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**A Shared History Forgotten:
Aboriginal miners and prospectors
of tropical Queensland, from
pre-contact times - c.1970**

Galiina W. Ellwood

BA (Hons)

**Thesis submitted for the research degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in the College of Arts, Society and Education
James Cook University**

May 2019

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Please note that in this thesis, there are the names and images of deceased Aboriginal people.

Acknowledgements

This work is dedicated all the Aboriginal miners and prospectors past and present. I hope I did justice to your stories.

I would like to thank all the old people, the Elders, whom I have mentioned in this thesis, and who are no longer with us.

I would like to thank Nicole Huxley and her family for our long discussions and for allowing me to research their grannies Jerry and Topsy Hann who were pivotal to the early development of modern north Queensland.

I would like to thank the following people who were invaluable to the production of this thesis:

My supervisory team Dr Jan Wegner, Dr Mike Woods, Dr Doug Hunt.

My long term good friends and mentors, Assoc. Prof. John Campbell, his wife Dr. Mireille Mardaga-Campbell, and their family.

Owen Ray, Jason Westerhout, Nicola Winn, Mr Stephen Imrie and Ms Annette Taylor for assistance with field work.

Mr David Flett, Ms. Mary Bolam of Chillagoe and Mr Athy Nye for sharing their recollections of Chillagoe and their private collections.

Duncan Ray and his partner Dale Burns for allowing us to camp at their place in Chillagoe.

Dr Dawn May and Mr Melville Davies for their proof reading and helpful **suggestions.**

My family for putting up with my PhD research and thesis writing craziness.

I would also like to dedicate this work to my father Joseph, my brother Wayne and my partner Graeme who passed away in 2015.

Statement of the Contribution of Others

Nature of Assistance	Contribution	Names, Titles (<i>if relevant</i>) and Affiliations of Co-Contributors
Financial support	Fee offset/waiver Research costs Stipend and conference costs	Australian Government Research Training Program Fees Offset College of Arts, Society and Education Research Training Program funds Abstudy Doctorate Award

Abstract

The story of Aboriginal miners and prospectors in north Queensland history has been underestimated, ignored, forgotten and written out of history. Complex traditional mining which predates similar European mining technology by thousands of years has been under-researched and under-estimated as ‘quarrying’ by archaeologists, and signs that pre-contact mining continued into modern times, either for its original purposes or adapted to the White economy, have rarely received attention.

Aboriginal prospectors made important discoveries, of both new mining fields and new ore bodies, and Aboriginal mining was far more extensive than indicated in the literature, whether this literature is popular history or academic history. So far only a few of these important figures in the north’s history have been noticed by academic historians and even for these, little research has been done. This thesis reinstates the essential roles of Aborigines in prospecting, mining and ancillary work on north Queensland mining fields. It reveals the importance of using an Aboriginal research paradigm, one which involves knowing Aboriginal family story to find post-contact Aborigines in the historical records.

This thesis has found that Aboriginal involvement in the mining industry was most extensive, and long-lasting, on those fields which Whites found difficult to access or were remote, and which had alluvial or eluvial resources suited to miners with limited capital, sometimes using Aboriginal mining methods. It found that on those fields, mining could give Aboriginal people a way of escaping White control, particularly under the Protection Acts. It also found that the miners and prospectors were often valued by their White communities, who tried to prevent their removal under the Act. It found that official records of removals were inaccurate, which has implications for Native Title cases.

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Frontispiece: Mt Leyshon, Charters Towers.¹ This is the only nineteenth century photograph of the ‘shared history’ of mining: an Aboriginal miner and his White mate at work.

¹ Geoff Hansen, “Cape River Goldfield (1867-1870)”, in Geoff Hansen, Lyndon Megarrity and Diane Menghetti, *Goldfields that Made Townsville: Cape River, Ravenswood, Charters Towers*, North Queensland History Preservation Society, Townsville, 2018, p. 38.

Story Time (Djubi²)

How The Bird made ore, opal and sandstone

The Bird story tells how valuable rocks and minerals were formed along the Pituri trade route up through inland South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. The stories differ but have elements in common. It seems the story follows the interior trade route from South Australia to Northern Queensland. The languages along the trade route are similar enough that people can understand each other.

Grinding stones in the Flinders Ranges (Adnyamathanha story)

Kurukuku the peaceful dove lived near Frome Well. She had some very good grinding stones (*wadla*). Every day she went out to find seeds to grind. There was a pigeon in that country called *Murlambada*. He was jealous of *Kurukuku*'s stones and one day when she was away finding seed, he stole the grinding stones and took them away to *Virnbartunha* [spring near Prism Hill]. Since then, people for hundreds of miles around have come to this place for large slabs of sandstone to make their grinding stones. Later the pigeon left *Virnbartunha* and went south to *Viliwarunha* [Reaphook Hill], leaving more stones there, and this is why grinding stones are found here, at the place now called *Wadla Wadlyu* (the grindstone quarry).³

Parachilna grinding stones (Adnyamathanha story)

Marnbi, the bronzewing pigeon, *Mulambada* the crested pigeon, and the galah *Gilanggila* argued over who owned a pair of *wadla*. Eventually in disgust *Mulabada* picked up the grinding stones and flew with them high into the mountain. On the north side of Parachilna, on top of the mountain, he is still there with his grinding stones. This is still a good area to pick up grinding stones.⁴

² *Yidinji* word for 'story time'. Others may call this 'dream time'.

³ "The dove's grinding stones", in Dorothy Tunbridge, *Flinders Ranges Dreaming*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1988, p.22

⁴ "The grinding stones at Parachilna", in *ibid.*, p. 44

Opals at Coober Pedy (Adnyamathanha story)

Marnbi the pigeon threw a firestick a long way and it landed at Coober Pedy. Where the firestick hit the ground, sparks flew in all directions and these sparks became the opal at *Mintabie* and Coober Pedy.⁵

The Marnbi's Journey (Adnyamathanha story)

The bird began his journey in the Flinders Ranges. A man wounded a bronzewing pigeon who got away. He flew, scattering feathers and blood wherever he stopped. The feathers became white quartz and the blood became gold. He stopped at Broken Hill and sat there suffering for a while. From there he followed the Barrier Range to Tibooburra, dropping more feathers and drops of blood. Then he died at *Pati Pati* [on Nockatunga Station, Qld] but his spirit went on to Mount Isa, which is why there is the big mine there.⁶

The Pinnacles (Barkinji story)

Stories of the Marnbi (Bronzewing Pigeon) were told to me by Uncle Badger Bates of the Barkandji in 1995 (Broken Hill, Wilcannia, New South Wales)

The Pinnacles are located in New South Wales near the regional town of Broken Hill. The Pinnacles are a part of the *Marnbi* Dreamtime Story. The *Marnbi* story began when the Eagle-Hawk made a net to catch some Bronze Winged Pigeons. When a flock came, he captured them in his net, and struck them with his club, and somehow, *Marnbi* escaped. *Marnbi* fled and flew dropping feathers and faeces (White Quartz and Black Rock) while flying till he was at his point of death, Mount Isa. During the journey, *Marnbi* had sat down as he was very sick at three places which are where the Pinnacles are today. *Marnbi* also lost blood as well, which became mineral deposits.⁷

The Bird at Cloncurry – Chillagoe

My Grandmother Dudu (Daisy Ellwood) told me and my siblings the story about the Bird who created quartz and the mineralisation that is mined today.

⁵ “The Sparkling Opals” in Tunbridge, *Flinders Ranges Dreaming*, p. 81.

⁶ “The Marnbi’s Journey”, in *ibid.*, p. 64.

⁷ Uncle Badger Bates, *Barkandji* elder, pers. comm., and <https://originsoftheaustraliancontinent.weebly.com/>

The crested pigeon and the bronzewing pigeon were arguing over who had the best sandstone. They made a bet. The bronzewing took his sandstone with him and where he stopped, sandstone dropped off his back and grew. The crested pigeon did the same. The people then chose the best sandstone, and this was the Bronzewing pigeon's, near Dajarra, northwest Queensland.

A man was hunting and went after the bronzewing pigeon. He hurt the pigeon's wing but the pigeon was able to escape. Wherever he came to ground, he dropped blood which made quartz reefs, and feathers which made the minerals. He created Cloncurry/Mount Isa, then the Etheridge, and finally he died at Chillagoe Creek where his wings formed Zillmantons copper outcrop and his fat turned into copper.⁸

Other Stories

Pukardu – Emu Blood

Ochre is usually associated with blood. Parachilna (*Pukardu*) ochre came from the blood of an emu.⁹ The rotting flesh of the emu makes green malachite.

Another story says the name "*Pukardu*" (*Pukartu*) comes from 'the term for the heart's blood of the fierce dog-like animals, which was spilt at the site'.¹⁰

Karrku – Human Blood

"Karrku ochre deposit was created by a *Warlpiri* man who stole ochre from an *Alyawarra* deposit, east of the Stuart Highway, and brought it west. The *Alyawarra* deposit was the congealed blood of a slaughtered man. On his journey home, the *Warlpiri* man stopped first at *Warrinjirrinjirri* (Crown Hill on Mt Allan Station), building a hut and placing the ochre on top. He stopped again at *Yariyarriri*, east of Newhaven Station, building a hut there too but this time he did not place the ochre on the roof. At the site of the mine he built a hut, placed the ochre on top and then went hunting, killing an eagle (*warlawurru*) and a python (*yurnturrkunu*) which he cooked at a windbreak nearby."

⁸ Family elders: Nanna Daisy Ellwood, telling *Pita-Pita / Kalkadoon* story.

⁹ Nicholas Peterson and Ronald Lampert, "A Central Australian Ochre Mine", *Records of the Australian Museum*, 37,1 (1985):1.

¹⁰ Mike Smith, *The Archaeology of Australia's Deserts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 6. Like many Aboriginal names, there are many spellings of the name: Bookartu, Pukatu, Pukartu, Pukatoo, Bookatoo, Pukardu. This study uses 'Pukardu' but notes the name used in the source in brackets if it is different.

[“Almost all recounters of this story are agreed that this man was of the *Jupurrula* subsection (except the senior man of the *Jampijinpa* estate in the area, who said on one occasion that the man was *Jampijinpa*) and had removed the ochre from his head when he saw the rain dreaming coming from the west. Before entering, it is common to call out to the old heroic ancestor inside the mine 'Don't be unpleasant to us' as the deceased *Jampijinpa*'s spirit was said to be there and the whole tunnel was out of bounds to outsiders.”]¹¹

Wilgie Mia – Kangaroo blood

Wilgie Mia ochre was created when “a kangaroo, in mythical times, was speared about six miles south of Wilgamia. In his death agony he jumped and landed at Wilgamia where the red represents his blood, the yellow his liver, and the green his gall. His last leap brought him to Little Wilgie which marks his grave”.¹²

Kuratiti - The Sisters

“Kuratiti is associated with the tradition concerning two quiet snake sisters, known as Milywaru, although sometimes referred to as Milwayi, especially by Warumungu speakers. ‘Quiet’ snakes in Aboriginal English are non-venomous, however [sic] the species of the Milywaru is not defined. The Milywaru Dreaming track with its associated mythological tradition is extensive, passing through Jingli, Warlmanpua, Warlpiri and Warumungu country.”¹³

¹¹ Quoted in Petersen and Lampert, “Central Australian Ochre Mine”, pp. 6-7.

¹² Daniel Sutherland Davidson, “Notes on the Pictographs and Petroglyphs of Western Australia and a Discussion of Their Affinities with Appearances Elsewhere on the Continent”, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 96, 1 (Feb. 29, 1952): 82.

¹³ Ken Mulvaney, “The technology and Aboriginal association of a sandstone quarry near Helen Springs, Northern Territory” in Richard Fullagar (ed.), *A Closer Look: recent Australian studies of stone tools*, Sydney: Sydney University Archaeological Methods Series 6, 1998, p. 77.

Introduction

The seeds of this research thesis were planted some years ago by Dr Jan Wegner, while we were travelling to conduct cultural heritage fieldwork at the abandoned mining town of Mungana near Chillagoe, in far north Queensland. Our discussion revolved around the early to mid, twentieth century Aboriginal miners' camps on the Palmer goldfield. I knew about some of these miners as they were members of my extended Aboriginal family, but at the time I thought that there would not be enough information which could be sourced to write an academic thesis concerning Aborigines working as prospectors and miners of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in north Queensland. This opinion was based on a journal article¹⁴ I researched in the late 1980s concerning the Aboriginal resistance to European invasion of the cultures I grew up with, *Yidinji* and *Gugu Yalanji*, during the Palmer River gold rush of the 1870s. Early in 2011, I talked to older members of my family and realised that the topic might warrant investigation. A literature search turned up three names of Aboriginal prospector/miners: Jupiter Mosman, the 10 year old boy who discovered Charters Towers;¹⁵ Kitty Pluto, who made a new and important discovery which revitalised the Batavia River goldfield;¹⁶ and Romeo, who discovered the Annan River tinfield. There was very little academic literature apart from Chris Anderson's paper¹⁷ about the *Kuku Nyungkul* and tin mining on the Annan River. Within a few weeks, with the help of a list published in a newspaper article from the *Nambour Chronicle*,¹⁸ which was sourced through Trove, the original list of three prospector/miners leaped to 20 Aborigines (see Table 1) who have been attributed with finding many of the principal gold and mineral fields and mines of Queensland. Many of them have never been heard of or written about in the histories of those fields before. These lists prompted me to unearth further information about some of these individuals from online resources such as Trove

¹⁴ B. Ellwood, "Aboriginal Resistance to European Invasion in the Palmer River Area, During the Years 1873 to 1881," *Black Voices* (1988).

¹⁵ D. Menghetti, "Australian Prospectors and Miners Hall of Fame Historical Profile – Jupiter Mosman (1861-1945)," <http://www.republicofmining.com/2008/07/29/australian-prospectors-and-miners-hall-of-fame-historical-profile-%E2%80%93-jupiter-mosman-1861-1945/>.

¹⁶ "Australian Prospectors and Miners Hall of Fame Historical Profile – Kitty Pluto," <http://www.republicofmining.com/2008/06/05/australian-prospectors-and-miners-hall-of-fame-historical-profile-kitty-pluto-unknown-%E2%80%93-unknown/>.

¹⁷ C. Anderson, "Aborigines and Tin Mining in North Queensland: A Case Study in the Anthropology of Contact History," *Mankind* 13, 6 (1983), pp. 473-498.

¹⁸ "Aborigines' Gold: Some Queensland Finds," *Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, 1 June 1934.

Year	Field	Prospector/Miner	Mineral	Associated Town/Field
1852	Lord Johns Swamp GF	unknown Aboriginal Stockman (discoverer)	Au	Thanes Creek
1861	Clermont GF	unknown Aboriginal Stockman (Dick?) (discoverer)	Au	Clermont
1867	Cloncurry/ Mt Isa	Tubbie Terrior (discoverer) shows Ernest Henry where 'big fella copper lay down'; followed by others discovering copper and lead deposits	Cu	<i>Yamamillah</i> changed to Argylla
1865-1872	Cape River GF Palmer River GF	Jerry (stockman) (discoverer) Prospector Gilbert Goldfield, Einasleigh copper with Daintree & Hann 1866-7 With William Hann's 1872 expedition	Au	Cape River Gilbert GF Einasleigh Copper Palmerville
1871 - 1940	Charters Towers GF Stockyard Creek Kangaroo Hills Tin	Jupiter Mosman (discoverer) (Horse boy, stockman, miner) – later part owner of tin mine, prospector in Kangaroo Hills and other fields	Au Sn	Charters Towers
1870s	Hodgkinson GF	unknown Aboriginal woman (miner/pro prospector)	Au	Thornborough
1886 - 1892	Annan River TF and the Batavia Diggings	Wm. Baird and Romeo (discoverer) prospector, miner	Sn Au	Mt Romeo Bairdsville (Retreat Creek)
1882	Cloncurry MF	Toby (discoverer, miner) with Ernest Henry	Cu	Mt Oxide
1887-1892?	Herberton/Chillagoe MF	George Hennessey (discoverer of major mines) Prospector, miner Also ran what is probably the first cave tour venture in the Chillagoe Karst area	Cu/Sn/Ag/Pb	Chillagoe, Koorboora, Muldiva, Zillmanton, Mungana
<1888	Darky Green's Reef, Mt Trial (Hodgkinson GF)	John 'Darky' Green (miner and millowner)	Au	Mt Trial Thornborough
1889	Jordan's Creek GF	unidentified Aboriginal diggers (discoverers of major mine)	Au	Geraldton (Innisfail)
Ca. 1899	Chillagoe- Mungana	King Cooper , invested with a King plate by Mr. Moffatt, for his reputation as a geologist, and his clan (miners)	Cu/Ag/Pb	Calcifer
c. 1900	Chillagoe MF	Bob, Gilbert and Palmer (stockmen) discovered OK Mine	Cu	OK
1905	Mt Emu GF	King (stockman) (discoverer)	Au	Mt Emu
1896 - 1942	Coen Ebagoolah Batavia Chock a block Blue Mountains	Fredrick 'Friday' Wilson (prospector, miner)	Au	Coen Ebagoolah Plutoville, Wenlock
ca. 1906	True Blue, Mt Carbine MF	Keating Brothers (discoverers, miners)	CaWo ₄ /Wo	Mt. Carbine
1905-1910-1915	Chock-a-block Batavia Diggings	Pluto (prospector, miner) Appears Pluto also packed during the off season. He paid white prospectors to find more deposits in the region	Au (Pluto Lead #1-1910), Au (Pluto Lead #2-1911), Au (the Tunnel-1912), Au (Pluto's Gully-1913)	Plutoville

1915-1922	Batavia Diggings (Lower Camp)	Kitty Pluto (prospector/miner)	Au	Lower Camp
1922	Nightflower, Herberton /Chillagoe MF	Archer and Stewart (prospectors, miners)	Ag/Pb/Au	Chillagoe/Mungana
1932?	Blue Mountains GF	'uncivilised Black' befriended by Mr Armbrust (discoverer)	Au	near Blue Mountain
1934	Goondiwindi GF	Weribone Jack (stockman) (discoverer)	Au	Tawool Station
late 1930s? (1875)	Cracow GF	Jacky Nipps (stockman) (discoverer)	Au	Cracow
1943	Little River Coal	Jerry Croydon (packer, drover, miner) (discoverer)	Coal	Laura
? – 1960s	Coen Geike Creek (tin, gold) Batavia/Wenlock	William 'Billy' Fox (miner)	Au, Sn	Coen Lower Camp, Wenlock

Table 1: Aboriginal miners and prospectors of particular importance to the Queensland mining industry.¹⁹

and the *Queensland Government Mining Journal*. Other names such as those associated with the Chillagoe-Mungana mineral province: George Hennessey, Archer and Stewart, King Cooper and King Spider - only came to light by accident while doing background research for a cultural heritage study I was conducting in the area. These discoveries in a relatively short period of time indicated that even closer examination of the primary sources, such as archival sources, were likely to yield a rich return. This led to my first research question: how many were there? How extensive was Aboriginal mining in the post-contact economy of north Queensland, and how important were these people for that economy? From this developed another question, one which spawned the title of this thesis: why had this mining history been forgotten?

In my investigations of the cultural heritage of the Chillagoe area, I had discovered archaeological evidence for the continuation of traditional mining and treatment methods into historical times. The evidence also demonstrated that Aboriginal people adapted traditional mining and stone treatment methods to mining and treating commodities valued by Europeans. Camps of Aborigines involved in the post-contact mining industry were also identified, and a similar integration of pre- and post-contact techniques for hut building was identified. This not only added the new methodology of archaeological investigation to the thesis, but placed it in the cultural

¹⁹ Au = gold, Ag = silver, Sn = tin, Pb = lead, Cu = copper, Wo = wolframite

heritage sphere. It also led to a second research query: to what extent did pre-contact Aboriginal mining transition into post-contact mining?

Methodology

I presented these early findings at seminars and conferences, but met with a surprising degree of puzzlement and even resistance to the idea that Aborigines were mining in the European economy. This scepticism meant that a great deal of this thesis had to be descriptive: collecting as much evidence as possible from a range of primary and secondary sources, and using the traditional historical method, analysing this evidence within the context of north Queensland mining history and race relations history. The main primary sources were newspapers, accessed through Trove. Collections searched were those at Queensland State Archives, Australian War Memorial online collections, National Archives online collections, Cairns Historical Society collections, James Cook University's Special Collections, and the collection of Dave Flett of Chillagoe, who did many interviews with old residents and took notes from old police records held in the court-house there. The Centre for Indigenous Family History Studies, which mined official correspondence in the Queensland State Archives, particularly police records, for mentions of Aborigines, was also useful. Personal communications from my Aboriginal relatives and friends, including those which happened from childhood onwards, provided much of the history of Aboriginal families in the region. Primary sources generated by the mining industry included reports of the Queensland Department of Mines, including the Department's Annual Reports, the *Queensland Government Mining Journal*, and Geological Survey, and the Federal equivalent, the Bureau of Mineral Resources' reports. Other sources included the annual reports of the Chief Protector of Aborigines for Queensland; legislation governing mining, and Aborigines; official notices in the *Queensland Government Gazette* and *Police Gazette*; a range of contemporary publications; reminiscences; contemporary photographs; and the *Votes and Proceedings* and *Parliamentary Papers* of the Queensland Parliament. Photographs were particularly useful in showing Aboriginal participation when this was neglected by contemporary written sources.²⁰ Individual documents were read

²⁰ The use of photographs by Aboriginal people to recover their own histories, and those of their families, has been extensively investigated by Jane Lydon. See eg. Lydon, "Return: The Photographic Archive and Technologies of Indigenous Memory", *Photographies*, 3,2 (2010): 173-187.

by rich analysis of text, often ‘against the grain’, and compared with each other and with relevant secondary sources. Research for this project has exposed enough material to demonstrate that the exclusion of Aboriginal voices from the story of the tropical Queensland mining fields is not due to a dearth of available information. Readily available online resources such as the *Queensland Government Mining Journal* and newspapers have a plethora of material about Aboriginal prospectors and miners.

Much of this evidence is fragmentary, and had to be forensically reconstructed into a cohesive story for each Aboriginal miner identified by name. The people and individuals described in the historical record often lack names and tribal identities. Analysis of the primary sources required an Australian Aboriginal research paradigm. Indigenous researchers in several countries, particularly Canada, the United States and New Zealand, have arrived at an Indigenous research methodology with some common elements. Though they recognise that so many different peoples will have diverse systems of knowledge, which will affect the way they research, they identify the following: using cultural practice and the oral tradition, including story-telling (yarning), based on family/clan/tribe; being concrete rather than abstract; particular rather than generalising; using experience (including personal experience); respecting the knowledge imparted to the researcher, and the culture in which it is embedded, including spirituality; and being empirical rather than theoretical, because the latter approach carries the danger of pre-determining the outcomes of the research by setting a contextual ‘lens’ between the researcher and the knowledge imparted. It opposes the tendency of Western research methodologies to be rational, individual and dichotomous, that is, ordered by binary opposites.²¹ The Indigenous methodology is also reciprocal, aiming to produce knowledge useful to the Indigenous culture being researched. The language used must therefore be accessible to members of that culture, with a narrative form suited to the oral tradition of story-telling.²² This thesis aims to tell the story of Aboriginal mining in

²¹ Ranjan Datta, “Traditional storytelling: an effective Indigenous research methodology and its implications for environmental research”, *AlterNative* 14, 1 (2014): 35

²² Virginie Magnat, “Honouring the Three R’s of Indigenous Research Methodologies”, *Forum: Theatre Research in Canada*, 32, 5 (2014): 244-247; Datta, “Traditional storytelling”, pp. 35-38; Diane Ruwhiu and Virginia Cathro, “Eyes-wide-shut: insights from an indigenous research methodology”, *Emergence: Complexity and Organisation*, 16, 4 (2014): 1-11; Myra Singh and Jae Major, “Conducting Indigenous research in Western knowledge spaces: aligning theory and methodology”, *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 44 (2017): 6, 10-11, 13-15; Joseph Gone, “Considering Indigenous Research Methodologies: Critical Reflections by an Indigenous

tropical Queensland in language accessible to communities and tries as much as possible to identify individuals and/or their clan or language groups, and recognises the importance of place in their stories – it tries to avoid homogenising the experiences of Aboriginal people. It draws on the author’s own heritage, knowledge gained from listening to elders, including family members. In particular, it requires knowledge of north Queensland clan territories, and for the post-contact period, knowledge gained from family histories to recognise Aboriginal people who ‘disappear’ from the historical records as Aboriginal once they adopt European names. There is still an assumption that European names in the records mean European people. Aborigines in the mining fields took European style names more quickly than in pastoral areas, and were less obviously made up such as those taken from place names. On pastoral properties and in towns, Aborigines were often given or selected for themselves single first names, for example ‘Charlie’, or took as surnames the name of stations, local towns, or the White managers and ‘owners’, such as Jupiter Mosman, Topsy Hann, Jerry Croydon. Others took or were given descriptive names, for example Jack Noble. On the mining fields, names were more conventionally European, like John Green, George Hennessy, and Frederick Wilson. Archer and Stewart were initially first names but became surnames, but it is easy for a historian to assume that they were always known by their last names and that these were European. Even harder to spot are those Aborigines with Chinese names like Paddy Ah Boo. The name of a Chinese father might be run together to create a surname, for example Go Sam becoming Gosam.²³ If they are known by their language names only, Europeans will mangle them such as Ernest Henry’s inability to pronounce *Kalkadoon* words, such as his rendering of one of his prospectors’ names as ‘Tubby Terrier’.²⁴ Another complication for the first two generations post-contact is the practice of adopting more than one European name. The only way to know who was Aboriginal in the records is to know the family histories. Families

Knower”, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 25, 1(2019): 46-7, 53, 55; Fiona Hornung, “Indigenous Research with a Cultural Context” in Donna M. Mertens et al. (eds), *Indigenous Pathways into Social Research: Voices of a New Generation*, Routledge e-book, 2013; Jagna Cyganik, “Indigenous Research in Academia: Methodologies, Identities, Relations”, *Prace Etnograficzne*, 45, 2 (2017): 148-150. DOI:10.4467/22999558.PE.17.007.7902; Maxine Briggs, “How do you teach Aboriginal history?” in Ben Silverstein (ed.), *Conflict, Adaptation, Transformation : Richard Broome and the Practice of Aboriginal History*, Aboriginal Studies Press e-book, 2018, Chapter 9.

²³ See eg. Robbie Go Sam, 25. 3.1931, CIFHS <http://www.cifhs.com/qldrecords/qldherberton.html> .

²⁴ Many Aborigines had / have traditional names as well as European, well after assimilation into the European society. See eg. Raphael Cilento’s health survey of Aborigines in 1932, CIFHS http://www.cifhs.com/qldrecords/A1928_4-5_SECTION_1_Aboriginals_Survey.html .

have their own stories, which maintain their link with the traditional past and keep the more recent past alive. Traditional clans and language groups were extended families so it is not surprising that Aboriginal story is family stories. This is why it is vital that researchers in Aboriginal history know the families and their traditional affiliations. The Indigenous Research methodology mentioned earlier emphasises the importance of connection with the group being researched. An Aboriginal historian is more likely to be very familiar with family names, provided s/he is centred in the culture and kinship networks in the region being studied. Family history is, in any case, a growing historiographical trend in Australia.²⁵ While the problem of family ‘myths’ arises in Aboriginal families as it does in other cultures, Aboriginal family story should not be simply discounted if it contradicts the official record; research for this thesis has found cases where the official records are simply wrong. ‘Respect’ is part of the Indigenous Research Methodology and family story should be given the same weighting as other historical records.

Use of the historical method, involving comparing primary source documents, produced the finding that removal documents in archives were not necessarily accurate. Kitty Pluto’s and Friday Wilson’s documentation says they were removed to Yarrabah, but according to newspaper reports about them, this did not occur. This official written documentation can be used against native title claims, as removals break the link with country. An application for native title by the *Wakaman* on the grounds of continued association with country was discounted because Nanna Fox was documented as being removed from the tin mining area of the Tate, though she stated categorically that this did not happen. An Indigenous research methodology would privilege her account over that of White officials.

One complication developing for research methods in Aboriginal history is well-intentioned removal of racist language from copies of primary source documents (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2 below). Birth, death and marriage certificates have the word ‘Abo’ removed, even though this may be the only clue to indicate that the researcher has found the correct historical identity, especially given the problems outlined above such as the practice of taking more than one name in a lifetime. To many, it is felt that by erasing this one note, it is removing the identity and Aboriginality from

²⁵ Miranda Johnson, “Writing Indigenous Histories Now”, *Australian Historical Studies*, 45, 3 (2014): 318. DOI: 10.1080/1031461X.2014.946525.

our old people. It is also the only proof we have that our Grannys and Nannas were Aboriginal.²⁶ The other is the equally well intentioned requirement of some institutions that the “community” agree to the researcher accessing records, even if that researcher is a descendant. The community expected to be consulted might not actually be the right community for the person being researched. For example, many people were removed to Yarrabah and Palm Island from other communities but their

1944		DEATHS in the District of Cairns				
No.	DESCRIPTION.			(1) Cause of Death. (2) Duration of last illness. (3) Medical Attendant by whom certified, and (4) When he last saw Deceased.	Christian Names and Surname of Father, and Occupation. Christian Names and Maiden Surname of Mother.	Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant.
	(1) When and Where Died.	(2) Christian Names and Surname, and Occupation.	(3) Sex and Age.			
151	2 January 1944	George Clifford Noble	male 49 years	1. Coronary occlusion & thrombosis (1) Atherosclerosis & Heart Failure (2) Post mortem examination held by R. G. Langman on 2 January 1944 (3) Order for burial signed by R. K. Moore C.M., Brisbane on 2 January 1944 (4) 2 January 1944	Jack Noble Deceased Alveta Blaw	Certified in writing by M. Noble Wife Kildston Street Cairns

Figure 1.1 Death certificate of Granny George Noble (author’s Great Grandfather). The white square at left is covering the word ‘Abo’, which is present in a copy of the document obtained earlier.²⁷

1950		DEATHS in the District of COOK				
No.	DESCRIPTION.			(1) Cause of Death. (2) Duration of last illness. (3) Medical Attendant by whom certified, and (4) When he last saw Deceased.	Christian Names and Surname of Father, and Occupation. Christian Names and Maiden Surname of Mother.	Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant.
	(1) When and Where Died.	(2) Christian Names and Surname, and Occupation.	(3) Sex and Age.			
4490	10 October 1950	Frederick Friday Wilson	male about 69 years	Believed Heart Failure Natural causes (1) (2) (3) (4) No request		Certified in writing by C. K. Wilson No relation Exchange Hotel Cook

Figure 1.2 An example of a death certificate of Frederick “Friday” Wilson, with the original notation in the usual place.²⁸

²⁶ Pers. comm. Nicole Huxley, Uncle Smokey Anderson, the Noble family, and others. Note that in north Queensland, grandfathers are called ‘Granny’ and grandmothers are ‘Nanna’. Great-grandparents are all called ‘Granny’ followed by the surname for nannas, and first names for grandfathers.

²⁷ Queensland Birth Deaths and Marriages record 1944 /C151 George Clifford Noble.

²⁸ Queensland Birth Deaths and Marriages record 1950/C4490 Frederick Friday Wilson.

descendants have left since; it is not appropriate to get permission from the modern communities in those two places, but rather the family, which may be scattered over Australia. This could be such a time-consuming and complex task that the researcher is discouraged from utilising the records.

Aboriginal cultural heritage, in the form of Story, is part of the Aboriginal research paradigm and helps with interpreting pre-contact traditional mining. As part of the consideration of pre-contact mining, some attention has been given to ‘Story’. In traditional society, Story was not solely spiritual; it is also about social relations and economics, which European writers do not see or understand. Sometimes Story has been interpreted correctly as a historical record, such as Aboriginal stories of volcanic activity on the Atherton Tablelands, and of the *Yidinji* people coming from the east as the east coast went under water around 4-6,000 years ago. In other cases Story provides clues that are ignored: for example, the long-standing belief that Aborigines were hunter-gatherers exclusively. This is disproved not only in early European records but in traditional Story. *Yidinji*, *Guyala* and *Damarri* Story tell how to farm plants. Similarly, the *Marnbi* (Bird) Story told in “The Story Time” is to explain mineral origins and creation, that is, ore diagenesis, but also explains where mined materials were traded, as the *Marnbi* story is also a trade route Story. Good quality sandstone from places like Cloncurry, Quorn near Adelaide, and Parachilna in the northern Flinders Ranges along the Bird Story route was traded throughout the grain-grass growing area around to the Pilbara of Western Australia. Greenstone was traded from a number of places, including Mt William in Victoria; stone from this place went up into the Cooper, the Murray, and southern Sydney. Near Kempsey, greenstone from *Dhungutti* and *Amaroo* country was traded over northeast NSW and southern Queensland. In north Queensland, Emu Creek open cut mines on Petford Station and sites near Koorboora supplied north Queensland with greenstone for axes.²⁹

As noted earlier, the methodology used for this thesis also incorporates cultural heritage research involving archaeological and anthropological analyses. This involved surveys and recordings of pre-contact Aboriginal sites in the Chillagoe

²⁹ Pers. Comm. John Campbell and Bruno David for Koorboora, and Nicky Horsfall for Emu Creek/Petford.

district, including limited excavation of a heat treatment pit. There are also artefact analyses of post-contact sites, such as Hennessy's camp, the Mungana Aboriginal camp, and flaked glass scatters and cave graffiti at Mungana, Hennessy Cave and other places. These all show integration of pre and post contact material culture.

Other findings

In the process of analysing the primary sources, I found that I was questioning some well-established paradigms in both Aboriginal and north Queensland history. In modern historical accounts of Australian mining, Aboriginal participation is often ignored or obscured, or Aborigines on the mining fields are only mentioned in terms of the (very real) negative impacts White mining had upon culture and lands and the consequent conflict. However, the mining industry certainly opened up numerous new opportunities for Aboriginal people to take part in the colonial economy. Not only were they participants, but they played important roles in the gold and mineral fields of tropical Queensland. They were discoverers of new fields and major new ore deposits, prospectors, drillers, and mill-owners as well as miners and fossickers. Aboriginal people were also present in many other capacities, as Native Police and police trackers, as guides, as carriers, as casual labour on the mines and in the mining towns, and as maids, servants, child-minders, wives and sexual partners. Unlike White women, Aboriginal women were often involved in mining. Particularly in the twentieth century, Aboriginal people often combined other occupations with 'fossicking' or 'scratching' for gold, tin or wolfram.³⁰ They were also entrepreneurs and, as local residents going about their everyday lives, developed other opportunities, such as staging corroborees for pay or donations. One, George Hennessy, even created an entire industry by being the first to conduct cave tours at Chillagoe. Some of these types of participation have been recognised in the historical literature of mining fields in tropical Queensland, but not all, and the recognition is limited.

In the later twentieth century Australian historians began to re-interpret the country's 'contact history' following Stanner's *The Great Australian Silence* in which he

³⁰ Fossicking is casual prospecting for rich specimens of ore, searching old mine dumps, or alluvial mining by panning. Scratching is more extensive and may involve alluvial mining, using sluices, or taking old mine dumps to be crushed.

argued there was a ‘cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale’.³¹ They have redressed certain biases found in historical accounts of our colonial history by introducing what Reynolds terms as an ‘Aboriginal perspective’ to Australian history.³² Instead of the earlier version whereby Aborigines ‘faded away’ in a Social Darwinian contest with a superior White race, contact history is now usually a story of violent conflict, where Aboriginal people, despite a solid resistance, were overcome by the invaders, massacred and reduced by disease, in some cases with whole clans wiped out. This was followed by a process of absorbing the remaining Aboriginal people into the lowest levels of the White economy with little choice given to the Aborigines, particularly once ‘protective’ legislation such as Queensland’s 1897 *Aborigines Protection and Prevention of the Sale of Opium Act* was passed. Once their resistance was broken they were relegated to the fringes of White society: station and town fringe camps where disease and poor diet continued to take its toll. The paradigm continues into the twentieth century with Aborigines continuing as victims, with steadily decreasing agency in their own lives under the Protection Acts. Missions and government stations such as Palm Island took most Aborigines from their land over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, unless they were employed, and trained their children to be servants and low-paid workers. Most of the Aboriginal people in Queensland became caught up in the pastoral industry or were domestic servants, as cattle stations in the north were uneconomic without cheap labour, and White women were no longer interested in being servants. The Aboriginal Protection Acts took civil rights from the people unless they denied their own extended families, were self-supporting, and were therefore eligible to apply for an exemption from the Acts, upon which they were considered assimilated to White society and its economy. Aborigines still under the Act were excluded from the better paid opportunities in the White economy, by legislation and practice, such as cane cutting and underground mining. Aborigines began to organise to protest the treatment of their people from the 1930s, though with little effect until the 1960s.

³¹ W.E.H. Stanner, *The Boyer Lectures 1968 – After the Dreaming*. Sydney, NSW: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1969.

³² H. Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier: An Interpretation of the Aboriginal Response to the Invasion and Settlement of Australia*. Townsville: James Cook University, 1981.

According to this newer historical paradigm, Aboriginal people had decreasing control over their lives and little agency in their own fates, particularly once the Protection Era began. Even mining historians have followed this paradigm for north Queensland. The usual histories have Aborigines, in the first couple of decades post-contact, in menial roles on mining fields, chopping wood and fetching water for households or, at most, doing surface work around the mines (if they are mentioned at all). This thesis challenges these assumptions as over-generalisations. Over a hundred individual Aboriginal miners and prospectors have been identified by name, working outside the historical paradigm outlined above, and hundreds more are known to have participated in mining and fossicking part-time. Very little academic work has been done on these miners, apart from the article on the Aboriginal miners on the Annan River tinfields noted earlier. An important example is that of Pluto and Kitty Pluto, the only Aboriginal woman to be recognised in Queensland for finding a gold field. This husband and wife team, working as independent miners or with other Aboriginal miners, were not only successful but apparently entrepreneurial, and were recognised by contemporary White society for their achievements without having to apply for exemption from the *Aborigines Protection and Prevention of the Sale of Opium Act* of 1897 and successive legislation. Another aspect of Aboriginal involvement in mining is that it helped Aborigines to escape from some of the restrictions of those Acts; mining, especially in difficult terrain or remote places, allowed Aborigines to dodge removal orders of official surveillance by disappearing while still being able to earn a living, or gave the local Protector proof that they were economically independent and should be left alone.

Another tendency by historians is to see Aborigines as peripheral to mining history and the main players, who were European. The Aborigines were ‘blackboys’ accompanying and occasionally guiding White prospectors or White explorers. Aborigines on established mining fields were interpreted as being only in ancillary roles. This thesis shows that ‘blackboys’ and ‘guides’ such as Jerry were central to the story, and that settlement patterns were probably determined by Aboriginal ‘guides’. Miners and prospectors, whether with White men, such as Romeo or by themselves such as Pluto and Kitty Pluto, were major figures in regional mining history.

Compounding this problem is the ‘forgetting’ of Aborigines’ roles in the industry. Hennessy, who discovered major copper and tin deposits at Chillagoe and Koorboora, was forgotten within a few years of his death. Amateur historians of north Queensland from the 1920s onwards seemed to be deliberately writing Aboriginal miners and prospectors out of history, or marginalising them by belittling their achievements while lauding those of the White prospectors and miners. The racism of the time would be aided by the fact that in the early twentieth century, Aborigines were themselves being marginalised by the Protection Acts and continued population decline, with many removed to remote missions and Government stations and others mainly confined to domestic service, unskilled labour and pastoral work. Even in the pastoral industry, where Aboriginal labour was essential,³³ Aborigines were marginalised, usually not allowed to eat and socialise with, or live in the same housing as, the Whites on the stations, and the few left in the towns mostly lived in reserves on the edges of town, out of sight of the majority. It might seem impossible to a historian in the interwar period that Aborigines could have been so important to the mining industry and its towns, even just a decade before. Instead, the assumption grew that the natural vocation for Aborigines was stock work, not mining – even though most groups would have done some kind of mining pre-contact. A finding of this thesis is that Aboriginal mining, particularly for themselves, did not sit comfortably within the framework of the Protection Acts, and that the operations of the Act worked against the continuance of mining into the twentieth century unless the mining district was particularly remote, or the Aborigines mined only occasionally when their labour was not wanted by pastoralists and other employers, or they were exempted from the Act. This made it easy for their mining and prospecting to be forgotten or discounted. Removals to missions and Government stations also interrupted intergenerational mining traditions in families and led to fewer miners over time. From the 1960s racism was being discredited and more opportunities for well-paid jobs were opening up for Aborigines, so they were less likely to resort to the uncertain life of a miner, though some began to work for the big companies mining on their traditional land or mission reserves such as the Cape Flattery silica mine. Nevertheless, it can be said that there was a strong

³³ Dawn May, *Aboriginal Labour and the Cattle Industry: Queensland from white settlement to the present*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; Dawn May, *From Bush to Station : Aboriginal labour in the North Queensland pastoral industry, 1861-1897*, Townsville: History Department, James Cook University, 1983.

tradition of mining in certain families well into the twentieth century. They often went mining between other occupations such as stock work or working on the railways.

Another finding is that pre-contact Aboriginal mining transitioned into mining in the European economy, though mining for traditional resources by traditional means also continued well into post-contact times. Groups of Aboriginal miners on the Chillagoe field demonstrated this. To satisfy the research question posed about this topic, a survey of archaeological literature on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island pre-contact mining was done to establish mining techniques used. This was then compared with mining techniques by European small miners. They were similar in most respects, showing that there was a logical progression from pre-contact mining methods to those used by the Whites. From the material finds in north Queensland to date, a hypothesis has been reached which indicates that post-contact mining may have drawn on pre-contact mining, in other parts of Australia as well as north Queensland, and drawn on processing experience of various valuable stones and minerals such as tin, chert, silcrete, greywacke, greenstone, obsidian, copper carbonates, and ochre. This experience was applied to the prospecting, mining and processing of minerals valuable to Europeans, particularly gold, tin, wolfram and copper. Further archaeological investigation of post-contact Aboriginal mining sites is needed to prove these hypotheses beyond question.

The survey of archaeological literature on pre-contact mining also shows the sophistication of that mining, and of geological and petrological knowledge. Those groups with good resources had specialised skills, along with specialised language and tools. This specialisation is understandable as these resources provided valuable items for trade. The complexity of pre-contact mining is rarely acknowledged in the literature, which tends to call all mines 'quarries' or assumes that little skill is required, and it is proposed that archaeologists use standard mining terms when describing Aboriginal mining methods to avoid this assumption. Another finding is that these valuable mines may have been responsible for more intense conflict on the frontier; two groups who had particularly ferocious reputations for resistance to Whites in the nineteenth century, the *Kalkadoons* and the *Gugu Yalanji*, both had valuable mineral resources to protect: the Lake Moondarra greenstone mines for axe

production and trade for the *Kalkadoon*, and for the *Gugu Yalanji*, the Maytown ochre mine, one of the very few in north Queensland.

The documentary sources, oral tradition, and the archaeological remains indicate that the contact and post-contact story for tropical Queensland's mineral provinces is more complex than the historiographical and archaeological literature indicates, and that Aboriginal miners had greater agency in their own lives than is generally allowed for in the histories of north Queensland. This thesis proposes a new interpretative framework for the history and cultural heritage of mining in tropical Queensland which incorporates these independent miners and prospectors.

Aims

The aims of this project therefore were:

- To test the prevailing historical interpretations for European-Aboriginal economic and social relations in north Queensland, particularly on the mining fields.
- To provide an alternative view of Aboriginal history, through mining history, that does not posit Aborigines during the conflict and protection phases of intercultural contact as 'victims' or marginalised, but in many cases as independent and successful agents within the wider Australian (European) economy.
- To provide a more rounded history of post-contact Aboriginal history in tropical Queensland by researching a neglected aspect of that history, that of mining, which is a shared history, one in which Aboriginal and White miners often worked together.
- To investigate the continuance of pre-contact tradition by considering links between pre- and post-contact Aboriginal mining.

This project aims to correct the popular portrayal of Aborigines living under the Act, in tropical Queensland, as powerless victims. This research will show that Aboriginal prospectors and miners had more agency than has been credited to them in the past and that some individuals did achieve economic success and social recognition within the European economy and society without having to compromise their own

culture. Not only that, but they were partly responsible for the economic development of post-contact Queensland through their discoveries of mining fields and major mines. The guiding principle of the thesis is that of a 'shared history' of north Queensland, where White and Aboriginal cultures intersected and contributed knowledge, material culture and skills to each other rather than a simple process of adaption by Aborigines to White society. Tim Murray notes the importance of longitudinal studies to the process of 'writing in' Aborigines to history, and given the generous time scale covered, this thesis does that for the north.³⁴ It is also hoped that the thesis will provide positive outcomes for Aboriginal communities, a means for Aboriginal people to feel a sense of pride in being a successful and resourceful part of the post-contact history in north Queensland, and continue the task of historicising their own stories and those of their families to amend and correct the historiography of the north.

Limits on the topic

While this thesis does not ignore the impact of White and Chinese invaders on the Aboriginal people of the northern mining fields, involving warfare, violence, kidnapping, rape and massacres, this is not its major emphasis. There are many treatises on frontier violence, but very little on the post-contact adaption to mining, which occurred very rapidly – in some cases, while warfare was still happening. The study therefore concentrates on the times from the immediate post-contact period until the 1970s, after which small-scale mining became increasingly difficult for Black and White miners alike. The thesis therefore does not examine in detail the following period of large-scale company mining and its impact on traditional owners, except to note that Aboriginal participation in the mining industry post-1970s included working for big mining companies. There is a range of literature on the complex issue of mining and Aboriginal land rights in modern times which can be consulted.³⁵

³⁴ Tim Murray, "Epilogue: an archaeology of Indigenous/non-Indigenous Australia from 1788" in Rodney Harrison and Christine Williamson (eds), *After Captain Cook: the archaeology of the recent Indigenous past in Australia*, Walnut Creek, California: Altamira Press, 2004, p. 214.

³⁵ See for example John Connell and Richard Howitt (eds), *Mining and Indigenous Peoples in Australasia*, Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1991; D. Cousins and Nieuwenhuysen, *Aboriginals and the Mining Industry*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984; Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, *Aborigines and Uranium*, Canberra: AGPS, 1984; R. T. Libby, *Hawke's Law: the politics of mining and Aboriginal land rights in Australia*, Perth: University of Western Australian Press, 1989; R. Howitt, *Developmentalism, impact assessment and Aborigines: rethinking regional narratives at Weipa*, Casuarina, N.T.: North Australia Research Unit, 1995; Jon Altman and

Background of the researcher

An Aboriginal research methodology incorporates cultural practice, and in Aboriginal society people who meet for the first time explain who they are and where they are from. In Western research methods, this is called 'reflective practice'. I am a mix of *Goenpul* (Stradbroke Island), *Budjula* (Fraser Island) and *Pitta Pitta/Kalkadoon* (Western Queensland), with extensive contacts throughout north Queensland, many of them from my extended family which includes *Gugu Yalanji*, *Djabugay*, *Yirragandji*, *Wakaman*, *Wakoora*, *Jittabal*, *Yidinji*, *Girramay* and *Mamu* peoples. I also have South Sea Islander, Scottish and English ancestry, and therefore embody a shared history and heritage. It is this shared history, and relationships with so many far north Queensland Aboriginal people, that has drawn my interest to this research. Family members, many of whom are now in their old age or are deceased, suffered the depredations of early frontier conflict, and the removals and mission experience in north Queensland. However other family members managed to slip through the Aborigines Protection net of the late 1890s and the 1900s to peacefully participate as prospectors and miners in the tropical Queensland mineral provinces. I have mining history in my heritage: my great-great-grandfather, Jack Noble of the *Budjala* people (Fraser Island), was brought to the North in 1873 as a native policeman for the Native Mounted Police, to break Aboriginal resistance to the invasions of their country by miners.³⁶ My great-grandmother Molly Noble was the Aboriginal child of a White miner/ roustabout in north-west Queensland. There are other members of my extended family who are small scale miners and miners in the past, or were employed in mining related vocations.

I am a qualified archaeologist with considerable experience in the cultural heritage field. I have already identified a number of Aboriginal mining sites, both traditional and post-contact, including partially buried ore treatment pits near Calcifer, at the Atherton Mine, and at the Pillar, Chillagoe. Since 2001, I have with assistance from a number of other archaeologists, anthropologists and interested community

David Martin (eds), *Power, culture, economy : Indigenous Australians and mining*, Canberra: ANU E-Press, 2009; Janine Roberts, *From Massacres to Mining : the colonization of Aboriginal Australia*, London : CIMRA, c.1978.

³⁶ Cf. Archaeology of the Frontier, the archaeological project which is investigating the Native Mounted Police camps of Queensland, <https://archaeologyonthefrontier.com/>; and for Jack Noble specifically, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/mar/06/descended-from-both-sides-of-queenslands-bloody-massacres>

volunteers, conducted a semi-continuous survey for cultural heritage sites in the Chillagoe-Mungana districts which includes a number of Aboriginal mining sites, pre- and post-contact.

Thesis outline

This thesis will be divided into seven chapters. Following this introduction, **Chapter 1** is a literature review. **Chapter 2** will examine pre-contact mining and treatment methods, by surveying a large sample of the archaeological literature on Aboriginal mining sites. It will also critique the language used by archaeologists and anthropologists to describe the complex mining techniques used by Aborigines, which were similar to but thousands of years in advance of European mining technology.

Chapter 3 is a history of nineteenth century north Queensland, which gives the historical background and context necessary for the thesis but also revises this history to show the importance of Aboriginal involvement for White settlement patterns and White history. This occurred due to the active decisions taken by Aboriginal 'guides', and the importance of early mining fields discovered by Aborigines. It demonstrates that not all contact history in Aboriginal Australia is as described by many of the historians, as conforming to the standard models of European invasion and Aboriginal resistance. It also emphasises for the first time the importance of the Hann family in the early history of north Queensland, as they deliberately set out to populate the region through gold rushes in order to create markets for their cattle.

Chapter 4 performs the same role as the previous chapter, but for the twentieth century. It examines the mining history context for the period, and also the Aboriginal history context, particularly the impact of the Protection Acts and removals. These both discouraged Aboriginal mining by removing groups from their homelands and discouraging casual work, but also encouraged mining as a sideline to other occupations and as a way of surviving economically when people were forced to 'go bush' to escape officials.

Chapter 5 is the first major case study using particular districts. This chapter examines Cape York, where Aboriginal involvement in discovery, prospecting and mining was clearest and most essential. Because it was remote and isolated, the Cape allowed Aboriginal participation in mining to flourish longer than those areas where it was easier to institute the controls of the Protection Acts. Here, Aborigines could become entrepreneurs: drillers, mill-owners, teamsters, and mine-owners who employed others to work for them.

Chapter 6 examines the Chillagoe – Mungana Mineral Fields, the first economic mines of which were discovered by an Aboriginal, George Hennessy. The contact and post-contact histories for the *Wakaman*, *Wakoora* and *Gugu Djungan* peoples of the Chillagoe-Mungana Districts have as yet not been told in any detail by historians,³⁷ though preliminary perusal of the Mungana court records appears to show that there is a disparity in the treatment of certain classes of Aboriginal persons and families. Some were sent to the coastal missions or sent to cattle stations, whereas others appear to be allowed to remain in the Chillagoe-Mungana mining areas and retain a measure of independence. It appears that the latter were involved in the mining industry. The district also presents a case study in the continued use of Aboriginal pre-contact mining and treatment methods into post-contact times. Archaeologically there are a number of locations in the district which have evidence for Aboriginal people occupying the country during the most active period of mining, showing a blending of European and traditional material cultures.

Chapter 7, Other Mining Fields and Ancillary Work, picks up the stories of miners and prospectors in other mining fields which were either smaller, such as the Russell, Mulgrave and Jordan fields, or which have limited documentary evidence, such as Croydon and the Etheridge. It shows that as on Cape York, Aboriginal mining was more likely to occur on those fields difficult to access, and which had good alluvial resources. It also considers the other work Aborigines did apart from mining: the ancillary occupations that were either essential for mining to continue, such as guides, packers, and charcoal burners, or useful in the mining towns, such as timber

³⁷ Carol Chong has written one of the few histories, in her case of the Wakaman people. Carol Chong, "The Chong Family History at Mungana", in G. Grimwade, K. Rains, and M. Dunk, *Rediscovered Past: Chinese Networks*, Ipswich: Chinese Heritage in Northern Australia Inc. (CHINA INC), 2016, pp. 51-65.

getters, water carters, horse handlers, labourers, domestic and yard workers, and surveyor chainmen.

The final chapter, the **Conclusion**, will discuss the results of the study, its significance, and its implications for historical models of post-contact intercultural relations. It will also outline directions for future research.

The problem with stories interpreting the past is that they have power in determining the present. 'History' derives from 'high story' – the version of the past that is accepted and propagated by the historians. It is well accepted that women and the working classes of White society have been short-changed by this 'accepted/acceptable' history and much effort has been put into first, realising how they have been victimised by the story, and second, rediscovering their agency in the history of mining. Aboriginal agency through mining needs to be better recognised. This history attempts to demonstrate that Aborigines were an integral part of mining and settlement patterns in the north, and that their roles and importance have been neglected and forgotten.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Aboriginal mining receives occasional attention in the literature but is rare, particularly in academic sources, and usually brief. Only one in-depth study of Aboriginal mining exists for post-contact tropical Queensland and even in the rest of Australia, only two academic authors have examined the topic in any detail. Initial contact between the Aboriginal peoples and the newcomers between c.1860 and c.1890s appears to be well documented in both primary and secondary historical accounts for some of the mining frontiers of north Queensland. However, the period after 1900 to post World War II is not as well researched in the literature for the region, and information concerning Aborigines is scanty apart from histories of missions.

Mining had decisive economic and social effects on European settlement of tropical Queensland, as it had on the other Australian states. A review of the literature of the history of post-contact mining in tropical Queensland reveals that there is a considerable corpus by both academic and popular historians. Apart from Geoffrey Blainey,³⁸ most of the academic historians have been associated with the University of Queensland and James Cook University, including postgraduates. Various aspects of mining in the region have been covered by academic writers such as Kett Kennedy,³⁹ Noreen Kirkman,⁴⁰ Peter Bell,⁴¹ Diane Menghetti,⁴² Jan Wegner,⁴³ June

³⁸ G. Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended: A History of Australian Mining*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1969; *Mines in the Spinifex: the story of Mt Isa Mines*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1960.

³⁹ K. H. Kennedy (ed.), *Readings in North Queensland Mining History*, Volume 1, Townsville: History Department, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1980; *Readings in North Queensland Mining History*, Volume 2, Townsville: History Department, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1982; *The Mungana Affair*, St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978; *Mining Tsar: the life and times of Leslie Urquhart*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986.

⁴⁰ N. Kirkman, "Mining on the Hodgkinson," in *Readings in North Queensland History*, Volume 2, ed. K. H. Kennedy; The Palmer Goldfield, B.A. Hons thesis, James Cook University, 1988; *Mt Isa: Oasis of the Outback*, Townsville: School of History and Politics, 1998; Mount Isa Mines' Social Infrastructure Programs, 1924-1963, PhD Thesis, James Cook University, 2011; "'A snider is a splendid civiliser': European attitudes to Aborigines on the Palmer River Goldfield, 1873-1883", in Henry Reynolds (ed), *Race Relations in North Queensland*, Townsville: Dept. of History and Politics, James Cook University, 1993, pp. 119-143.

⁴¹ P. Bell, *The Mount Mulligan Disaster*, Townsville: James Cook University, 1978; "Essay on North Queensland Mining Settlement," in *Readings in North Queensland Mining History*, ed. K. H. Kennedy, Volume 2; *Timber and Iron*, St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984; *Gold, Iron and Steam*, Townsville: History Department, James Cook University, 1987; Historic Sites Associated with Mining and Chinese Settlement in North Queensland, Report to the Australian Heritage Commission on ten sites nominated for the Register of the National Estate, 1992; "'If you take something from Mother Earth, she will retaliate' : Legends from the Mt. Mulligan coal mine disaster", *Royal Historical Society of Queensland Journal*, (1980): 89-92; London North Mine Headframe, Ravenswood, report to the Queensland Heritage Council, 2003; Ravenswood Conservation Management Plan : report to Ravenswood Restoration & Preservation Association Inc., 2000; History of the Chillagoe smelters, report to Allom Lovell Marquis-Kyle, 2004; with K.H. Kennedy and Carolyn Edmondson, *Totley, a study of the silver mines at One Mile, Ravenswood district*, Townsville: History Dept., James Cook University, 1981.

Stoodley,⁴⁴ Geoff Hansen,⁴⁵ Lyndon Megarrity⁴⁶ and Ruth Kerr,⁴⁷ but they have tended to concentrate on general histories of mining fields and their communities, or aspects of the mining process itself such as technology, finances, and health and safety. While they have given some attention to interactions with Aborigines on the mining frontier, references to Aboriginal miners and prospectors are few and brief. Rarely do they mention names, or tribe.

Some historians have the subject of mining embedded in general histories for tropical Queensland, such as Bolton⁴⁸ and Fitzgerald,⁴⁹ and they provide good general overviews of Queensland's mining industry, but also remain largely silent regarding the Aboriginal prospectors and miners. Cilento and Lack⁵⁰ provide brief overviews of the key gold and mineral provinces, though they again have little concerning many

⁴² D. Menghetti, "The Gold Mines of Charters Towers," in *Readings in North Queensland Mining History*, ed. K. H. Kennedy, Townsville: James Cook University, 1982; Charters Towers, PhD thesis, James Cook University, 1984; *I Remember: Memories of Charters Towers*, Townsville: History Department, James Cook University, 1989; *Ravenswood: Five Heritage Trails*, Townsville: History Department, James Cook University, 1992; *Blair Athol: the life and death of a town*, Clermont: Blair Athol Coal Project, 1995; "Extraction practices and technology on the Charters Towers goldfields", *North Australia Research Bulletin* 8 (1982); "Invention and innovation in the Australian non-ferrous mining industry: whose technology?", *Australian Economic History Review*, 45, 2 (2005): 204-219 .

⁴³ J. Wegner, *The Etheridge*, Townsville: Department of History and Politics, James Cook University, 1990; Croydon: Technology transfer on a north Queensland goldfield, PhD thesis, James Cook University, 1995; "Kangaroo Hills" in K.H. Kennedy (ed.), *Readings in North Queensland Mining History* Volume 2; "Too much haste, not enough prospecting: Mount Garnet Mine and Smelters, North Queensland", *Journal of Australasian Mining History*, 14 (2016): 99-115; "Blasting out: explosives practices in Queensland metalliferous mines, 1870-1920", *Australian Economic History Review*, 50, 2 (2010): 193-208; "Sludge on tap: Queensland's first water pollution legislation, 1944-1985", *Environment and History*, 15, 2 (2009): 199-216; with Justin Lambert, "The Emuford Battery, North Queensland: a study in survival", *Journal of Australasian Mining History*, 4 (2006): 93-107; "Underground gold prospecting techniques in late 19th Century- early 20th Century North Queensland", *Journal of Australasian Mining History*, 1(2003): 159-168.

⁴⁴ J. Stoodley, *The Queensland Gold-Miner in the Late Nineteenth Century: His Influence and Interests*, M.A. thesis, University of Queensland, 1964.

⁴⁵ G. Hansen, *A Mining History of the Cape River Gold Field (1867-1870)* (unpublished ms). ; Geoffrey Hansen and Lyndon Megarrity (eds), *Goldfields that made Townsville: Cape River, Ravenswood and Charters Towers*, Townsville: North Queensland History Preservation Society, 2018.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*; A history of New Ravenswood Limited 1899-1917, M.A. Thesis, James Cook University, 1997; British investment in North Queensland gold mining, 1886 to 1907, B.A. Hons thesis, 1995; "Ravenswood and the Deep Mines fiasco 1902 to 1920", *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, 17, 10 (May 1988).

⁴⁷ R. S. Kerr, *John Moffat's Empire*, St. Lucia: J.D. & R. S. Kerr, 1979; *Chillagoe*, Cairns: G. K. Bolton, 1986; *The German Demand for Wolfram, Tin and Copper from North Queensland 1890-1914*, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991; *John Moffat of Irvinebank: A Biography of a Regional Entrepreneur*, St. Lucia: J.D. & R. S. Kerr, 2000; The Century Project : environmental studies: European history and heritage, report to Century mine, 1993; Queensland historical mining sites study: report for the Department of Environment and Heritage, 1992; with Tom Freeman, "Heinrich Carl Wilhelm Buls: A successful gold miner of early north Queensland", *Queensland History Journal*, 23,4 (2017); "Queensland Mining Heritage", *Queensland History Journal*, 22, 2 (2013); " Calcifer — the First Copper Smelter on the Chillagoe Copperfield", *Australasian Historical Archaeology*, 13 (1995); "The Advent of Tin Dredges in Eastern Australia", *Australasian Historical Archaeology*, 7 (1989).

⁴⁸ G. C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away: A History of North Queensland to 1920*, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1970).

⁴⁹ R. Fitzgerald, *From the Dreaming to 1915: A History of Queensland*, St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1982.

⁵⁰ Sir R. Cilento and C. Lack, *Triumph in the Tropics: An Historical Sketch of Queensland*, Brisbane: Smith & Patterson Pty Ltd, 1959.

of the Aborigines who actually found and worked these fields. These general histories do mention three Aboriginal prospectors: Jupiter Mosman who, as a boy, is attributed in many sources with finding gold at what was to become the town of Charters Towers; Pluto, discoverer of Plutoville in 1910, and his wife Kitty Pluto, the Aboriginal woman who found gold at Lower Camp in 1916 on the Batavia River; and Blainey's⁵¹ references to the Aborigines, working for Ernest Henry in the late 1860s, who found copper on the Cloncurry field and at Mt Isa. Robert Logan Jack⁵² dedicates a chapter to Aboriginal miners which is really about Pluto as finder of the Batavia River gold strike in 1910 at Plutoville, so named in his honour. Hansen⁵³ mentions an Aboriginal blackboy named Jacky who worked for Joseph and William Hann, of Maryvale, as finding the first gold on what was to become first major alluvial rush in tropical Queensland, the Cape River Goldfield.

Many popular histories for tropical Queensland were published in the local newspapers or local and regional history books, by writers such as Hugh Borland in *The Cairns Post* between 1940 and 1951, Glenville Pike,⁵⁴ Hector Holthouse⁵⁵ and Ion Idriess⁵⁶ for far north Queensland. Reading these stories/ histories, it seemed as if the non-Aboriginal explorers and prospectors, such as Richard Daintree, Christie Palmerston, William Hann, James Venture Mulligan, John Dickie, James Dick, John Moffat, Tony Linedale and the Atherton family, were central to the tale of the discovery and development of the North's mining industry, which was vital to the European settlement and economy of the region. In more recent years these non-academic historians have been joined by Michael Brumby⁵⁷ with his many

⁵¹ Geoffrey Blainey, *Mines in the Spinifex*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1960.

⁵² R. L. Jack, *Northmost Australia*, London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent and Co., 1921.

⁵³ Hanson, *A Mining History of the Cape River Gold Field*.

⁵⁴ G. Pike, *In the Path of the Pioneers : The History and Progress of the Herberton Shire*, Mareeba: Pinevale Publications, 1952; *Queensland Frontier*, Mareeba: Pinevale Publications, 1978; *The Golden Days: Life in North Queensland in the Gold Rush Era*, Mareeba: Pinevale Publications, 1981; *The Last Frontier: Cape York Wilderness*, Mareeba: Pinevale Publications, 1983; *Unsung Heroes of the Queensland Wilderness: Pioneering Our Remote Far North, 1870-1914*, Mareeba: Pinevale Publications, 2001; *Cryodon Gold: An Illustrated History of Cryodon, North Queensland*, Mareeba: Pinevale Publications, 2002; *On the Trail of Gold: The Story of James Venture Mulligan North Queensland's Greatest Prospector- Explorer*, Mareeba: Pinevale Publications, 2006.

⁵⁵ H. Holthouse, *The River of Gold: The Story of the Palmer River Gold Rush*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1967.

⁵⁶ I. L. Idriess, *The Tin Scratchers*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1959; *My Mate Dick*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1962; *Challenge of the North: Wealth from Australia's Northern Shores*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1969; *Back O' Cairns: Adventures in the Far North*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1994.

⁵⁷ M. Brumby, *One Square Mile : Re-Discovering the Buildings and the Life of Mosman, Gill and Bow Streets Charters Towers, North Queensland*, Charters Towers: Charters Towers and Dalrymple Archives Group, 1997; *Beyond the Bin : Some of the Places and Some of the People of Charters Towers, North Queensland*, Charters Towers: Charters Towers and Dalrymple Archives Group, 1998; *Charters Towers: People and Places*, Charters Towers: Charters Towers and Dalrymple Archives Group, 2010.

publications on Charters Towers social history; John Hay;⁵⁸ Colin Hooper;⁵⁹ and Rodney Liddell.⁶⁰ Some like Joe Fisher⁶¹ and A. J. Dick⁶² have written semi-autobiographical works or histories coming from family history research.⁶³ These local and regional histories are often mostly concerned with colonial progress and pioneering, the savagery of the ‘cannibal blacks’, and how the White fellow’s tenacity and determination managed to tame a wild country and its original inhabitants.

We read about Christie Palmerston and his ‘blackboy’ Pompey,⁶⁴ but we do not hear about the Aboriginal prospectors or miners, the very people who found and worked some of the most important gold and mineral fields in tropical Queensland. They have been whitewashed from the region’s history, its legends, and sadly even from its collective memory.

Some authors acknowledge the roles of Aborigines in mining. One non-academic author who does give a little attention to Aboriginal miners is David De Havelland,⁶⁵ who notes their presence as workers at various mines in tropical Queensland. In Hooper’s *Angor to Zillmanton*,⁶⁶ he makes mention of Aboriginal miners and prospectors, although some of his reported information appears to be incorrect, particularly many of the dates and some of the Aboriginal names. Similarly Menghetti⁶⁷ posted two entries in the Mining Hall of Fame website which also concerned Jupiter Mossman and the Plutos, again with incorrect dating of Kitty’s

⁵⁸ J. C. Hay, *The Palmer Legacy*, Mareeba: Author, 1998; *Riches of Wolfram Camp: A Mareeba Historical Society Publication*, Brisbane: Mareeba Historical Society, 2005; with S. G. St-Clair (eds), *Lone Wolf*, Mareeba: Author, 2002.

⁵⁹ C. Hooper, *Angor to Zillmanton: Stories of North Queensland's Deserted Towns*, Townsville: Bolton Print, 2006.

⁶⁰ R. Liddell, *Cape York: The Savage Frontier*, Dubbo: CS Printers, 1991.

⁶¹ J. Fischer, *Battlers in the Bush: The Batavia Goldfield of Cape York*, Melbourne: S.R. Frankland P/L, 1998.

⁶² A. J. Dick, *Peninsula Pioneer: James Dick (1849-1916), Visionary of Far North Queensland, a Biography*, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2003.

⁶³ Dick does mention Pluto’s original Batavia River find but has no mention of Kitty’s later 1915 find at Lower Camp, *ibid.*, pp. 264-265, 270. Fisher mentions Kitty Pluto’s Lower Camp find but not Pluto’s earlier 1910 find at Plutoville. He also mentions William Baird, but not Romeo with their 1882 Retreat Creek find at Bairdsville. Fischer, *Battlers in the Bush*, p.13.

⁶⁴ The name is spelled Pompo in some sources.

⁶⁵ D. W. de Havelland, *Gold and Ghosts Volume 4*, Carlisle, W.A.: Hesperian Press, 1989.

⁶⁶ Hooper, *Angor to Zillmanton*, p. 21.

⁶⁷ D. Menghetti, "Australian Prospectors and Miners Hall of Fame Historical Profile – Kitty Pluto," <http://www.republicofmining.com/2008/06/05/australian-prospectors-and-miners-hall-of-fame-historical-profile-kitty-pluto-unknown-%E2%80%93-unknown/>; "Australian Prospectors and Miners Hall of Fame Historical Profile – Jupiter Mosman (1861-1945)," <http://www.republicofmining.com/2008/07/29/australian-prospectors-and-miners-hall-of-fame-historical-profile-%E2%80%93-jupiter-mosman-1861-1945/>.

Lower Camp find. Although these accounts have errors they also give a number of leads to other Aboriginal people who either found fields or were miners.⁶⁸ Blainey records some Aboriginal miners and prospectors in his mining histories; he notes that “These men [White prospectors] employed blackboys to tend their horses, to guide them to water, and to look for gold; the honour of finding many valuable fields no doubt belonged to, though was never credited to, blackboys”.⁶⁹ He also mentions a few Aboriginal miners and prospectors by name or tribal affiliation.

The only author to extensively research Aboriginal miners in Queensland is Christopher Anderson.⁷⁰ He acknowledges the discovery of tin in 1886 near Mt. Romeo in the Annan River district by “William Baird and his *Kuku Nyungkul* offsider Romeo”.⁷¹ Writing from an anthropological perspective, Anderson sheds light on the extent and importance of the *Kuku Nyungkul* people’s role in prospecting and mining on the Annan River Tin fields, near Cooktown. He notes that both the *Kuku Yalanji* and *Kuku Nyungkul* peoples had a social system which allowed the incorporation of the non-Aboriginal tin miner and their economies into their system of ‘Bosses’. These social structures allowed the *Kuku Nyungkul* to instigate a number of initiatives: not only were they working for personally selected White bosses, but in several cases the Aboriginal people were prospecting and mining tin for themselves. Further, the Aboriginal miners had a number of strategies in place so that they would not get caught up in ‘protection’ policies such as being removed to reserves. For example, they would stay clear of towns or camps where there were police, or they would get the ‘Boss’ to purchase their supplies when they went to the larger centres such as Cooktown. Anderson points out that this not only increased the *Nyungkul*’s economic stability but also allowed the five main clan groups to remain in their clan estates and maintain their traditional camps. It was really only when tin mining more or less ceased on the Annan around the time of the Second World War

⁶⁸ There are about 25 accounts of major gold and mineral fields being found by Aboriginal people, many of whom are Aboriginal stockmen or shepherds. We never hear about them again, though for six of these, there is evidence that they were prospectors and subsistence miners for long periods eg Pluto and Kitty Pluto (Batavia 1910-1932), George Hennessy (Herberton – Chillagoe 1886 - early 1890s), Romeo (Annan River Tin and Batavia, 1886 - 1892), Keating (Mt Carbine, 1906-1908), John Green (Hodgkinson Goldfield ca. 1888).

⁶⁹ Blainey, *The Rush that Never Ended*, p. 173.

⁷⁰ C. Anderson, “Aborigines and Tin Mining in North Queensland: A Case Study in the Anthropology of Contact History,” *Mankind*, 13, 6 (1983); *The Political and Economic Basis of Kuku-Yalanji Social History*, PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 1984; “All Bosses Are Not Created Equal,” in *Traditional Aboriginal Society*, ed. W. H. Edwards, Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia Pty. Ltd., 1998.

⁷¹ Anderson, “Aborigines and Tin Mining”, p. 479.

that the camps disappeared. Like this thesis, Anderson argues that the usual story of Aboriginal resistance followed by disruption and decline is over-generalising.⁷²

Copland's work,⁷³ although not a mining history, does dedicate a chapter to the removal of 58 Aboriginal people, many of them miners and their wives and children, from the Wenlock (Batavia) River Diggings in 1932 by the Police Protector stationed in Coen. Even though Copland records that Kitty Pluto was removed to Yarrabah Aboriginal Mission near Cairns in 1921, other evidence is available to show that Kitty was actually still living at Plutoville at that date and was among those who were forcibly removed by Police Protector on the 24th December 1932.

Sandra Pannell's history of the *Ngadjon-jii* of the Atherton Tablelands in the Malanda area discusses the stories of people who worked alluvial gold in the Russell and Jordan goldfields, as part of the oral history of that group.⁷⁴ However, she sees the history of mining as exploitative for the *Ngadjon-jii*, though her informants did not give that impression. Gillian Cowlshaw discusses the problem of modern historians' interpretations of Aboriginal history conflicting with that of the older people:

autobiographical stories attest to the fact that, while Aboriginal labour was exploited and to some extent unfree, it commonly entailed relationships of respect and esteem, as well as pride in skills and pleasure in accomplishment. It is state officials, such as mission managers, welfare officers, teachers and police—that is, outsiders—who are commonly identified as the oppressors of the past.⁷⁵

Some work has been done in other States on Aborigines and mining. David Cahir's⁷⁶ work on the Victorian goldfields of 1850-1870s revealed that the story of Aboriginal

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 483-492.

⁷³ M. Copland, *Calculating Lives: The Numbers and Narratives of Forced Removals in Queensland 1859-1972*, PhD thesis, Griffith University, 2005.

⁷⁴ Sandra Pannell and the Ngadjon-Jii Traditional Owners, *Yamani Country: A Spatial History of the Atherton Tableland, North Queensland*, Cairns: Cooperative Research Centre for Tropical Rainforest Ecology and Management, Rainforest CRC, 2005.

⁷⁵ Gillian Cowlshaw, On 'getting it wrong': Collateral damage in the history wars, *Australian Historical Studies*, 37,127 (2006): 190. DOI: 10.1080/10314610608601210.

⁷⁶ D. Cahir, *Black Gold: A History of the Role of Aboriginal People on the Goldfields of Victoria, 1850-70*, University of Ballarat, 2006; "The Attraction of Gold Mining in Victoria for Aboriginal People," *Journal of Australasian Mining History* 6 (2008); "Are You Off to the Diggings?": Aboriginal Guiding to and on the Goldfields," *The La Trobe Journal*, 85 (2010); I. Clark and D. Cahir, "Aboriginal People, Gold and Tourism: The Benefits of Inclusiveness for Goldfields Tourism in Regional Victoria," *Tourism Culture and Communication* 3, 4 (2003); *Tanderrum 'Freedom of the Bush': The Djadjawurrung Presence on the Goldfields of Central Victoria*, vol. 3, Friends of Mt Alexander Diggings, 2004.

participation on the goldfields had been neglected by historians. His work “reveals an emerging picture... which places Aboriginal people not on the periphery of the gold epoch, but often firmly ensconced in the social and economic milieu that was the gold rush”.⁷⁷ However, he talks about Aborigines in ancillary roles, not mining. A number of authors, including Read and Coppin, relate the history of the *Nyamal* people of the Pilbara, who famously have adapted ‘yandying’ grain to tin mining.⁷⁸ However, only Sarah Holcombe acknowledges that Aboriginal mining for gold and tin had occurred before this episode,⁷⁹ and there seems to be no awareness that this is not the only instance of Aborigines using mining to resist colonial controls. There is occasional mention of Aboriginal mining in other sources, for example Ian Coates’ throwaway line about Aborigines in north-west Western Australia “fossicking for gold”.⁸⁰ Timothy Jones often mentions Aboriginal miners in his history of gold mining in the Northern Territory.⁸¹ Mike Harding has picked up the concept of Aboriginal mining and applied it to the opal fields of Cooper Pedy.⁸²

In the later twentieth century Australian historians generally began to re-interpret the country’s ‘contact history’, spearheaded by such researchers as Henry Reynolds,⁸³ Noel Loos,⁸⁴ Bain Attwood and Richard Broome.⁸⁵ The aims of these works have

⁷⁷ Cahir, *Black Gold*, p. 336.

⁷⁸ Jolly Read and Peter Coppin, *Kangkushot: The life of Nyamal Lawman Peter Coppin*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2014; Anne Scrimgeour, “ ‘To Make It Brilliantly Apparent to the People of Australia’: The Pilbara Cooperative Movement and the Campaign for Aboriginal Civil Rights in the 1950s”, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 40,1 (2016):16-31.

⁷⁹ Sarah Holcombe, “Indigenous Organisations and Mining in the Pilbara, Western Australia: Lessons from a Historical Perspective”, *Aboriginal History*, 29 (2005): 110-111.

⁸⁰ Ian Coates, “Golden Reflections” in Iain McCalman, Alexander Cook and Andrew Reeves, *Gold: forgotten histories and lost objects of Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001, p. 166.

⁸¹ Timothy G. Jones, *Pegging the Northern Territory: The history of mining in the Northern Territory of Australia, 1873-1946*, Darwin: Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development, 1987.

⁸² Mike Harding, ‘Plenty of opal back then: Opal Pulkah’: a history of Aboriginal engagement in the northern South Australian opal industry, c. 1940-1980, PhD Thesis, University of Adelaide, 2016.

⁸³ H. Reynolds, “Settlers and Aborigines on the Pastoral Frontier,” in *Lectures in North Queensland History*, ed. B. J. Dalton, Townsville: James Cook University of North Queensland, 1974; “Fringe Camps in Nineteenth Century Queensland,” in *Lectures in North Queensland History*, Third Series, ed. B.J. Dalton, Townsville: James Cook University of North Queensland, 1978; *The Other Side of the Frontier: An Interpretation of the Aboriginal Response to the Invasion and Settlement of Australia*, Townsville: James Cook University, 1981; *With the White People: The Crucial Role of Aborigines in the Exploration and Development of Australia*, Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1990; *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land*, Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 1996; *Black Pioneers: How Aboriginal and Islander People Helped Build Australia*, Ringwood: Penguin, 2000; *North of Capricorn: The Untold Story of Australia's North*, Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2003.

⁸⁴ N. A. Loos, “Aboriginal Resistance on the Mining, Rainforest and Fishing Frontiers,” in *Lectures on North Queensland History*, ed. B. J. Dalton, Townsville: James Cook University of North Queensland, 1974; Aboriginal-European Relations in North Queensland, 1861- 1897, PhD Thesis, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1976; “Aboriginal Resistance in North Queensland,” in *Lectures on North Queensland History*, Third Series, ed. B.J. Dalton, Townsville: James Cook University of North Queensland, 1978; *Invasion and Resistance : Aboriginal-European Relations on the North Queensland Frontier 1861-1897*, Canberra: Australian University Press, 1982.

⁸⁵ Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians*, Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2010.

been various: “an attempt to reveal and explain the sources of racial interaction in an Australian colonial setting”;⁸⁶ “an interpretation of the Aboriginal response to the invasion and settlement of Australia”;⁸⁷ a “study of the different frontiers of contact”.⁸⁸ The common, explicit theme, though, in most of the studies, is to portray an ‘Aboriginal perspective’ regarding frontier contact. This is clearly a welcome trend and the involvement of Aborigines themselves in the documenting of such matters is becoming increasingly evident.

Unfortunately there are a number of serious problems in much of the work to date. Fourmile⁸⁹ and Anderson⁹⁰ both point out that a major criticism of these new histories is that although attempting to describe the Aboriginal perspective of ‘contact history’ it is still very much a viewpoint seen through Euro-centric eyes. Much of this stems from the continued concentration on archival and written sources.

Primarily, though, this problem results from the tendency to portray, for ideological reasons, Aborigines as either ‘heroes or victims’. On the one hand, it is argued that all Aborigines were comrades in a generalized heroic struggle of violent resistance against European colonial invasion and domination. On the other hand, we see following the conflict phase naught but paupers dwelling on the fringes of European society and the “breakdown of . . . traditional values and group cohesiveness . . . accompanied by a squalor previously unknown, by disease, unhygienic living conditions, unbalanced diet and malnutrition, a declining birth rate, and by the exploitation of Aboriginal women and children”.⁹¹

These historians certainly redressed certain biases found in historical accounts of our colonial history by introducing an Aboriginal perspective. Many of these studies have however:

- 1) assumed uniformity of Aboriginal societies around Australia;
- 2) assumed uniformity of impact of European society; and

⁸⁶ R. Evans, K. Saunders, and K. Cronin, eds., *Race Relations in Colonial Queensland: A History of Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination*, St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1975, p. xi

⁸⁷ Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier*, p. 1

⁸⁸ Loos, *Invasion and Resistance*, p. xviii

⁸⁹ H. Fourmile, "Who Owns the Past? Aborigines as Captive of the Archives," *Aboriginal History* 13, 1 (1989): p.1.

⁹⁰ Anderson, "Aborigines and Tin Mining", pp. 473-474.

⁹¹ Loos, *Invasion and Resistance*, p. 160.

3) assumed uniformity of Aboriginal responses.

An over-emphasis on either view portrays Aborigines and their situations in a too generalized and stereotyped way. Tim Rowse points to a number of differences across Australia: urban/rural, northern versus southern, differences caused by geography and chronology.⁹² According to the homogenizing interpretations, Aboriginal people had decreasing control over their lives and little agency in their own fates. We do not see a great deal in such descriptions of Aborigines as humans of resource, making intelligent decisions, acting in an apparently alien material and social environment, while retaining a traditional cultural context. Henry Reynolds does consider it, though he fails to recognise the autonomy of the Aboriginal miner-pro prospector by reinforcing the 'peripheral' thesis, that Aborigines were considered to be valuable on mining fields as domestics or as carriers. However, he does present the subject matter in a more complex way.⁹³ One serious criticism is that nowhere in his chapter dedicated to the Aboriginal miner in his study of Aboriginal contributions to the White economy, *With the White People*, did he mention even those outstanding figures such as Jupiter Mosman of Charters Towers, or Pluto and Kitty Pluto who were so important to the Batavia (Wenlock) field. Nor is there mention of some of the less known but equally important Aboriginal prospectors and miners such as George Hennessy on the Chillagoe Mineral field, or of John Green, who had a mining lease at Mount Trial on the Hodgkinson, or the Keating brothers who had mining leases at Mt Carbine. While some of these figures are obscure, for others there is a great deal of evidence available to the researcher, particularly the Plutos.

A number of authors examining post-contact history have pointed to Aboriginal agency and choice. Stanner⁹⁴ is an early example, where he points out that it was common for Aborigines in the Northern Territory to make conscious choices to leave their traditional areas (at least, for part of the year) in order to take advantage of European goods. Anderson also picks up a similar theme with the *Kuku Nyungkul* tin miners of the Annan River. He notes that tin mining and its associated development

⁹² Tim Rowse, "Indigenous Heterogeneity", *Australian Historical Studies*, 45, 3 (2014): 297-310.

⁹³ Reynolds, *With the White People*, republished as *Black Pioneers: How Aboriginal and Islander People Helped Build Australia*, Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 2000.

⁹⁴ W. E. H. Stanner, "Continuity and Change among the Aborigines," *Australian Journal of Science* 21(1958): 100-102.

altered the way the *Kuku Nyungkul* made a living. The *Kuku Nyungkul* were instantly attracted to a number of resources available in the European economy. These included any item which would improve the efficiency of their technology, or substitute for pre-contact based technology such as steel axes, pieces of flaked glass, metal fishing hooks and gut line, billy cans and water containers, wire spear points and metal bars for digging sticks. The second group of European commodities which made *Kuku Nyungkul* life easier was foods and related substances such as beef, tea, sugar, flour and tobacco. It would appear that the *Kuku Nyungkul* consciously and aggressively chose to assimilate the economies and trappings of the tin fields quickly and began to exploit not only the new commodities bought by the industry, but also the labour arrangements.⁹⁵ This ground-breaking work is however just one case study in an industry and region which appears to have many worthy of investigation.

The 1980s saw a number of histories looking at Aboriginal choice and ability to modify European institutions to their benefit or accept their limitations because of cultural matching, such as Anne McGrath⁹⁶ for station workers and Bain Attwood and Jane Lydon⁹⁷ for mission life.⁹⁸ McGrath, and others such as Henry Reynolds and Dawn May, have shown that even though pastoral work was exploitative and, under the Protection Acts, increasingly forced, the workers used it to stay on country and used the cycles of station work to look after that country – though this compromise did not last long in Queensland once removals became more general after the 1920s, and the missions and government stations chose where workers would be sent. Richard Broome has emphasised Aboriginal agency in frontier relations, an agency ‘attenuated’ by adverse circumstances but which could produce an integration of European and Aboriginal cultures and successes by Aborigines in the European economy, such as sporting heroes.⁹⁹ These have been criticised for underestimating the power of colonialism and its impact on Black lives, but they did balance the historiographical issue of Aborigines as helpless and passive victims.

⁹⁵ Anderson, "Aborigines and Tin Mining", pp. 484-486; Anderson, *The Political and Economic Basis of Kuku-Yalanji Social History*, *passim*.

⁹⁶ Ann McGrath, *Born in the Cattle: Aborigines in cattle country*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987.

⁹⁷ Jane Lydon, "Imagining the Moravian mission: space and surveillance at the former Ebenezer Mission, Victoria, Southeastern Australia", *Historical Archaeology* 43, 3 (2009).

⁹⁸ Bain Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989.

⁹⁹ Richard Broome, "Theatres of power: tent boxing, circa 1910-1970", *Aboriginal History*, 20 (1996); "Enduring Moments of Aboriginal Dominance: Aboriginal Performers, Boxers and Runners," *Labour History*, 69 (1995): 171-87.

Lynette Russell's works show how pre-contact skills continue to be important in post-contact situations, such as her *Roving Mariners*¹⁰⁰ and (with Penny Olsen) the forthcoming *Australia's First Naturalists: Indigenous People's Contribution to Early Zoology*.¹⁰¹ These acknowledge how much the whaling industry and biologists have depended on Aboriginal people using their knowledge and hunting skills. This welcome trend in historiography was derailed for a time by Keith Windschuttle's *Fabrication of Aboriginal History*,¹⁰² which redirected a great deal of attention to frontier violence to refute him.

In recent times an increasing area of popular history that includes Aboriginal mining is biographies and autobiographies of Aboriginal people's lives such as those published by Kathleen Denigan¹⁰³ and Glenda Morris.¹⁰⁴ These works demonstrate that mining was often a family occupation, such that Aboriginal mining was no aberration, but a continuing tradition. Autobiographies and interviews quoted in histories also link mining to a sense of place. Often, the stories tell of the enjoyment of being on country, relating to the plants, animals and spiritual aspects of the place.

Research for this project has exposed enough material to demonstrate that the exclusion of Aboriginal voices from the story of the tropical Queensland mining fields is not due to a dearth of available information. Readily available resources such as the *Queensland Government Mining Journal* and Trove's digitised newspapers have an abundance of material about Aboriginal prospectors and miners. This brief review of the available literature on Aboriginal involvement in mining in Queensland, if not Australia, shows that Aboriginal-European relations have been stereotyped and Aboriginal roles in the very important mining industry mostly ignored or forgotten. Moreover it highlights four common misconceptions surrounding Aboriginal people on the gold and mineral fields of tropical Queensland. These misconceptions are:

¹⁰⁰ Lynette Russell, *Roving Mariners: Australian Aboriginal Whalers and Sealers in the Southern Oceans 1790–1870*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2012.

¹⁰¹ Penny Olsen and Lynette Russell, *Australia's First Naturalists: Indigenous People's Contribution to Early Zoology*, Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2019.

¹⁰² Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002.

¹⁰³ K. Denigan, *Norman Baird: A Spark Within*, Cairns: Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation, 2006.

¹⁰⁴ Glenda Morris, *Looking Back the Way I Came*, Mareeba: Pinevale, 1991; *The Con Goo Line*, Home Hill: Glenda Morris, 1997.

- that in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most Aboriginal people were attached to pastoral stations and missions, rather than mining fields;
- that those few Aboriginal people living near mining settlements were on the periphery;
- that those on the periphery were bewildered spectators or casual unskilled labour;
- that Aboriginal experiences on the gold and mineral fields were primarily negative.

The standard paradigm for post-contact Aboriginal history in Queensland's tropics needs to be modified. The history of Aboriginal miners shows that they had agency, independence and respect from the White community, though as they have faded from community memory this story has disappeared.