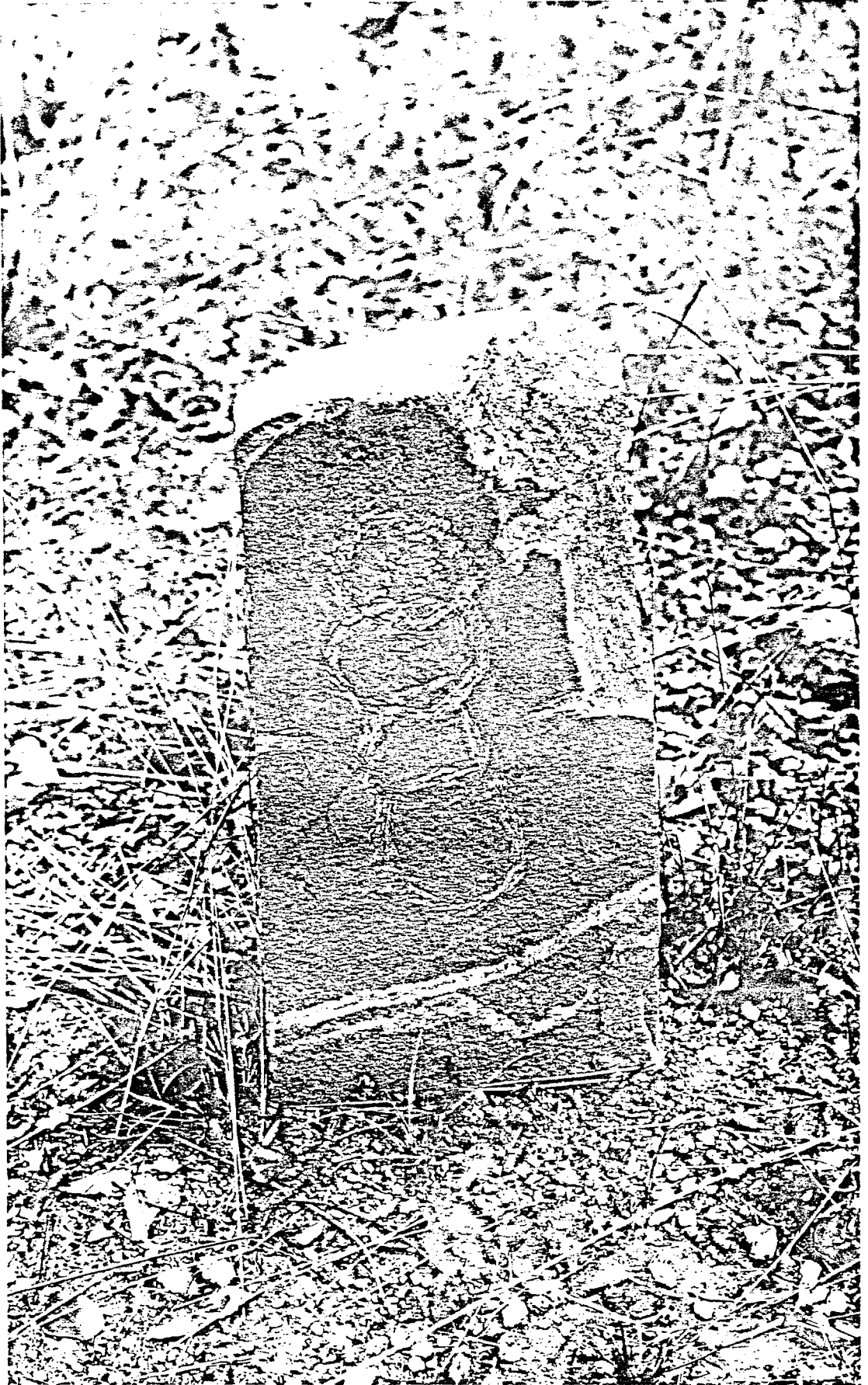
112. Christian Pedersen v Ah Chong and Ah Sam 16 February 1880, MWO 13B/G2 QSA.



Cast iron gong said to be from the Maytown temple,
James Cook Historical Museum, 1979.

Traditional obligations required the Chinese to return home after a period of mining, with the result that few married or entered into other long-term commitments. For Chinese who died on the Palmer, burial overseas seems to have been frowned on as it denied the fulfilment of ancestor worship. Even so, at least 148 Chinese are known to have been buried on the Palmer, although a few were exhumed at a later date. At Maytown, the burial ground was separate from the European cemetery, the only indication of its location now being a blue diorite slab, about 36 centimetres high, firmly set in the ground. Bone markers, carved with Chinese characters, used to stand on the grave sites, but all have been removed in recent years.¹¹³ Whether a funeral association existed on the Palmer is not known.¹¹⁴ It seems the majority of burials were carried out with little ceremony by the individuals, such as a brother, nephew, cousin, neighbour or friend,¹¹⁵ or groups of Chinese, or by Europeans assisted by Chinese.¹¹⁶ One Revolver Point storekeeper acted as informant or undertaker on several occasions for deaths in his area. However, while there were these obvious manifestations of kinship allegiance in some burials, Sellheim, Hill and Coward constantly complained of the reluctance of Chinese to bury Chinese dead.¹¹⁷ There were possibly as many as

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113. The Cairns Historical Society has in its collection a photograph of one of these markers *in situ*. The photograph has been reproduced on an accompanying page. See also S.E. Stephens, *Maytown Cemetery, Historical Society Cairns North Queensland Bulletin* 142 (June 1971), p.2.
114. Dundas-Crawford claimed that a *Fokting-tong* or Funeral Association existed in Cooktown in 1877. While the Association was expected to assist in defraying funeral expenses, its effectiveness, according to Dundas-Crawford, had diminished, thereby creating more reliance on European institutions. Dundas-Crawford, Notes, pp.10-11, 29, FO17/891. PRO.
115. The Palmer District Death Register 1873-83 has been used as the source for information regarding burials. The following footnotes are intended as additional comment on information extracted from the register.
116. However, it must be added that such statements of a specific relationship are rare. Over the decade, two deaths were reported by a "cousin", one by a "nephew" and three by a "brother". At least five of the informants described their relationship to the deceased as "friend". In other cases, in which an entry for an informant is given, the name and occupation of the informant is usually given.
117. Sellheim to Col Sec 23 October 1875, 75/2862 COL/A 214 & Hill to Col Sec 29 April 1876, 76/1172 COL/A 221 QSA; Coward to Min Mines 18 February 1876, *QV&P* 1878, 2, p.286.



Marker near Chinese burial site, Maytown, 1979.

thirty-eight Chinese buried by individual Europeans, the gold field administration or police: some of these were under the care of a European doctor or the Maytown hospital at the time of death. Burial, it seems, was a kinship responsibility, and St. George, in early 1875, noted that those left unburied were apparently without kin.¹¹⁸ On another occasion, when a Chinese doctor was questioned by police after refusing to become involved in one such burial, he explained that the dead man was not one of his countrymen.¹¹⁹ To McHenley, the Anglo-Chinese linguist, it was the inadequacy of the European system that was at fault, as he argued that the Chinese believed that when a man died in the house of a stranger, then the proprietor of that house was responsible for recompensing the family.¹²⁰ Those Chinese who died on the Palmer left only the most meagre information about themselves in European records: the columns regarding their family in the death register are generally entered as *unknowns*, and very few cases of exhumation were recorded before 1883.¹²¹

The Chinese population was almost exclusively male with an average age in the early thirties.¹²² The emigration of women was rare, although two women did come to the field to join their husbands late in the decade. One, the wife of James Ah Fun, a prominent Maytown storekeeper, was married in Canton but bore their first child on the field in 1881.¹²³ The first Chinese marriage on the field did not

118. St George to Col Sec 20 March 1876, 75/2953 COL/A 214 QSA.

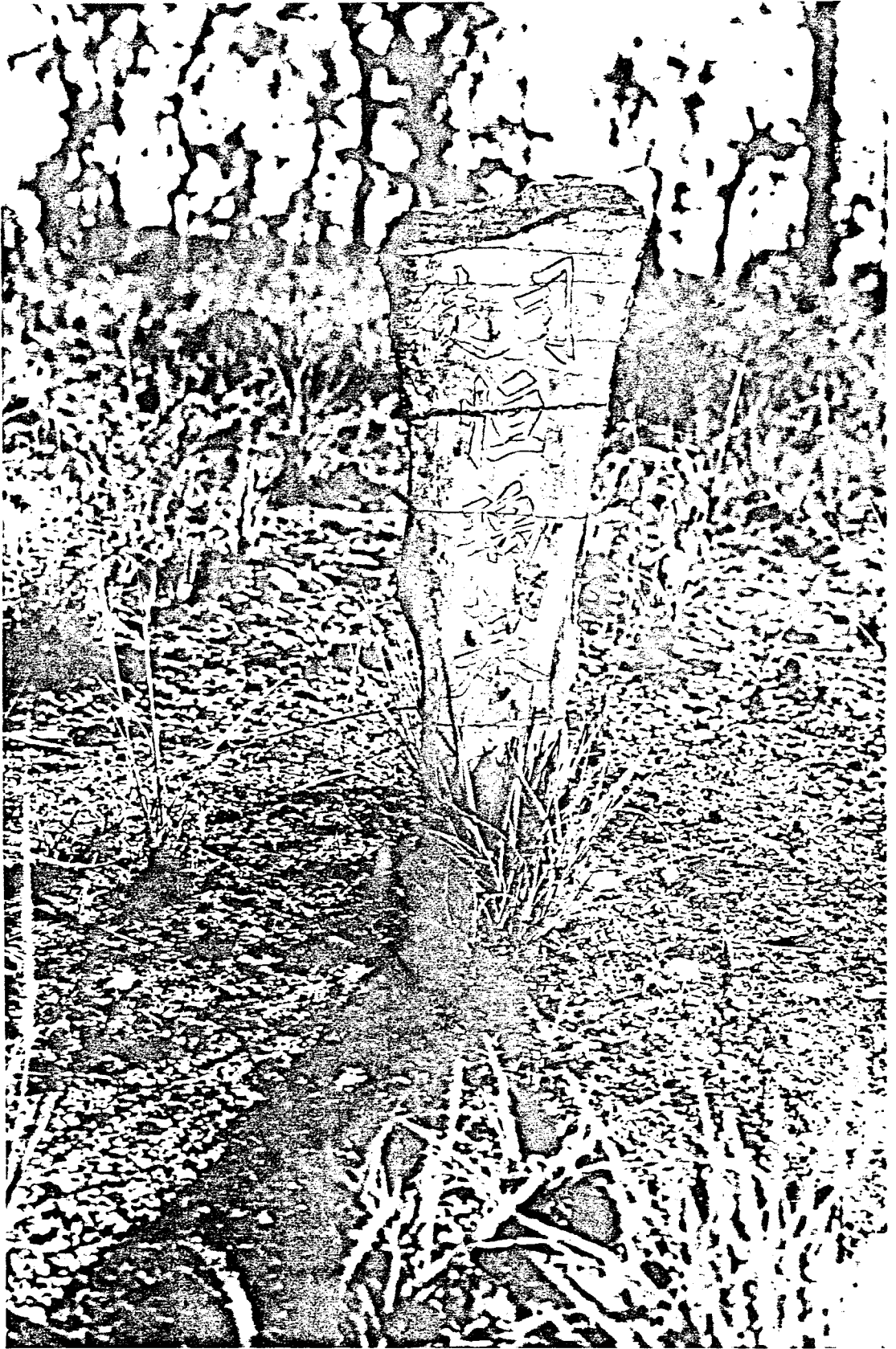
119. Constable Alexander McLennan, *QV&P* 1878, 2, p.284.

120. *CC* 15 September 1875. See similar explanation in *CH* 24 June 1876.

121. Ah Mee (Hodgkinson to Under Col Sec 18 September 1882, 82/5251 COL/A 347 QSA); Ah Chie (Hodgkinson to Under Col Sec 11 September 1882, 82/5701 COL/A 346 QSA); Ah Quock buried July 1875, exhumed September 1883 (A.C. Haldane to Under Col Sec 20 September 1883, 83/5092 COL/A 370 QSA). Note: a search for further applications for exhumation through Colonial Secretary's file beyond 1883, has not been attempted for this thesis.

122. The figure is based on information in the Death Register regarding the 148 Chinese who died on the Palmer.

123. Application for certificate of naturalization 23 November 1882, 82/6242 COL/A 350 QSA. Ah Fun had been to Peak Downs and the Etheridge prior to coming to the Palmer during the initial rush.



Grave of See Toe Hinye, Maytown. This grave marker had been removed by 1979. (Cairns Historical Society).

take place until August 1884, between Hung Fann and the wealthy merchant Gee Kee, who had been in the colony fifteen years. The wedding was something of an occasion, the guest list including the members of the gold field administration; the *Queenslander* reported that the bride was presented with a half a sovereign from every member of the Chinese community.¹²⁴ Both Ah Fun and Gee Kee were naturalized soon after their marriages.¹²⁵ Even less is known of relationships between Chinese men and European women. Two women, named Sarah Ah Bow and Sarah Ah Chin, lived in Maytown in 1876, and one Margaret Riley was called in as a witness for Chinese at Byerstown.¹²⁶ The de facto relationship of Ah Bin, storekeeper at Revolver Point, and Kate Knowles, was considered stable, with three children born by 1877, one on the Palmer.¹²⁷ The attitude of the European community to these women can only be guessed, although two acted as midwives to women whose husbands were prominent in the European community.¹²⁸

While the Palmer Gold Field was not marked by outbreaks of physical violence between Chinese and Europeans, there nonetheless was an uneasiness between the two populations. Evidence in the records of the police courts reveals a sporadic campaign of economic harassment against individual Chinese entrepreneurs, of both an irrational and rational kind. And while several Chinese used the police courts to gain redress for the misconduct of other Chinese, it is clear that they were reluctant to do so when Europeans were involved.

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124. Wedding ceremony described in Q 23 August 1884.
125. Return of Aliens Naturalized During the Last Five Years (August 1880–August 1885, *QV&P*, 2, p.231; Gee Kee's certificate of naturalization SCT/CF 34 QSA. During the same period, 14 Chinese were naturalized in Cooktown.
126. Sarah Ah Chin and Sarah Ah Bow gave evidence against Sam Qui and Ah On 12 July 1876, CPS 13B/P3 QSA; Ah Kee was discharged of a charge of larceny with the evidence of Margaret Riley 6 June 1878, CPS 13A/P1 QSA.
127. Information about the Ah Bin family gathered from the case of Ah Bin v A. Dimes 7 October 1875, CPS 13B/P2 QSA.
128. Father's occupation contained in information concerning births from Palmer Birth Register 1874–1883.

In exceptional instances they did so with the support of a European or an influential Chinese businessman or interpreter, such as Harry Hee or Sam Hand.¹²⁹ Evident in those Chinese complaints brought to court is the open provocation of the Europeans involved; the penalties against them were minimal, all involving fines in default of short gaol terms. Some cases were notable.¹³⁰ In December 1874, Johnny Ah Sing had been invited by John McLennan, a European publican, to have a drink, but in an ensuing fracas was knocked down several times by Frederick Brady, a habitual drunkard under prohibition. A European witness, Lewis Moniz, accused McLennan of encouraging the incident, saying: "you ought to be ashamed of yourself allowing your man to knock the Chinaman down in such a way." Brady was fined £5 in default 3 months gaol; McLennan £20 for supplying spirits to a known drunkard. In the cases of Christopher Palmerston and Thomas Sutton, in September 1876, blatant harassment of Ah Yuck and Ah Toy was carried out with undisguised intent. Palmerston, the only butcher operating on the Right Hand Branch at that time, obviously wished to maintain a monopoly over the trade. When Ah Yuck attempted to set up in competition, Palmerston and Sutton maliciously fired the grass in the vicinity of the Chinese butcher's yards, driving off the cattle. Palmerston and Sutton then assaulted Ah Yuck and his assistant Ah Toy. While Palmerston and Sutton were found guilty they received fines of only £5 and £3 each.

Harassment sometimes took on more mischievous forms, with destruction of property still the motive. There was the case of William Wallace, who in August 1874 deliberately let loose his eight draught

129. Both Hee and Hand were fluent and influential witnesses in Maytown court cases. In one, Hee appeared for a European defendant against a Chinese plaintiff. Ah Sue v. A. Moniz 23 April 1878, CPS 13B/P4 QSA.

130. Information contained in the following two paragraphs regarding Chinese charges against Europeans has been derived from CPS 13B/P3-5, CPS 13A/P1 QSA.

horses in Pan Shing's gardens at Palmerville. In September 1877, fire was set to fodder being carried by Ah Sing. Although the defendant in this latter case was discharged, the evidence suggests that the fire had been deliberately lit, but the identity of the European could not be proven. While similar cases illustrate victimisation of individual Chinese, its full extent remains unknown, as only twenty-three charges were laid during the decade, eight of which were dismissed. Clearly the difficulty of arranging mixed juries militated against the impartiality of the courts, with the penalties for Europeans generally less than for Chinese found guilty of a similar offence. The most outrageous case was that of Rogers, who killed a Chinese miner at Stewart's Camp in mid-1878. The jury returned a verdict of not guilty, even though the evidence was quite damning. Howard St George was later to remark that the acquittal was "in the face of what to all unprejudiced persons appeared the clearest evidence" adding that Rogers was "conspicuous even amongst this community for his unreasoning animosity against the Chinese."¹³¹

Only rarely did animosity find expression in violence, but it was to become a powerful political force. In Cooktown, a small but vocal band of entrepreneurs campaigned for the rights of European diggers and small businessmen. Within their ranks were very few miners, although one member, James Mulligan, proved a valuable asset to the group, for not only did he retain considerable influence within the European mining community, but he had close contact with Gresley Lukin of the *Queenslander*. This anti-Chinese group was initially concerned with the influx of overseas Chinese, the first meeting being held in March 1875. While its main objective was to urge the government to take steps to avert inevitable conflict between Europeans and Chinese miners, it also informed the government that a committee had been formed to coordinate concerted action on the part of the miners.¹³² A second meeting held on 8 April was more specific in its resolutions, demanding that the government restrict Chinese from new gold fields for

131. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 2 December 1878, 78/211 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

132. Q 3 April 1875.

at least three years.¹³³ Attempts to channel anti-Chinese feeling on the Palmer into violent action met with little success: the committee itself preferred the vitriol of the pen to agitation on the field, sparking not a riot but a lively, sectarian debate on the merits and demerits of Chinese immigration. The anti-Chinese debate was based *prima facie* on the familiar stereotypes of the Victorian gold fields. It was claimed that Chinese miners did not prospect, but merely took advantage of the absence of European miners from their diggings, and that by their impermanency and stolid self-sufficiency they impeded European industry and investment in reefing. Worst of all, the Chinese were vilified as morally debased and carriers of disease, with a propensity for violent crime.¹³⁴

However there were other businessmen who welcomed a stable *laissez faire* relationship with the Chinese, dreaming of Cooktown as an *entrepot* for Chinese and Indian trade, with its agricultural hinterland tilled by cheap Asian labour. Drawing their members from the Chamber of Commerce, the group's most outspoken and influential voice was the editor of the *Cooktown Herald*, W.H.L. Bailey,¹³⁵ who claimed that his newspaper was "an advocate for Chinese labor directed into a proper channel."¹³⁶ They recognized the value of a voluntary Chinese labour force, a view diametrically opposed to that of the anti-Chinese faction, as demonstrated by an editorial of the *Herald* of 1 December 1875:

The Chinese who visit us are not a pauper race, they pay their way fairly, are hardworking, frugal, and industrious; they work for less wages than a European, and are less liable to epidemical diseases that are so prevalent among the Europeans of the North.

133. CH 10 April 1875; Q 1 May 1875.

134. These sentiments were expressed at the anti-Chinese meetings. See footnotes 132 & 133. See also Phoenix to editor, CH 21 April 1875; Nemo to editor, CC 27 September 1876; Southern Cross to Editor, CH 23 August 1876.

135. Other prominent Chinese supporters were F.J.W. Beardmore, W.J. Hartley, J.C. Baird, J. Walsh and E. Henriques.

136. CH 13 October 1877.

谷
 本行承辦各色美酒未嘗布足
 各人等這新文通傳廣潤上至
 各埠無處不至舖在谷當開張
 諸君倘有欲此新文者請至本
 相宜特此佈告
 新大報館未士比利啟

本行自辦各色美酒未嘗布足
 宜往稅關事務諸君光顧價相
 宜舖在谷光大街急頭酒店對
 開港船政寫字房在哩公馬頭

COOKTOWN JOCKEY CLUB ANNUAL RACES will be held, at Cooktown, on THURSDAY and FRIDAY, 9th and 10th SEPTEMBER, 1875. President and Judge: Howard St. George, Esq. Vice-President: M. Fox, Esq. Starter: B. Fahey, Esq. Clerk of the Course: A. Trevathan, Esq. Stewards: T. Clobey, R. T. Shields, A. A. Mayou, E. J. W. Beardmore, B. Fahey, Esqs. Hon. Treasurer: E. J. Finch, Esq. First Day: First Race to start at 11:30 a.m. The Maiden Plate of 50 sovs. with a sweep of 2 sovs. for second horse; distance, 1 1/2 miles; weight for age; for all horses that have never won a prize of public

£100 REWARD.

WHEREAS, on the night of MONDAY, the 9th INSTANT, some evil-disposed person or persons did maliciously attempt to SET ON FIRE the NEW SOUTH WALES and AUSTRALIAN JOINT STOCK BANKS, thereby endangering the whole town.

The above Reward will be paid at the BANK OF NEW SOUTH WALES to any one giving information that will lead to the conviction of the would-be incendiary.

英八月九日
 二良房敢在投
 四來罪即實
 帶共民在租
 零其民在租
 帶共民在租
 零其民在租

JOHN WALSH,
 Wholesale & Retail Storekeeper,
 WINE AND SPIRIT MERCHANT,
 CHARLOTTE STREET, COOKTOWN.

ELLIOTT'S CHAMPAGNE QUINA WINE—this very superior preparation can be strongly recommended for the use of Quinine is indicated, as in the treatment of intermittent Fevers, Acute Chronic Diarrhoea, Scrophulous condition of the system, Debility, Neuralgia, Impure Blood, Malaria, and all disorders of the digestive organs.

Manufactured solely by ELLIOTT BROS. & CO., Brisbane.

BLOOD PURIFIER — SASSAPARILLA has, from time immemorial been considered the best agent for its purpose.

Dr. BAYLEY'S COMPOUND EXTRACT OF SASSAPARILLA contains the valuable properties of this plant, together with the advantage of being pleasant and palatable beverage. For those who obtain from alcoholic drinks this will act as a gentle nervous stimulant, which renders it peculiarly adapted to a hot climate.

SAMUEL KERSH
 B EGGS to announce that the First Shipment of NEW GOODS has arrived and will be opened in a few days, and will be offered at Lower Prices than are offered in Cooktown before.

The goods consist of shirts and shod Iron Bedsteads, single and double Iron Posters & cetera, gilt Mir. (Glass, 20 by 2 large Engravings, the most selected ever imported, Table Lamps, from 1 Revolvers and Rifles, at low prices, & a number of other articles too numerous to mention.

WEDNESDAY, 18TH AUGUST.

At 2 o'clock.

At the recently erected Store of Mess HENRIQUES, Green-street, opposite the Courier Office.

To Hotelkeepers, Persons Furnishing, & Others.

under 33 near
 tail, JG near
 laytown and
 paid for each
 your bringing
 DGSFLESH.

designated, to
 his inst., from

May

Hanna
 Cheese.
 LEY & CO.
 282

BUILDING
 residence of F.
 ing Allotment
 over half an
 fine site, and

SHAMROCK HOTEL,
 CHARLOTTE-STREET, COOKTOWN,
 Next to Henriques & Co.'s New Building

Chinese notices in the Cooktown Herald.

It was further stated that the Palmer could only be developed by Chinese, as "whitemen cannot make it pay."¹³⁷ Predictably such criticism of the European miner was resented by the anti-Chinese group. The debate was fundamentally economic; the undercurrents of racism were strong. The pro-Chinese group defended the charges that the Chinese were undesirable immigrants, but did not oppose measures to restrict them from new gold fields. Yet when other measures aimed at the Chinese threatened commercial interests by causing poverty among Chinese consumers, they were swiftly denounced.

The anti-Chinese agitation placed the government of Arthur Macalister in a quandary. Not only had the former Palmer ministry entered into negotiations to employ Chinese coolies on sugar plantations,¹³⁸ but the Governor William Cairns, was totally opposed to any form of discriminatory legislation.¹³⁹ Also, there existed international treaties between Great Britain and China which, in fact, discouraged any attempt to prohibit Chinese immigration. Macalister was forced to admit the delicacy of the matter, and concluded that there "was nothing to prohibit Chinamen from landing here in large numbers, provided they paid their passage-money and did not violate the sanitary regulations of the various ports."¹⁴⁰ This admission foreshadowed the indirect tactics adopted to restrict Chinese immigration.

In April 1875, Doctor Conradi, the health officer at Cooktown, received "special instructions" to strictly enforce the health

137. Contributor to editor, *CH* 3 April 1875.

138. See J. Rose (ed), *Cambridge History of the British Empire* Vol 7, part 1: Australia (Cambridge 1933) p.322. The Palmer ministry included such men as Joshua Bell, W.H. Walsh, J.M. Thompson and Thomas Murray Prior.

139. Cairns had been appointed lieut-governor in Malacca, St. Kitts in 1868, Honduras in 1870, and Trinidad in 1874 before coming to Queensland. While at St. Kitts he was appointed to a board of inquiry to look into the condition of Indians and Chinese in British Guiana. *ADB* 3, pp.330-1; He was of the opinion that the proposal of the Queensland government to implement any form of discriminatory legislation as "shortsighted and unfair" and "a sop" to the northern electorates "where Chinese competition is of course distasteful." Confidential Report on Parliamentary Proceedings 12 August 1876, Queensland /12407 CO 234/36 PRO.

140. Macalister to deputation led by J.R. Dickson, undated press clipping, enclosed Dickson to Macalister 6 April 1875, 75/1024 COL/A 208 QSA.

regulations on board steamers with Chinese passengers.¹⁴¹ The specific nature of these instructions was not spelt out, although members of the Legislative Assembly were asked to "make public that all steamers carrying Chinese to Cooktown will be liable to be detained there until the Health Officer satisfies himself that they are fit subjects to be landed."¹⁴² Conradi apparently failed to appreciate the broad hint that he was to use his office to obstruct Chinese entry for political purposes. Interpreting the special instructions as a slight on his professional capacities, he indignantly replied that all ships from overseas were "subjected to the closest examination" as a matter of course.¹⁴³ Conradi later resigned his post but not before the defeat of the Macalister government at the polls in May 1876.¹⁴⁴ In the new government, led by George Thorn, William Murphy was sworn in as member for the new electorate of Cook.¹⁴⁵

Under the guise of revenue raising, the Thorn administration moved quickly to amend existing legislation, placing further penalties on Chinese. First, duty on rice was increased from £2 to £7/6/8 per ton under the *Customs Duties Act* of 1870. Ignoring criticism that the action was a "miserable contradiction" of the avowedly free-trade principles of the government,¹⁴⁶ Treasurer James Dickson, nevertheless, justified the measure on the grounds that rice was "chiefly consumed by those colored races, whose arrival in the colony we have to deplore".¹⁴⁷

141. *Ibid.* Authorities at Hong Kong and Singapore were also informed. See 75/1445 COL/A 209 QSA, and *QV&P* 1875, p.95.

142. Macalister, in reply to McIlwraith 2 June 1875, *QV&P*, p.95. The query by McIlwraith seems to suggest that the move was not generally known. Yet Macalister had informed a Cooktown delegation led by Mulligan, of this action, before 17 April. See *CH* 17 April 1875.

143. S. Conradi to H.H. Massie 12 April 1875, 75/3403 COL/A 216 QSA.

144. *QPD*, XX, introduction. For papers relating to the resignation of Conradi see 76/2164 COL/A 225 QSA.

145. *QPD*, XX, introduction.

146. J.P. Bell to Legislative Assembly, *QPD* XX (15 August 1876), p.485.

147. *QPD*, XX (26 July 1876), p.362.

The government also sought an amendment to the *Gold Fields Act* of 1874, proposing to raise miners' rights for "aliens" (African and Asiatic) to £3, six times the amount paid by European miners. Alien business men would also be affected under this amendment, with business licences rising from £4 to £10. In parliament, the more blatant aspects of the *Gold Fields Act* amendment bill provoked strident debate, especially clause 3 which provided that any Chinese (or any other Asian or African for that matter) was automatically an alien unless sufficient proof of naturalization was immediately forthcoming.¹⁴⁸ Both bills prompted hostile reactions from vocal sections of the Chinese community on the Palmer and in Cooktown, where a large public meeting was held on 1 August to protest against the Queensland government's proposal "to enact measures opposed to the tradition and the policy of the English law." A petition was subsequently forwarded to the Legislative Assembly, arriving in Brisbane before the third reading of both bills.¹⁴⁹

The Chinese opposed the bills on commercial, political, and humanitarian grounds, placing the whole issue of discriminatory legislation against Chinese within the wider perspective of British law and foreign policy. The increased duty on rice, described as an "oppressive and unjust measure of taxation", came in for bitter criticism on the grounds that local Chinese had already made significant contributions to government revenue by way of import duties on other commodities, but still had no political rights within the colony. The government was accused not only of watonly breaching British treaties with China, but also of acting with inequity by attempting "to starve out the Chinese", knowing that a tax on a basic item such as rice would "fall heavily on the poorer class of Chinese." Furthermore, the Chinese warned, with respect to the proposal to raise miners' rights, that if imposed it would "effectively extinguish the

148. Preamble to *Gold Fields Act Amendment Bill of 1876* as passed by the two houses of Parliament 20 September 1876. See photocopy at end of chapter.

149. The whole text of the petition was printed in the *Cooktown Herald* 2 August 1876, and has been reproduced in full at the end of this chapter.

mining industry" on the Palmer and reduce Cooktown to its "original insignificance". Claiming that at least one-half of the gold won by Chinese miners went back into equipment, food and taxes, they openly condemned the "idle and ignorant" European miners who "failed to make the gold fields of this district payable after trial": an assertion naturally unpalatable to Europeans. However, the content of the petition was not universally critical, as the Chinese put forward more equitable alternatives to raise revenue from those who could pay:

That if the Government of the colony determine to impose more taxation of the Chinese, your petitioners would prefer a poll-tax to be levied on immigrant Chinese, which would not be open to the objection of its being an insidious measure, or a tax upon the export of gold, which would fall upon those able to pay, and be a more just and state-manlike measure than one which has been deliberately calculated to starve out the Chinese already in this colony.

As the original petition was in Chinese, it was accompanied by a translation certified by a Cooktown solicitor. The translation was read to the Legislative Assembly by William Murphy, on 15 August 1876.¹⁵⁰ However, the Speaker objected to it, deeming it "irregular" and "disrespectful": it was irregular because Murphy had himself not provided a certificate endorsing the accuracy of the translation, but had simply placed his signature above the list of Chinese names, and was disrespectful because it alleged that the Queensland government proposed "to legislate against the spirit and letter of solemn treaties, in order to oppress and starve the already oppressed Chinese in the sparsely populated wilderness of Queensland."¹⁵¹ That the Chinese were oppressed was rejected out of hand, and to accuse the government of proposing legislation to oppress them in the future was declared equally nonsensical. In the ensuing debate it was also brought to

150. The petition was translated by Mr. Foon Sing, with the legal advice of Mr. Reilly, a Cooktown solicitor. *CH* 2 August 1876; the petition was acknowledged as read and received on 15 August, *QV&P* 1876, 1, p.113.

151. *QPD*, XX (16 August 1876), p.515.

Murphy's attention that he was ineligible to certify the petition because he could not read Chinese; even the different lengths of the two documents were questioned. The exasperated Murphy could only reply: "no member of the House could certify it."¹⁵² Despite the objections of Murphy and W.H. Walsh, who maintained that petitions were "necessarily objections to Governments",¹⁵³ the Colonial Secretary ordered that the Chinese petition not be printed on the grounds of its "untrue or incorrect" content, and the matter was peremptorily dropped.¹⁵⁴

The petitioners were understandably indignant, and were reported as being determined to seek the appointment of a Chinese consul to represent their interests.¹⁵⁵ Further, it was alleged that a petition had also been sent to the Chinese Emperor drawing his attention to the breach of treaties with Great Britain.¹⁵⁶ Complaints also came from some Europeans objecting to the proposals as "class" legislation ruinous to the future prosperity of Cooktown: they claimed it would increase the cost of services, such as the Royal Mail which operated comparatively cheaply because of the conveyance of Chinese passengers.¹⁵⁷ In desperation, several Chinese appealed to the Governor, William Cairns, urging him to withhold assent to both bills.¹⁵⁸ As it eventuated, Cairns gave assent to the *Customs Duties Act* of 1876, imposing a duty of one penny on each pound of imported rice,¹⁵⁹ but deliberated over the amendment to the *Gold*

152. *QPD*, XX (15 August 1876), p.477.

153. *Ibid.*

154. *QPD*, XX (16 August 1876), p.517.

155. *Q* 19 August 1876.

156. *CH* 23 September 1876; *Q* 30 September 1876.

157. Give Every Man His Due to editor, *CH* 25 October 1876; Subscriber to editor, *CC* 6 September 1876.

158. *CH* 23 September 1876; *Q* 30 September, 1876.

159. *40 Victoriae* 5. *An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain Increased Duties of Customs*. *QGG*, XIX, 32 (30 October 1876), supplement, pp.623-4. This legislation was retrospective to 27 July.

Fields Act. The Attorney General, Samuel Griffith, had tried to reassure the governor that it was not inconsistent with the Treaty of Tien Tsin, and that precedents existed in legislation passed by both the Victorian and New South Wales governments.¹⁶⁰ However, Cairns informed the Earl of Carnarvon on 11 October that he had decided to reserve the bill on the grounds of its "extraordinary nature."¹⁶¹ Within a month he received notice of his commission to South Australia;¹⁶² his replacement was Arthur Kennedy, Governor of Hong Kong.

Cairns' decision to reserve assent to the *Gold Fields Act* amendment pleased most Chinese, but the prospects for alluvial miners on the Palmer were fast diminishing. 7,708 Chinese arrived on the field within the first five months of 1877, bringing the total population to around 18,000, a number, in Sellheim's opinion, "considerably in excess of the capabilities of the field in the dry season." By the close of May, the average earnings of Chinese miners was estimated at a mere 3 dwts.¹⁶³ The increased rice tax was having its effect on the diet and health of the miners. Taam Sze Pui who arrived during this time was greatly disturbed by the distress of earlier arrivals:

Oh, what a disappointment when we learnt that the rumour was unfounded and we were mislead! Not only was gold difficult to find the climate was not suitable and was the cause of frequent attacks of illness. As we went about, there met our gaze the impoverished condition and the starved looks of our fellow countrymen who were either penniless or ill, and there reached our ears endless sighs of sorrow. Those who arriving first expressed no regret for being late, on the contrary, they were thinking of

160. Griffith to Acting Private Secretary A.V. Drury 5 October 1876, *QV&P* 1877, 3, pp.229-30.

161. Cairns to Vice President of the Executive Council, 9 October 1876 & Cairns to Earl of Carnarvon 11 October 1876, *QV&P* 1877, 3, pp.230-1.

162. News of Cairns' new appointment first appeared in the local press in November 1876. *CH* 29 November 1876.

163. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 1 June 1877, 77/122 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

departing. Could we, who had just arrived, remain untouched at these sad tales?¹⁶⁴

There was growing apprehension among gold field administration staff over their ability to cope with a steadily increasing population. W.R.O. Hill expressed his fears in May 1877: "I trust the Govt. are taking into consideration the desirability of checking the immigration of Chinese in such numbers for even now things are beginning to look serious and I dread what it is likely to be in a few months hence."¹⁶⁵ Disputes over claims, rare in the past, became more common, some leading to fighting. When the first of these occurred, Sellheim described it as "peculiar", caused by the intrusion of "a mob of new chum Chinamen."¹⁶⁶ Other disputes occurring throughout 1877 were similarly triggered by new arrivals.¹⁶⁷

As the Chinese population steadily increased public meetings were called again in Cooktown and at Thornborough on the Hodgkinson to demand some form of government control over immigration. The Cook District Progress Association rather oddly reiterated the demands of 1875 to prohibit Chinese from mining "any new field for three years after its opening and proclamation".¹⁶⁸ Indeed, by mid 1877, this

164. Taam Sze Pui, *My Life*, pp.10-11.

165. Hill to Under Sec Mines 1 June 1877, 77/85 MWO 13A/G1 QSA.

166. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 7 April 1877, 77/79 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

167. In March 1877, about one hundred long term Chinese miners tried to reclaim an area recently proven rich by "new chum" Chinese (Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 7 April 1877, 77/79 MWO 13B/G1 QSA). Another incident occurred at the end of June, when "a mob of new chum Chinamen" jumped the claims in the possession of other Chinese at the Right Hand Branch (Sellheim to Mines Office 25 June 1877, reprinted in *Q* 30 June 1877). During the first half of August, an affray between Chinese over a claim at Jessop's Gully was reported, with wounds inflicted (*CH* 15 August 1877). Sellheim vaguely mentioned "one or two serious fights" during July (Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 4 August 1877, 77/177 MWO 13B/G1 QSA), while Hill received information of a case of claim jumping by an armed group at Byerstown early September (Hill to Under Sec for Mines 1 October 1877, 77/1647 MWO 13A/G1 QSA.)

168. *CC* 15 August 1877. See also *Q* 25 August 1877, *CH* 18 August 1877.

demand was no longer relevant to the Palmer, now in its fourth mining year. The only plausible explanation is that this was a veiled attempt by the Progress Association, which had close links with the pro-Chinese Chamber of Commerce, to defuse local attempts to disrupt commercial relations with Chinese ports. If so, they were not entirely successful; aware that a three year embargo on Chinese no longer affected the Palmer, anti-Chinese groups agitated to restrict Chinese from mining for a longer period. A public meeting was held in Cooktown at the end of June, and a petition was drawn up requesting W.E. Murphy to promote a measure excluding Chinese miners from new gold fields for five years.¹⁶⁹ But it was the Hodgkinson miners who were most vociferous, alarmed now that the large Chinese population might spill southwards. "It's high time our defences were looked after," reported the *Hodgkinson Mining News*, "as I have heard that the videttes of an invading army of 'Chinks' are already down the river - rumour says from 100 to 300."¹⁷⁰

Meanwhile the government had embarked upon yet another programme to halt further immigration through quarantine regulations, which by its poor timing almost cost them the support of the new governor, Arthur Kennedy. From January 1877, with the discovery of a case of smallpox, all vessels from Chinese ports had to obtain admission to pratique at the first port of call south of Somerset.¹⁷¹ Kennedy, *en route* to Moreton Bay from Hong Kong, had intended disembarking at Cooktown but was prevented by the new regulation. Waiting dignitaries were obliged to row out to the governor-designate's quarantined steamer to present their petitions including a magnificently hand-painted scroll from a Chinese deputation.¹⁷² While Kennedy was not amused by the "unnecessary strictness" of the quarantine regulations, his opinion did not prevent the government issuing a further order,

169. CC 27 June 1877.

170. HMN 11 August 1877.

171. QGG, XX, 2 (6 January 1877), pp.9-10.

172. CC 21, 24 March 1877. The Chinese greeting was apparently very elaborate, designed by Ty Tong Yik, an artist, and translated by Samuel Ashew.

effective from 30 March, requiring all ships from Chinese ports, with or without clean bills of health, to be placed in quarantine.¹⁷³ Ten days later Kennedy was cleared from quarantine and invested as Governor of the colony of Queensland.¹⁷⁴

With valuable cargoes remaining at sea for the quarantine period and shipping timetables disrupted, both European and Chinese commerce was severely affected. Little or no preparation was made to accommodate or feed the passengers of quarantined ships, and shipowners found themselves paying the costs. With inadequate sanitary conditions at quarantine stations, such as Fitzroy Island, it was feared that disease would spread rather than being contained.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, Kennedy was alarmed at the treatment meted out to "the more thrifty sober and industrious Chinese immigrants." A confidential despatch to the Earl of Carnarvon reveals that he "did not share in the apprehensions" of his ministers, for he regarded the Chinese as "useful" colonists. He

173. QCS, XX, 55 (30 March 1877) p.1034.

174. The notices granting pratique to the *Kato* (Kennedy's temporary lazaret) and the proclamation of Kennedy as governor, appeared side by side in the gazette. QCS, XX, 59 & 60 (10 April 1877), pp. 1117, 1119-1120.

175. Captain Garceau of the *Gaoga* after landing his passengers at Fitzroy Island complained that quarantine would promote rather than prevent sickness (A. Garceau to Col Sec 2 June 1877, 77/31 89 COL/A 239 (SA). The disabled *Thalée*, which was unable to go to Fitzroy Island on 30 March, was eventually allowed to unload passengers at Cape Bedford north of Cooktown on 17 April (QCS, XX, 55 (30 March 1877), pp.1033-4; QCS, XX, 75 [17 April 1877], p.1222). In the case of the *Valley of Love* with 946 Chinese on board, the captain refused to hoist the yellow flag and to go to Fitzroy Island. The captain argued that not only was his ship uninsured outside the Hong Kong to Cooktown route, but that he had cargo to load, and the large number of Chinese passengers were becoming restless, their rice rations low. Eventually, with rice supplied by PM St. George, the *Valley of Love* left, returning to Cooktown at the beginning of May. For the owners of the vessel, the trip to Fitzroy Island was a completely lost venture, and on top of it was a fine of £20 for the Captain, for his refusal to hoist the quarantine flag (Telegrams from Dr. Kortum, Howard St George and E. Fahey regarding *Valley of Love* 13 April-2 May 1877, 77/2904 COL/A 238 QSA). Another lost venture was encountered by the proprietors of the *Bowen*, who found that they had to pay the expense of keeping 500 Chinese in food while in quarantine which amounted to c£250-300 (F.H. Hart to Legislative Council, QCS, XXII (1 November 1877), p.284.

described the inadequate quarantine facilities as "calculated to produce greater evils than it was proposed to avert", as well as claiming that smallpox was more prevalent among European immigrants than Chinese. Kennedy concluded that valuable trade would be lost.¹⁷⁶ It seemed that Cairns and Kennedy were of similar ilk, but this was not so.

The clumsy and unpopular quarantine measures were only a stopgap. What the government had in mind was a two-fold attack, involving not only an amendment to the *Gold Fields Act* to restrict Chinese mining, but also a measure to regulate immigration. The *Chinese Immigrants Regulation Bill* and the amendment to the *Gold Fields Act* progressed simultaneously through parliament, and it is clear that most parliamentarians did not distinguish between them in debate. The *Chinese Immigrants Regulation Act*, which became law on 20 August 1877, placed a £10 poll tax on Chinese entering the colony.¹⁷⁷ The *Gold Fields Act Amendment Act of 1877*, passed 1 October, was essentially the same as its predecessor which had been reserved by Cairns; it imposed a £3 fee for miners' rights and £10 for business licences. It differed in the substitution of the word "person" for any "Asiatic or African alien" in Clause 2 with regard to penalties for illegal mining, and the omission of the offending section of Clause 3, which in the former amendment had made the assumption that any Asian or African was an alien unless immediate proof was produced.¹⁷⁸ The governor had no grounds to refuse assent.

Predictably, pro-Chinese elements in Cooktown were critical of the imposition of a poll tax; Bailey of the *Cooktown Herald* denounced the *Chinese Immigrants Regulation Act* as "iniquitous, tyrannical and un-

176. Kennedy to Earl of Carnarvon 16 May 1877, Queensland/9062 CO 234/37 PRO.

177. 41 *Victoriae* 12. *An Act to regulate the Immigration of Chinese and to make provision against their becoming a charge upon the Colony.*

178. 41 *Victoriae* 12. *An Act to Amend "The Gold Fields Act 1874" so far as it relates to Asiatic and African Aliens and in other respects.*

just."¹⁷⁹ From the *Queensland* came a pessimistic forecast for Cooktown's future: "No more arrivals of 110,000 a month".¹⁸⁰ Its impact was immediate, as there were no new Chinese immigrants to Cooktown for over a month after the enactment of the *Regulation Act*. The first "responders" to arrive early in October were businessmen; they regarded the £10 entry fee as an acceptable commercial risk.¹⁸¹ However, in the subsequent three years, only three hundred Chinese paid the capitation fee for entry to Queensland.¹⁸² Some were returning entrepreneurs as Sellheim received many enquiries from Chinese store-keepers wanting to make short term visits to their ancestral villages as to whether the Act applied to them. It was rumoured that a few did return without paying the entry fee, by travelling through Port Darwin and other colonies.¹⁸³ However, while the *Regulation Act* was discriminatory it did not cause distress to Chinese already in the colony. In this regard it differed from its companion legislation, the *Gold Fields Act Amendment Act of 1877*, which had greater impact on the Palmer itself.

179. *CH* 19 September 1877.

180. *Q* 6 October 1877.

181. *CC* 6 October 1877. See also *CH* 10 October 1877.

182. Return Showing the number of Chinese who paid the Capitation Fee, from August 1877 to September 1880.

Year	Number of Chinese	Amount paid for Capitation fee	Number of Refundments	Amount
		f-s-d		f-s-d
1877	45	450-0-0	1	20-0-0
1878	124	1,240-0-0	3	380-0-0
1879	115	1,150-0-0	36	360-0-0
1880	134	1,340-0-0	41	410-0-0
	418	4,180-0-0	117	1,170-0-0

From *Q.A.S.* 1880, p.195.

183. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 30 June 1879, 79/164 MWO 13B/G2 QSA.

Chinese miners were understandably angered at having to pay £3 for a miner's right and it was rumoured that the Chinese would physically resist any attempt by the gold field administration to extract payment. Sellheim reported this undercurrent of discontent to the Under Secretary for Mines in 1877:

I am informed by leading Chinamen that the passing of this Act is the cause of great discontent amongst their countrymen, and it is rumoured that at the expiration of many of the current licences, a roll-up may be looked forward to, if the £3 licences should be strictly enforced. I trust such an event will not take place, as I fail to see how much bloodshed could be prevented in such a case.¹⁸⁴

No violence eventuated, however, as it became clear to gold fields staff that collection of revenue was now near to impossible. Indeed Sellheim asserted that "the issue of Miners Rights is a perfect dead letter,"¹⁸⁵ for while he had accused leading Chinese storekeepers of discouraging payment of the increased fee initially,¹⁸⁶ it was soon evident to him that most of the Chinese miners were simply too impoverished to pay. Fines served no purpose, and if imprisonment was ordered, all "the gaols in the colony would be filled in a fortnight."¹⁸⁷ Assistant Warden Farrelly, during his December patrol, let about one hundred Chinese miners go without payment because, in his opinion, they were "actually starving and suffering from fever and sickness":

...the majority of the Chinese whose Miners Rights have now expired are unable to pay for new ones whilst others are trying to evade the payment under the Amended Gold Fields Act. The Chinese Miners on this field are rendered penniless through their inability to wash the alluvial they have been raising from the Creeks and Gullies for months past but I have reasons to believe that as soon as the rainy season is over and they are able to commence washing I will have no difficulty in collecting the revenue

184. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 2 November 1877, 77/252 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

185. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 5 February 1878, 78/29 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

186. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 2 November 1877, 77/252 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

187. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 5 February 1878, 78/29 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

from them. However there are many that will be unable to pay and who appears to be subsisting on the charity of their countryman will have to be summarily dealt with.¹⁸⁸

Hill was equally unsuccessful in extracting payment from Chinese miners. His long-held attitude to Chinese was obviously mellowed by their plight, for he pessimistically predicted "the beginning of the end [of the Palmer] if the present oppressive Chinese legislation is enforced."¹⁸⁹

Contrary to the objective of the Act, Sellheim found that he had collected less rather than more revenue in the first month of implementation, and notified the Under Secretary for Mines accordingly:

The issue of Miners Rights has been smaller than during any previous month that I have been in charge of these goldfields. The collections of the ten shilling fee was beset with many difficulties but the collection of the three pound licence is a matter of impossibility, at any rate for the presentRegarding Miners Rights, from my experience of the present condition of the Chinamen on this Goldfield, I fear that the Revenue will lose about £5000 per annum by the passing of the Act.¹⁹⁰

From October 1877 to July 1878 only 217 miners' rights were collected by Sellheim, in some months none at all.¹⁹¹ The total number issued for the whole field during that period would not have amounted to more than 495.¹⁹² Even with the coming of the wet season, the lot of

188. Farrelly to Under Sec Mines 14 January 1878, MWO 13A/G1 QSA.

189. Hill to Under Sec Mines, November report, in *CH* 25 December 1877.

190. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 2 November 1877 77/252 MWO 13B/G1 QSA; also *CC* 17 November 1877.

191. Number of Miners' Rights issued to Chinese in the Maytown district October 1877-July 1878.

October 1877	39	March 1878	25
November	1	April	0
December	0	May	2
January 1878	1	June	52
February	54	July	43

Extracted from the Register of Miners' Rights, Warden's Office, Maytown, MWO 13B/12 QSA.

192. During the last quarter of 1877, Sellheim reported for the entire field that only 150 miners' rights had been issued, presumably most of these would have been issued to Chinese. 345 miners' rights were issued to Chinese from January to July 1878 at £3 each. *AR* 1877 p.11; *AR* 1878 p.6.

the Chinese did not improve dramatically, many deciding to spend £3 on a passage home, rather than persevere on the field. By mid-1878, the manager of the Queensland National Bank reported a perceptible decline:

...the old workings here are no longer payable and the imposition on them of the £3 for a miners right has driven away many who had that sum....[As this amount] is required for the passage back, numbers of them who have little or nothing are most afraid to venture for fear of being "run in".¹⁹³

In contrast to the miners, Chinese merchants appear to have been more able to pay their increased fee. Sellheim collected 113 business licence fees in the period October 1877 to August 1878, reflecting a fair proportion of the total number of Chinese businessmen on the field.¹⁹⁴ However, Cooktown merchants, although unaffected directly by the increased fee, became increasingly unwilling to take the commercial risks involved with a steadily dwindling population. Because Chinese miners were no longer buying, some Chinese merchants owed carriers as much as the freight for two trips to the field.¹⁹⁵ Other merchants became more wary, requiring prepayment for any goods forwarded. Some of the merchandise, including rice, had to be put in bond. News from Cooktown dated 20 October made the following report:

The latter fact [i.e. putting cargoes in bond], commercially speaking, does not present a very healthy state of things, but can readily be accounted for consequent upon recent Chinese legislation, and more especially that portion of it represented by the Gold Fields Act Amendment Act of 1877. The Chinese merchants in this town, who hold, comparatively speaking, the whole of the goods recently to hand, will not forward any portion thereof inland unless the price of same is paid beforehand, as they feel convinced that their customers, represented chiefly by the Chinese engaged in mining pursuits, will perforce

193. Kent to General Manager 24 June 1878, BR/QNB/032 NBA.

194. MWO 13B/12 QSA.

195. CC 22 December 1877.

be compelled to seek fresh scenes and pastures new, as it is simply out of the question that they can afford to pay the mining fees of £3 now required of them, and which I hear is religiously enforced.¹⁹⁶

The *Gold Fields Act Amendment Act of 1877* was generally unpopular with both European and Chinese businessmen on the field. Jointly they composed a memorial to the Under Secretary for Mines complaining of its injustices:¹⁹⁷ not only did it disrupt trade between the port and the field, but it also created on a declining field such as the Palmer a large concentration of Chinese paupers who threatened to become "an expensive burthen on the funds of the State."¹⁹⁸ The Act further dissatisfied European miners, who still feared Chinese competition on new fields where it was claimed that Chinese could still make a profit, despite the handicap of higher fees. As a result an Anti-Chinese League was formalized on 25 October 1877 to bring this point home to the government.¹⁹⁹ In the main, the tenor of anti-Chinese meetings held in Cooktown, and the content of petitions forwarded to the government in early 1878, demanded unequivocally the repeal of the 1877 Amendment.²⁰⁰ News that assent had been granted

196. Q 3 November 1877.

197. References to the memorial can be found in CC 10 April 1878; also Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 7 March 1878, 78/48 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

198. CC 20 October 1877.

199. CC 10 November 1877. Some members of the League rose to prominence as Cooktown Municipal Councillors, viz. S. Samper and J. Josephson. Other members included Adolphus Norrie, pharmacist and first chairman of the Anti Chinese League; Benjamin Palmer, ex-miner and unsuccessful candidate at the 1876 elections; C.A. Fielberg, an editor of the *Cooktown Courier* and author of anti-Chinese propaganda; F.W. Eicke, Donald Land, J. Nolan and C.W. Crowley. For other names see petition to governor from merchants, storekeepers, miners, teamsters and other residents of Cooktown and the Palmer District 15 November 1877, 77/5756 COL/A 249 QSA.

200. Meetings were held 25 October and 7 November 1877, 25 April and 2 May 1878, requesting prohibition of Chinese from new gold fields for up to 5 years. CC 27 October 1877; CH 31 October 1877; CC 10 November 1877, 27 April, 1, 4 May 1878; Q 4 May 1878. A petition was presented to PMG on visit to Cooktown c.21 November 1877. 1,200 signatures appeared on a petition to A.E. Kennedy, requesting a five year exclusion. Merchants *et al.* to A.E. Kennedy, 15 November 1877, 77/5756 COL/A 249 QSA.

to the *Gold Fields Act Amendment Act of 1878* was hailed with much satisfaction on the Palmer from all quarters, both Chinese and European. Under the Act no miner's right could be issued to any Asiatic or African alien for any new gold field, for three years after its proclamation.²⁰¹ Moreover it went to the heart of disputes on the field: while still openly discriminatory, at least it clarified the situation on the Palmer. Sellheim was besieged by applications from Chinese for miners' rights. While he collected only 43 miners' rights in the month preceding the enactment of the new amendment, 3560 were applied for in August 1878.²⁰² Further the Act allowed Chinese on any new field actually discovered by them. Thus while it controlled Chinese access to new discoveries, it did not oppress Chinese already at work on the Palmer. The new legislation coincided with a rush in late July to a find on the lower Palmer, located by Chinese.

The Chinese or Lukinville rush was the first substantial alluvial rush since the Hodgkinson. Its timing promised the remaining Chinese on the Palmer a release from the poverty that they had endured under the previous amendment to the *Gold Fields Act*. It was Lukinville which prompted a clamour for miners' rights during August 1878, which Sellheim claimed was the "largest issue that ever has taken place during such a short period on any Australian Goldfield."²⁰³ However, the find was not a completely new discovery, as it was evident to Sellheim that the Chinese prospectors had been secretly at work for some time.²⁰⁴ With the influx of 8,000 hopeful miners, including a small number of Europeans, competition over limited resources was bound to occur, and

201. *42 Victoriae 2. An Act to further amend "The Gold Fields Act 1874" so far as relates to new Gold Fields.*

202. MWO 13B/12 QSA.

203. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 7 September 1878, 78/168 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

204. Sellheim received notice of the discovery 25 July. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 5 August 1878, 78/157 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

there were soon rumours of a plan by Europeans to drive the Chinese off, and that fighting had broken out between the two groups. Reliable information however was not easily obtained from the lower Palmer.²⁰⁵ The *Queenslander* even alleged that a European had shot a Chinese miner in a dispute over a claim, but this cannot be verified from official reports.²⁰⁶ Notwithstanding rumours of angry incidents information was received that serious fighting had broken out among Chinese on or about 6 August, involving about 500-600 miners.²⁰⁷ This was the first of three disputes which became known as the Lukinville riots, possibly the most serious local affrays in Queensland history. The riots are still shrouded in mystery, as very little is known of the sequence of events, the numbers involved, or the issues from which the conflict arose. Certainly there were several days of violent civil disturbance, involving at least a few hundred people and resulting in a number of violent deaths. Folklore raises the Lukinville affair to the level of a major battle along ethnic lines. It may well be that a campaign was fought on the lower Palmer in the winter of 1878 which pales the Eureka Stockade into insignificance. If so, unfortunately there was no Raffaello Carboni present to chronicle it. Over a period of two weeks, at least four deaths - other estimates vary from 9 to 48 - and a number of other casualties occurred.²⁰⁸ Spencer Browne maintained that from twenty to thirty miners were killed, and a writer under the pseudonym of "Fossicker" alleged that "a massacre" of forty-eight "Pekinese" was the outcome.²⁰⁹ The number involved has also been exaggerated with figures as high as 8,000-10,000.²¹⁰

205. Originally reported in the Brisbane *Telegraph* 25 July 1878 and *Sydney Morning Herald* 24 July 1878, referred to in CC 3, 7 August 1878.

206. Q 10 August 1878.

207. CC 10 August 1878; Q 10 & 17 August 1878.

208. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 7 September 1878, 78/168 MWO 13B/G1 QSA; Fossicker, Chinese on the Palmer, p.19.

209. Spencer Browne, *Memories*, p.53; Fossicker, Chinese on the Palmer, *C&CMM* 21, 11 (November 1945), p.209.

210. Spencer Browne came to the figure of "not less than 10,000 men", Glenville Pike gave a number of 8,000. Spencer Browne, *Memories*, p.52; G. Pike, *Old Palmer Days: Reminiscences of Harry Harbord and Spencer Browne*, *C & CMM* 28, 2 (1952) p.37.

The 6 August incident alarmed the gold field administration considerably, as violent disorder among the Chinese had been rare. Sellheim, having only just returned from the new rush, had instructed Towner to proceed to Lukinville to set up a permanent camp.²¹¹ Now, with the latest telegraphic message to hand, he contacted Farrelly at Byerstown, for additional police reinforcements.²¹² Fighting broke out again over a claim on 15 August. The police reported "a roll up amongst the Chinese....There were 800 Macao against 400 Canton men. Two men were killed and several wounded."²¹³ Sub-Inspector Britten later put the number of deaths at three. Four days later, another man was killed, but this time in a gambling house. Britten, who, according to the *Palmer Chronicle* had "struck terror" into the rioting Chinese with his Aboriginal trackers, concluded that this last death was a continuation of previous events.²¹⁴

In his official assessment, Sellheim identified the primary cause as inter-group rivalry, urged on by ringleaders, and maintained that before the rush these groups had remained separate:

I regret to have to refer to some serious riots that took place amongst the Chinese at the beginning of this rush, during which four men were shot dead and many others were more or less seriously wounded. The primary cause of the disturbance was the collision of the different tribes which hitherto had been in possession of separate portions of the gold field, evidently a tacit agreement amongst themselves which had been strictly adhered to.²¹⁵

According to Sellheim, the "Hong Kong" men had previously been in possession of the upper workings of the Byerstown-Uhrstown area, the

211. Mentioned by Sellheim in his report to Under Sec Mines 5 August 1878, 78/157 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.
212. Sellheim to Farrelly 7 August 1878, 78/160 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.
213. The content of a telegram sent by Kilkarney to Inspector Clohesy 16 August 1878, CC 17 August 1878.
214. Item from *Palmer Chronicle* reprinted in Q 19 October 1878; telegram from Sub-Inspector Britten 20 August 1878, CC 21 August 1878.
215. AR 1878 p.20.

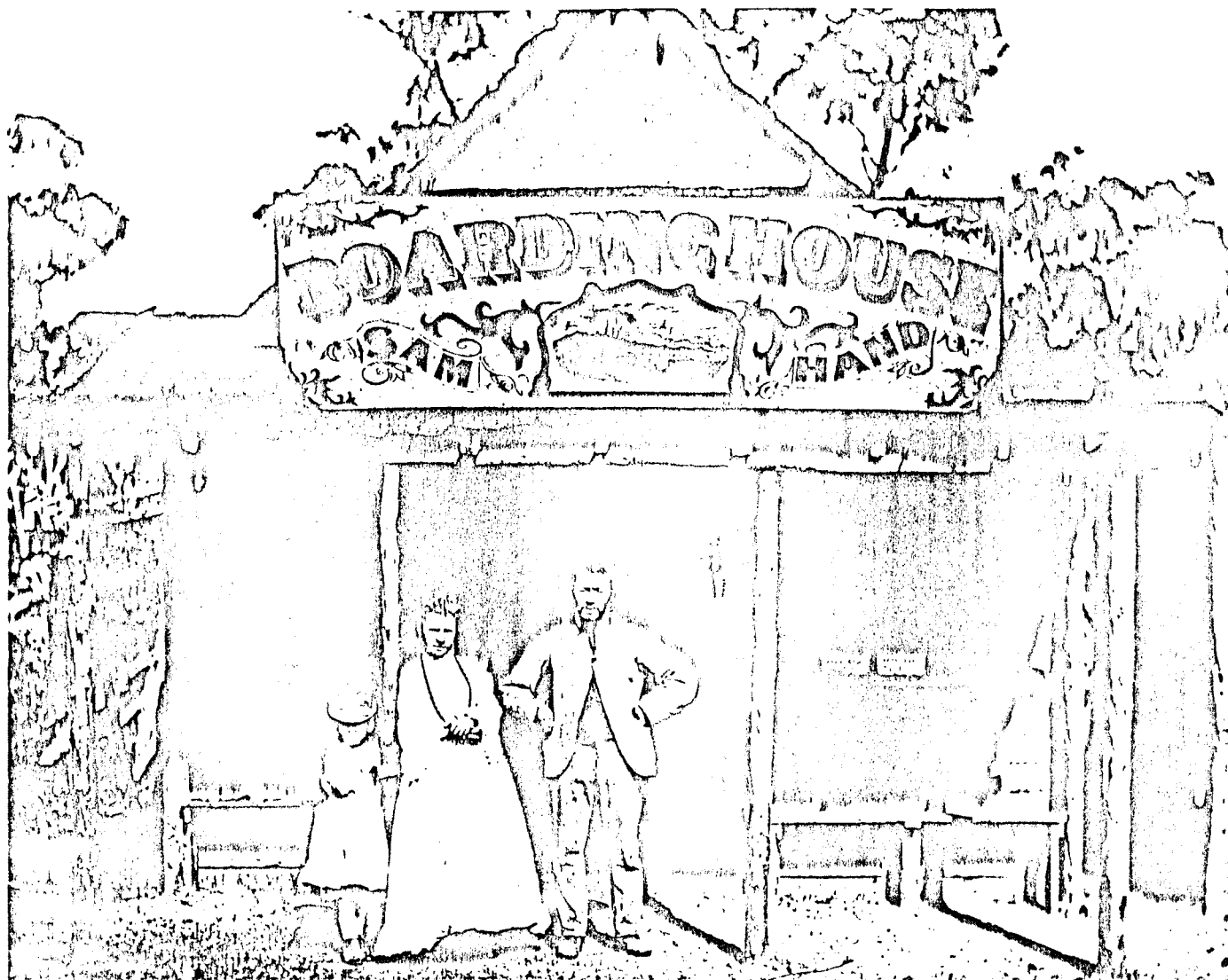
"Tartars" were located at Jessop's Gully and the Conglomerate, and the "Macao" men were found at Stony and Sandy Creeks.²¹⁶ Presumably the "Tartars" were non-Cantonese, Mandarin speakers, sometimes referred to as "Hak'ka", a community of whom was known to have existed at Cradle Creek in 1876.²¹⁷ However, the district origins of Sellheim's "Hong Kong" and "Macao" men are difficult to determine, despite his allegation that the principal clashes involved these two groups.²¹⁸ On the evidence of some Chinese, Sellheim blamed "gambling vagabonds" for inciting the riots to further their own interests. The supposed ringleaders were charged with vagrancy and sentenced to Rockhampton Gaol; one of them was a prominent storekeeper and mine owner, Sam Hand, a naturalized Chinese, married to an Irish woman, and resident in Australia for at least seventeen years. Hand had considerable experience on other North Queensland fields, and was possibly the same Hand whose photograph was taken at Gulgong in the early 1870s.²¹⁹

216. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 7 September 1878, 78/168 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

217. James McHenley defined Hak'ka as meaning "strange family" and identified the existence of one such group at Cradle Creek. CH 21 June 1876.

218. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 7 September 1878, 78/168 MWO 138/G1 QSA.

219. Sam Hand was born Canton probably 1846 but possibly 1836 (there are discrepancies between the information on his death certificate 1896 and his naturalization memorial 1871, the evidence of the latter is probably more reliable). Resident in Queensland from 1861* or 1870**. Married in 1863* to an Irishwoman with whom he had a family which included at least one daughter.** According to his death certificate he resided in Queensland for 26 years and 16 years in New South Wales, however in his own naturalization memorial of 1871, he stated that he had been in Queensland for a longer period. Reefer and interpreter at Middle Camp, Ravenswood in 1871 which was his address at the time of naturalization. Of his life between 1872 and 1876 little is known. It is possible that he was the same Sam Hand of Gulgong, a boarding-house keeper. Storekeeper, miner, and interpreter on the Palmer Gold Field c.1877-78, with his wife and family. Eventually resided in Geraldton (Innisfail) area as a cane farmer. Died Geraldton 14 June 1896. See also Oaths of Allegiance, Samuel Hand (Ravenswood) 12 April 1871, 1135 SCT/CF 7 QSA; Memorandum written by W.R.O. Hill 13 April 1871, Memorial of Samuel Hand, 6 March 1871, 71/1722 COL/A 157 QSA; Certificate from Registrar of Deaths 658/1329. See also K. Burke, *Gold and Silver: photographs of Australian Goldfields from the Holtermann Collection*, photograph 121. (*Naturalization memorial 1871; **Death certificate 1896).



Sam Hand's boarding house, Gulgong.

(Burke, *Gold & Silver*, p.121)

Sellheim's charge against Hand prompted a number of Chinese businessmen to forward a petition to the governor requesting him to review the case.²²⁰ It attributed the main cause of the disturbance of 15 August to a breach in mining ethics on the part of one party of Chinese miners: the signatories to the petition were Sze Yap Chinese, and alleged that the "Macao" men had locked up valuable ground by force of arms to all new comers, including those referred to as "Canton" men. When the latter attempted to occupy the disputed ground, fighting began. As the petition asserted:

That some time prior to the sixteenth day of August last past disturbances amounting to riots occurred amongst the Chinese Diggers on the recently discovered gold field at Lukinville during which riots some few Chinamen were killed and a great number seriously injured and that these riots arose mainly from the fact that a comparatively few Chinamen called "Macao" men held by force of arms over one hundred men's legitimate ground on the Diggings named to the exclusion of all comers more especially Chinamen known as "Canton" men the consequences of which conduct was that some scores of Chinamen principally "Canton" men attempted to occupy the ground so illegally held and a fight ensued which was the commencement of the riot.

Hand, they submitted, was neither vagrant nor ringleader, it being "known to the Bench that he had a claim on Stoney Creek worth two hundred pounds and had on his person when arrested over twenty pounds in money besides jewellery." It was conceded that a "bitter feud existed between the "Macao" and the "Canton" men, but that Hand, a "Canton" man, was the "victim of the animosity of the 'Macao' men."²²¹ In response, Sellheim stated that Hand was charged under clause 3, not clause 2, of the *Vagrant Act* as being a "rogue and vagabond" living off his countrymen and from his earnings as a gambler: he was the main cause of the riots "having levied a weekly tribute of 4/0 for every cradle and 2/0 for each man installed by him in the ground, unlawfully and violently taken from the Macao men."²²² To Sellheim, Hand had incited a case of claim jumping.

220. Petition of Chinese Residents Cooktown 16 September 1878, 78/846 COL/A 266 QSA.

221. *Ibid.*

222. Statement by Sellheim attached to the petition from Chinese residents, *ibid.*

Mining disputes involving the locking up of ground or the jumping of claims were certainly not unusual on gold fields, and if such cases could not be resolved by the individuals concerned then settlement could be sought in the warden's court. Why Hand was charged in the police court under the *Vagrant Act*, and not in the warden's court, is not clear. Certainly there would have been support among some Chinese for such remedy, as there had been a meeting of another group of merchants at the store of Chow Lee and Company, who publicly indicated their support for the "first holders" of the claim and advised other Chinese to "submit themselves to the Mining regulations in every way."²²³ District group rivalry cannot be discounted, for the Chinese themselves acknowledged its existence. As the "Macao" men were probably from Chung-Shan, for the port of Macao was originally in that district, and the "Canton" men had the support of Sze Yap merchants, it is possible that old prejudices intensified the issue over claims.²²⁴ The role of Sam Hand in the affair was most likely accidental, although it is quite probable that, as a storekeeper, he was the creditor for one of the groups involved in the episode.

By the end of August the Chinese had resumed their normal orderliness and the lower Palmer continued as the main producing area of the Palmer, with another large settlement growing at Stewart's Camp. Another dispute occurred there over claims, but this time between Europeans and Chinese. On this occasion it was no mere rumour: a Chinese miner was shot dead, a European committed for trial for wilful murder. Sellheim expressed his anxiety at this new turn of events:

It is to be deplored that Europeans should introduce firearms at all on such occasions, as their disputes can be always settled in a few minutes by the Wardens, and it is not at all desirable that such a bad example

223. CC 28 August 1878.

224. Some of these miners were later to settle in the Cairns district, where Cathie May has identified the existence of marked antipathy between Chung-Shan and Sze-Yap groups. May, Chinese in Cairns and District, p.123.

should be set the Chinese. For should they once get into the way of producing arms during every paltry squabble, it would be rather difficult to foresee the ultimate consequences.²²⁵

But there was to be no conviction, for this was the Rogers case,²²⁶ where in the aftermath of Lukinville, the murderer was acquitted by the European jury, to the disgust of Sellheim and St George.

As the dry season progressed, the profitability of the marginal Lukinville area diminished correspondingly and the Chinese fell back to reliable areas. Farrelly reported during October that 2,000 Chinese had already returned to Byerstown, and a large number had started to dam creeks in the vicinity of Stony Creek.²²⁷ By the end of 1878, almost 3,000 Chinese had left the field for other gold fields, two-thirds of these for the Hodgkinson. Another 2,152 returned home.²²⁸ Lukinville was the swansong of the Palmer's alluvial phase. Nevertheless Sellheim was still confident about the field's future, believing that further finds would "give employment for many of these people [i.e. the Chinese] for years to come."²²⁹ Yet within twelve months the population had fallen by a further 3,300, the total number of Chinese at the end of 1879 standing at 6,000. The effects of the exodus was both "serious and striking", the yield plummeting in proportion to the population decline.²³⁰

According to Francis Gill, Sellheim's successor, the pressure on the remaining miners began to ease slightly, as competition decreased.²³¹

225. Sellheim to Under Sec Mines 2 December 1878, 78/211 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

226. See footnote 131.

227. Farrelly to Under Sec Mines 7 November 1878, 78/195 MWO 13B/G1 QSA.

228. Of those who moved to other fields, Sellheim estimated that 2,000 went to the Hodgkinson, 400-500 to the Etheridge, 300 to Ravenswood, and 150 to the Charters Towers and Cape River fields. Only 84 arrived from overseas. *AR* 1878 p.23.

229. *AR* 1878 p.20.

230. *AR* 1879 p.16.

231. *AR* 1880 p.17.

Disputes were few, although in 1879, in a faint echo of Lukinville, Ah Wah alleged that "over 100 MaKow men" had overpowered "about 20 Canton men" and occupied their claim.²³² Miners still conflicted with gardeners over available river bank, and one such incident in 1880 had fatal consequences.²³³ But by this time the Palmer no longer produced the earnings which might encourage heated disputes, and new developments elsewhere were beginning to outweigh its attractions. A buried lead was found in Jessop's Gully by Chinese miners in August 1880, causing a small rush, but far greater numbers were leaving for the Coen or the Northern Territory gold fields,²³⁴ finding work on the coastal sugar fields, or simply returning to China. Some Chinese turned to tin mining with as many as 500 on Granite and Cannibal Creeks during the years 1880-1881. A few worked for Europeans, but most for themselves, as Chinese storekeepers were offering 3d per pound or up to £35 per ton of tin concentrate. However, mining of tin in high, granite country proved problematic as the deposits were shallow and water scarce.²³⁵ With the prohibition of Chinese from this branch of mining under the *Mineral Lands Act of 1882*, their labour could no longer be exploited and this industry too faltered.²³⁶ By the end of 1883, the Chinese population had dropped to 1043,²³⁷ a size approximating that of the first Chinese rush in mid-1874.

* * * *

Every attempt to describe the influx of Chinese to the Palmer has oversimplified it, for it was a complex phenomenon which occurred in

232. Ah Wan v Ah Sing, Ah Pie, Ah Long 21 April 1879, CPS 13B/P4 QSA.

233. AR 1880 p.20.

234. AR 1880 p.20; AR 1881 p.12.

235. AR 1879 p.17, 1880 p.19, 1881 pp.15-16, 1882 p.15, 1883 pp.21-22.

236. 46 *Victoriae* 8.

237. AR 1883 p.20.

several phases, and in the years while it lasted there were important changes in the success rate of Chinese in gold production, their affluence and lifestyle, the reactions of the European community to their presence, and the official measures adopted to deal with them. Similarly there is little recorded about day-to-day life among the members of this community, which is remarkable considering that for several years it constituted about a third of the population of North Queensland. Although they were vilified by European propagandists as slothful, diseased, villainous, and given to unspeakable vices, the evidence on early Chinese settlement on the Palmer suggests the majority of its members were uncommonly hard-working, sober, healthy, thrifty and law-abiding: in fact, the very model of the settlers that government immigration agents in Britain were attempting to attract to the colony.

The initial European reaction was characterized by vocal indignation rather than by any effective response. Intimidatory gestures reserved some parts of the diggings to Europeans for a time, but the transitory habits of the alluvial miners yielded even these areas to the Chinese within a year. The Hodgkinson rush of early 1876 finally confirmed Chinese possession of the entire Palmer, and the dominance of the Chinese miner was reflected in the success of Chinese merchants, packers and entrepreneurs in establishing themselves in the commercial affairs of the region. The gold field administration was baffled by the Chinese influx. Apart from the warden's discretion in granting extended claims, no powers existed to thwart Chinese expansion, although individual officers employed methods of doubtful propriety in waging private campaigns against them. Preoccupied with revenue-raising because of official pressure, the administration was unable to cope with the sheer pace and volume of the inundation of diggers; the fact that the newcomers were Chinese was largely incidental. After 1876, the situation steadily changed. It seems likely that immigrants, 18,000 in number to that year, simply overwhelmed the commercial and social infrastructure that supported the Chinese community. Declining returns from the diggings undoubtedly contributed to this breakdown. Poverty, malnutrition and disease steadily increased, and petty crime became more common.

The colonial government responded belatedly and in piecemeal fashion to the Chinese question. Increasing government charges merely exacerbated the growing destitution of many Chinese miners, and tinkering with quarantine regulations simply inconvenienced shipping; neither served to reduce the number of Chinese on the Palmer. A more intelligent response was finally adopted by proscribing Chinese access for three years after discovery. But it was too late. The Lukinville rush and the consequent civil disturbances, remembered luridly in folklore as the heyday of the Chinese on the Palmer, in fact signalled the decline of the field as a significant gold producer, the failure of official policies, and the precarious state of Chinese social organization under growing economic pressures. When the efficient, patient and orderly Chinese erupted into violent dispute over auriferous ground, it meant that the heady days of the Palmer were over.

This PUBLIC BILL originated in the Legislative Assembly, and, having this day passed, is now ready for transmission to the Legislative Council for their concurrence.

Legislative Assembly Chamber,
Brisbane, 30th August, 1876.

LEWIS A. BERNAYS,
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.

The Legislative Council have this day agreed to this Bill with Amendments.

Legislative Council Chamber,
Brisbane, 20th September, 1876.

H. B. FITZ,
Clerk of the Parliament.

Queensland.



ANNO QUADRAGESIMO

VICTORIÆ REGINÆ.

No. .

A Bill to Amend "The Gold Fields Act 1874" so far as relates to Asiatic and African Aliens.

WHEREAS great expense is incurred in maintaining order on the Gold Fields in consequence of the presence of large numbers of Asiatic aliens thereon and it is expedient to amend "The Gold Fields Act 1874" so far as the same relates to the issue of Miners' Rights and Business Licenses to Asiatic and African aliens Be it therefore enacted by the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly of Queensland in Parliament assembled and by the authority of the same as follows—

- 10 1. The sum payable by an Asiatic or African alien for a miners' right shall be three pounds and for a business license shall be ten pounds for each year during which the same is to be in force instead of ten shillings and four pounds respectively as by the said recited Act is provided.
- 15 2. And no miner's right or business license shall hereafter be issued to any such alien except on payment of such sums as aforesaid respectively.

Increased fee for miners' rights and business licenses to Asiatic and African aliens.

2. No

Gold Fields Act Amendment Bill of 1876.

Restrictions.	<p>2. No Asiatic or African alien shall be permitted to mine upon any gold field until two years after the proclamation of such gold field unless it shall have been discovered and reported by an Asiatic or African alien.</p>
Penalty.	<p>3. 2. Any Asiatic or African alien who shall be found on any gold field not having in his possession a miner's right or business license lawfully issued to him</p> <p>Or who shall mine on any gold field within the time during which he is by the last preceding section prohibited from so doing and any person who shall upon any gold field employ any Asiatic or African alien such alien not having in his possession a miner's right lawfully issued to him .</p> <p>Shall on conviction thereof forfeit and pay a sum not exceeding five pounds and in default of immediate payment the amount of such penalty shall be levied by distress and sale of the goods and chattels of the offender and in default of such distress or if sufficient distress be not found the offender shall be liable to be imprisoned with or without hard labor for any period not exceeding six three months.</p>
Proof to be on defendant in case of prosecution.	<p>4. 3. In any prosecution for any offence against the provisions of this Act the averment in the information that any person named therein is an Asiatic or African alien shall be sufficient proof that he is such alien unless the defendant shall prove that at the time of committing the alleged offence such person was a naturalized British subject And the averment in the information that any person named therein had not in his possession at the time of the alleged offence a miner's right or business license lawfully issued to him shall be sufficient proof that such person had not such miner's right or business license unless the defendant shall prove the contrary.</p>
One justice may hear cases whenever the offender is found.	<p>5. 4. Any information for any offence against this Act may be heard and determined by any one warden or any two justices of the peace and any such warden or justices may hear and determine the same in a summary manner at any place where any offender shall be found within the limits of any gold field.</p>
Short title.	<p>6. 5. This Act shall be styled and may be cited as "<i>The Gold Fields Act Amendment Act of 1876.</i>"</p>

85

Chinese Petition protesting against the Customs Duty and
Gold Fields Act Amendment Bills of 1876

[ADVT.]

To the Honorable the Speaker and
Members of the Legislative
Assembly of Queensland, in
Parliament assembled:-
The Humble Petition of the under-
signed Chinese Residents, in Cooktown,

SHEWETH:-

That the additional Customs Import duty of seven pounds six shillings and eight pence per ton on rice now levied, and to be proposed for the sanction of your Honourable House, which will make the price of that article to consumers about four times the cost price of rice in China, is an oppressive and unjust measure of taxation, deliberately calculated to fall heavily on the poorer classes of Chinese in the colony, is in the worst form of class legislation, and is an insidious breach of the spirit, if not of the letter, of sacred treaties now existing between the Governments of the British and Chinese Empires.

That the commerce of China is already heavily taxed in this colony, and Chinese consumers are heavily burdened by the Customs import duties on tea, opium, tobacco, and other articles of their consumption, and in spite of the few wants of the laboring Chinese and their unwearied industry, a large proportion of them in this colony are at present in a state of absolute distress.

That although the Chinese are thus heavily taxed, and Chinese trade contributes a large proportion of the revenue of the colony, the Chinese are prohibited by the operation of the Alien Act from having any voice in the expenditure of that revenue, contrary to the fundamental mansion of the English Constitution, that there shall be no taxation without

representation, yet the Chinese as a body are as well educated and as good colonists as any other foreigners in the colony, and have been accustomed to have the laws in their own country framed and administered by men whose only recognised claim to the office is their honesty, and their abilities clearly shown by their conduct and their success in the Imperial schools.

That if the Government of the colony determine to impose more taxation on the Chinese, your petitioners would prefer a poll-tax to be levied on immigrant Chinese, which would not be open to the objection of its being an insidious measure, or a tax upon the export of gold, which would fall upon those able to pay, and be a more just and state-manlike measure than one which has been deliberately calculated to starve out the Chinese already in this colony.

That the tax to be proposed to your Honorable House for its sanction, of three pounds per annum on each Miners' Right, if imposed on the digging population of this district, will effectually extinguish the mining industry, and if it be levied on the Chinese alone, it will be an open violation of the treaties existing between their Imperial Majesties, the Queen of England and the Emperor of China.

That the commerce carried on with China has chiefly contributed to make the Customs revenue of Cooktown the second in the colony. And if the 10,000 Chinese at present engaged in developing the resources of this district be starved ou[t] by legislation, the port of Cooktown will sink to its original insignificance, and the revenue of the colony experience a serious diminution.

That the gold recovered by Chinese labor, which raises the envy of the idle and ignorant, and the voices of demagogues, at least one-half the value of which is paid by the Chinese in the shape of taxes on

food, on clothing, and on mining utensils towards the revenue of the colony, is won from ground admitted to be too poor to support European miners, and would therefore remain for ever unproductive and lost were it not for the patient industry of the despised and maligned Chinese.

That it is admitted that Cooktown is indebted to the Chinese for its supplies of vegetables, necessary for the health of the inhabitants, for domestic servants, necessary to the comfort of families, and for at least one-half its Municipal revenue, necessary to the support of Municipal Government.

That Europeans, who fail to make the gold fields of this district payable after trial, and hundreds who never make the trial at all, obtain assistance from the Government to enable them to seek for a livelihood in other colonies, and although the heavily taxed Chinese contribute towards the assistance so rendered they never receive assistance from the Government, although the Chinese in Cooktown are compelled to subscribe money in order to pay the passages of hundreds, who consider their densely populated native country a fairer and better field for their honest industry, than the wilderness, which has been opened to commerce chiefly, by their labors and the commerce of their country.

That the British Empire has gained more from its commerce with China, than China has gained from commerce with it, and the Imperial Government of China has acted contrary to its traditions and its ancient policy in admitting foreigners into China, already over-populated, while the Government of Queensland propose to enact measures opposed to the traditions and the policy of the English law, and to legislate against the spirit and the letter of solemn treaties in order to oppress and starve the already oppressed Chinese in the sparsely populated wilderness of Queensland.

Your Petitioners, therefore, pray that your Hon. House will take the matter in this their humble petition into favorable consideration, and will cause to be done in the premises, as in you justice and wisdom you may consider meet, and your petitioners will ever pray &c., &.

(Source: *Cooktown Herald* 2 August 1876).

CHAPTER 6

ABORIGINES AND MINERS

"All hands that had any shooting stick rushed off for the place were they thought the blacks were"

Peter, a miner 1876.

The coming of Europeans and Chinese to the Palmer heralded a period of violent conflict with local Aborigines, arguably as destructive and brutal as any on the Australian continent. Its effects on the mining industry and the way of life of the participants formed an important aspect of the history of the area. That violence occurred is by no means a revelation; indeed the reputation of the gold field in folklore and popular writing leans heavily on racial conflict, frequently expressed in stereotyped and exaggerated terms and contributing little to a clear understanding of the period.¹ Part of this trend can be traced to contemporary sources. There were reasons for overstating the level of violence at the time, when demanding better roads and more police, or in seeking to deter Chinese immigration. Moreover, journalists were not always scrupulous in adhering to facts when presenting an incident to the public: the illustrated southern press in particular pandered to the appetites of the readership with sensational stories and engravings, both created far from the Palmer.² There was also a mythologizing tendency at work in the early years, which cast events in larger-than-life proportions when depicting the northern frontier of settlement, and which was reflected in the ironic comments of more fastidious contemporary writers. These elements provided grist for later creators of romantic tales. However, there is a much greater quantity of unsentimental writing which permits the nature of racial conflict on the Palmer to be treated more objectively. The number of European deaths is often used as the chief indicator of the

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1. H. Holthouse, *River of Gold: A Story of the Palmer Gold Rush* (Sydney 1967); G.P. [Glenville Pike], *Battles with Blacks, C & CMM* 17, 7 (1944), pp. 5, 37; fictitious characters and circumstances were used to embellish an article by E.F. Gay, *Battle Camp, Truth* 16 June 1957.
 2. See engravings from *Australasian Sketcher* and *Illustrated Sydney News* illustrating this chapter.

severity of violence; Chinese deaths are less accurately recorded, while Aboriginal deaths cannot even be guessed with any confidence. Accounts written in recent decades have expressed European and Chinese deaths in "hundreds"³ and even "thousands".⁴ Indeed, while also tending to stress the ferocity of specific incidents, and to repeat assertions of widespread cannibalism, the official centenary history of Queensland put the numbers of Chinese eaten by Aborigines on the Palmer in the thousands.⁵ The inherent improbability of these figures inflates the conflict to ludicrous proportions, but the real death toll is sobering enough. The Chinese and European dead can verifiably be measured in dozens, a scale sufficiently grim to require no embellishment.

Existing alongside sensational works are a number providing authoritative descriptions of racial conflict in North Queensland and other parts of Australia. As early as 1938, A.P. Elkin defined in general terms the phases of Aboriginal reaction to white settlers⁶; a refined interpretation was offered by Mervyn Hartwig over twenty years later.⁷ Modern revision of the history of racial conflict was greatly assisted by C.D. Rowley, who published a broad synthesis of

3. Holthouse, *River of Gold*, pp. 32, 93.

4. Cilento and Lack, *Triumph*, p.203.

5. *Ibid.*

6. According to the Elkin model, the first three phases of Aboriginal reaction were: tentative approach, clash and adaptation - intelligent parasitism. A.P. Elkin, *Reaction and Interaction*, *American Anthropologist* 53 (1951), pp. 164-187. See also A.P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines* (5th rev. edn., Sydney 1974), pp. 363-367.

7. Hartwig's research in the Alice Springs area suggests the following stages: fear and avoidance, tentative approaches, resistance and intelligent exploitation. M.C. Hartwig, *The Progress of White Settlement in the Alice Springs District and Its Effects upon the Aboriginal Inhabitants, 1860-1894* (PhD thesis, University of Adelaide 1965), pp. viii, xxi.

events in each Australian colony, based on a political rather than an anthropological analysis.⁸ Ray Evans showed that frontier conflict cannot be explained away as the random acts of desperate people; it arose from the "self-righteous progressivism" of nineteenth century white settlers, with aspects of their ideology reflected in the deliberate policies of Queensland governments.⁹ Noel Loos based part of his study of North Queensland on the role of the mining frontier in shaping racial contact, pointing out that the region was the last in eastern Australia to be settled by Europeans, who, as experienced colonists, brought with them longstanding practices of dispossession. At the same time, however, isolation and the demands of the environment made the frontier policies of the colonial government ineffective in the very areas where a much greater influx of population over a short time created a more pressing need for government intervention than on the pastoral frontier where those policies had been shaped. Loos has outlined other distinctive elements of mining settlement which impinged on Aboriginal life: the immediate devastation of the land, especially in and around watercourses, and the absence from the mining fields of the large numbers of introduced animals which in pastoral areas partly compensated for the Europeans' disruption of normal food supplies. It is notable that a significant proportion of Loos' evidence, especially of violent conflict on the mining frontier, is based on the Palmer experiences.¹⁰

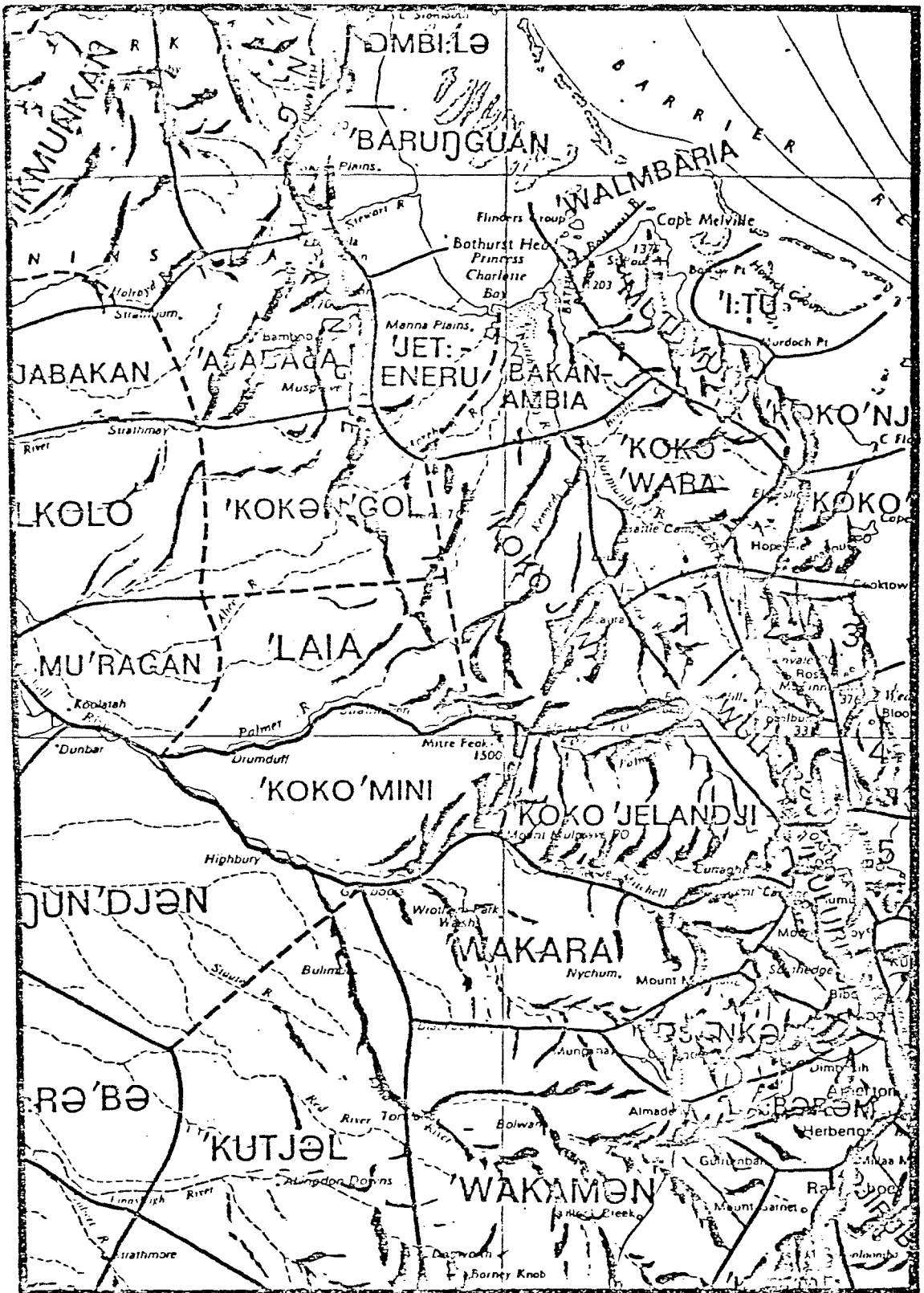
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8. C.D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* (Canberra 1970), *Outcasts in White Australia* (Ringwood 1972), *The Remote Aborigines* (Ringwood 1972).
9. R. Evans, K. Saunders, K. Cronin, *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination: race relations in colonial Queensland* (Sydney 1975), pp. 25-66.
10. N.A. Loos, *Aboriginal-European relations in North Queensland, 1861-1897* (PhD thesis, James Cook University of North Queensland 1976), pp. 193-240, *Invasion and Resistance. Aboriginal-European Relations on the North Queensland Frontier 1861-1897* (Canberra 1982), pp.62-87.

The most recent contribution is that of Henry Reynolds, who has sought to interpret the process of contact as far as possible from the Aboriginal viewpoint. In a succinct summary of the role of mining in modifying the nature of contact, he supports Loos' explanation of the sudden impact of alluvial mining leading swiftly to violence, without the progressing through the stages of non-violent contact observed in other areas. Reynolds points out, too, that miners generally had less long-term commitment than settlers in other industries, and thus less incentive to seek avenues of compromise and negotiation in their dealings with Aborigines, and that mining was probably to an Aboriginal observer the least comprehensible of European activities.¹¹ There are no authoritative ethnographic accounts of the Palmer Aborigines before the arrival of the alluvial rush in 1873. Indeed only five separate documents describe the district before the rush; they were written by a surveyor, a pastoralist, a prospector and two botanists. Most make passing observations on the behaviour of the Aborigines, revealing second-hand acquaintance with European ways before settlement of the region began, and immediate reactions to Europeans in the form of restrained hostility, perhaps best described as warning rather than violent.

Kennedy's expedition of 1848 first encountered Aborigines on a river that may have been the Palmer, but was more probably the Mitchell:

Twelve or fourteen natives made their appearance at the camp this evening, ...each armed with a large bundle of spears, and with boomerangs. Their bodies were painted with a yellowish earth which with their warlike gestures made them look ferocious. The grass in the position they had taken up was very long and very dry, quite up

11. Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier: An Interpretation of the Aboriginal Response to the Invasion and Settlement of Australia* (Townsville 1981), pp. 153-4.



Aboriginal tribes of the Palmer region, according to Tindale.

N.B. Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia* (Canberra, 1974), accompanying maps.

to the edge of the gully; they set it on fire in three or four places, and the wind blowing from them to us, it burned very rapidly. Thinking we should be frightened at this display they followed the fire with their spears shipped, making a most hideous noise, and with the most savage gestures. Knowing the fire could not reach us, as there was nothing to burn on our side of the gully, we drew up towards them with our fire-arms prepared. They approached near enough to throw spears, one of which went quite through one of our huts. No one was hurt, but a few of our party fired at them; we could not tell whether any were wounded, as they disappeared almost immediately. We kept three on watch this night for fear of the natives.¹²

It seems unlikely that the Aborigines with knowledge of the wind and terrain had not observed the lack of vegetation around Kennedy's camp. Their action was possibly intended to frighten off the strangers. However, in turn, they had their first experience of firearms.

It was not until 1872, with the Hann expedition and with pastoral settlement as close as the Etheridge, that the Palmer again received attention. In the vicinity of the Palmer itself, Hann met mostly small numbers of Aborigines, whose first reactions were of overwhelming alarm at the presence of strangers. On one occasion an old woman with two children assisted, although with much trepidation, in the search for straying sheep.¹³ A subsequent attempt to enlist the assistance of Aborigines to locate cattle believed to be in the area was unsuccessful; they deserted camp at the Europeans' approach. For six women intercepted by Hann, the experience must have been terrifying.¹⁴ Faced with "continuous howling", Hann was compelled to withdraw, leaving a present of fishing hooks.¹⁵ While Hann took

12. Carron, *Narrative*, pp. 52-3.

13. Hann, *Diary* (19 August 1872), *QV&P* 1873, p. 1052.

14. Hann, *Expedition of Exploration* (First Note Book 20 August 1872), p. 31.

15. Hann, *Diary* (19-20 August 1872), *QV&P* 1873, p. 1052.

these Aborigines by surprise, the movements of the explorers had been carefully observed by others who responded differently. Returning from a prospecting trip, Warner and Hann came across tracks around their temporary camp, occupied only by Jerry who seemed unconcerned. Yet in the time it took to saddle up, the grass around the camp was alight. Hann interpreted this as an act of aggression and ordered Jerry to shoot; he later recorded the episode:

On looking up we saw the blacks running around us setting fire to the grass. I sent Jerry after them but in his hurry and excitement he lost his gun cap. It was a picture I shall never forget to see him running back to me shouting "Cap oh, cap oh Mr Hann, save me, get him black Fellow plenty coola, plenty spear, cobon saucey fellow" at the same time the blacks were just as frightened as he was for they were running away shouting with fear. It appeared to astonish them to see us ride through the fire. Jerry, on getting another cap went after them again but in the meantime they had all cleared out.¹⁶

While no shot was fired, it is clear that Hann was not averse to using firearms to ward off Aborigines. Equally clear, the Aborigines seemed to have recognized the musket as a threat and fled, no doubt because they had observed Jerry shooting ducks in the locality two days previously.¹⁷

It was not until they reached areas outside the Palmer basin that the expedition came into more immediate conflict with Aborigines. To that time, Hann seems to have adopted a humane but cautious policy towards Aborigines; he was always at some pains to avoid provocation and on several occasions mentioned giving gifts such as fish hooks to

16. Hann, *Expedition of Exploration* (First Note Book 15 August 1872), p.28.

17. *Ibid.* (First Note Book 13 August 1872), p.27. As a point of interest, Thomas Tate the botanist, failed to make any reference to Aborigines in his diary entry of the same date. Thomas Tate, *Diary* (26 June- 1 November 1872), Microfilm A2.10 JOL, original C723 ML.

Aborigines, who in some cases reciprocated.¹⁸ But other members of the party were at times less diplomatic. Intrusion by members of the expedition into Aboriginal affairs preceded three incidents during which firearms were discharged although apparently without causing casualties. The most serious incident occurred on 17 September and was vividly described:

My doubts of the previous day were verified this morning, when Stewart and the blackboy went in search of the horses; these had been put together during the night by the Doctor and myself, as a measure of precaution. They say that while collecting the horses a body of natives made their appearance from a lagoon, simultaneously, with another body from the river, evidently with the intention of cutting off their retreat to the camp; they, however, quickly collected the horses and made a quick retreat, while the shouting and yelling of themselves and the natives put us all on our mettle, and we instantly sallied forth to meet the enemy. We saw them coming from all directions in front of us, and all with bundles of spears, but how many natives there were we could not say, but certainly more in numbers than on the previous day, when eighteen were counted. Stewart galloped past, shouting and yelling, and driving the horses before him saying, "They mean it!" while my black boy was now very valiant. He was evidently conscious of being on his own hill, as he was challenging them to come on and do, but at the same time keeping a respectful distance from their spears. As they kept on advancing in great numbers, it was now time to show them that we did not intend to be trifled with; so two of the party fired upon them at long distances, to endeavour to check their advance. The effect was instantaneous; the quick advance was immediately turned into as quick a retreat - they did not wait for a second admonition; some of our party ran after them, but with little chance of overtaking them, when the chase was given up and all returned to camp. I was not sorry that the affair ended as it did, although the natives were the aggressors, and would only have had themselves to blame had it been otherwise, as they threw spears at Stewart in the morning, while collecting the horses.

Hann also added that:

These fellows had evidently heard of the efficiency of firearms, as, no sooner had they heard the report of the guns, than they made off.¹⁹

18 Aborigines on the Kennedy River offered Hann fish in return for hooks and twine. Jerry was given food wrapped in green leaves and baked in ashes by Aborigines on the Bloomfield. Hann, Diary (20 August, 9 & 13 September, 11 October 1872), *QV&P* 1873, pp.1052, 1055-6, 1062.

19 Hann, Diary (16-17 September 1872), *QV&P* 1873, pp.1056-7.

There is no mention of casualties, and it is not clear how close or how threatening the Aboriginal party was, although they had certainly frightened Stewart. However, the motivation was explicit: on the previous day, Thomas Tate had brought an Aboriginal boy to the camp. Whether this was an abduction or a harmless piece of fun on Tate's part is immaterial - it was obviously construed by the Aborigines as a serious matter. Tate's only comment on the incident was terse: "A mob of blacks came about the camp with hostile intentions. A few shots however dispersed them."²⁰ Both Hann and Tate attributed the Aborigines' prompt response to gun shots as familiarity with European weapons. No Europeans are known to have been in the immediate vicinity previously, but Kennedy in 1848 and the Jardines in 1864 who had used guns against Aborigines, had passed further west, and closer at hand, Hann found the remains of a fishing camp, two or three years old, belonging to Robert Towns' men at the mouth of the Annan.²¹ Whether or not this foreknowledge of guns had been transmitted from other places, the local Aborigines certainly knew of firearms after the passage of Hann's party. The long-term significance of this affair, in which Hann described Aborigines as "the enemy", cannot be overstated, for it happened at camp 41, shown on Hann's map as a lagoon on the Normanby River. The camp was at, or very near, a place which a little more than a year later would receive its present name: Battle Camp.

The second encounter was in the rugged hills at the head of the Granite Normanby River - probably Roberts Creek - where a number of violent encounters occurred in later years. On 17 October, late in the afternoon, the party surprised a camp of Aboriginal women and children who fled in panic. The expedition subsequently set up their

20. Tate, Diary (17 September 1872), frame 1222.

21. Hann, Diary (22 September 1872), *QV&P* 1873, p. 1057. Towns' camp was described by Hann: "I saw where they have had a fence for a paddock and sheep yards and two jetties, one for high water and one for low water." Hann, *Expedition of Exploration* (Second Note Book 22 September 1872), p. 52.

own camp on the site. During his watch Tate gave the alarm that Aborigines were close by, and shots were fired. Accounts of what happened are surprisingly divergent. According to Hann's field diary, a day after the event, the party was "attacked by natives", who retreated "after a few well directed shots".²² However, the official report stated that Tate had fired into the darkness, and was disbelieved until daylight, when packsaddles were found to have been looted "within a few feet of one of the sleepers."²³ If the Aborigines intended injuring the sleeping Europeans, they could have only been successful at such close range. On the other hand nocturnal visits to Hann's various camps had occurred before, the packsaddles having been raided only five days previously.²⁴

Forced north west, instead of south, they were alarmed when they met a small group of determined Aborigines on the Laura on 21 October, not far from present Crocodile Station. The party were by now hungry and dispirited and the wet season had set in the previous day.

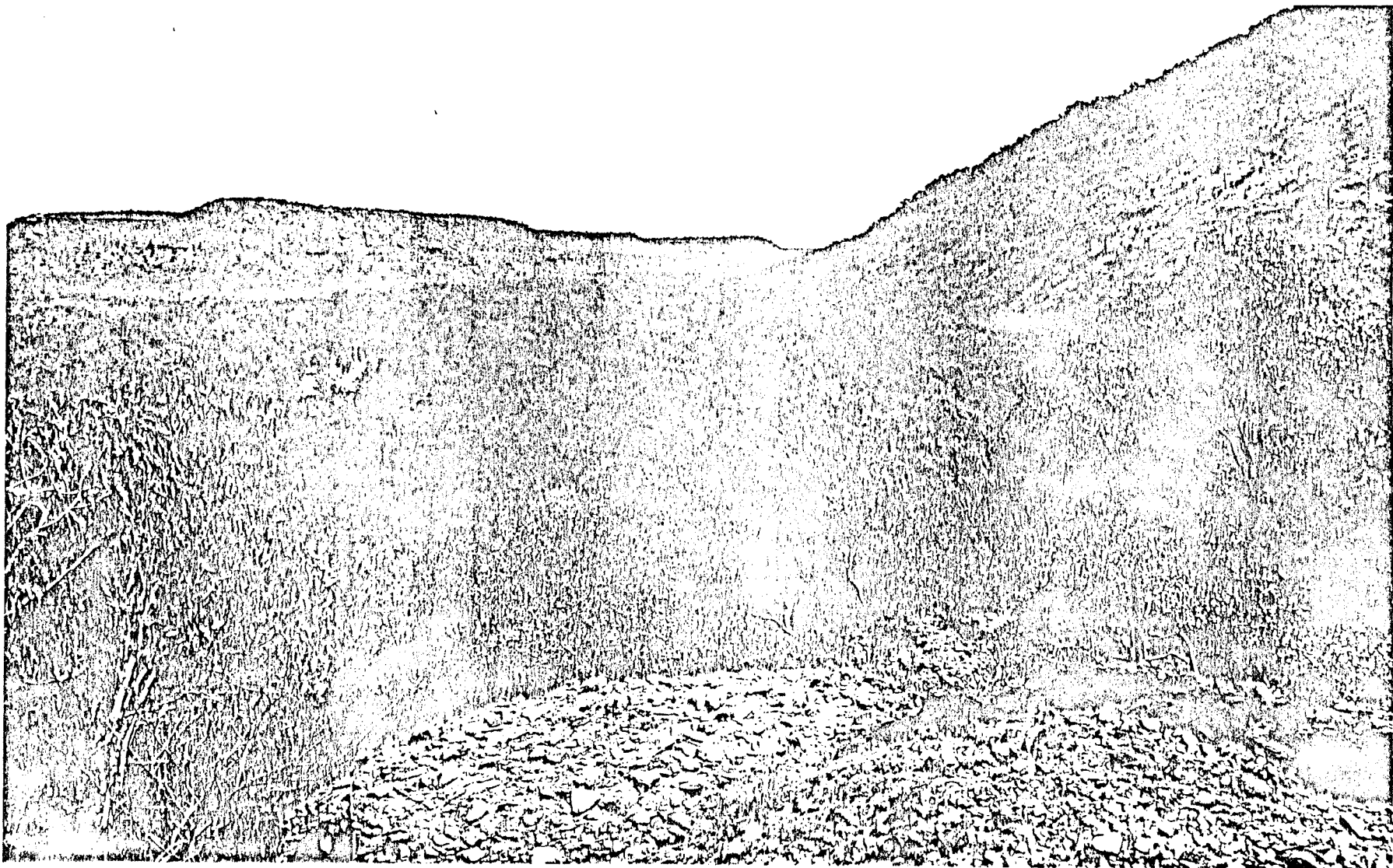
In six miles further cut the creek, and while I was ahead of my party came upon a native, who at first ran away, but shortly returned with his friends, who began to shout and gesticulate, and brandish their spears; I rode away to join my party without paying any attention to them....[One and a-half miles further north] the natives again made their appearance, and began to yell at us, all being armed with spears. I now thought it necessary to disperse them, so four of us dismounted from our horses and advanced towards them. When one of our party went to within eighty yards of the mob, one native made himself more conspicuous than the rest by preparing his spears for an onslaught; but a ball fired amongst them had the desired effect, for they all ran away without looking behind. This was all I wanted. I had no wish to have these fellows hovering about the neighbourhood, watching every chance to pilfer or prowl about our camp.²⁵

22. Hann, *Expedition of Exploration* (Diary 18 October 1872), p. 65.

23. Hann, Diary (17 October 1872), *QV&P* 1873, p. 1064.

24. *Ibid.* (12 October 1872), p. 1063.

25. Hann, Diary (21 October 1872), *QV&P* 1873, p. 1065.



Laura Gorge looking north-west from Giant Horse Gallery, 1979.

The composition of the Aboriginal party, and their immediate hostility, seems to suggest that Hann had stumbled upon a hunt or ceremony. But there may have been a more simple explanation missing from the official report. Only one day before, Hann and Jerry had chased after a group of frightened Aborigines overtaking two women for no explained reason.²⁶

Mulligan's prospecting trip in June-August 1873 was less eventful. However, upon reaching the Palmer, Aboriginal fires threatened the first camp, near the location of later Palmerville:

Some of our party were fishing, the rest of us pitching the tents, when a few darkies showed themselves on the opposite side of the river, stretching their necks up out of the long grass like wild fowl, once in a while, to scrutinize our camp. Soon after the grass is set on fire a few yards above the camp on our side. Simultaneously it was fired on the opposite side, a number of darkies running up at the same time to the top of a big mountain, setting the grass on fire. Here they Brandish their spears, throw big stones down the hill at us, cooey and gesticulate in a most excited manner; delighted at the idea of our going to be burnt out. In meantime the bush is burning sky high. We immediately set to work and burn a circle round our camp to prevent the approaching fire. We examine our firearms and round up our horses, appoint watch for the night. Should they come in the morning they must get a warm reception.²⁷

As the Aborigines had been watching the prospectors setting up camp, it is likely they also observed Mulligan examining one of their caches, containing food and receptacles, along with red ochre, chalk, spears and flint, although he took care to "fix everything exactly as it was." As the site obviously held some significance for the Aborigines, evident by the items stored in the cache, it is probable that the fire was meant to warn the strangers away. It is interesting that fires did not menace Mulligan and his party again. Nor had Mulligan considered the fires a real hazard. Reflecting in 1904 upon his examination of

26. Hann, *Expedition of Exploration* (Second Note Book 20 October 1872), p.66.

27. Mulligan, *Guide*, p. 7. References to Mulligan's contact with Aborigines while on his journey of exploration are from Mulligan's *Guide*, pp. 8-9, unless otherwise cited.

the cache, he wrote: "After looking at curios we put everything back in its place, and I firmly believe that owing to this and other proper treatment the blacks were never hostile."²⁸ Mulligan, nonetheless, remained cautious, keeping two men at camp while three more prospected under the vigilant eye of another on guard.

In the main, the Aborigines avoided Mulligan's party, although they took the opportunity of observing the Europeans at close quarters. While hunting, one group was startled from hiding when a shot was fired inadvertently in their direction. Others watched from a safe distance - "about gun shot off" was Mulligan's estimation, implying that they were aware of the range of gunfire. The Aborigines were quick to examine abandoned camps; Mulligan noted on passing a previous camp that the Aborigines had "ransacked and burned up every old thing about the camp." They were described as numerous but civil, one group even exchanging coeys. Mulligan admired their "wonderfully constructed dams" of ti-tree bark and sand built to catch fish (the dams were also ideal traps for gold) and because fish were an important part of the Aboriginal diet, one can only wonder at their thoughts as the prospectors hauled in good catches - a "large swag" was Mulligan's description.

Several themes worthy of recapitalation are evident in the five accounts which summed up the extent of European knowledge of Aborigines in the region prior to September 1873. Firstly the response to the appearance of the explorers was variable, depending on the circumstances of the meeting and the degree of European interference. The Aborigines generally avoided contact, preferring to observe from behind cover or at a distance. Both Hann and Mulligan noted that some Aborigines ransacked abandoned camps. However when an Aboriginal group was caught

28. Q 10 September 1904.

by surprise, as was the case with Hann on the Palmer in August 1872 and on the Normanby the following month, the reaction was extreme fear and flight. On the other hand, Aborigines in the vicinity of the Bloomfield River overcame this fear, visiting Hann's camp, some acting as guides.²⁹ Yet the Aboriginal reaction on other occasions was interpreted by the explorers as aggressive. Hann's party fired shots in defence three times, but the Aboriginal hostility had, in each of these cases, been provoked by the European's activities. The most conspicuous similarity between the accounts of the three exploring parties is that, at times when they believed themselves most seriously threatened, the attack was made by fire. On all three occasions, Carron, Hann and Mulligan believed fires had been set alight deliberately to surround the European camps. Carron and Mulligan both described the Aborigines as brandishing spears and uttering frightening noises, as if participating in a hunt. It seems hardly coincidence that all three expeditions believed that an attempt had been made to burn them out. Yet, it is surprising considering Aboriginal expertise in the use of fire, that these attacks were quite ineffective. Indeed the only damage of any kind occurred on the earliest of the expeditions, Kennedy's with a spear piercing a tent. It was the habitual grass firing practices of the Aborigines that were more hazardous in the long run. Hann constantly referred to the difficulty of finding suitable feed for the horses, and one of Mulligan's horses was badly burned by smouldering ashes of an old fire.³⁰ One could on the occasions when fires were deliberately lit, that this was intended to warn, to move on the explorers, which it did. Nevertheless, it

29. Hann, Diary (11 October 1872), *QV&P* 1873, p. 1062.

30. Hann, Diary (24 August, 8, 12, 26 September, 29 October 1872), *QV&P* 1873, pp. 1053, 1055-6, 1058, 1067; Mulligan, *Guide*, pp. 7-8.

was the deliberation and similarity of these three actions, separated by time and place, which together with events that occurred on the Laura and Normanby, near Battle Camp Lagoon and Roberts Creek, reinforced the view that Aborigines of the district would greet intruders with hostility.

Secondly, the Aborigines also had knowledge of many aspects of European culture by the time of the Palmer rush, which was not only attributable to Hann and Mulligan. Aborigines of the Normanby were already utilizing fragments of iron as implements and weapons before Hann's expedition, a Bloomfield group even having acquired tomahawks.³¹ Indeed, the explorers, some unintentionally, contributed to the use of European goods by Aborigines. Hann, in particular gave away fish hooks and handkerchiefs. He even left behind at one camp, all the hammocks, a blanket, 500 rounds of ammunition and an old gun.³² Some Aborigines in turn became attracted to European camps. After one stealthy raid on Hann's sleeping party, it was found that the Aborigines had procured a wash pan, digging pick, ammunition and a sewing kit.³³ European animals also came under close, but cautious scrutiny. Kennedy in 1848 had set out with 28 horses and 100 sheep.³⁴ Over twenty years later, Hann followed with 25 horses, 27 sheep and two dogs used for

31. Hann, Diary (6 October 1872) *QV&P* 1873, p. 1061.

32. Hann, *Expedition of Exploration* (Second Note Book 13, 17 October 1872), pp. 63-4.

33. Hann, Diary (12 October 1872), *QV&P* 1873, p. 1063.

34. John Macgillivray, *Narrative of the voyage of H.M.S. Rattlesnake commanded by the late Captain Owen Stanley...during the years 1846-1850, including discoveries and surveys in New Guinea, the Louisiade Archipelago...to which is added the account of Mr. E.B. Kennedy's expedition for the exploration of the Cape York Peninsula* Vol. 1 (Adelaide 1967 facsim. London 1852), p. 83.

hunting native animals.³⁵ He was therefore greatly intrigued by the discovery of fresh tracks of cattle, which although not seen had obviously managed to survive for some months, in the rough country bounding the upper Palmer River.³⁶ Hann lost one horse without trace, left four others dead, and one of the dogs was left behind because of its much deteriorated condition.³⁷ This would have given the Aborigines some opportunity to study these exotic animals at close quarters without European interference. The impact of firearms was certainly known to the Aborigines, the Europeans using them to hunt native wildlife including ducks and kangaroos, and Kennedy and Hann to frighten away advancing Aboriginal parties. At least one group of Aborigines was considerably disturbed by the sound of gun shot which had not been intended to harm them, shifting camp as a consequence.³⁸

A third theme often noted by the explorers was Aboriginal dependence on the main watercourses for fishing and water. Around these, Aboriginal communities concentrated. In August 1872, Hann described the Palmer as "a fine river teeming with fish", with Mulligan in June of the next year, noting: "Abundance of fish. Darkies numerous".³⁹ Evident also was the fragile balance of the food chain, for by late August 1873, Mulligan was noting that the "fish will not bite at all this last moon, and the birds are scarce and hard to kill..."⁴⁰ Hann, a year earlier, had found "little animal life either on or in the water" of the Laura by late October.⁴¹ These

35. Hann, *Expedition of Exploration* (Diary 26 June, 3 August and Second Note Book 2 August 1872), pp. 8, 23.

36. Hann, Diary (10 August 1872) *QV&P* 1873, pp. 1050, 1052.

37. Hann, Diary (16 August, 7, 27 September, 18, 20 October 1872), *QV&P* 1873, pp. 1051, 1055, 1058, 1065 & *Expedition of Exploration* (15 October 1872), p.64.

38. This was in the locality of the Bloomfield River. Hann, Diary (13 October 1872), *QV&P* 1873, p. 1064.

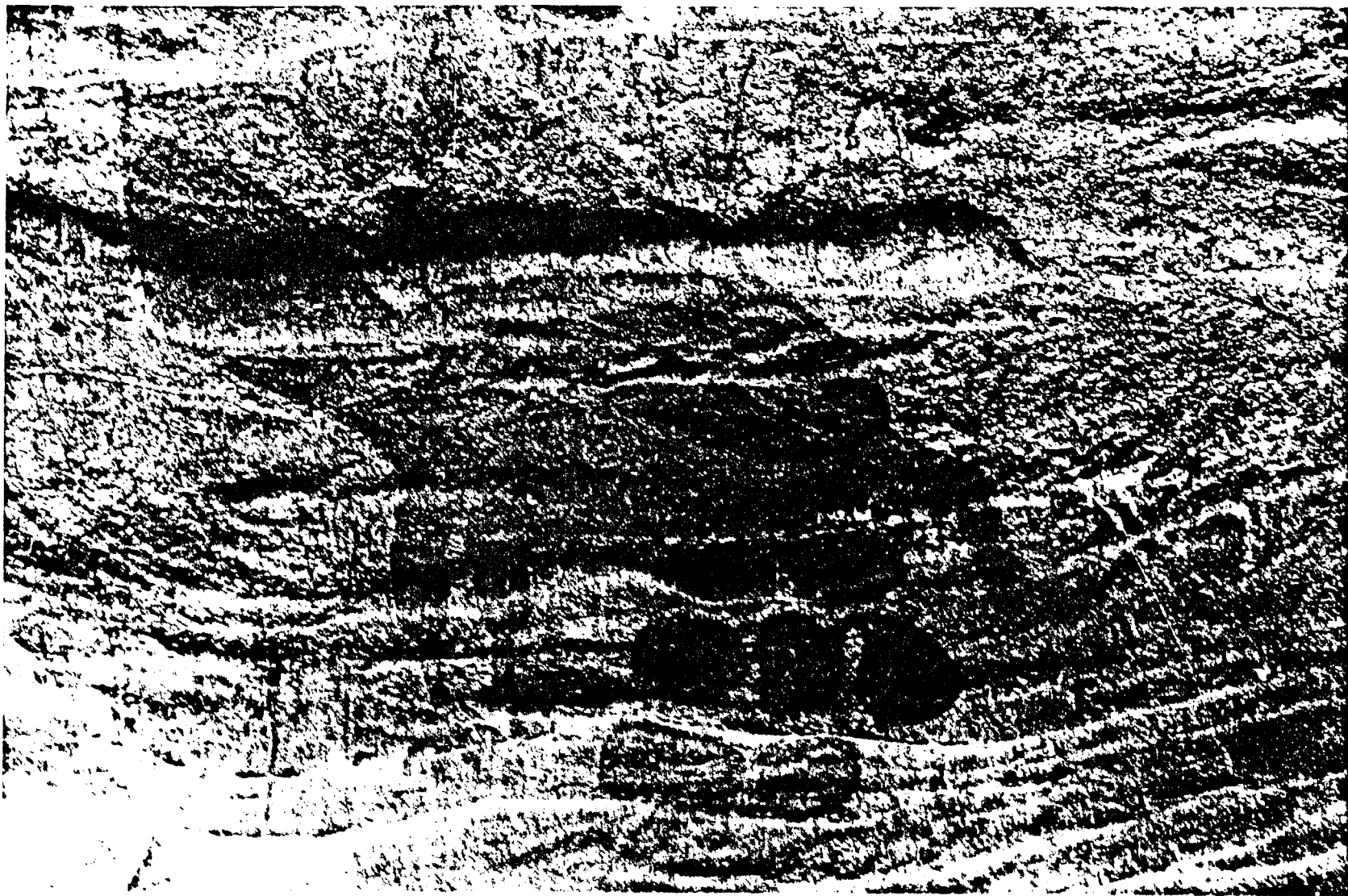
39. Hann, *Expedition of Exploration* (First Note Book 5 August 1872), p.24; Mulligan, *Guide*, pp. 6-7.

40. Mulligan, *Guide*, p.10

41. Hann, Diary (20 October 1872) *QV&P* 1873, p.1065.



Human figure with catfish and wallaby, Giant Horse Gallery,
Laura Gorge, 1979.



Scrub turkey with eggs, Giant Horse Gallery, Laura Gorge, 1979.

observations make it clear that any increase in population, especially in the months before the wet, would inevitably lead to bitter competition over the water and food supply. In 1873, the wet season did not set in until mid-December.

The Aboriginal policy of watching and warning strangers did not survive the arrival of the first miners. On 27 September 1873, a day after Mulligan returned with his party from Georgetown, a group of miners forcibly removed Aborigines from a camp near where they were working. According to Mulligan, the attack was unprovoked, and marked the commencement of conflict:

...a few of the boys, a little daring, went up to the black's camp, which was about a quarter of a mile away, fired some revolver shots, and dispersed the blacks.... After this hostilities commenced, and some of the boys got chased into camp the next day, and Christie Palmerston was speared in the foot.⁴²

The Aborigines did return during the first month of the rush, frightening miners from the gullies two or three times.⁴³ One evening "a major punitive raid"⁴⁴ by ten armed miners was carried out on a camp of thirty Aborigines at Fish Creek. One miner was speared through the thigh. What happened to the Aborigines was not disclosed, except that the Europeans were then able to turn over the camp taking items such as horseshoes, tomahawks, dilly bags and items presumed to have belonged to Mulligan; they destroyed spears in the process.⁴⁵ The earlier observations of Hann and Mulligan, in addition to the report of the *Queenslander* correspondent of 4 November that the Aborigines "do not like being put off their fishing grounds on the river",⁴⁶ made it clear that even without the host of external influences, which acted to exacerbate conflict, there was competition between miners and

42. Q 10 September 1904. See also Q 25 October 1873.

43. Correspondent 2 November 1873, Q 13 December 1873.

44. Q 10 September 1904.

45. Correspondent 2 November 1873, Q 13 December 1873.

46. *Ibid.*

Aborigines on the Palmer for purely economic reasons from the outset. The watercourses represented the fundamental resource of the district for both groups. The Aborigines were utterly dependent on them for food supply, and for the miners they contained most of the gold, and the means of extracting it. This competition for the riverbeds in part explains the decade of brutality on the Palmer; the *raison d'être* for the miners' presence and the very survival of the Aborigines were irreconcilable and direct hostility was inevitable.

However, not all conflict between Aborigines and Europeans originated from the first rush of miners. There were other initial contacts, not on the Palmer proper, which were notably more influential in shaping European policy towards Aborigines, and certainly more controversial at the time. When the *Leichhardt* arrived at the Endeavour River on 25 October 1873, with ninety passengers including Lieutenant Connor, St George and Macmillan, Aborigines at first avoided contact with them. But when Connor started to survey the river mouth, he found that the Aborigines repeatedly took down his survey flags, perhaps believing them to be tokens of reciprocity. A conspicuous attempt was made to seize the one flag used jointly by Connor for bearings and the Native Police for target practice. An account of this incident by an anonymous member of the expedition appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 January 1874, taken from the *Cleveland Bay Express*.

A black was seen just in the act of seizing the flag, having waded and swum some 500 yards to get there; this, too, at mid-day. Whiz, whiz, went the bullets shot by the Native Police; bang, crack, bang, went the rifles of the ship. At the sound of each shot the intrepid savage dived under the water, the flag-staff in one hand, the spear in the other. The bullets splashed all round him but he still held to his prize. At length the shore was reached, and, with a triumphant wave of the spear and flag, he vanished into space, alias the scrub. It was a defiant declaration of war to the whitefellow, and as a simple act of daring, beat anything I ever saw. The Native Troopers, under the command of Sub-Inspector Johnstone, were wild to go over, for the purpose

of teaching the 'myalls' better behaviour. Two gentlemen went over after sunset and followed the fresh tracks for⁴⁷ upwards of a mile, but failed to reach the camp.

Even St George interpreted the incident as "intense hostility entertained by the blacks towards the location of European settlement."⁴⁸

Yet the sole justification for the violent conduct of the Native Police was the display of daring on the part of the Aborigine. In time it was to spark vocal humanitarian opposition to the conduct of the Native Police; in the *Sydney Morning Herald* two critical letters urged reforms. Charles Heydon alleged that the Queensland government had "deliberately adopted the system of arming the savage for the extermination of the savage" - a system which had already achieved a reputation for initiating violence between Europeans and Aborigines. Heydon wrote that the gunfire at the Endeavour was not the work of a rabble of miners, but of employees of the Crown, acting with the approval of their superiors:

This party, on board the "Leichhardt" had gone to establish a settlement at the Endeavour River. It was then, therefore, that permanent relations between the two races were to begin. Might we not expect that at such a time the intending civilized Christian and immeasurably stronger race, would show some small desire to do good to the other - would, at least, wish to be friends with it? Is it at this time of day, in the nineteenth century of progress and humanity, that Englishmen, upon their settlement amongst an inferior race, are to despise the slightest attempt to conciliate or improve it, but to begin at once to war upon it, and (for that is what such a war means, to exterminate it, for such paltry offences as that mentioned above?) And this was a Government Expedition too! Can it be possible that its leaders had received no instructions as to their treatment

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47. The incident became the subject of an inquiry and the findings were printed. See Alleged Outrages Committee on the Aborigines in Queensland by the Native Mounted Police (Despatches Respecting...), *QV&P* 1875, 1, pp. 621-8. The anonymous description of the incident which first appeared in the *Cleveland Bay Express* was quoted in the letter C.G. Heydon to editor *Sydney Morning Herald*, *ibid.*, pp. 621-2.
48. St George to Sec Works & Mines 30 October 1873, 73/4597 WOR/A 74 QSA.

of the natives, and the importance of establishing friendly relations and treating them with kindness? Every one in the expedition must have known that if the settlement began by entering into hostilities with the natives, it would be almost impossible afterwards to restore peace; while if, on the other hand, a friendly intercourse were once established,⁴⁹ there would be some chance that it might continue.

A.L. McDougall tacitly supported Heydon's accusations with examples from the Kennedy district.⁵⁰ But the matter went further. On receipt of these letters by the Aborigines Protection Society, pressure was placed on the British Government to act. The Earl of Carnarvon, Queen Victoria's principal Secretary of State, initiated an inquiry into the truth of the statements.

The British Government was concerned but cautious; it recognized the necessity for "checking any abuses on the part of the Native Police", yet was reluctant to offend the Queensland government.⁵¹ The inquiry thus consisted of no more than a request for Police Commissioner Seymour to provide information on the event. Predictably, Seymour denied the accuracy of the account; he argued that if in fact a shot had been fired it would have been meant as a warning, not to injure the Aborigine, and questioned the credentials and conduct of the complainants.⁵² While the affair was quickly forgotten in the face of stonewalling by officials in both Brisbane and London, it is interesting that in the printed correspondence there is a letter from the Aborigines Protection Society hinting that the appointment of a governor more humane than Normanby might be desirable.⁵³ Certainly Normanby showed no great enthusiasm for investigating allegations of brutality; his successor would prove more sympathetic.⁵⁴

49. *QV&P* 1875, 1, pp. 621-3.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 623-4.

51. Carnarvon to Normanby 13 May 1874, *QV&P* 1875, 1, p. 621.

52. Seymour to Col Sec 31 July 1874, *ibid.*, p. 626.

53. J.W. Chesson, Secretary of the Aborigines Protection Society, to Carnarvon 16 October 1874, *ibid.*, p. 627.

54. *Viz* William Cairns and the reservation of the Gold Fields Act Amendment Bill 1876. See previous chapter.

In the shorter term, the process of dispossession of Aborigines was seen to be taking form within the police department, and was shaping as official policy. The local reaction at the Endeavour was a demand for more Native Police to be led by "locally" experienced officers. Two troopers were transferred from Dalrymple's command to accompany the first expedition from the coast to the Palmer, thus affording the Native Police de facto recognition as an instrument of Aboriginal suppression on the gold field.⁵⁵

The expedition of government officials and diggers left the Endeavour 30 October 1873, guided by Hann's Aboriginal assistant Jerry. From all accounts, there were at least three serious clashes with Aborigines before the Palmer was reached.⁵⁶ The *Northern Argus* 13 December published a secondhand account by J.J. Cranley which caused little comment.

On November the 4th, they crossed the Endeavour Range and camped upon the South Bank of the Normanby when the horses were turned out that blacks put in an appearance and attempted to drive the horses away. This led to the sable visitants being dispersed and the horses secured. Next morning they crossed the Normanby and observed some blacks in a valley on the side they had just quitted. Before leaving the camp in the morning, the party was disturbed again about daylight by the natives who approached within twenty yards of the camp, shouting and brandishing their spears, boomerangs and nullah-nullahs. While these were so engaged another party of them took away thirty of the horses and drove them a distance of a mile and a half when they were overtaken by the troopers, the horses recovered and driven back to camp. When on the march this day the troopers guarded the whole length of the expedition party....On the 12th ran the Kennedy up for 13 miles to its junction with a creek; the blacks here made another effort to drive⁵⁷ away the horses, after hovering round the camp for some time.

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55. See St George to Sec Works & Mines 30 October 1873, 73/4597 WOR/A 74 & 16 November 1873, 74/160 WOR/A 77 QSA. The troopers who accompanied the first expedition were later assigned to protect Macmillan's road party.
56. H.H. writing from the Endeavour River 21 November 1873, referred to "three brushes" with Aborigines. His account was originally published in *Cleveland Bay Express*, reprinted in Q 20 December 1873.
57. *Northern Argus* 13 December 1873, reprinted Q 27 December 1873.

However, a letter written on 17 November from the Palmer, published anonymously in the *Brisbane Telegraph* in January 1874, introduced a different perspective on these incidents, and created considerable public protest:

November 3. - Started over the spur of the range running to E.; came to Normanby River (15 miles); started a mob of blacks; shot four and hunted them; fine river. November 4th. - Started, 15 miles; Surprise Lagoons; camped 5th for spell. November 6th - Blacks surprised us at day-break, about 150, all were armed; got close to camp before any one heard them; great consternation; shot several; they ran into the water holes for shelter, where they were shot;.... [Several days later] followed River Kennedy up coarse S., 15 miles; camped; had an encounter with the blacks; shot a lot....⁵⁸

The first clash occurred on the Normanby River, the second near a lagoon, known then as Surprise Lagoon, and later as Caulfield's Lagoon. While there are similarities between the two accounts, the points of view of the two correspondents are remarkably divergent. Cranley makes no reference to the use of firearms, seeing the horses as the focus of the Aboriginal advances. The anonymous correspondent on the other hand described the first incident at the Normanby River as if it was dispersal, resulting in the shooting of at least four Aborigines, without any specific justification except perhaps that this was the general practice elsewhere. The second clash was explained away as the Europeans having fired in self-defence, shooting a great number of Aborigines - he seems to imply the entire 150 - after trapping them in the lagoon. Both writers however do concur on two points concerning the affray at Surprise Lagoon: the Aborigines were armed and numerous, and had taken the Europeans by surprise. The name Battle Camp grew out of this incident. Indeed, the Aborigines, in this locality had already encountered Europeans: a year earlier, at Hann's camp 41, the kidnapping of a child by Thomas Tate had provoked

58. *Brisbane Telegraph* 20 January 1874.

a determined advance by a large group of armed Aborigines which was staved off eventually by gun fire.⁵⁹ It is likely that St George and Macmillan, using Hann's map on which the words "Natives hostile" featured prominently,⁶⁰ anticipated a repetition of Aboriginal hostility and prejudged the situation.

It was not until almost fifty years later, in 1922, that a third account of Battle Camp by another member of the original expedition came to light. According to William J. Webb, some eighty Aborigines were killed on this one occasion:

About five next morning, *5th November*, while the stars were still shining, a crowd of natives came up yelling out a terrible war cry, and they reached to about 70 yards from where we lay all over the ground. There were about 40 in the first and as many more in reserve some distance behind. Just as the day was breaking, Messrs. Macmillan and St. George advanced towards them. I noticed that they fired over the heads of the blacks, but some of the men fired straight at the blacks, some of whom fell. Thereupon the blacks ran away and were pursued as far as a large lagoon, and all that went there stayed there.⁶¹

Webb's words gave credence to the much earlier *Brisbane Telegraph* account of January 1874, which had created a public outcry and prompted Alfred Davidson, a Queensland representative of the Aborigines Protection Society, to bring the matter to the notice of the Colonial Secretary, Arthur Macalister. Davidson pointed out that murder had been committed.⁶²

59. Hann, Diary (16-17 September 1872), *QV&P* 1873, pp. 1056-7.

60. Map Shewing Route taken by the Northern Exploration Party in 1872 Queensland Sheet No 1, *QV&P* 1873, after p. 1070.

61. Jack, *Northmost Australia* Vol 2, pp. 421-2. William Webb's reputation as an expert on mining matters had been boosted shortly before this in 1897, when he had provided information about the Cook district to the Royal Commission appointed to enquire into the advisability of establishing a State Iron and Steel Works, *Queensland Parliamentary Papers* 1918, pp. 1815-99.

62. Alfred Davidson to Col Sec 23 January 1874, 74/701 COL/A 194 QSA.



William J. Webb 1916

(Jack, *Northmost Australia* Vol 2,
opposite p. 400)

A magisterial inquiry was called for March 1874, to be held in Cooktown, to investigate the accusation that Aborigines had been killed by the Government expedition. Included in the evidence was the third clash on the head of the Kennedy River, probably on 12 November 1873, in which it was alleged that another group of Aborigines had also been shot.⁶³

Thomas Hamilton, the Police Magistrate, was uncertain whether the inquiry was into the conduct of the government officials or the miners who accompanied the expedition. He eventually decided to rely on unofficial sources, although St George and Macmillan were still in the district.⁶⁴ Sixteen miners out of a total 86 in the official expedition came forward. They put their signatures to a statement which claimed that only one Aborigine was shot, and this was at Surprise Camp:

It is true the Expedition were surprised by the blacks; the horses were between our Camp and the blacks, and their Bells alarmed us. The Native Police were called, and drove the Blacks away. The Blacks were rounding up our horses to take them away and we heard there was one black shot in the dispersion but did not see any one shot. The Native Police did not follow the blacks but saddled up immediately and went on to the Palmer. And we believe there was not a single Black followed or shot after by any one. We also beg to say that the Officers in charge of the Expedition did not on any occasion treat the blacks in any way improperly.

They added: "...had they not been disturbed in the way they were, the whole company could have been massacred."⁶⁵ This statutory declaration, in Hamilton's handwriting, attempted to refute any suggestions of misconduct on the part of officers or diggers. While it insists that there was no opportunity for reprisals because the whole party left immediately for the Palmer, it also states that the miners did not know what action the native troopers took - "we

63. *Brisbane Telegraph* 20 January 1874.

64. Thomas Hamilton to Col Sec 28 March 1874, 74/701 COL/A 194 QSA.

65. Statement before Thomas Hamilton PM 26 March 1874, *ibid.* Full text of statement reproduced at end of chapter.

heard there was one black shot" - but apparently relied on the report of the returning police for their information. In other words, there was ample opportunity for punitive action; the declaration simply asserts it took place out of the sight and earshot of the sixteen signatories. St George, in his first report from the field, did not dwell specifically on any incidents involving Aborigines, except to admit that they were "very numerous and on two occasions made unprovoked attacks upon us." He also recommended the establishment of Native Police camps on the Palmer and Normanby Rivers.⁶⁶ Yet neither St George nor Macmillan produced declarations. And it seems strange that the inquiry was held at Cooktown, and not Palmerville where the remainder of the first diggers from the Endeavour were more likely to be. Probably the clearest indication of the hollowness of the miners' declaration of 1874 is that the second signature on it is by William J. Webb, author of the 1922 account of the slaughter of eighty Aborigines in the lagoon.

St George and his party arrived on the Palmer on 14 November to find that Aboriginal resistance, provoked by the Georgetown group, was preventing prospecting away from the main branch of the river, and restricting mining to a strip of riverbed stretching some fifty-six kilometres (thirty-five miles) long:

...so far the ravines and gullies have not been prospected to any extent owing to the Blacks who are most numerous and ferocious and who invariably drive the diggers out of the ravines, whenever they attempt to go any distance from the River.⁶⁷

Between the arrival of Mulligan's party in late September to the beginning of the wet season in mid-December, at least six men were speared and a number of horses were also attacked and killed,⁶⁸ presumably for meat.

66. St George to Sec Works & Mines 16 November 1873, 74/158 WOR/A 77 QSA.

67. *Ibid.*

68. Q 25 October, 13 December 1873, 7 February 1874; St George to Sec Works & Mines 16 November 1873, 74/158 & 24 November 1873, 74/45 WOR/A 77 QSA. At least three horses were killed and six speared during this period. St George to Sec Works & Mines 16 November 1873, 74/158 & 15 December 1873, 74/612 WOR/A 78 QSA.

St George commented that this was unusual: "[The Aborigines] do here what I have never seen them do elsewhere viz. eat the horses. I have myself found three horses with nearly all the flesh cut off the bone."⁶⁹ The Aborigines left the river once the rain came,⁷⁰ and the miners were able to prospect new ground, steadily increasing the area of mining activity. But in doing so the miners disrupted not only Aboriginal food supplies, but also their tradition, religious life, and patterns of seasonal migration.

The Aboriginal perception and response to the sudden appearance of the mining population can only be inferred from European sources. From the first days of the rush - following the incident which Mulligan described as an unprovoked attack on an Aboriginal camp - there was open hostility. Whereas the earlier exploring parties had frequently seen Aborigines in the district, and had made cautious friendly contact on two or three occasions, contacts of any kind other than aggression seem to be almost unknown in the alluvial mining period. This was unquestionably due in part to the "shoot first" mentality of the miners, but also stemmed from the Aborigines' characteristic withdrawal from areas of European activity. Indeed it is notable that in the fluid circumstances of the alluvial rushes, the miners' move to a new area often resulted in an upsurge of violence, followed apparently by a deliberate Aboriginal exodus. Nor were the Aborigines able to return to areas abandoned by the European miner, for these were quickly taken up by Chinese. Few localities were safe from the miners' attentions, except perhaps the conglomerate tablelands, and these were nearly as barren of water and food as they were of gold. In the dry seasons, Aborigines were forced back to the watercourses and into competition with miners.

69. St George to Sec Works & Mines 15 December 1873, 74/612 WOR/A 78 QSA.

70. St George to Sec Works & Mines 3 January 1874, 74/495 WOR/A 78 QSA.

Over the decade, there were fluctuations in the level of violence: sudden outbreaks were followed by lulls of several months, especially after 1876. The number of reported and publicized attacks can be summarized briefly, although there is doubt about the authority of the figures, as many accounts are vague or repetitious and a few exaggerated. For example, a report that seven Chinese had been killed in one incident in 1882 was dismissed by Hodgkinson as a "stupid hoax" put about for political reasons during the visit of Premier McIlwraith.⁷¹ Despite the problems inherent in the records of deaths from Aboriginal attack, the numbers given here are more likely to be too low than too high, as it has been argued that many attacks involving Chinese went unrecorded.⁷² Aborigines were believed to have been responsible for deaths of eleven people on the Palmer Gold Field during the decade, with almost the same number killed on roads leading to the field - four at Laura, three near Battle Camp, and three near Hell's Gate on Douglas' track. Possibly another twenty-two were killed by Aborigines, including Donald and Hugh Macquarie at Hell's Gate, but the evidence is inconclusive.⁷³ The theme common to almost all attacks was isolation. Most of the victims were miners working or travelling as individuals or in small groups. Since the pattern of violent conflict had been established by the use of firearms in the first days of the rush, the Aborigines took whatever opportunities offered to attack individuals and small parties. In all cases the attacks were stealthy; open displays of shouting and gesticulating before an advance were never recorded again after the incident at Battle Camp.

Inquest evidence provides much detail on the nature of attacks, enabling the tactics of Aboriginal resistance to be reconstructed.

71. Hodgkinson to Under Sec Mines 2 December 1882, MWO 13B/G3 p.210(a) QSA.

72. Loos, *Aboriginal-European Relations*, p.234.

73. See appendix at end of chapter.

In early February 1874 James Souter, Thomas Appleton, Henry Bonner and four others arrived at a place forty-eight kilometres (thirty miles) up river beyond the upper township (later Maytown). Working the bed of the river they were not always in each others' sight because of the undulating terrain. They had only been there a short time when Aborigines took them by surprise early in the afternoon as the miners groped for their guns. In the clash, Souter received multiple spear wounds, delivered with terrifying precision, as Appleton testified at the inquest:

I was then on a ridge back from the river and the other men were in the bed of the River prospecting we had come there that day about 11 o'clock, had dinner & begun to try the bed of the River for gold - I heard a great noise of blacks singing out on a hill on the other side of the River and at the same time the horses came running up to the Camp. I started down to the Camp & on my way I heard a couple of revolver shots. When I got to the camp one of the men named Henry Bonner came up from the bank and told me that Souter was speared I took my gun & went down to the beach and met Souter with John Burke leading him up to the Camp - I and two others went down and drove the blacks back, when we went to the Camp, I then saw Souter he had one wound through his right breast which came out at his back, he had another which pinned his right arm to his belly and another on his right elbow, he appeared to be suffering pain but was very quiet.⁷⁴

The spear that proved fatal was barbed, and had entered the body above the collar bone, passing through the right lung. Souter died a week later.⁷⁵

Similar tactics were used against an armed party of six miners travelling by foot with eleven packhorses in broken terrain near Cannibal Creek. Anxious to join the new rush to Sandy Creek the miners were recklessly traversing new country. Aborigines easily surrounded them. Attempting to move ahead with the horses, Cornelius Hurford was speared in the heart and died instantly.⁷⁶ This was a rare episode, as most Aboriginal attacks were made on smaller groups, on two or three or the

74. 74/95. JUS/N 59 QSA.

75. *Ibid.*

76. 74/225 JUS/N 41 QSA.

solitary traveller. In at least one case, the attackers were unseen. Sinclair Balsar, who cared for Henry Scharfs after he was speared at the last crossing of the Normanby River in March 1875, told the inquest that "he[Scharfs] saw no blacks, he was alone watering and leading his horses when he was speared."⁷⁷ More vulnerable victims were killed by axing, and not spearing,⁷⁸ suggesting that the Aborigines had assessed the likely outcome before attacking.

Specific motivation is difficult to determine. Only on two occasions did Aborigines ransack the camps after their attacks. In one case they took blankets, along with a tent, tin dish and iron tomahawk; and in the other, they stripped iron off a dray.⁷⁹ A group of Chinese miners at Byerstown in 1875 complained of the "continued attacks by the blackfellows on any of the men going a mile or two from the main camp." Several Chinese were wounded, probably as a warning, and then on one occasion one was killed.⁸⁰ Overall, the attacks were sporadic, occurring at different times of the day, which seems to suggest they stemmed from chance contact, or were shaped by the mentality and the armed state of the miners involved, and the degree to which the Aborigines could use the element of surprise. The Aborigines were hunters, habitually armed and watchful. Their behaviour was not necessarily provoked by the action of the victims, but by an association with past events at a particular place. Battle Camp was one such place where they seem to have sought revenge, illustrated by one particular episode. On 17 October 1874, John and Bridget Strau with their infant daughter Annie unharnessed the horses from their dray and camped for the night alongside a lagoon about twenty-six

77. 75/161 JUS/N 44 QSA.

78. John, Bridget and Annie Strau, Ned, Alfred, Matthew Wright and Alfred Dobitz were disabled by spearing first, and then killed with axe wounds to the head.

79. *Viz* Alfred, Matthew Wright and the Strau family.

80. Memorial, Henry Way & Thomas Tin Chong to Police Magistrate 16 June 1875, 75/1781 COL/A 211 QSA.



*On the Road to the Palmer: An Attack by Blacks (Australasian Sketcher
19 February 1876)*

kilometres (sixteen miles) from Battle Camp. The area around the lagoon was well grassed, the location of Aboriginal camps, but also a logical stop out for teamsters. During the evening the whole family was attacked and killed with stone axes. Their bodies were stripped of clothes - Bridget and Annie Strau totally, and Jack Strau of his shirt - most likely to ascertain their gender. Teamster Martin Greene had passed the same spot a short time before and had warned Strau not to camp at the lagoon as "there were Blacks about there".⁸¹ Indeed, the *Cooktown Herald* alleged quite openly that the actions of Greene and fellow teamster Grant had provoked Aboriginal retaliation on Strau's dray instead of that of the teamsters.⁸² The Aborigines were ruthlessly dispersed by three combined native police detachments of Inspector Thomas Coward, and Sub-Inspectors Douglas and Townshend, and the stolen property recovered. The place of dispersal became known as Skull Camp.⁸³

Two other places with reputations for Aboriginal attacks were Hell's Gate, a narrow rock defile on the Conglomerate Range section of Douglas' track, and the Laura Gorge, where the Laura River flows between the escarpments of that range and a similar formation to the east. In the early months of the Palmer rush, Douglas' track was heavily used, and at least one man was speared, but survived.⁸⁴ In 1875 mysterious disappearances were reported, the first being James Flannery and Ned, a miner. Both men were allegedly speared in two separate incidents but within six weeks of each other, their mates fleeing in terror from the scene, to return later to find no bodies. Both men were believed

81. 74/274 JUS/N 41 QSA.

82. CH 21 October 1874.

83. J.C. Hogsfleisch to Chief Sec, B.P. Morehead, 8 October 1889, 89/9567 COL/A 595 QSA. In fact Hogsfleisch claimed that it was he who first came across the bodies of the Strau family. He also claimed he was present, but not a participant, at the Skull Camp dispersal.

84. This was John Hardman. St George to Hon Sec for Works & Mines 1 June 1874, 74/3129 WOR/A 86 QSA; CC 16 May 1874.



Hell's Gate, 1970.



Hell Gates, on the Road to the Palmer River. (Illustrated Sydney News 3 March 1876)

to have been carried off by Aborigines.⁸⁵ After 1875 the track was little used. However, in January 1877, Hugh and Donald Macquarie also disappeared under even more mysterious circumstances, near an Aboriginal camp. The bodies of two mutilated horses were located near Hell's Gate, where broken spears were found, with what appeared to be human skin and bones in the fire of the Aboriginal camp. Cannibalism was assumed, but the inquest into their disappearance also recorded the discovery of some of their possessions including gold scales, an empty watch pouch and an empty chamois gold bag. Certainly the Macquaries met death by violence, although no bodies were found, but the evidence of Aboriginal involvement is slight: that they were returning from a gold-buying trip, and no money or gold was found with their possessions suggests motivation for a European rather than Aboriginal attack.⁸⁶ The inquiry apparently did not record a finding and was discontinued after a brief session.⁸⁷ Notwithstanding lack of evidence the newspapers claimed that the unarmed Macquaries were "run down like paddy-melons by a merciless mob of infuriated cannibals."⁸⁸ The Deighton and Laura Rivers similarly gained a notorious reputation. The earliest deaths occurred in January 1874 on the Deighton, with the discovery of the mutilated bodies of Matthew Wright and a miner named Alfred.⁸⁹ A year later an attack was made on the mail station at Laura. Bernard MacAdam, the mail contractor, survived a spear wound in the thigh, but

85. 75/391 JUS/N 46, 75/336 JUS/N46 QSA.

86. Evidence of Senior Constable Pickering 77/47 JUS/N 52 QSA.

87. The magisterial inquiry apparently did not deliver a decision and was discontinued only after a brief session. CH 24 February 1877.

88. CC 17 February 1877.

89. 74/90 JUS/N 39 QSA.



*Packers Stuck Up by Blacks. Sketches About the Palmer, North Queensland.
(Australasian Sketcher 13 April 1878)*

J.M. Blair, a carpenter, was not so lucky, and died instantly from a spear wound in the back.⁹⁰ A month later Alexander Mann, a cattle dealer, was killed at the same place.⁹¹ The attacks at the Laura crossing which involved Blair and Mann were open and seemingly pre-meditated, as by 1875 the location was regularly visited by Europeans and was one of the more permanent settlements on the Palmer road.

It was the survivors of Aboriginal attacks, people like Bernard MacAdam the mail contractor, who were more influential in creating fear among miners and travellers. The survivors, with a spear wound as testimony, became local celebrities, constantly re-telling the story of their ordeal to the alarm of newcomers. For every fatal spearing, there were many non-fatal ones, numbering almost forty, which left the victim with injuries ranging from slight to critical. The wardens' reports often described the condition of people suffering wounds who became the charge of the gold field administration until well enough to continue their livelihood. One miner, John Hardman, became a living legend on the field. He received five spear wounds on the Douglas track but elected to stay at the scene awaiting his partners with a sign to indicate his predicament - "Look after wounded man."⁹² By choosing to remain beside the principal track to the diggings, Hardman probably became personally familiar to more people on the gold field than any other victim and must have been a potent source of insecurity. Yet while he probably played a part in gaining Hell's Gate its reputation for violence, no one was speared in that place again for well over a

90. 75/32 JUS/N 43 QSA

91. St George to Col Sec 24 February 1875, 75/3229 COL/A 215 QSA.

92. CC 6 June 1874; St George to Sec Works & Mines 1 June 1874, 74/3129 WOR/A 86 QSA.

year, after the initial rush had abated, and the number of miners travelling this track had decreased. Less fortunate than Hardman was Patrick Callinan, who suffered a spear wound to the right eye, which did not kill him, but drove him insane.⁹³ Nevertheless, there were a few who received quite serious multiple wounds and survived: one was found with a piece of spear 35.5 centimetres (14 inches) long embedded in him and at least three were speared in the back or chest. Several men, including Mulligan, were speared in the leg, sustaining minor wounding or sometimes merely bruising, but were not incapacitated.⁹⁴

While most reports understandably concentrated on spearing of people, this aspect was only a small part of the overall pattern of Aboriginal hostility. Far more numerous were attacks of an economic nature, which severely affected the mining community. The most common form of Aboriginal attacks involved animals: the killing, injuring or driving away of cattle, sheep, and in particular, horses. Reports of injuries to animals are unfortunately vague, as the word "speared" seems to have been widely used in contemporary sources without any indication whether the wound was minor, serious or fatal. Nor do contemporary accounts give the number of animals rendered unfit for work by injury, or deliberately driven away. Nevertheless, a conservative estimate can be made. The number of horses reputedly killed on the gold field and on the roads from Cooktown in the decade is estimated at 130, while another 351 were speared, presumably not fatally. Over half of the spearings and almost a third of the deaths occurred on the roads from Cooktown to the Palmer.⁹⁵ Taking the average cost per horse

93. St George to Macalister 2 April 1874, 74/1615 COL/A 197 QSA.

94. *CH* 16 October 1875; *CC* 13 June 1874; *Q* 13 December 1873.

95. An estimate based on newspaper and official sources.

at £50 to £60, packers and miners would have lost at least £6,500 and possibly £21,000 if all the horses speared were incapacitated, although it is probable that many recovered. St George noted that in the period November 1873 to July 1874, horses to the value of "several hundred pounds" had been killed,⁹⁶ and Sellheim reported to the Secretary for Works and Mines in the year 1875 that the Aborigines had "speared whole teams of horses".⁹⁷ One teamster lost between May 1874 and November 1875 £1,000 worth of horses, killed by Aborigines.⁹⁸ The impact of these losses and injuries affected every aspect of life on the Palmer, as the field was dependent on pack-horses and horse-drawn vehicles for transport and supplies. Loss and injury to horses reduced the number of teamsters operating, increased their working costs, and substantially raised carriage rates, thereby inflating all prices. Bullocks were also attacked, but most in the vicinity of the Eight Mile near Cooktown. A total of sixty-five bullocks is estimated to have been killed by Aborigine during the decade, with a further thirty-three speared, only nine of these on the Palmer Gold Field proper. The livelihood of bullock drivers was severely hit by such attacks: the Reynolds brothers lost an entire team in October 1875 at the Normanby crossing.⁹⁹

In addition to stock, attacks on property were also common, for more than a single motive. Many cases involved the theft of European items, entirely consistent with Hann and Mulligan's observations of the use of metal artefacts. The Aborigines readily incorporated European commodities into their own culture. In an area where it was presumed

96 St George to Col Sec 4 August 1874, 74/1680 COL/A 197 QSA.

97. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 12 December 1876, 76/12 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

98. James A. Kennedy to editor 22 November 1875, CH 24 November 1875.

99. CH 30 October 1875.

no other European had been, the first expedition from the Endeavour found a dilly bag, dropped by an Aborigine, in which were "some leaves from a pocket-book, a sheath-knife, and some fishing hooks."¹⁰⁰ Glass, discarded horseshoes, even iron from gates, were used for spear points, along with telegraph wire and insulators. A correspondent to the *Cooktown Herald* described a tool made from a dray bolt, with a wooden handle tied with twine.¹⁰¹ Articles brought back after one punitive raid on an Aboriginal camp included pieces of hoop iron beaten into knives and set into handles to make swords, forehead bands made from a horse's bridle, waggon lynch pins made into axes, in addition to bullock bells and spears.¹⁰² Telegraph construction teams frequently found their camps disturbed by Aborigines, who in one week in November 1875 twice robbed the same camp, taking away boots, clothes and other items. The rapidity with which Aborigines adapted metal to their own needs, improving the efficiency and function of traditional weapons, indicates their ability to adopt new methods and materials, and contradicts the assumptions about the unchanging nature of their society and lack of intelligence which underlay much of the treatment meted out to them by Europeans.

Another cause of conflict was the competing uses of land. Some years, 1877 in particular, were drier than usual, water and native animals even scarcer. According to the *Queenslander*, Aborigines killed horses and cattle out of necessity:

The country is not fertile, is poorly stocked with game, and the whites have taken possession of all the water-courses. Native Police officers say that most of the Palmer blacks are half starved....The white man occupy their only hunting ground, and in default of the fish, roots and game of the waterholes and creek "bottoms", they are in a manner compelled to eat horses and bullocks.¹⁰³

101. CH 11 November 1874.

102. CH 30 October 1875.

103. Q 8 December 1877.

Yet in 1883, Hodgkinson felt that Aborigines were not so "recklessly improvident" of food "to spear eight horses in one day."¹⁰⁴ Indeed, there are cases which are inexplicable in terms of Aboriginal requirements, and appear intended to cause destruction or denial, particularly when large numbers of animals were killed and speared. There are references to Aborigines frightening away horses, and there are instances where some were speared while the remainder were driven off.¹⁰⁵ Whatever the motivation, the theft or destruction of goods from camps and pack-teams necessitated an almost military system of sentry duty in outlying places. Felled poles and stolen wire and insulators cut telegraph communications on numerous occasions.¹⁰⁶ While there is no direct evidence that disruption of communications was the Aborigines' aim, cutting the telegraph wires exploited the mining population's chief enemy, isolation. The amounts of wire taken ranged from eighty metres to 280,¹⁰⁷ more than sufficient for spear points. Even before the wire was stretched, pole-cutters were reluctant to go to work for fear of Aboriginal attack.¹⁰⁸ When completed, maintenance became a problem, for linesmen, were often hesitant to risk venturing along the line in small parties.¹⁰⁹ Added to the more tangible forms of depredation

104. Hodgkinson to Under Sec Mines 9 June 1883, 13B/G3 pp.464-5 QSA.

105. *CC* 10 March 1877; *BC* 20 March 1883.

106. *CC* 2 February 1878; *CH* 17 February, 10 March, 7 April, 25 July 1877, 14 February, 2 March 1878; *Q* 17 February, 31 March 1877, 2 October 1880; Report of the Post and Telegraph Department of Queensland for the year 1881, *QV&P* 1882, 1, p. 476.

107. This included substantial lengths of wire: 201 metres taken near Battle Camp *CH* 4 April 1874; "hundreds of yards of wire" during six months from the Blacksoil area *CH* 25 July 1877; 256 metres from line over Normanby Range *CH* 14 February 1877, *Q* 17 February 1877; 285 metres *Q* 28 April 1877; 79 metres taken at Little Oakey Creek *CC* 30 January, 2 February 1878; 84 metres from Normanby Range area *CC* 17 February 1877; 183 metres near Battle Camp *CC* 10 March 1877, *Q* 31 March 1877.

108. *CH* 28 April 1875.

109. Report of the Post and Telegraph Department of Queensland for the year 1881, *QV&P* 1882, 1, p. 476.

were a host of other forces contributing to the difficulty and expense of mining: the cost and inconvenience of carrying firearms, labour time lost in keeping watch, reluctance to travel, the need to organize groups for most forms of activity, and the psychological stress of living in constant apprehension of a surprise attack.

The total absence of written or oral accounts from Aborigines during the period of conflict obliges the historian to rely exclusively on European accounts to infer Aboriginal motivation and reaction. However, there does exist tangible evidence of Aboriginal responses to the influx of the mining population in the form of paintings in rock shelters throughout the Laura district; unfortunately there are no living informants to interpret these, and so even this source cannot be understood without the imposition of European ideas and a large measure of sheer conjecture.

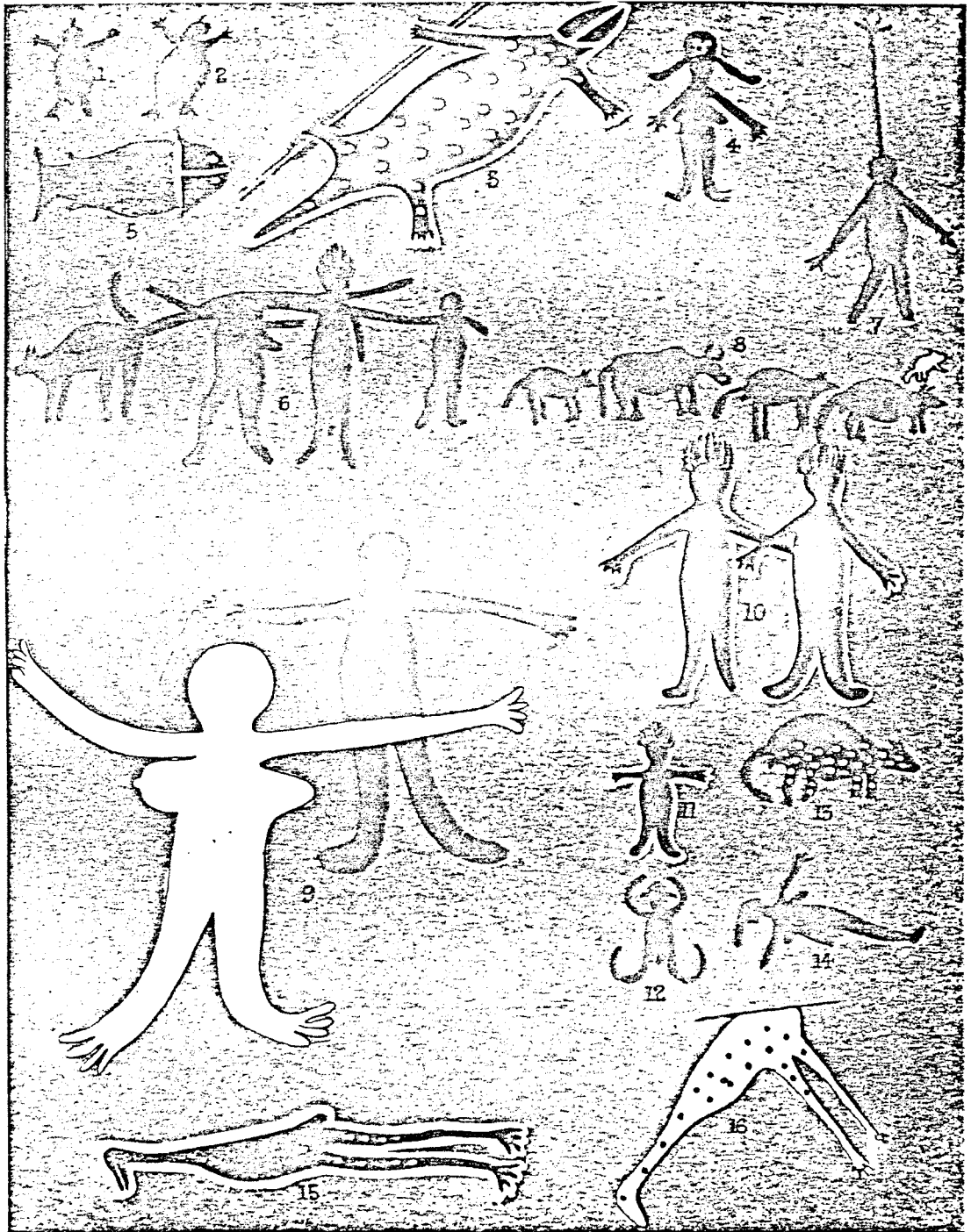
There are early accounts of Aboriginal paintings discovered by Europeans. An ex-packer explained how he found himself in one cave at the end of the plateau near springs on the Douglas track, which he described:

The ceilings and walls were also adorned with rude paintings in red ochre representing warriors, canoes, &c. The cave was about 70ft. deep by some 40 ft. in width and from 4ft. to 14ft. in height.¹¹⁰

In 1895 Robert Logan Jack found similar caves in the escarpments north of Chinky and Mun Gin Creeks, which he believed had been drawn since European settlement. He described in one cave a group of humans with upturned legs, one wearing a hat, and in other caves paintings of native animals and birds including also an outline of a bullock or cow. But Jack made no attempt to interpret these paintings, dismissing them as "the art of a race in the stage of intellectual infancy" and a copy of European art.¹¹¹

110. Q 8 June 1878.

111. R.L. Jack, On Aboriginal Cave-Drawings on the Palmer Goldfield, *RSQP* 11 (1896), p.91.



Aboriginal Cave Drawings from various galleries in the Conglomerate Range (Jack On Aboriginal Cave-Drawings, Roy Soc Qld Proc 11, 1896, plate 1)

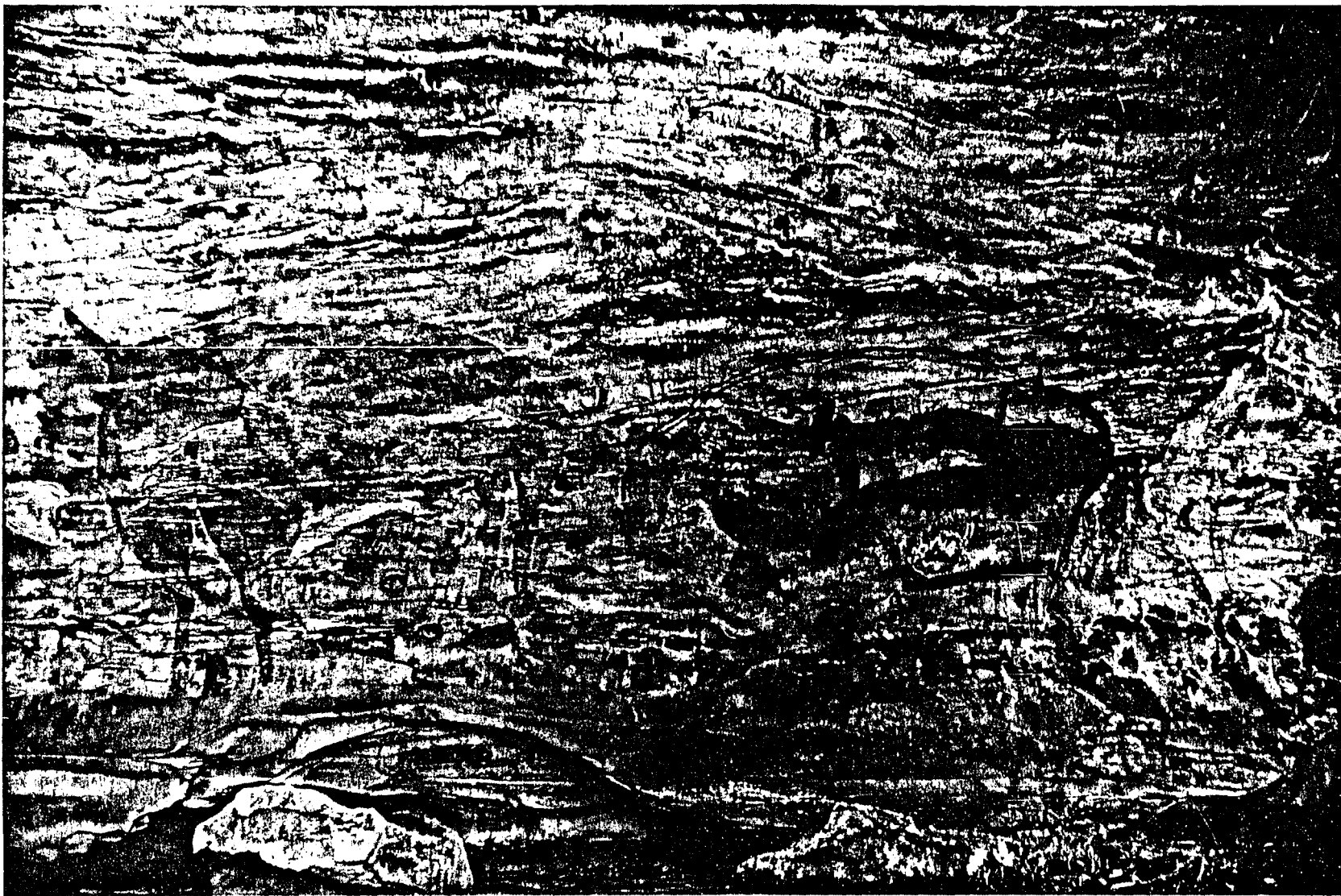
Rediscovery of paintings came about by accident in the 1960s, and it is only in the last two decades that recording and interpretation have gone ahead, initiated by the work of Percy Trezise. Through direct observation, advice from local Aboriginal descendants, inference from a knowledge of paintings elsewhere, and a degree of speculation, Trezise has developed a tentative chronology of the techniques and styles employed by the rock painters of the Laura Gorge. While most of the ten styles he identifies in rock shelters are not precisely dated, he claims that the last two periods discernible in the painted galleries correspond to the period of first contact with Europeans and the subsequent collapse of Aboriginal society.¹¹² The style and subject-matter of this period of rock-painting portray the impact of the arrival of Europeans in the region. Horses feature in several galleries, notably the Giant Horse Gallery, named for its dominating feature, a huge painted animal, unmistakably a horse, about six metres long and three metres tall.¹¹³ The unique scale of the painting undoubtedly expresses Aboriginal perception of this new animal. Trezise points out that while horses are an important feature of late rock paintings, cattle are rarely represented, suggesting that conflict with Europeans had sufficiently disrupted Aboriginal society in the region to put an end to painting ceremonies before the establishment of the pastoral industry.¹¹⁴

The human figures in these late paintings are frequently depicted in ways which identify them as Europeans or Native Police. The convention of cross-hatching of the bodies is used to represent clothing, the feet are drawn as a solid mass representing boots rather than in the

112. P. Trezise, *Rock Art of South-east Cape York* (Canberra 1971), p.126.

113. See photograph accompanying text.

114. P. Trezise, *Last Days of a Wilderness* (Sydney 1973), p.133. Trezise's comment on the rarity of cattle representations arises from his discovery in 1970 of stencilled cowhorns in a gallery in the Laura Basin.



Clothed human figure with rifle being thrown from horse, Giant Horse Gallery,
Laura Gorge, 1979.

carefully five-toed manner found in older paintings, and there are sometimes identifying items present such as leggings, rifles or police caps. One painting in the Giant Horse galleries clearly depicts a rifle-bearing rider being thrown from a horse. Moreover, the events depicted, the postures, and the juxtaposition of European figures with malevolent symbols such as carrion-eating ibis strongly suggest that the paintings are not merely visual records, but have sorcery or some form of metaphysical threat as their intention. Trezise reports that elderly Aborigines in the 1960s instantly recognized some of the late paintings as "puri-puri" or sorcery figures.¹¹⁵ But in the absence of clearer understanding of the paintings from the European contact period, there is little point in speculating on their significance. They suggest that resistance to Europeans was conducted not only in terms of physical attack, but also on an entirely different plane; indeed, in Aboriginal terms, sorcery, not violence, may have been regarded as the principal battleground. It is known that the European miners were entirely oblivious to this second front. How Aborigines interpreted its effectiveness, however, is unknown.

Most miners and carriers took precautions against Aboriginal attacks by working in groups and carrying firearms. Police Magistrate Hamilton recorded in 1874 that miners "not infrequently travel with their rifles loaded and even cocked for fear of sudden attack", as did the *Cooktown Courier*, that "every man on the road travels well armed, a carrier's camp at eventide is a regular 'school of musketry'."¹¹⁶ To prospectors, a gun was an essential tool in the search for new diggings. As one miner testified in March 1874: "We are going out prospecting ten or fifteen miles up the right-hand branch and are only

115. Trezise, *Rock Art*, pp. 9-10, 124-5.

116. T.Hamilton to Col Sec 28 March 1874, 74/701 COL/A 194 QSA;
CC 5 December 1874.



Palmer Gold Fields, Queensland. Diggers Preparing for Defence
(Illustrated Sydney News 22 July 1876)

waiting for more firearms."¹¹⁷ Experienced prospectors such as Mulligan routinely carried what amounted to a small armoury on trips into unsettled country. And Mulligan himself described how he was overcome by irrational terror when on one occasion he mislaid his rifle in the bush, although he also had a shotgun and revolver back at his camp.¹¹⁸ A "shoot first" mentality certainly existed among prospectors entering new country, the assumption being that any approaching human figure was Aboriginal. This was particularly evident in the behaviour of one of William MacLeod's men who fired unhesitatingly at the shadowy figure of one of Mulligan's party while prospecting on the Hodgkinson River in January 1876. The explanation given by MacLeod's men is telling: Mulligan was mistaken for "a black fellow going to spear the horses."¹¹⁹ Similarly in 1878, within the precincts of settlement, a butcher by the name of Ah Kit saw an Aborigine attempting to steal his cattle: "I thought it was a wild blackfellow I then went home and got a rifle". The culprit was in fact Sandy, an employee of Dickson, a rival butcher. While the exact circumstances of the incident are not known, Ah Kit's reaction seemed to have been approved.¹²⁰ Another incident, potentially more serious, occurred in 1875 when a digger, seeing an Aboriginal encampment on the upper Palmer, approached it with a rifle intending to "get a couple of shots amongst them before they scattered." But before firing he saw the red cap of a native trooper and realized his mistake.¹²¹ The response of a party of diggers camped on the Upper Laura in May 1876, to the suspected presence of Aborigines

117. *Northern Advocate* 11 April 1874.

118. Q 10 September 1904.

119. Q 1 April 1876.

120. Ah Kit V. Sandy the Aborigine 26 November 1878, CPS 13B/P4
P274 QSA.

121. Q 30 October 1875.

close to their camp further illustrates both a readiness to use firearms and blind panic over unseen threats. It is made ludicrous by the fact that it was a false alarm, but the intentions were quite clear, as revealed by the diary of a miner named Peter whose narrative ability is not matched by his spelling:

...blacks were talked of a great deal at the camp fire, and when three parts of the camp were in bed but no body asleep, there was a quear noise towards the place were the horses were seen last, the chaps at the fier said did you here that yes was the cry all round thats the blacks was said by another, down by the horses said another, and then there was a general rush for the fierarms one chap fiers a shot from his revolver as soon as he came out of his tent and then all hands that had any shooting stick rushed off for the place were they thought the blacks were one of my mates had a single barrel but were the powder was he did not know and was in to much of a hurry to stop to look for it that he runs off with the rest without trousers or boots or powder for his gun, but he came back with the rest and no one seen any blacks and no body ever knew whether his gun was loddid or not, I for one, knew it was not, for I was carrying it all day and discharged it as he well know just at dusk, such was the grand charge after the blacks as thought on the road to Byerstown.¹²²

This account demonstrates not only the diggers' enthusiasm in firing at imaginary Aborigines, but also the incompetence with which many handled their weapons.

D.T. Seymour, on the other hand, the Commissioner of Police, was particularly critical of the lack of preparedness of some miners:

...so long as miners and travellers continue to neglect ordinary precaution, no number of Police that could be stationed in the District could protect them. I have met solitary travellers and packers proceeding leisurely along, some unarmed and many with their rifles either strapped on packhorses or so carefully wrapped up and tied that if required they could not be made use of.¹²³

Panicky or unprepared, others were more ruthless, capable of using their weapons with savage effectiveness. On the way from the Palmer to the Hodgkinson in May 1876, the results of one punitive raid were observed by passers-by:

122. Peter (surname unknown), Diary (6 May 1876).

123. Seymour to Col Sec 26 November 1875, 75/2973 COL/A 214 QSA.

At one point of the journey a sickening odor of decomposed blackfellows was observable, and indicated the whereabouts of a recent brush between a party of diggers and a band of "original possessors", in which it appears the latter were not only the aggressors, while the others were quietly pursuing their way, but had carried the war right into the white men's camp at night. This was too much for North Queensland human nature, and they consequently "dispersed" in North Queensland fashion.¹²⁴

It was generally known that there would be no recrimination for shooting Aborigines, as the *Cooktown Courier* announced to its readers on the field: "Of course we all know that it is ridiculous to expect a white-man to be hanged for the murder of the black in Queensland."¹²⁵

Justifying the use of guns were the assumptions that mining represented progress, the triumph of civilization over barbarism, and that the Aborigines were savage and incapable of change. The *Cooktown Herald's* comments reflected this view:

But a few months ago, this outpost of civilization was merely the haunt of Aborigines, in a primitive condition, and possibly the camping-grounds of barbaric warriors who knew nothing of the value of the soil, or the mines of wealth hidden beneath the surface. Civilization has alighted upon the scene - progress¹²⁶ has advanced - barbaric cannibalism fled to other parts.

The appeal to the virtues of civilization and progress is a familiar theme in nineteenth century newspaper editorials. But it usually applied to regions of close agriculture and major towns, rather than to the scattered, shifting encampments of alluvial miners. Such rhetoric undoubtedly encouraged violence as morally necessary, especially as the northern miners were so vulnerable. Their one strength was the possession of firearms, and yet this was frequently negated by Aboriginal bushcraft and familiarity with the terrain. As the *Queenslander* suggested: "Nature herself intervenes in favor of the

124. Q 10 June 1876.

125. CC 18 October 1876.

126. CH 19 June 1875.

aboriginal more effectively than in southern colonies."¹²⁷

Admittedly many victims of Aboriginal attacks were unarmed, such as in the cases of the Straus, James Flannery, Henry Scharfs, Matthew Wright and Harry. Some had been armed but were either beyond reach of their firearms at the time of the attack or outnumbered. In the cases of James Souter and Cornelius Hurford, although their parties were armed, the former was working a gully and the latter leading horses when speared. Ned in fact had been firing when he was surrounded and killed.¹²⁸ Aboriginal powers of observation could not have failed to notice tactically important details. It was even acknowledged by the *Cooktown Herald* that the Aborigines were "immeasurably their superiors in tactics and bush-fighting", which in part explains the incessant calls for more police protection during the decade to keep mining viable:

...the very fact of white men giving way to the savage must necessarily tend to increase the importance of the natives in their own estimation, and make them bolder in consequence. ...The miners have difficulties to contend with without having to enter into guerilla warfare, and risk their lives fighting their sable foes, who are immeasurably their superiors in tactics and bush-fighting...Therefore in the interests of the miners and packers, it is absolutely necessary to have an increase in the present numbers of the native police, so that a constant and thorough patrolling of the road may take place ...[Lack of protection] causes men to keep together in mobs, and prevents a very great deal of prospecting which would be undertaken by miners singly, or at all events in small parties, if the Government would only step in, and by largely increasing the native police force...Therefore, prospecting on the Palmer has not been carried on to the extent it ought to have been simply because, as has been stated hundreds of times, "The niggers were bad" and the little ~~or~~ no protection afforded to the miners by the Government.¹²⁹

It was obvious from such demands that the mining population felt vulnerable to Aboriginal attack, and alone could not protect themselves.

127. Q 18 September 1880.

128. 75/336 JUS/N 46 QSA.

129. CH 24 June 1874.

The Native Police had been used in Queensland prior to its colonial separation from New South Wales to break the back of Aboriginal resistance in new districts opened to pastoralism. Ostensibly, the role of the force was to teach the Aborigines "that no outrage or epredation shall be committed with impunity"; however it was also officially instructed to disrupt stable Aboriginal communities by dispersing "any large assemblage of blacks".¹³⁰ The instructions were obviously vague and were open to individual interpretation by the officer in charge. Native troopers were recruited from outside a new district, and were trained in the use of firearms. Communications between troopers and local Aborigines was strictly forbidden by the official instructions. The type of men attracted to the force as officers were on the whole unlikely to interpret the official instructions in a moderate or judicial way, nor was this expected. Against charges of outright murder and "wholesale butchery", Police Commissioner D.T. Seymour did not vacillate in his support of his officers' actions, conceding only that when "blacks commit a crime they are followed up by the police, and encounters take place in which undoubtedly some natives were killed."¹³¹ But Seymour's airy admission of occasional high-handedness on the part of his police force bears little resemblance to the "dreary blood-stained business" of reprisal and counter-reprisal in the Cook district, as described by the editor of the *Cooktown Courier*:

When first we come into a new district, we bring with us the Native Police, a body of trained savages armed for the destruction of their countrymen. We never make any attempt to soothe the suspicions or maintain friendly relations with the aboriginal inhabitants of the soil, but we set the Native Police at them to make them "quiet". This is effected by the trained savages surprising their countrymen whenever the occasion offers, and massacring

130. Official Instructions of the Commandant to the Officers and Camp Sergeants, Select Committee on Native Mounted Police, *QV&P* 1861, p. 152.

131. Seymour to Col Sec 15 June 1883, 83/3025 COL/A 363 QSA.



Native Police Detachment, Laura, c.1880s. (C.B. Marrett Papers, James Cook Historical Museum)

them indiscriminately. Often this process is speedily successful; the tribes thinned in numbers and broken in spirit, become cowed, and we are no longer formidable. They are then "let in", allowed to mingle with the settlers, and the rum bottle and disease does the rest. Often the blacks are "very bad", as they are in this district...they fight obstinately for their country. Then the massacring process continued, and becomes reciprocal. The blacks kill any white man they can surprise, the whites shoot every black they see, and every now and again an active Native Police comes across a camp and leaves as many dead bodies in it as the rifles of the troopers can produce in the short time before the startled wretches can escape. There isn't one particle of the romance that gilds warfare even with ordinary savages about this dreary blood-stained business,¹³² it is merely reciprocal murder in all its naked deformity.

Police activity began in a small way. The first detachments of Native Police, called in to protect the mining population and property on the gold field and on the roads leading to it, did not number more than three, under Sub-Inspectors Alexander Douglas-Douglas, E.J. Townshend and Edward Dumaresq. The extent of the patrols of these three detachments was dependent on the amount of fodder available, for when scarce the activities of the Native Police were restricted to the populated mining areas. Conversely when the season was favourable, detachments were often not seen near the settlements for months. This was particularly noticeable during early 1874 when both Dumaresq and Douglas were also investigating possible routes to the field.¹³³ Both the main body of miners fossicking remote gullies and ravines and the secretive prospectors testing new ground far from the security of the first diggings, were very difficult to protect with such small numbers of Native Police. When the rush to Sandy Creek occurred in mid-1874, Douglas was on a punitive expedition thirty-two kilometres (twenty miles) west of Cooktown, Dumaresq at the headwaters of the Palmer, and soon to be deserted by his detachment. The Native Police could not be

132. CC 10 January 1877.

133. Douglas to Morissett 24 January 1874, 74/345 COL/A 192 QSA; Q 30 May 1874.

134. St George to Sec Works & Mines 1 June 1874, 74/3129 WOR/A 86 QSA; CC 20 June 1874.



Alexander Douglas Douglas

(JOL)

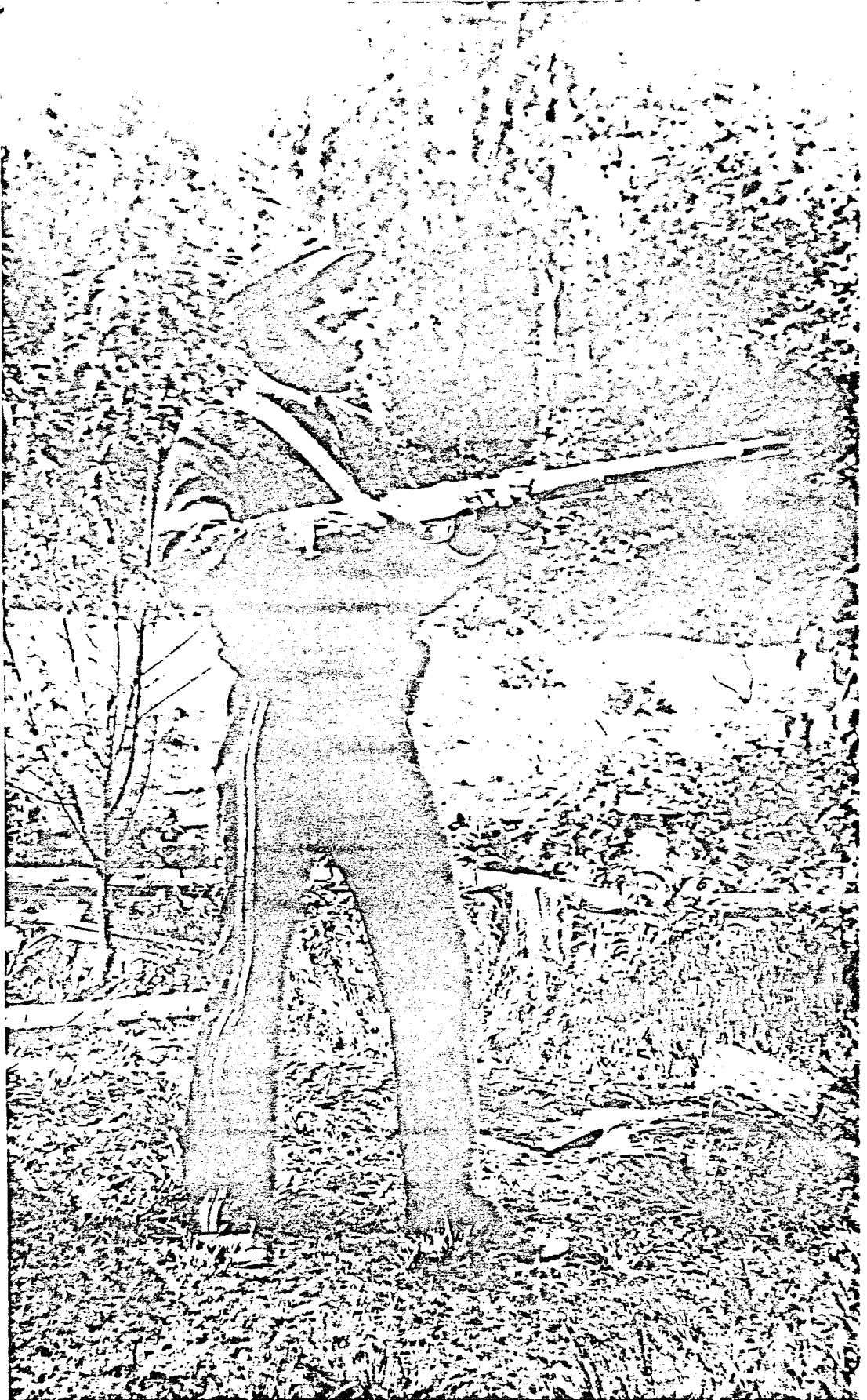
relied upon to protect the miners at the new rush, nor were Aborigines immediately dispersed for the attacks they made, as Dumaresq explained at the inquest of Cornelius Hurford: "In consequence of my having but one boy and the horses being knocked up the blacks could not be followed up."¹³⁵ For troopers to desert was another serious matter; it was feared that they would join forces with local Aborigines, turning their knowledge of firearms and drill against the Native Police. In fact, Dumaresq's troopers were seen with Aborigines in the vicinity of Pine Creek - the scene of a successful attack on fifty horses in September 1874.¹³⁶ Yet, a deserter could not expect to find acceptance in either Aboriginal or European communities. One trooper's desertion and subsequent death were the subject of an enquiry; the evidence gives an insight into the conduct of two Native Police detachments in the field in 1874-5, at a time of intense Aboriginal resistance.

Trooper Corney had been with Douglas' detachment at Puckley Creek camp since 1874, and had complained to Thomas Coward, then Acting Inspector of Police for the Cook district, of ill treatment by Douglas, and requested a transfer to another detachment.¹³⁷ Corney told Coward that Douglas "used to flog him too much, and was on too friendly terms with his gin." Coward explained that flogging was a usual practice "which an officer frequently has to do" to discipline troopers, and thus the application for transfer was ignored. According to trooper Alick, also a member of Douglas' detachment, disagreements had arisen between the officer and his troopers over the procurement of alcohol and opium, and over Douglas' interest in an Aboriginal woman: "Mr Douglas plenty want em gin". Corney deserted from the detachment in April or May 1875, accompanied by the woman, but was arrested at Palmer-ville and returned to Puckley Creek. It was alleged by native troopers,

135. 74/225 JUS/N 41 QSA.

136. CC 3 October 1874.

137. Report of Pope Cooper and Virgil Powers 28 December 1880 to A.H. Palmer, Colonial Secretary, 81/296 COL/A 306 QSA. Information in the following two paragraphs was gathered from this source.



Queensland Native Trooper, after 1877. (PRE140 QSA).

including Alick, that Douglas ordered Corney to be shot by troopers of his and Townsend's detachment, claiming the terrified woman - who had been chained to the victim while he was executed - as his property. An enquiry held five years later, into charges brought against Douglas by John Hamilton (then MLA but previously a doctor on the field), dismissed the evidence of Alick as inconsistent, and stressed Coward's antipathy towards Douglas. But Douglas was also able to call upon some influential support, for James Mulligan, William Little and Johnny Byers testified that they had since seen Corney alive. Their evidence was sufficient to dispose of the murder allegation, and Douglas was acquitted.

However the inquiry canvassed a number of other matters of some seriousness, involving dispersal of innocent Aboriginal camps, sexual abuse of Aboriginal women, ill-treatment of native troopers and procurement of alcohol and opium to win back their loyalty. As Hamilton complained to the Colonial Secretary:

Mr Douglas with his troopers and a white man came across some blacks and although they were innocent of having committed any outrage that they shot several, and captured a female quite a child who after being washed by the troopers in a creek was taken to the camp and ravished by them.

The enquiry seemed far from sympathetic to Hamilton's charges against Douglas coming as they did in the midst of a controversy over the role of the Native Police. It was suggested that there was personal antipathy between Hamilton and Douglas; there certainly was between Coward and Douglas. While the evidence of Mulligan, Byers and Little leaves Corney's death unproved, there was little doubt that alcohol, opium and concubinage were tolerated by Douglas, even possibly encouraged among his detachment. Combined with his harsh treatment of them, these procedures, on which the inquiry made no pronouncement, had eventually led to disaffection among the troopers. Indeed, the evidence suggests that far from being a disciplined and efficient instrument of colonial order, some detachments of the Native Police performed their duties in a state

of sullen, almost mutinous resentment, motivated largely by immoral inducements and fear of white officers.

The internal problems of the Native Police were not of great concern to the packers and miners who counted on their protection. Early in 1875 a rush to the Normanby¹³⁸ and an upsurge of Aboriginal violence at Laura led to the transfer of Native Police away from the Palmer basin,¹³⁹ and when spearings increased on the main diggings, Sellheim began to receive complaints concerning the insufficiency of police protection in the heart of the field.¹⁴⁰ By November 1875, Sellheim reported "great insecurity of life and property". He added: "I cannot help feeling, that unless vigorous means are taken at once to stay the depredations of these savages, that the prosperity of this Goldfield must suffer severely."¹⁴¹ Petitions were forwarded to the government in June, October and December 1875, making the complaints official.¹⁴² Two public meetings were held in November in Cooktown, coinciding with the visit of the Minister for Works. Resolutions were passed "all condemnatory of the manner in which the action of the police...had been administrated, the general feeling expressed that there was not only a deficiency in number, but inefficiency in action on

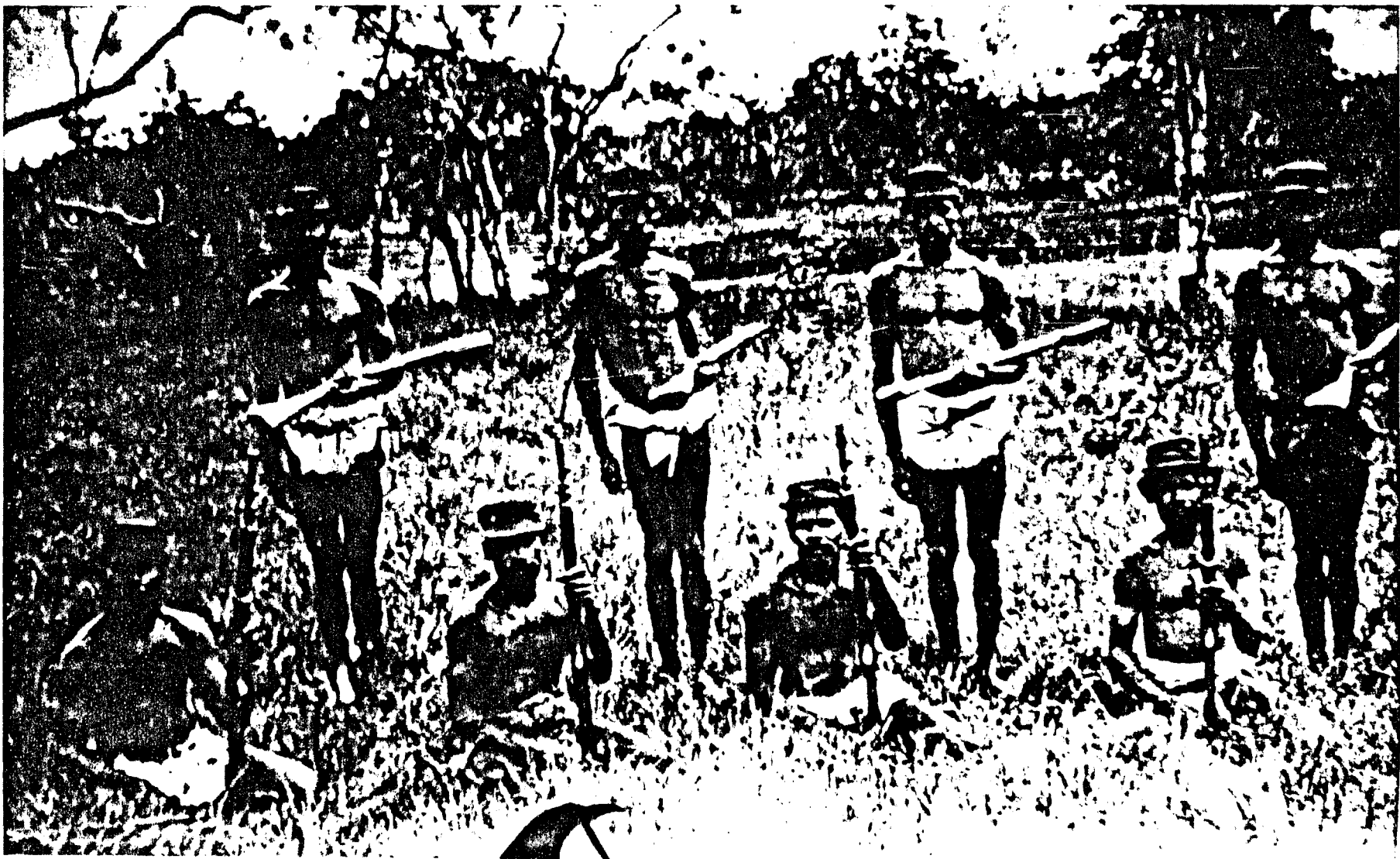
138. Douglas' detachment was ordered to the Normanby. Q 12 June 1875.

139. The entire Palmerville detachment was removed to Laura. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 2 February 1875, 75/34 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

140. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 4 April, 75/125, 4 June, 75/194, 5 July, 75/235, 1 October 1875, 75/304 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

141. Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 7 November 1875, 75/7960 WOR/A 110 QSA.

142. Memorial Henry Way and Thomas Tin Chong to Police Magistrate 16 June 1875, 75/1781 COL/A 211, Petitioners Edwardstown 27 October 1875, 75/2973 COL/A 214, Petition of Edwards & Co (Stockowners) and residents of Mitchell River and of the Palmer Goldfields reserve to Colonial Secretary (received 10 January 1876), 76/84 COL/A 217 QSA.



Native Police troopers, Laura, c.1880s (C.B. Marrett Papers, James Cook Historical Museum.
Cooktown)

the part of the force at our command."¹⁴³ It was also mentioned that the Native Police lacked sufficient horses and lost considerable time in travelling for supplies. The Commissioner of Police increased the number of detachments, for the total complement of Native Police in the Cook Police District in 1876 comprised one first class inspector, five second class sub-inspectors, three constables, and fifty-two native troopers.¹⁴⁴ And Sellheim subsequently noted that the "Native Police have been almost constant in their patrols of late and no outrages by Blacks have been reported."¹⁴⁵ In August the *Cooktown Herald* congratulated Townshend on his work in the Byerstown area after the fatal spearing of K. Donaghey: "The blacks appear to be completely extinguished in this locality none having introduced themselves of late."¹⁴⁶ In fact, very little was seen of Aborigines for the remainder of the year, and the annual report is positively glowing in its support for the Native Police:

I am glad to be able to report that the patrol of several detachments of Native Police, as far as the goldfield staff is concerned have been effective in the prevention of crime by the aborigines, and that outrages have been quite insignificant when compared with former years. Only one murder¹⁴⁷ and two or three raids on stock have been reported to me.

However, the success of the Native Police in quelling resistance was open to some question. Certainly there was a dramatic decline in attacks on Europeans in 1876, the year in which the police were greatly reinforced and thus were able to patrol more vigorously. But that year also saw a considerable decline in the European population with the rush to the Hodgkinson, followed by a steady increase in Chinese

143. *CC* 17 November 1875; *CH* 20 November 1875.

144. Report of the Commissioner of Police for the Year 1876, *QV&P* 1877, 1, p. 1034.

145. Sellheim to Sec Mines 4 May 1876, 76/98 CPS 13B/G1 QSA.

146. *CH* 12 August 1876.

147. Sellheim to Sec Mines 10 February 1877, 77/37 MWO 13/G1 QSA.

competition. And paradoxically, 1876 was the year in which the greatest number of horse spearings was reported: 119, fifty-seven of them fatal. Accordingly, the apparent success of the police in protecting European lives must be offset by the facts that there were fewer European targets, and no rushes to the Palmer gullies where miners had proved vulnerable in the past. Whether the increase in horse spearings was a random fluctuation, or reflected a deliberate change in Aboriginal tactics, can only be the subject of conjecture.

The maintenance of Native Police in the Cook Police District - especially as many as five detachments as was the case in 1876-77 - was a heavy financial burden. The report of the Commissioner of Police for 1878 described the exorbitant costs involved:

In the Cook and Palmer districts the horses had to be fed on corn at from fifteen to twenty-five shillings per bushel, and frequently in outside places, where corn was not procurable, flour at three shillings and sixpence per 'pannikin' had to be substituted; the cost of rations for native troopers at the same time being three shillings and sixpence per diem in excess of their usual cost in other districts.¹⁴⁸

From 1877 the numbers of Native Police were steadily reduced all over the colony; by 1880, the number of Native Police was less than half that for 1876.¹⁴⁹

Local criticism of the effectiveness of the Native Police underwent a change in emphasis. From demanding more troopers and active patrols, critics were now decrying this policy, and calling for stronger measures. Early in 1877, presumably motivated by the disappearance of the Macquarie brothers, the editor of the *Cooktown Courier* deemed the force a failure, not for humanitarian reasons, but because its methods only provoked retaliation and counter-reprisals.¹⁵⁰ Although reform of the Native Police was mooted, the termination of the force was not intended. The

148. Report of the Commissioner of Police for the Year 1878, *QV&P* 1879, 1, p. 752.

149. Report of the Commissioner of Police for the year 1880, *QV&P* 1881, 1, p. 398.

150. *CC* 28 February 1877.

Cooktown Courier objected to a continuing war that affected the prosperity of the area.

[There are]...districts where the blacks are 'quiet' and those where they are 'bad'. In the first the blacks have given up all avowed hostility: their depredations, if they commit any, taking the nature of larceny. In the second a state of warfare between the two races exists...in places where they are bad, as in the Palmer district, every depredation committed by the blacks is avowedly an act of warfare...In such districts Native Police are employed. Their aim of terrorising the blacks should be changed if it does not put terror into them...And a persisting hunting down of an offending mob of blacks, even if it were to their complete extermination, would be far less cruel and cost fewer lives, than the present system of desultory little massacres, having no obvious connection with any specific offence. Rigorous punishment of the kind we have described, especially if efforts were made at the same time to invite the confidence of unoffending tribes in the same neighbourhood, would soon pacify the most troubled districts. We venture to affirm that the adoption of such a system would have given greater security of life and property in the Palmer district twelve months after it opened than is to be found there now, after four years of spasmodic police raids and haphazard 'dispersals'.¹⁵¹

It was stressed that dispersal had to be immediate to have an effect, as "desultory little massacres" well after the event only encouraged revenge. Collective punishment was advocated, favouring promptness and continuity of punishment rather than severity.

Let the blacks understand that if they don't touch the whites the police will leave them alone; but let them also find that every outrage will be punished by a vengeance as certain and as impossible to be evaded as the decrees of fate. Such plain teaching would be understood even by wild animals, and could not fail to be intelligible to beings who, whatever¹⁵² they may be have the same reasoning powers as ourselves.

In July 1879, a public meeting held in Cooktown advocated the reorganisation of the Native Police and more effective police protection.¹⁵³ A letter from the *Cooktown Courier* criticizing the waste of human and animal life over the years since 1873 featured in the

151. CC 1 January 1878.

152. CC 21 February 1877.

153. CC 16 July 1879.

Queenslander's debate of 1880 over the role of the Native Police. In an article entitled "The Way We Civilize" the action of the Native Police at Battle Camp was held responsible for causing the conflict:

[From Battle Camp] the tug of war commenced, and everyone knows at which costs it has been maintained and how ruinously it has been fostered during the past five or six years in human life, horse and cattle flesh, money, ammunition, &c.; also how the progress of the district has been retarded therefrom...Had the government properly instructed their officials and furnished them with the necessary staff and means of preventing aggression, and to conciliate the natives by very lawless means, and to have furnished those means from time to time as required or suggested by those in charge, a great and blessed boon¹⁵⁴ would have been bestowed on this important district.

It was disclosed that the cause of Battle Camp was the abduction of an Aboriginal woman and child, and the accidental shooting of the woman.¹⁵⁵ But at the time of the *Queenslander* debate, calls for a more aggressive Native Police force were falling on deaf ears. Commissioner Seymour had become disillusioned with the cost, public outcries and ineffectiveness of the force, and saw that no reorganization within his powers would do more than pour old wine into new bottles. By 1880 he had already decided on the "gradual disembodiment of the Native Police Force" altogether.¹⁵⁶

* * * *

The violent nature of contact between Europeans and Aborigines on the Palmer cannot be questioned; it is mentioned in almost every account of the gold field. Many reports have attributed this to some innate hostility on the part of local Aborigines, but a more careful analysis of the sequence of events shows that initial contact was watchful but

154. CC 14 April 1880, reprinted Q 1 May 1880.

155. How We Civilize the Blacks Pt.5, Q 19 June 1880.

156. Report of the Commissioner of Police of the Year 1879, QV&P 1880, 1, p.705.

not violent. The use of physical force arose as a European initiative, out of incidents in which Europeans had given provocation. Once violence was established, the use of warnings and fire by Aborigines was abandoned, and replaced by a new policy of stealthy counter-violence, making effective use of bushcraft, terrain and the mobile habits of Europeans. Economic warfare was also instituted, with particular emphasis on the destruction of draught animals. Whether the effect was calculated or not, the strategic outcome of these tactics was to reinforce the isolation which, even without Aboriginal intervention, was the greatest problem facing Europeans living and mining on the Palmer.

The European response was to employ the policy of "dispersal" by the Native Police, which had already seen decades of service in the pastoral districts of the south. We have little knowledge of the operations of this force, but it is known to have kept up systematic patrols, and to have been called in to undertake reprisals in the wake of specific incidents. The level of Aboriginal attacks fell during the decade, but whether in response to casualties inflicted or general harassment by the Native Police, or some other cause, is unknown. There is some evidence that a tendency away from direct confrontation to attacks on animals may have been the result of Native Police activity. Generally, however, the Native Police was judged to be a failure. Difficulty in maintaining men and horses in the field, disaffection and low morale among the troopers, and the unsuitability of many of the European officers made it an unwieldy, expensive and ineffective body. Its disbanding at the end of the decade had little effect, for by that time the catastrophic disruption of Aboriginal society and the decline of European and Chinese numbers on the field had combined to reduce the level of racial conflict.



Native Police on parade at Cooktown barracks, c.1881 (JOL).

Deaths Attributed to Aborigines in the Vicinity and the Palmer Gold
Field 1873-1883

The names of the dead, along with dates and references, have been organized under two main categories - probable and possible - depending on the reliability of the evidence. Probable deaths have been further divided under place.

A. PROBABLE

Palmer Gold Field Proper:

James Souter 5 February 1874 (74/95 JUS/N 39 QSA)

Alfred Dobitz 12 March 1874 (74/100 JUS/N 39 QSA)

Cornelius Hurford 22 July 1874 (74/225 JUS/N 41 QSA)

Henry Scharfs 2 April 1875 (75/161 JUS/N 44 QSA)

Chinese miner c. June 1875 (Memorial Henry Way and Thomas Tin Chong
to Police Magistrate 16 June 1875 75/1781 COL/A 211 QSA)

Chinese miner c. August 1875 (Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 1 September
1875, 75/275 CPS 13B/G1 QSA)

Chinese miner c. January 1876 (CC 22 January 1876; CH 26 January,
9 February 1876)

T.K. Donaghey 10 May 1876 (76/123 JUS/N 49 QSA)

Chinese gardener c. September 1878 (CC 28 September 1878)

Chinese miner c. September 1880 (Gill to Under Sec Mines 4 October
1880, MWO 13B/G2 QSA)

Chinese miner c. October 1881 (St George to Under Col Sec 28 October
1881, 81/4709 COL/A 324 QSA).

Laura Area:

Alfred and Matthew Wright 15 January 1874 (74/90 JUS/N 39 QSA).

John Mitchell Blair 18 January 1875 (75/32 JUS/N 43 QSA)

Alexander Mann 10 February 1875 (75/3229 COL/N 215 QSA)

Bell's Gate:

Ned 22 September 1875 (75/336 JUS/N 46 QSA)

Chinese c. September 1875 (Sellheim to Sec Works & Mines 1 October 1875,
75/304 CPS 13B/G1 QSA)

James Flannery 2 November 1875 (75/391 JUS/N 46 QSA)

Battle Camp:

John, Bridget and Annie Strau 17 October 1874 (74/274 JUS/N 41 QSA)

B. POSSIBLE

Two Europeans found by C.H. MacDonald 16 August 1874 (CH 5 December 1874)

Three miners missing c. February 1875 (CH 13 February 1875)

Chinese man 8 June 1875 (CC 12 June 1875; CH 9 June 1875)

Five Chinese c. July 1875 (CH 17 July 1875)

Two Chinese 12 October 1875 (CC 28 October 1875)

Two Chinese c. January 1876 (CH 9 February 1876)

George Rushton who disappeared January 1877 (CC 10 January 1877)

Hugh and Donald Macquarie c. 28 January 1877 (77/47 JUS/N 52 QSA)

Two Chinese c. November 1878 (CC 23 November 1878)

Two Chinese c. September 1880 (Q 25 September 1880)

Statement of Members of the Expedition from the Endeavour River to the
Palmer River before Police Magistrate Thomas Hamilton 26 March 1874

We, whose names are severally subscribed, have this 26th March 1874 appeared before Thomas Hamilton the Police Magistrate of Cooktown, and state as follows:-

1. That we have heard read to us an excerpt of a letter purporting to be a description of the Expedition from the Endeavour River to the Palmer and which states as follows "Nov 3. Started over the spur of the range running to East. Came to Normanby River (15 miles) started a mob of blacks. Shot four and hunted them." - And we do most Emphatically state there is not a single particle of truth in this report.
2. We have also heard read to us the following "Nov 6. Blacks surprised us at Day break about 150 all were armed: got close to camp before anyone heard them: great consternation: shot several: they ran into waterholes for shelter where they were shot." - It is true the Expedition were surprised by the blacks; the horses were between our Camp and the blacks, and their Bells alarmed us. The native police were called, and drove the Blacks away. The Blacks were rounding up our horses to take them away and we heard there was one black shot in the dispersion but did not see any one shot. The Native Police did not follow the blacks but saddled up up [*sic*] immediately and went on to the Palmer. And we believe there was not a single Black followed or shot after by any one. We also beg to say that the Officers in charge of the Expedition did not on any occasion treat the blacks in any way improperly.
3. That every one of us whose names are underwritten do most Emphatically State and are prepared to state on Oath when required, that in no single instance, did we see any of the officers of the Expedition, or any one accompanying the Expedition fire a single shot at the Blacks Except at

the Surprise Camp, and we also state that we believe that had they not been dispersed in the way they were, the whole company would have been massacred.

4. That every one of us accompanied the Expedition and had opportunities of seeing how the Blacks were dealt with, and sincerely believe that they were treated with great forbearance, considering the difficult circumstances of the case.

Thos. Lynott	Cooktown
William J. Webb	Cook Town Endeavour
Edward Biss	Cooktown
Alexander Cox	Cookstown
Thomas Taylor	Palmer River
David Taylor	Palmer River
Thomas Jones	Palmer River
Christopher Berg	Palmer River
George Pratt	Palmer River
John Jackson Hogg	Cooktown
John Dunn per Tho. Hamilton	PM
John Cox	Cooktown
John J. Gerhot [?]	
Andrew Nelson	Cooktown
Barker Dodsworth	Palmer River
Thomas Jackson	Cookstown

Declared and signed in presence [*sic*] of Tho. Hamilton P.M.

(Source: 74/701 COL/A 194 QSA)

Summary of Causes of Death on the Palmer Gold Field 1873-83

Note: Causes of death have been arranged by general type, year of occurrence, and racial origin of deceased.
The three columns under year relate to Europeans, Chinese and Other or Indeterminate Race, in that order.

A. NATURAL CAUSES	1873	1874	1875	1876	1877	1878	1879	1880	1881	1882	1883	1873-83	Total		
Fever		27 1	24 32 1	15 14 1	5 5	13 2	8 1	1 1	2 1	1 3	2	96 62 2	160		
Dysentery, enteric fever	3	52 3	29 5	9 2	1	8	3			1		106 10	116		
Other digestive/urinary infections		6	2	2 2		5 2	1	2		1		16 7	23		
Malnutrition related			2	1	1		1					3 2	5		
Alcoholism				1	1				1			3	3		
Respiratory complications		5	6 3	3	2	3 1	1	1	1 2	2	1 1	24 8	32		
Exhaustion, debility, etc.		6	11 5 1	4 3	2 1	3 1	2					28 10 1	39		
Infantile				1		2	1			2	1	7	7		
Other eg heart disease		4	3 1	4 1	3 1	5	1 1	1	1 1		1 1	21 7 1	29		
B. ACCIDENTAL/VIOLENT CAUSES															
Drowning		3 1	4		1		1 1		1		1	9 3 1	13		
Killed by Aborigines		2	1	1				1			1	4 1	5		
Murder (not by Aborigines)		1	2	1	3 3	2		1				5 8	13		
Accidents (eg.falling off horse)			1	1			2	3	1 1	1 1		5 6	11		
Suicide		1	1 1	1	1		1	2		1	1	4 6	10		
Snake bite			1					1				2	2		
C. UNRECORDED CAUSES															
Not known/no entry		2	2 8	3 8 1	2							7 18 1	26		
Indecipherable	1	14*	1									16 1	17		
												*11 entries were completely missing from beginning of register late 1873-early 1874. It is unlikely any of these were Chinese.	Total Deaths	355 149 7	511

(Source: Palmer Death Register 1873-1883).

CONCLUSION

By 1883, at the end of a decade of mining, the Palmer had proven to be Queensland's most productive gold field, far exceeding the Gympie and Charters Towers yields. Yet these two fields, soon to be joined by Mount Morgan, were yet to experience nearly three decades of ever-increasing prosperity. The Palmer, on the other hand, was finished, despite optimism over the future of the reefs whose heyday had also passed. As the population drifted away, abandoning the field to nature, the Palmer's history became increasingly obscured by romantic tales and exaggerated yarns.

True, several popular stories of the Palmer correctly identify some of the characteristics which singled it out among nineteenth century gold fields. Its location in an inhospitable area not yet settled by Europeans, the quantity of fine alluvial gold located in the early rush which gave rise to a prolonged alluvial phase, the problems of the administration, the high costs of freight and of commodities on the field, the ephemerality of the settlements, the Chinese influx and the degree of violent confrontation with local Aborigines are universal themes in such writings. What is less well known about the Palmer is in many ways just as interesting and colourful, although much of the evidence contradicts, or at least modifies, the more widely disseminated stories of the rush.

It is rarely pointed out that despite the easily-won gold collected during the initial rush, most alluvial miners on the Palmer found it difficult to pan sufficient to survive. Poverty was indeed common; most of the miners earned less than the average wages-man in the colony. And yet, on a remote gold field, where firearms were essential equipment and a great inequality of wealth existed, armed robbery, bushranging and other forms of violent crime were rare.

It was the preoccupation of popular writers with violence which has contributed to the legends that belie the realities of life on the Palmer. Certainly death by gunshot or Aboriginal attack was more frequent than on most other mining fields in Australia. But if death is to be the measure of human misery, then fever and dysentery were its

principal agents on the Palmer. A disparate collection of new arrivals of varying experience, the European miners lived in makeshift shelters, engaging in work that was arduous and monotonous, and rarely earning enough to purchase necessities. Poor diet and even poorer sanitation exacted a heavy toll; other infectious diseases were common. Heavy drinking of alcohol by Europeans (and opium among Chinese) probably exacerbated health risks: the suggestion that consumption of either was merely celebration of successful prospecting is ludicrous; despair was a more plausible reason for Europeans and Chinese alike.

Chinese have always been synonymous with the Palmer, as the region experienced the most rapid and successful influx of Chinese to any nineteenth century mining field in Australia. Although their arrival was accompanied by placards threatening action on the part of Europeans, and demagogues evoking the memory of Lambing Flat, no serious confrontation between Europeans and Chinese ever occurred. The intra-Chinese disturbance at Lukinville was the only instance of "rioting Chinamen", and blame for the incident can be fairly attributed to colonial legislators. Indeed the role of the Chinese on the Palmer has been grossly misinterpreted, partly because they left few records of their life on the gold field which they dominated during the most productive years. It is difficult to refute the conclusion that the high alluvial yield was, in fact, due as much to the efficient working methods of the Chinese as to the natural richness of the gold. Their achievement was to persist in the face of discriminatory legislation, the product of the resentment their presence aroused among miners in previous decades in southern colonies. Fearing a backlash in northern mining constituencies once the Chinese arrived in large numbers, the Queensland government adopted policies which reflected confusion and ineptness: legislative and administrative measures were put in train to keep the colony white, despite the disapproval of Imperial authorities. Their only effect was to ensnare the Chinese miner in poverty and add to the difficulties of the local gold field's administration, whose charges they became. Ironically, as late as 1965, the Queensland government was embarrassed on learning that the 1878 legislation, prohibiting Asiatics from new mining fields, precluded the participation of a Japanese company in coal

developments in the Bowen Basin.¹

Finally there is the aspect of the long list of violent clashes with Aborigines, which popular accounts suggest were attributable to the extraordinary degree of ferocity and hostility on the part of local Aborigines. This interpretation ignores the fact that the outbreak of hostilities can be precisely dated and was invariably the result of acts of deliberate provocation on the part of Europeans. The contrast between the brutality with which Europeans engaged Aborigines, and their apparent restraint both within local European society and in coping with Chinese competition, arose essentially from the policies of the goldfield administration. The Palmer, despite its remoteness, was by no means beyond the administrative frontier. From the beginning of the rush it was governed by gold commissioners, wardens, magistrates and sub-inspectors with sweeping powers, a relatively sophisticated public service and two separate police forces at their command. While order was maintained within the European and Chinese communities at large, no conscious attempts were ever made to improve relations between those communities and the Palmer Aborigines. The Native Police had no compunction about suppressing Aborigines by most violent methods, thus encouraging by their example local miners who knew no charges would ever be laid against them for their actions. This aspect of confrontation between Aborigines and miners reflected no credit whatsoever on the latter.

The Palmer gold rush did not promote prosperous and enduring settlement similar to the larger reefing fields. No more than a half dozen people reside permanently on the Palmer today, and Cooktown is no longer a lively port. The Palmer town sites are but silent clearings, disturbed occasionally by campers with four-wheel drives and prospectors with metal detectors. At Maytown the stone kerbing put

1. M. Drew, Queensland Mining Statutes 1859-1930, Kennedy (ed); *Readings* Vol 2, pp.168-169.

down by the Hann Divisional Board is the most impressive relic of the town where Philip Sellheim once warned miners not to make "swine of demselves". On the nearby reefs, the mullock heaps and rusting boilers mark the sites of the larger mines of the "new Bendigo" of the North.

The significance of the Palmer in Australian history is its immediate contribution to the wider region. When Hann rode north from Junction Creek in 1872 he was crossing the limit of European settlement into unknown territory. Five years later there were steamships anchored at Cooktown, Cairns and Port Douglas, cattle stations, telegraph lines and thousands of people fanning out over Cape York in search of gold which in turn triggered proclamation of other fields at the Hodgkinson, Coen, and a number of other remote localities. Admittedly, almost all of the Palmer diggers, teamsters and small entrepreneurs were indifferent to anything but their own immediate need to get rich quickly. The vast majority never realized that need in the 1870's, but given the reports of abundant alluvial gold and the widely circulating stories of the fortunes to be won, the rush was an opportunity not to be missed.

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