

4 The Kamberri in focus

From the evidence presented in the first four chapters of Part I we are starting to get to know the group that occupied and claimed the district southwest of Weereewaa at the time the Europeans arrived in 1820. It is interesting, also, how many different names there were in use to describe the same group.

During the first ten years of European settlement in their country, from 1820 to 1830, we have only glimpses of the Kamberri (although they were not necessarily referred to as such) through the records left by government authorities and the writings of explorers or their employees. They were one of an aggregate of groups who claimed Weereewaa as part of their territory. With other Weereewaa groups, they were feared by Aboriginal communities north of the Wollondilly River and east of Marulan and could raise a force of over a thousand warriors if unacceptable behaviour, such as European stockmen taking Aboriginal women, required it. Conversely, the Kamberri may have hidden from the first Europeans who arrived in their country but, slowly, they got to know, befriend and protect some of the more isolated stockmen who were sent by their employers to run stock or guard claimed land.

During the next 15 years, from 1830 to 1845, Kamberri families gathering at their usual camping grounds may still not have been completely aware that Europeans had claimed most of their land. As individuals and small family groups, they gradually overcame their initial fear of the white men and bartered various goods and services with the managers, superintendents and resident station owners in exchange for food, clothing and European technology.

Two settlers who knew and wrote about them at this time were Terence Aubrey Murray and Stewart Marjoribanks Mowle.

Terence Aubrey Murray and Stewart Marjoribanks Mowle

Terence Aubrey Murray and Stewart Marjoribanks Mowle were not the first European settlers in the Kamberri district but they were among the first to leave written records of their interactions with Aboriginal groups local to the areas where they settled.

Aubrey Murray arrived on the Goulburn side of Weereewaa at the age of 19 to take possession of his father's land grant there in September 1828. After a couple of false starts, Murray eventually established a station on Major Mitchell's former camp-site at Collector.¹ He called the new property *Ajamatong*, the same name for the same place as Mitchell had used.² He did not start building his better known station, *Winderadeen*, until much later. *Ajamatong* is no longer standing but *Winderadeen* is still a working property in the year 2001. When his father died in 1835, Aubrey Murray inherited the Lake George properties.³

Murray began building *Winderadeen* homestead in 1837. The same year, he obtained a grant for *Yarrowlumla*⁴ homestead with Thomas Walker. *Yarralumla* had previously been promised to Henry Donnison in August 1828 and it was Donnison's men who erected Taylor's hut, near where the woolshed is now⁵ (see Map 7). He hired a young 16 year old, Stewart Marjoribanks Mowle, to help him manage *Yarralumla*.

Towards the end of his life, Murray wrote in his diary that in his early life in the colony he kept diaries but on looking into them subsequently was so unimpressed with the utter inanity of his eventless existence he threw them in the fire.

The shooting of a duck, killing of a snake, the advent of a tribe of savages... the record seemed to indicate a living death yet I am sorry now I destroyed it for the thoughts I had in those days and the opinions I entertained would perhaps be interesting now not only to me but to the good, gentle and loving companion of my day, to Leila and to Evvy and even to the boys.⁶

The advent of a tribe of savages? Was that his real opinion of the Aboriginal friends and employees of his youth? What secrets were thrown in the fire with those diaries! During those lonely days and nights, when his closest friends were local Aboriginal people, Murray could have asked them so much about their history, their family networks, their social relations with surrounding groups and their territorial boundaries. Perhaps he did, but he left few records if this was the case. Mowle also destroyed many valuable papers dating back to his early life. Luckily, neither Murray nor Mowle destroyed everything from the early days.

In 1836, Murray sketched a pen and ink portrait of a local 'blackfellow' and identified him as 'Bindermarren of Canbrey'.⁷ This was preserved by descendants of the Wright family, although whether the sketch is extant is unknown, as is Bindermarren's identity and relationship to better known members of the Kamberri. Mowle, who arrived in the district about two years later, does not mention

1. Wilson, Gwendoline, 1968, p 39.

2. *Ibid*, p 58.

3. Compiled from Wilson, 1968.

4. Murray always spelled it this way, but since the current spelling is better known I shall spell it *Yarralumla* from this point onwards.

5. Wilson, 1968.

6. These are his children. Diary, 1 January 1869, Murray family records, NLA Manuscripts MS565, series II.

7. Letters from MP Cummins and A Cummins, *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 1913.

Bindermarren so he might not have known him, which suggests Bindermarren might have passed away before 1838.

Stewart Mowle, although only 16, was frequently left alone in charge of large numbers of stock and 50–60 men, mostly convicts. He depended for companionship on local blacks. In his memoirs he wrote of his earliest days: 'My companion was a native black, Tommy Murray,⁸ who slept on a carpet in my room'. Tommy, like Harry, another close Aboriginal friend of his, was from the Tumut district. With the assistance of Garrett Cotter and Onyong, Murray had frequently explored the mountain tracks and river routes linking the Murrumbidgee district with the upper Murray and upper Tumut districts, and he established an outstation, Mannus,⁹ near Tumbarumba (see Map 12). Mowle was also placed in charge of Mannus and lived there for long periods of time even after he married.¹⁰

Mowle described one typical expedition he and Murray took to the 'Murrumbidgee Mountains' to look for good grass runs for stock (see Map 12):

Our party consisted of Mr Murray, my self, two blacks, Tommy and Harry, McNamara, overseer, six horses and a pack of hounds. We followed the same track to Coodradigbee, then up to the extensive plains of west Monaroo, called the Long Plain, Yarrangobilly, down Mt Talbingo to the Tumut River, where there was a settlement and the home of one of my passenger friends, Mrs Shelley, formerly Miss Peters.¹¹

On their return to the Murrumbidgee, we were joined by a member of a tribe, and I think we sent one of them [*sic*] on to Yarrolumba [*sic*] for horses – in the meantime we continued our walking towards home, and some of the blacks carried our saddles.'

In 1839 Mowle received a letter from Murray, dated 10 November 1839, which suggests Murray was not opposed to gathering artefacts or skeletal remains from his trips across the mountains:

Went up to Condore, Berindabella [*sic*], Coolalomine [*sic*] with Lowe.¹² Investigated caves at Arrang Arran [Yarrangobilly]. I found human bones and a skull. I took away the skull.¹³

According to Mowle, the 'native' name of 'Yarrolumla' was Arralumla. Murray used the name 'Canberry' to describe the surrounding area but does not mention in his diaries the name of the Aboriginal group local to the area. Curiously, although Mowle wrote the name 'Canberry Plain' in his diaries, he claimed the 'native' name of 'Canberry' was 'Caanberra': 'the first syllable is long – phonetically Karnberra'.¹⁴

8. Tommy appears to have adopted Aubrey Murray's surname.

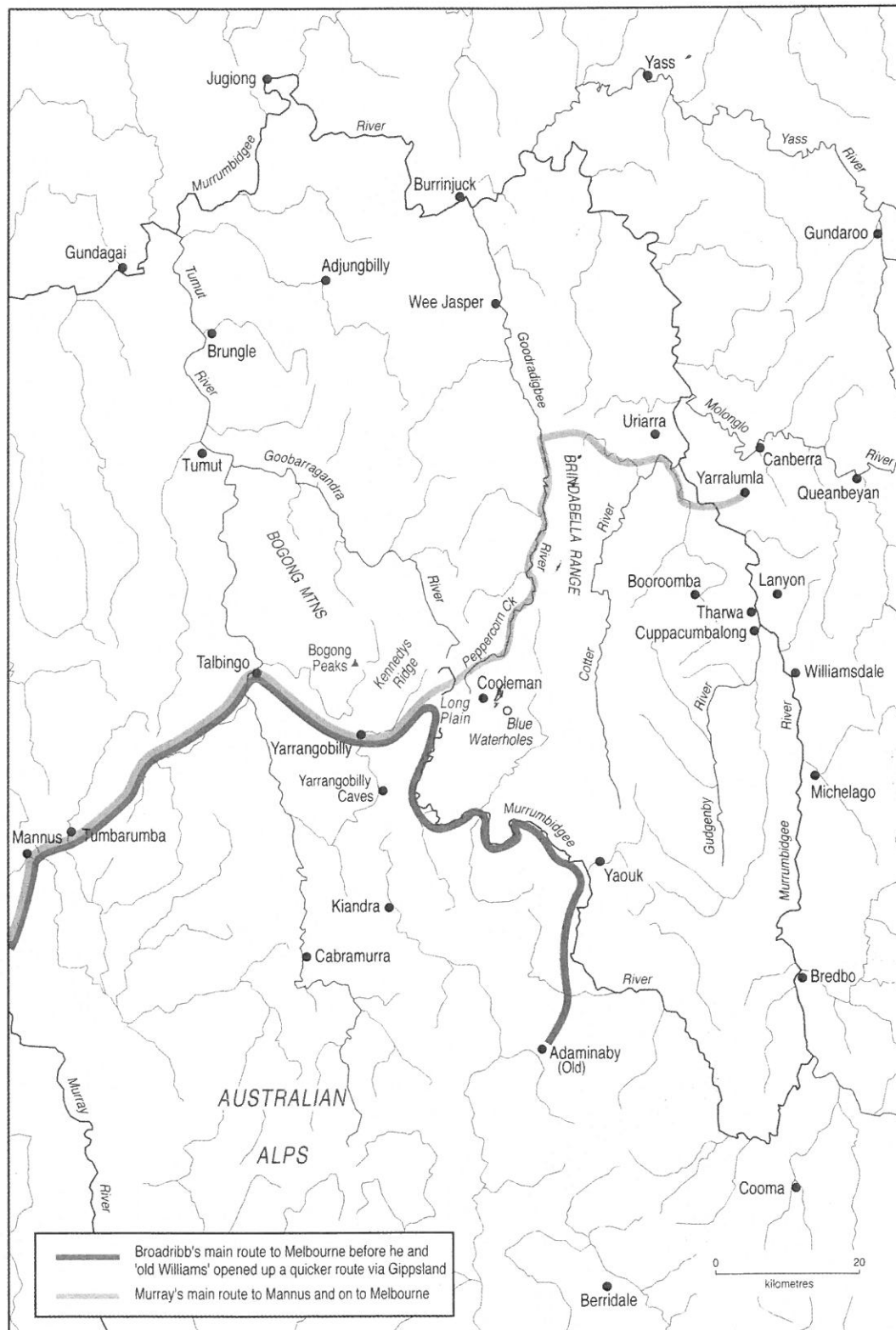
9. This was later purchased by William Broadribb.

10. Mowle, Stewart Marjoribanks, 'A retrospective journal', Mowle family papers, NLA Manuscripts MS 1042, MS 258/11.

11. *Ibid.*

12. This may have been John or Richard Lowe. The latter moved to the Monaro district. Richard and a co-worker, Henry Williams, may each have fathered a Kamberri boy to whom they gave their names. See Part II.

13. Letter from TA Murray to SM Mowle, 10 November 1839, reproduced in the *Queanbeyan Observer*, Letters to the Editor, 27 August 1901.



Queanbeyan, wrote Mowle, should be spelled and pronounced 'Cuumbean'.¹⁵ Like Murray, Mowle spoke the local Aboriginal language quite fluently and wrote down the words from two Aboriginal songs as well as some vocabulary,¹⁶ but, also like Murray, failed to leave a written record of the name of the local Aboriginal group. We had to learn from their younger contemporaries, William Davis Wright and John Blundell, who grew up with local Aboriginal children, that the name of the local Aboriginal group was the Kamberri.

Mowle remembered his early Aboriginal friends clearly even when he was an old man. They included 'Hong-Kong',¹⁷ Parramatta Jack, Fat (Buen) Jimmy,¹⁸ Tommy Murray and Flash Harry, 'with whom I used to join in their songs and some of whom attended us in our wanderings in the mountains'.¹⁹

With the exception of Onyong, these individuals were visitors from other areas – although Tommy and Harry probably identified with the Gurmäl. They may have met Mowle when he stayed, periodically, at Mannús. Parramatta Jack, with Parramatta Tom, was included regularly on contemporary blanket distribution lists for Aboriginal groups in the Illawarra-Wollongong area (see above), with whom the Kamberri had good relations. Most of Mowle's Aboriginal friends, however, were from the 'Canberry Plains' and areas to the west as far as Mannus and Tumut.²⁰ Murray had outstations or runs in the mountains at 'Coolalamine' [Cooleman] and surrounding areas as well as at Mannus.

The ease with which Murray, Mowle and other contemporary settlers such as Broadribb passed through the districts from Weereewaa as far as Tumut and Tumbarumba reflects their good relations with the Kamberri who, in turn, obviously had friendly social relations with other Aboriginal groups in those districts. Although James Ainslie was clearly the first European to establish close relations with the Kamberri, Garrett Cotter came a close second (see Chapter 1). In fact the Kamberri extended their friendship to most of the early European settlers, including Terence Aubrey Murray, at Weereewaa and areas to the southwest.

The close relations the Kamberri had with Aboriginal groups to the west, and the sometimes hostile relations that still existed at that time between the Kamberri and Gundungurra groups east of Lake George, are reflected in a particular event Murray described in his diary in 1841.²¹

14. Mowle, SM, 'A retrospective journal', entry dated July 21 1838, Mowle family papers, NLA Manuscripts MS 1042.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. Mowle referred to Onyong as 'Hong-kong' and Murray referred to him as 'Hong-gong'.

18. This may have been Bien, who grew up with Hamilton Hume and was regularly employed as a guide for Joseph Wild, Charles Throsby, Hume and others.

19. Mowle, 'A retrospective journal', NLA Manuscripts MS 1042.

20. Groups in these areas would have been friendly with, even kin to, the Kamberri, and spoke the same Walgalu dialect.

21. Murray family papers, diary record for February 1841, NLA Manuscripts MS 565.

In his diary entries between 4 and 20 February 1841, Murray records a trip he took via the mountains to Melbourne²² (see Map 12). This was a few years after Garrett Cotter had been exiled to the western side of the Murrumbidgee and the same year King Jamie Gilbee came to call on the Kamberri from Delegate.

Stewart Mowle and Charles O'Connell (another of Murray's workers) accompanied Murray from *Yarralumla* to the upper Murrumbidgee at Peppercorn Creek. Mowle stayed at the Murrumbidgee to await his return. Joined by Black Michael McNamara, his overseer at Cooleman, and Duggan, his groom, Murray followed a route that led across the Murrumbidgee, up to 'Burrowgra Summit'²³ and the 'Haunted Spring', across the high ridges of the Brindabellas and then along a rough track to Cooleman and the Wombat ground, where they slept. Next day they ascended 'Coolamine Mountain', toiled for some miles through thick forest, reached the Long Plain and had breakfast at one of Murray's outstations. They then continued across the Plain, entered more forest, and halted on the bank of the Tumut River (see Map 12).

From here, they ascended 'Bynning Mountain' and breakfasted near the dividing ranges of the Murray. After continuing this course, they entered the 'occupied' country to the west. On their way they met a large party of armed blacks, who 'were out on a warlike expedition'. Murray stopped with them for half an hour and 'was sorry, very sorry' to hear from them that 'my poor friend Harry Bondaroon ('a Hume'²⁴ River native') had been killed when on his way across the mountains to see him.

Harry had met and joined Onyong and one or two more 'blacks' in the mountains who had also been on their way to *Yarralumla*. They had reached Meeriara (*Uriarra*?) and encamped there for the night intending to head for *Yarralumla* the next day. Onyong, however, had left the party and slept in a hut on one of Murray's mountain stations, unaware that he was being hunted by Mangamore²⁵ and a dozen followers from Goulburn, who planned to kill him.

At *Yarralumla*, Mangamore and his group heard from a drayman that 'Hong-gong' was in the mountains, so they crossed the Murrumbidgee and sneaked up to the place where they were told 'Hong-gong' would be. One thing led to another and Mangamore and his men attacked Hong-gong's camp as midnight approached. Hong-gong's men 'sprang from their slumbers in a moment and darted into the thick of the forest in the wildest alarm', and all escaped except poor Harry, who received

22. The name 'Melbourne' had come into use by this time.

23. I've consulted geographers on the possible location of these two areas, but to date have not located them. Judging by the route Murray was taking, they must have been somewhere between *Yarralumla* and the Brindabella Range.

24. Hamilton Hume had named this river for his father during his trip from Lake George to Port Phillip in 1824. Charles Sturt renamed it the Murray on a subsequent trip.

25. Not much is known of Mangamore. He does not appear on any of the blanket distribution lists for groups I have identified above as Weereewaa Aboriginal communities, although Jim Smith claims there was a small settlement on Mulwaree Creek named Mangamore (see Jim Smith, 1992, p 22). I would not like to speculate.

nearly the whole of the charge of spears, and two 'gins'²⁶ who were captured. Poor Harry ran some distance but fell and died. His body was found by a shepherd the next day and was buried by him and his comrades. 'Thus fell the best black I ever met!' wrote Murray.

'Having heard this account from the Blacks', Murray then continued on his journey and reached 'Monnas' [Mannus], another of his stations, at about 3 o'clock. At Mannus he met a great many more 'blacks' who gathered about him in considerable numbers and 'seemed glad' to see him. Many were old acquaintances and reminisced with him 'all the evening until ten or eleven o'clock and ever and anon even at that hour'.²⁷ The next morning, he left Mannus and set off for the remaining part of his trip to Melbourne, returning on 15 February. He was back home safely at *Yarralumla* on 21 February.

From this passage in Murray's diary, we learn something more of Onyong's social relationships with his neighbours. He is clearly free to travel as far as Tumut and was friendly with the upper Murray River groups at this time. It is quite possible that this was because they all belonged to one group, the Walgalu. On the other hand, it is also possible that the friendly relations Onyong had with these groups were a development in the post-European era. 'Landowners' such as Murray opened up districts not only for other Europeans but also for Aboriginal groups or individuals who may have been more restricted in their travels in earlier times. It is also possible, however, that these friendships had been forged at the annual bogong moth ceremonies and it is feasible that mountain groups with whom Onyong was friendly had good relations with groups at Tumbarumba and Tumut.²⁸

Mowle managed *Yarralumla* for Murray and also lived for a time, following his marriage, on the Mannus station, moving backwards and forwards over the mountains between the properties. Since Mowle was obviously protected even in such an isolated spot, and often left his wife alone at Mannus when he had to go on a trip, the relations between him and local Aboriginal groups must have been excellent. These relations were probably established with the help of Onyong and Harry Bondaroon.

Although Murray appeared to have maintained his friendships with the local Kamberri at least until February 1841, it must be remembered that he had also appropriated for himself more than 3500 hectares of Aboriginal land at Lake George and *Yarralumla*. This did not include the land he was using for his runs in the mountains and his outstations on the Monaro and Mannus. Murray had arrived as a teenager in the district in 1828, as did Mowle a few years later, but from 1835, when he inherited his father's Lake George properties and later acquired *Yarralumla*, he became increasingly more conscious of his status as a 'landowner' and magistrate. Between 1835 and

26. The Europeans turned this into an offensive term, but it was originally the name by which Aboriginal men referred to their tribal wives in southeast Australia so I have retained its use here. No offence is intended.

27. If only Murray had left us a record of those 'reminiscences'!

28. According to Howitt, 'Tumberumba' was part of the country of the people he referred to as the 'Wolgal'. Howitt, AW, 1904, p 78.

1841, the forces of historical change in New South Wales were affecting Murray as well as the Kamberri and other Aboriginal communities throughout 'the colony'.

When Murray first arrived at Weereewaa in 1828, his only companions were his assigned servants and local Aboriginal people. At that time, there were fewer than 20 'white' women in several thousand square miles.²⁹ By 1833, he had been appointed magistrate for the southern counties. His father died in 1835 and he inherited the Lake George properties. In 1843, he married for the first time and was elected to represent the southern counties in the Legislative Council.

It was during this period that Murray began to distance himself from his local Aboriginal friends. George Augustus Robinson recorded Murray's continued distress at the actions of local 'Aborigines' who, 'a few years ago' had rounded up eight 'half-caste'³⁰ children whose ages averaged three, four and five, put them in 'a pen' near the Murrumbidgee and killed them. It may be that these children were singled out because their fathers were European men working on Murray's properties (not all the children of mixed heritage were killed). Perhaps this was a revenge attack against Murray as relations deteriorated between himself and the local Aboriginal community, on which he may have been previously quite dependent? In this context, it seems extraordinary that the meeting between Robinson and groups local to the Canberra district was held on *Yarralumla*. The gathering there at the time of Robinson's visit may have been the last time Aboriginal people camped on any of Murray's properties.

From the 1850s, Murray became more involved in politics and Mowle, impoverished, moved his family to Twofold Bay to take up the position of Collector of Customs. The first wives of both Mowle and Murray passed away during or following childbirth in 1857 and 1858 respectively. The two widowers lived more permanently in Sydney following the death of their wives and rose in the ranks of politics before they each remarried. It was left to other contemporaries to continue the stories relating to the Kamberri.

From the 1840s, the first generations of locally born children of European descent were growing up on the properties and including local Aboriginal children as their friends. William Davis Wright and John Blundell were two such children. Directly or indirectly, they left to posterity a record of the individual and group identities of the Aboriginal community in this region and told us that the name of this community was the Kamberri – also spelled Kgambery, Kembery, Nganbra and even Gnabra.

John Blundell

John Blundell, the major informant for William Bluett on the Kamberri and early settlers, grew up with Kamberri children. Bluett, on Blundell's advice, claimed in a letter to the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

29. Wilson, 1968, p 40.

30. This term is offensive. I am using it here in its historical context.

The domain of the Kgamburry tribe extended from Lake George on the east to the Goodradigbee River on the west, and from near Yass, to the head waters of the Murrumbidgee.³¹

This statement concurs with contemporary historical evidence presented earlier regarding the extent of Kamberri country. In an earlier article he had published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which was also based on the evidence of Blundell and other 'oldtimers' who knew the Kamberri well, Bluett confirmed that the local settlers knew the local blacks as the 'Kamberri tribe'.³² Bluett maintained that, as a 'lad' in the 1840s, John Blundell went fishing and possum hunting with the 'native' boys and learned to speak some of their language. According to Blundell, the 'whites' called the locality (that is, the Canberra district) Kamberri, because it was the headquarters of the tribe. In fact, said Blundell, the Aborigines pronounced it 'Kgamburry', stressing the 'nasal' 'Kgamb' and slurring the thick 'urry'.

While it was certainly the case that European settlers referred to Aboriginal groups by the name of the locality they frequented, those who did not travel much around this vast district were not necessarily aware that the 'Pialligo', 'Black Mountain', 'Ginninderra', 'Queanbeyan' and 'Murrumbidgee' 'tribes' were all the same people. It may be because Kamberra or Kamberri was the heart (rather than the 'headquarters') of their country that the Kamberri referred to themselves by this name even though their country included an area much greater than the Kamberri plain, as we have seen. William Davis Wright, who grew up with local Aboriginal children in the upper Murrumbidgee districts of Tharwa and 'Cuppercumbalong',³³ also confirmed that this group referred to itself as the Kamberri. Although the government reporters referred to the group by other names, the core 'territory' they identified for Onyong's and Noolup's groups is as I have described in earlier chapters.

There is no doubt that at the time the European settlers arrived, Kamberri numbers were much greater than in later years. Bluett, with the help of Blundell, provides a delightful though somewhat romanticised description of the peaceful idyllic existence the Kamberri enjoyed even after the first group of settlers arrived:

When the first settlers arrived just one hundred years ago, the natives were numerous. The watersheds of the Queanbeyan, Molonglo, Murrumbidgee, Cotter and Gudgenby rivers provided an abundance of animal food — kangaroo, wallaby, possum, wombat, platypus, and native cat. On the limestone plains were Wonga and bronzewing pigeons, turkey, and native companion [*broilga*]. The rivers and swamps were the breeding ground for all kind of waterfowl in countless thousands, while fish were easily procured. So that the Kgamburry tribe, which numbered about 500, had small trouble in securing its daily needs.

The natives spread themselves over the district in bands of 20 to 30, camping for a week or a month, according to the available food and the season of the year, then moving on to a new ground ...

31. Bluett, WP, 1927, 'Canberra's Blacks', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 June.

32. Bluett, WP, 1927, 'Canberra Blacks in early settlement days', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 May. I have spelled it Kamberri because this is the preference of Kamberri descendants.

33. The Wrights spelled the name of the property and area as 'Cuppercumbalong', while the De Salis family, who purchased it from the Wrights, spelled it 'Cuppacumbalong'.

It was a regular custom with all members of the tribe who could stand the journey to trek in the early spring, through Gudgenby or Brindabella, to the Bogong mountains, about 100 miles on the way to Kosciusko. Here was the home of the big brown bogong moth, which at this season of the year was to be found in millions clustered under the rocks ...

On the whole, the Kgamburri tribe was a peace-loving people. They had occasional fights with a tribe from Yass, partly through encroachments upon each of their hunting grounds, and partly for amusement.³⁴ A tribe from the Braidwood side periodically came over to see the fat, juicy breed of kangaroos on the limestone plains, and they had to be chivvied home again.

The men of the Kgamburri tribe spent most of their time fashioning their tools of war for the chase ...

At the foot of Black Mountain, north of the Molonglo River, from the new Parliament House, was the Kgamburri's favourite corroboree ground. John Blundell saw many of them. Here a clear open space under a big tree would be selected. Old King Hongkong sat in state watching the enjoyment of his people, what time a couple of wives plied him with choice morsels of duck and goanna. A big active man, he carried himself as born to the purple. A bodyguard of eight or ten warriors stood behind him, each with a spear handy in case of accident.

The early members of the Kgamburri tribe were fine athletes, fond of running and swimming, not particularly keen on regular work, but many of them, being fine riders, made excellent stockmen, and were splendid in moving stock about the mountains to good pasturage. Much of the early clearing of scrub and burning off was done by the blacks, work in which the lubras and piccaninnies took a goodly part.

The pioneers found the natives of great service in tracking down lost stock. In those days, the runs were unfenced, and stock could stray from Tumut to Goulburn ... The police, too, used the blacks' tracking ability in keeping check on the flotsam and jetsam which at that time paid small heed to the law ...

And what of the Kgamburri tribe today? Up to the acquisition of the territory by the Commonwealth there were some ten or twelve purebreds and lighter shades working in their shiftless, spasmodic way on *Yarralumla* and surrounding stations. These have either died or drifted to other parts. Canberra knows them no more.³⁵

In a paper he read to the Canberra and District Historical Society on 29 May 1954, Bluett amended his earlier stories somewhat. His statements were again based on evidence he had obtained from John Blundell and also from Mrs John McDonald, nee Webb, both of whom had known the Kambarri well as they had come to the area as small children in 1838 and 1842 respectively.

Bluett now reported that the 'headquarters' of the 'Nganbra-Pialligo tribe' was within the city boundaries. Those who camped at Pialligo (Duntroon) were known as the 'Pialligo blacks'. Those who camped at the foot of Black Mountain near 'Canburry Creek' were known as the Canburry or Nganbra blacks.³⁶ This made it seem as if there were two separate groups here, yet he said corroborees were held at Black

34. According to Jack Cotter, a descendant of Garrett, Cotter oral history relates that Yass Aboriginal groups came over and killed large numbers of Aboriginal people local to the Canberra-Queanbeyan district because they frequently 'stole gins' from the Yass area. Jackson-Nakano, Ann, 1995a, Interview with Jack Cotter, Canberra.

35. This was not exactly correct. See Parts II & III.

36. Bluett, WP, 1954.

Mountain and social gatherings at Pialligo. He claimed that 'Hong Kong' was from Pialligo and that his authority was recognised at the Queanbeyan Police Station. On the other hand, he claimed 'Queen' Nellie (see Part II) disputed his 'royalty'. Another claimant to 'royalty' was Kongwarra from Tidbinbilla. According to Bluett, Kongwarra's group may have been pushed out of Pialligo and 'Canberry'. This is all speculation.

As I argued above, the historical records provide clear evidence that only two groups consistently identified with the area that is now the Australian Capital Territory and surrounds; these were Onyong's and Noolup's groups, which later merged. It may be that, as Bluett said in his earlier articles, members of these groups spread across the mountains and plains in family units of 20 or 30. This custom might have confused early settlers and led some of them to believe there were a number of scattered and unrelated groups in the district. The historical evidence suggests otherwise.

Information on the Kamberri provided by William Davis Wright, who also grew up with Kamberri children from the 1840s and got to know the same group Blundell did, but in the Tuggeranong and Tharwa districts, nevertheless concurs with Blundell's via Bluett.

William Davis Wright

William Davis Wright was born on the *Lanyon* property near Tharwa in 1843. He was the son of James Wright and his wife, Mary Davis, who were among the earliest settlers in Kamberri country and forged good relations with the local Aboriginal community.

Wright grew up with Kamberri children and knew some of the adults as well. He died at *Edgerton*, Yass, on 25 September 1924, which is ironic since the *Edgerton* property had been an Aboriginal reserve housing some Kamberri survivors about a decade or so before Wright's death (see Part II).

Wright's memoirs of his early life from the 1840s to the 1860s provide the most detailed information about Kamberri individuals as well as the group. His book, *Canberra*, is one of the most important historical records on the Kamberri and is mostly a series of recollections of a period in which the group experienced great change.³⁷ Although, as he reached adulthood, Wright began to regard and describe some members of the group with some contempt, historians must be grateful to him for the window he opened on the Kamberri past. Most of his memories are presented as vignettes.

37. Wright, W Davis, 1923.

Re his mother and the arrival of his Davis grandparents:

The last station on the road [from Sydney] was Campbell's cattle station at 'Majura', and here a fresh thrill awaited the 'new chums' for a camp of blacks had assembled to watch the newcomers, keenly inquisitive about the most trivial matters.

One young gin, about sixteen years of age, perhaps, was much attracted by old Mrs Davis, and kept pointing her finger at her and saying: Ol' ooman, ol' ooman'. Presently she gathered that the old lady was the mother of Mrs Wright, of *Lanyon*, who was popular with the natives. Once having digested that information, she suddenly darted off alone and, as we subsequently found out, ran the whole twelve miles to *Lanyon* merely to inform Mrs Wright that her mother was coming, where she was sleeping, and at what time she would arrive on the morrow. It was a fine mark of friendship.

On the marriage of Alexander McKechnie³⁸ and Elizabeth Buss:

Weddings as a rule are not particularly exciting affairs, except to those most nearly concerned, but the first wedding in a community has always some points of interest. Such was the wedding of Alexander McKechnie and Elizabeth Buss in March, 1842. The ceremony was performed at *Lanyon*, by the Rev E Smith of Queanbeyan, to the satisfaction of all concerned and the expressed approval and wonder of the blacks, who were impressed with the importance that white people invested such a trivial affair with.

Re the Kamberry [sic]³⁹ and Kamberra

Ainslie: To Goulburn and Yass he went without success, but he heard from some of the blackfellows of Kamberry, the aboriginal name, now Canberra Plains, which he eventually found with their aid, and there he settled with the sheep ...

The property of Joshua John Moore of Acton: Granted by purchase, October 12 1833, 1000 acres and on November 24 1837, 942 acres. [Wright claims he was not the first settler in the Canberra district.] This block of land, with adjoining blocks, is really the exact locality of the name of Canberra, pronounced 'Kamberra' by the natives⁴⁰ ...

From many conversations I had with various members of the tribe I got to know them and their customs pretty well. The correct rendering of their tribal name was Kamberra. Their corroboree ground was at Kamberra, as far as I can gather the exact spot being near the Canberra Church, where the Administration Offices are now erected at Acton, Canberra and by Canberra Church towards the old *Duntroon* dairy. It served also as their general and best known meeting place.

It was an ordinary sized tribe, between 400 and 500 at the time of the first white settlement.⁴¹ In their nomadic style of life, always on the move, they carried their weapons with them, up to at least the year 1850.

Their usual battery was anything from two to six spears, some of them with fearsome barbs quite an inch in length, so that, once driven home in flesh of man or beast, extraction was only possible by driving the spear head through. As a rule, however, the spears were unbarbed, and with the 'thrower', a contrivance for throwing the spear, with which considerable force and accuracy could be attained. Then the *nulla nulla*, a weapon made of solid wood with a knob at one end and a smooth handle.

38. This is the way Wright always spelled this family name; others spelled it McKeachnie. The latter is now in more common use among descendants.

39. I am using the spelling 'Kamberri' to refer to the group and 'Kamberra' to refer to the place. This is the preference of descendants.

40. This was on the site of the former Canberra Hospital on Acton Peninsula, now (2001) the site of the new National Museum of Australia.

41. This might have included groups from surrounding areas.

There were two kinds of shields used, one for defence against the nulla nulla, a very solid affair, and a broader one to guard against spears. These shields were usually well and carefully made, with a grip on the inside to hold and manipulate the working. Add to these the invariable boomerang or two, and a primitive tomahawk made of hard polished stone, and a warrior was fully equipped.

With the coming of the Europeans and the advent of iron, stone implements were soon dropped, and are now merely curios, of which most old settlers have a specimen or two. It was the custom of the tribe to meet once a year for a big corroboree. Then they would split up into small camps of from twenty to thirty, and resume their uneasy flitting from one spot to another, living on the animal, grub, and plant life and moving on as they exhausted each place.

The style of their camps varied. If they were in the vicinity of a settler's homestead, where they could obtain meat, tea, flour, tobacco etc., they merely erected bough shelters, just enough to shield them from the rain, frost etc; but in the bush proper they could erect very good bark huts, quite warm and comfortable.

A camp was, as a rule, composed of a man, his gin, and their progeny, and, of course, half a dozen mangy curs, all sleeping together. Their bush food consisted mainly of opossum, wallaby, bandicoot, turtle, fish, eggs, and snakes — diamond or carpet — if killed by themselves.

Sinews of kangaroo or wallabies' tails were used for many purposes, especially fishing lines and snares. Their cooking and eating habits were anything but nice, but they sufficed; one example will do for many.

An opossum, when caught, was plucked, fowl fashion, opened and cleaned, leaving, however, the heart and liver. Head, tail and feet were left on. Then if to be cooked, a small fire was kindled, and on this was kept turning the roast, sometimes (not always) covering it with hot ashes. When cooked, the liver and heart was first eaten by the master of the ceremonies, after which the carcase was pulled asunder, the loin always being his share, and sometimes also the hind legs; the forequarters going to the gin and children, or if his mastership were in a well-filled and generous condition he would give them the hind legs also; but it was always the fancy bits for the man and the balance for the wife and children. If he was unlucky in his hunting, or sulky or sick, well, the gins and piccaninnies had to hustle for themselves or fill in with yams (a jolly good food, too).

An interesting tribal custom, and one strictly observed, was that of sealing, as it were, a male and female child as future husband and wife. From that time they were termed each other's snake and were supposed not to look at one another. I have often seen these bridal couples (of the future) when meeting pull a covering over their faces or turning aside, to observe the tribal law. This interregnum lasted until the tribal man-making ceremony came off, i.e., when the boys were about seventeen to twenty years of age, and a sufficient number of them available, say five or six. Then all the men together left with the boys for Jedbenbilla⁴² Mountain, the sacred place, so to speak, sanctified for that purpose. It was a very solemn affair and great secrecy observed. I never heard what the actual rites were, but the boys returned fully made men, with one tooth knocked out, then all proceeded to Kamberra for the great feast.

The ground was cleared around a big tree — if one was available, if not, a pole and boughs were arranged — and at a set time the gins entered the arena, and sitting in a circle with an opossum rug tightly stretched across their knees, made a sort of drum-like tautness. This the gins started beating, evidently as an accompaniment to what they called their singing.

Now came the men, arrayed in a perfect galaxy of decorations, skin tassels hung in festoons, faces and bodies painted with clay, white and coloured, they danced and

42. Tidbinbilla.

postured until weary, or the ceremony was concluded. Then came the event of the day, and the blushing couples, so long sealed and blind to each other's existence, were presented to each other, to begin life in orthodox style, the snaky relationship a thing of the past.

If the weather was good, the festivities may last for as much as a week. I have had many years with the aborigines, and although very little authentic is really known about them I believe what I have related to be correct ...

I am sure my first hazy impressions were of an unlimited out-of-doors and blackfellows, who to my childish brain seemed to be in number as the stars, and naturally my first companions were the native youngsters. What did it matter to me when I went bathing in the rivers, possum hunting and fishing, whether my companions were black or white. We were all just kiddies together, and at that period of life it seems that Nature was doing the fair and square thing by making all childish thoughts and impulses alike and simple, without the disturbing sex problems that are so harassing in after life.

Re Jellbinbilla, later Tidbinbilla:

Jellbinbilla (Aboriginal, *Jedbinbilla*, the place where all males are presumed to be made young men)

Re Como and Jacky:

In writing of these intimate memories, a bushranging incident, related to me by my father, comes back to my mind. Green was a notorious character, but Watson, his companion in iniquity, was considered as being merely in 'bad company'. As they were a nuisance, however, it was decided to put two black trackers after them. So armed with a gun and ammunition, Como and Jacky⁴³ set out on their errand. Picking up their tracks, they eventually came up with the pair just as they were entering the hut of one of Mr Wright's stockmen, named Conlon. Como and Jacky crept stealthily up to Conlon's hut, and helped Mrs Conlon hand them over to Mr Wright.

Re Jacky, Frank and Duke:

Some of the natives were splendid stockmen, and among them were several very fine roughriders, equal to tackling any buckjumper. Once at shearing time at *Lanyon*, there was known to be on the estate a very active plough-horse, known to be a bad buckjumper. Jacky, a native, was working with the shearers, and they chaffed him until it ended in his vowing he would ride the bucking plough-horse, and if he succeeded he would win a bottle of rum. Mr Cunningham,⁴⁴ fond of a bit of fun, agreed to the trial, and on Saturday the event came off. It was a bad horse and it had to be blindfolded before it could be saddled. However, we had everything ready at last, the bandage pulled off the horse's eyes. Jacky was sent sky high almost immediately, and, of course, came down hard, but he was after the bottle of rum and had another try and yet another. Then a fourth time, and he held on like a burr. The horse plunged some, and did all in his power to get rid of his burden, but Jacky hung on and won his battle. His hands cut about the reins, with blood splashed over him and the horse, showed what a stern fight it had been. Jack had truly earned his rum and the 10/- collected for him.

The best buckjumper I ever knew was a native named Frank. He was a drover in my employ for many years, and both as a drover and horse-breaker he was in a class by

43. These two workers may have accompanied Wright and Co from other areas when he established *Lanyon*, as they do not appear to be otherwise associated with the Kamberri. A number of Aboriginal individuals were arriving in this country at that time. They were referred to as 'domesticated blacks', which meant they were trustworthy and had probably worked for the bosses for some time.

44. The Cunninghams bought *Lanyon* from the Wrights.

himself. One native named Duke was with me droving to Queensland on one occasion, and proved a trustworthy man, one of the cleverest assistants I ever had. He was usually employed by me at dairying or general work among stock and in the paddocks.

Re Neddy, Long Jimmy, Jimmy the Rover and Jimmy Taylor:

Neddy and Long Jimmy were tribesmen, and our stockmen. And very good and careful stockmen aboriginals usually were. The two I mentioned were great cobbbers.

About 1850⁴⁵ a camp of blacks had settled where the Queanbeyan Police Station is now. There was trouble in the camp owing to a supply of liquor getting among them, and in the general squabbling the two chums fell out, and Long Jimmy killed Neddy. Jimmy speedily repented and gathered his gin, sick child and effects together, and got away to Tuggaronong [sic], about nine miles from Queanbeyan. After the runaway came the indignant camp — Neddy having been buried — and when they arrived Long Jimmy was informed that he would have to submit to tribal discipline by single combat with a male relative of Neddy's. And so it was arranged. The fight between Long Jimmy and Jimmy the Rover — the chief of his tribe⁴⁶ — was scheduled to take place in the yard about eighty yards from Tuggaronong [sic] kitchen on a Sunday afternoon. Jimmy Taylor, and another man were appointed referees, and believe me there was some excitement, over thirty Europeans, men and women, attending to admire and cheer the gladiators.

The natives, of whom there were about fifty, were very determined to see that justice was done. So at the appointed time, the two brawny warriors, clad in a slender band and a few tassels, and armed with nulla nulla and shield, strode forward, glared balefully at each other and crouched for the fray. With each nulla nulla raining heavy blows on the sturdy hardwood shields, guarding the opponent's body, there was plenty of din to prove the earnestness of their intentions, and then Jimmy Taylor called 'Time'. Alas! The Homeric combat was shadowed by the next move, for instead of retiring in dignified fashion to their respective corners and the ministrations of their seconds, they threw down their weapons and lay down side by side in an adjacent mud hole, where they rolled and wallowed like two pigs.

But Jimmy Taylor, the inexorable, once more called 'Time', and out the two mud larks jumped, resumed their swords and shields and became once more warriors —

Feeling that joy that warriors feel,

In foe men worthy of their steel.

Then that round ended, the warriors returned to the mud hole until again 'Time' was called. Four rounds had gone, four mud baths taken, and still the hearty blows, like the chopping of heavy axes, could be heard five hundred yards away, and so far — and this was an absolute fact — neither man had received a blow.

Round five was a bitter one, for Long Jimmy caught his doughty opponent one on his haughty crest, which, bringing him to his knees, gave Jimmy his opportunity, so heaving up his nulla, he prepared to administer the coup-de-grace, but Jimmy Taylor called 'Time'. So the valour went unrewarded.

Two more rounds, two more baths. Then, shameful as it may sound, Long Jimmy threw down his arms, and to the derision of the audience, who had only seen one blow struck, he bolted for the homestead, where he hid himself so effectively that he

45. It was 1852.

46. This comment by Wright suggests that Onyong was dead by the time this fight took place.

could not be found. Next day Long Jimmy, his gin and sick baby were at *Cuppercumbalong*.⁴⁷

Mrs Wright did what she could for the sick child, and the three left that night for the Oldfield's place, where Mrs Oldfield did her best to help the little thing. In spite of all the attention, it died. After burying it, Long Jimmy left for the Monaro, and I did not hear of him again, until the time of the great Gundagai floods, when he turned up and helped to rescue a drowning Chinaman. He died at Booroomba a week later.

Re Onyong:

Apropos of old Hong Kong, the terror of my childhood days, he was once caught by Mr Hall spearing a beast. For his audacity he carried away a shot through the leg which apparently did the trick, for never again were any cattle molested in the district ...

In all our games [as children], however, there was one sort of evil spirit hovering about, and for old Hongkong — the chief of the tribe — a hardbitten old aboriginal, we — especially I — had a healthy respect. I expected he was just the usual uncivilized (I prefer the word uncontaminated) type, but to the present day he is associated in my mind with old Giant Despair, or any fee-fō-fum character of my childhood's literature ...

When the whites first came to Queanbeyan,⁴⁸ Hongkong was chief of the Kamberra tribe.⁴⁹ It was not a very troublesome crowd, in fact — as related in the beginning of these notes — the old chief was the worst of the lot. Honkong's burial had some gruesome features. After his death at *Cuppercumbalong*, the men of the tribe got together, tied him up in a complete ball, then cut him open between hip and rib, and through the orifice withdrew the old chap's kidney fat, distributing it in small pieces to every gin in the camp, who stowed the treasure away in the net bags they always carried around their shoulders. His grave was on the top of a rocky hill — about a quarter of a mile from Tharwa Bridge⁵⁰ — and about five or six feet in depth. A tunnel about six feet in length was excavated and the body inserted, with his spears (broken in half), his shield, nulla nulla, boomerang, tomahawk, opossum rug, and other effects. Then the hole was filled in with stones and earth. I was very young when I saw all this.⁵¹

Well, that was the end of that worthy, with the exception that a number of years later a man named Smithie dug up the skull, and with questionable taste had it made into a sugar bowl, which I actually saw in use on his table.

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47. *Cuppercumbalong*, *Lanyon* and *Booroomba* were all Wright properties situated very close together in the Tharwa district. Wright sold *Lanyon* to Andrew Cunningham in 1847 and moved to *Cuppercumbalong*. His wife's parents were at *Booroomba* and his brother-in-law was at *Ginninderra*. All the properties still stand, as does Tuggeranong homestead.
 48. Before the Australian Capital Territory was declared, Canberra and the surrounding areas were included in the Queanbeyan district.
 49. Wright would have got much of this earlier information from his father, James Wright, who was one of the first European settlers in the upper Murrumbidgee district.
 50. This is between *Cuppercumbalong* and *Booroomba*. Up until the end of the 19th century the locals called it 'Hongyong's Hill'. It is the small hill to the right after crossing the Tharwa bridge from *Lanyon*.
 51. He was about eight or nine as this event must have taken place before Neddy Chippendale was killed in 1852. The fact that Onyong's presence or involvement was not mentioned at all suggests he had already passed away. According to Shumack and others, Onyong died as a result of a fight with Noolup for the supremacy of the group but this might have been a fanciful suggestion. Wright, who would have been informed by his father, James, if this had indeed been the case, did not make such a suggestion. Onyong may have died from natural causes. He would have been in his early fifties at the time of his death.

While the stories on the Kamberri of the first or second generation of European children were mostly from direct experience, subsequent generations often had to rely for their information on secondary sources. Nevertheless, the stories continue to provide an image of the past that we would otherwise have had to do without. We must bear in mind, however, that secondhand stories are not always accurate and occasionally become embellished with each new telling. In spite of a number of obvious inaccuracies, the recollections of Samuel Shumack and those of the people who told him stories from the days before his arrival in Kamberri country provide valuable information on the Kamberri from the 1850s to the 1860s. At the end of this period, the first generation of Kamberri to have their country invaded by Europeans had passed away.

Samuel Shumack

Samuel Shumack arrived with his parents in the Canberra district in 1856 when he was aged five or six years. His uncles had then been in the district about 10 years and told young Samuel stories about the early days. Many of the stories he tells, which are similar to but probably not as accurate as Wright's, who was a witness to most of the events he described, are hearsay up to the 1860s. Nevertheless, he includes some historical information on the Kamberri that Wright did not mention.

The Shumacks were typical of the smaller landholders who were able to make selections of 100 acre land blocks under the Robertson Land Act of 1861. Samuel Shumack Senior and Junior obtained their first selection on *Ginninderra*, which was land then 'belonging' to William Davis, William Davis Wright's uncle. The Shumacks named their property *Springvale*, which was located near Emu Bank at Weetangera north of the Molonglo River. Samuel died, aged 90, in 1940.

Most of Samuel's stories about Aboriginal people local to the Canberra district are related through the European identities about whom he wrote.

Joseph Brown, also known as Joe the Trouncer, was an early Canberra identity, one of the first white men to see Canberra in its virgin state and he was present when the great battle was fought on the plain between the Narrabundah (Red Hill) tribe and the Pialligo tribe and a visiting tribe of about 300 blacks from Cooma. The visitors were camped on Mount Pleasant [near *Duntroon*] and a few braves came down the river to challenge the local tribe. The battle lasted three days, and after minor casualties had been inflicted the visitors disappeared as suddenly as they had come.⁵²

Joseph Brown told Shumack that about 30 whites were present at the battle. Shumack regretted that he did not get more detail from him. The battle was not mentioned in contemporary newspapers and it is difficult to know exactly when it occurred or understand why no other contemporaries wrote about it, but descendants of early settlers have passed down stories of this and other battles through oral family history (see below).

52. Shumack, 1977, p 95. The 'Narrabundah' and 'Pialligo' 'tribes' were the same group. Together, they fought off the 'blacks' from Cooma — not each other.

Shumack's stories about Noolup (whom Shumack always referred to as Jimmy the Rover) and Onyong differ quite dramatically from those of Wright, who knew them. Shumack claimed Jimmy the Rover was the chief of the 'local tribe of Aborigines', although he was not a 'native' of the area. As I have explained in previous chapters, Noolup's authority had been subordinated to that of Onyong so Shumack must have been writing about events that occurred after Onyong's death. Shumack was clearly wrong about Noolup not being 'a native of the area', as the historical evidence presented in this volume suggests otherwise. Shumack's account of the fight that led to the death of Chippendale Neddy and the fight between Noolup and Long Jimmy is also mostly inaccurate when compared to that of William Wright. Shumack claims that Jimmy the Rover killed his 'rival' and that, after his rival's death, he became chief of the Pialligo tribe (Long Jimmy was not a 'chief'). Shortly after this, according to Shumack:

It was then that his roving instincts became manifest. Shortly afterwards he disappeared, and some two years passed before he again appeared in County Murray with a little white girl about four years of age. He looked after this child and she was his gin when I first met them. They often visited our home, but mother was unable to get any information from her because Jimmy guarded her jealously and she was uncommunicative in his presence. However, Mrs John Coppin learnt from some of the local lubras that when Jimmy left the locality he went to the north of the State and joined a tribe, but it was not long before they were hunted by the local squatters and many were shot. In retaliation the tribe made a raid on a station homestead and killed all except the little girl. Jimmy had to fight some of the tribe's stalwarts to save the child's life, so he fled back to County Murray, taking the child with him. The journey took some months and another blackfellow named Hong Kong had usurped his position as chief, so Jimmy had another fight on his hands. This took place at *Lanyon* and lasted an hour; Hong Kong then fled to *Cuppacumbalong*, where he later died.⁵³

Compared to Wright's account of the fight at *Tuggeranong* (not *Lanyon*) station and the death of Onyong at 'Cuppercumbalong', Shumack's stories are quite mixed up.

He also told the story of 'Hong Kong's' grave being desecrated and claimed the offending party had the skull mounted as an ink stand, whereas Wright, who saw it, claimed it was a sugar bowl (either way, it was a terrible desecration).

The last time Shumack saw Jimmy the Rover he was camped out with his group near Shumack's home at Emu Bank in 1863. Shumack heard from 'a native named Bobby'⁵⁴ that Jimmy was then in mourning because 'Ginnie' (the little white girl) had just died. According to Shumack:

Shortly after this the tribe moved out towards Yass, and there Jimmy killed another blackfellow during a fight.⁵⁵ The police from Yass [*sic*] came out to arrest him, but he

53. As mentioned above, Shumack has confused both facts and stories.

54. Bobby Hamilton.

55. Other records suggest that the fight actually took place at Braidwood. The man Noolup was supposed to have killed, Bobby Deumonga, turned up in Queanbeyan the day after the fight. Noolup would probably have been unaware of this when he died.

took to the bush and later called at *Uriarra* for rations, saying, 'Police want Jimmy — don't tell police where Jimmy is'.

These people befriended Jimmy and after a short stay he went on to *Booroomba* homestead, where he saw the McKeachnie sisters.⁵⁶ 'Jimmy bad — police want Jimmy — no tell police that Jimmy camp in such-and-such a cave', he said. When they agreed to keep quiet about his visit he said, 'You leave Jimmy some tucker at such-and-such a place and Jimmy get it there'. They faithfully looked after him for some months, and then one day he appeared at the homestead and his appearance shocked them. He was almost white in colour and said, 'Jimmy soon fall down and never jump up again — you bury Jimmy?' He then gave instructions about where he and his weapons were to be buried.

A month later the girls took his rations to the usual spot and found the previous supply untouched. They told William and Joseph Webb [*friends from Uriarra station*] who made a search and found Jimmy dead in his cave. Archibald McKeachnie told me that his sisters attended the burial and Jimmy's wishes were carried out according to his instructions. This would be about 1864 and Jimmy's age was believed to be about sixty. It is strange the authorities made no effort to trace the antecedents of Jimmy the Rover's white gin.

There were a good many males in the Pialligo tribe in 1860, of whom I remember Jimmy the Rover, Bobby, Jimmy Taylor and Kangaroo Tommy. I first saw Bobby in 1858 when the tribe was camped near our house. During this time my father saw Bobby break an outlaw horse at Ginninderra and later told me that Bobby's exploit was superb. The horse tried every trick known to the equine race but it never unseated him. His lubra's name was Nellie and they had two children — Eddie and Millie — but both died young with the measles.

According to Shumack, Jimmy Taylor passed away in the early 1860s. Jimmy was about the same age as Nanny, allegedly the daughter of James Ainslie and a Kamberri woman (see Chapter 2) and was, like her, among the first generation of Kamberri born after the Europeans arrived. He may have acquired his name from James Taylor, the hutkeeper who was stationed near *Yarralumla* in the mid-1820s (see Chapter 2). Although there is no evidence to suggest Jimmy was of mixed heritage, he might have been so. He had a son, Johnny, whose mother's identity is not revealed in the historical records. Both Jimmy and Johnny were excellent cricketers and, with Bobby Hamilton, played to great acclaim for the Ginninderra Cricket Club, established by William Davis on the Ginninderra Estate.

The Wright family had sold *Cuppacumbalong* to the De Salis family in 1856 and moved to the Illawarra district for some years, so this may have been the year when Jimmy Taylor and other members of his group moved over to the Ginninderra Estate, where Shumack got to know them. According to Shumack, whose father worked with Jimmy at *Ginninderra* and who knew Jimmy himself, Jimmy Taylor suddenly collapsed and died at Spring Creek, where he had gone with three European workers to split some oak timber.⁵⁷ Shumack said he was buried 'on the Spring Creek above the flood mark, but no man today can point out the actual spot. I know the locality but not the grave'.⁵⁸

56. The Wright family had since sold the property to the McKeachnies.

57. Shumack, 1977, chapter XI.

58. *Ibid.*

From the mid-1860s, Shumack's stories focus on Bobby, Nellie (Bobby's wife), Johnny Taylor, Kangaroo Tommy and Jenny (Tommy's wife), Nanny, Nanny's daughter Sarah and Sarah's husband, Richard Lowe, and 'King Billy' from the south coast (who eventually became one of Nellie's husbands), all of whom were known to Shumack because they were regular visitors to *Ginninderra* (see Part II). These were the main Aboriginal characters known to contemporary European settlers in the Canberra district from the 1860s after the passing of 'first generation' Kamberri characters, such as Onyong and Noolup, who had witnessed the advent of European settlement on their ancient lands. It was up to Shumack's *dramatis personae* to lead the Kamberri into the next era of change without losing their ancestral identity.

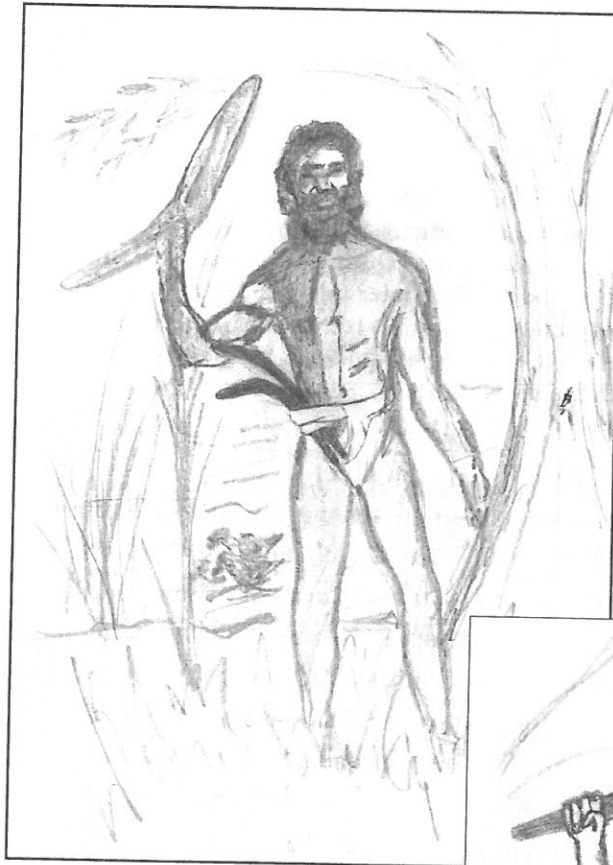


Plate 9: Portrait of Onyong

by Robert Williams,
aged 12, 2001

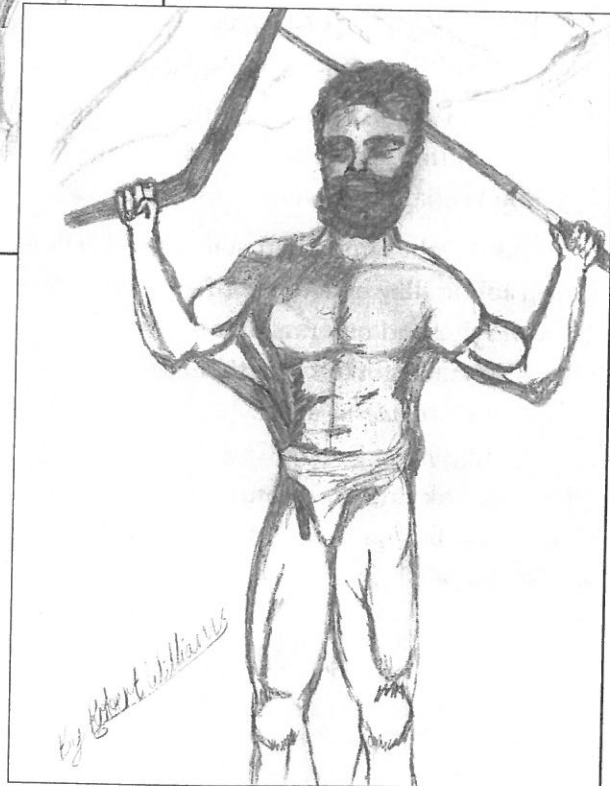


Plate 10: Portrait of Noolup

By Robert Williams,
aged 12, 2001

Summary

From the evidence presented in the first four chapters, a picture slowly comes into focus of the Aboriginal group who inhabited the district southwest of Weereewaa at the time of European exploration and settlement.

Language. The Kamberri group spoke the Walgalu dialect of a common language, possibly derived from Gundungurra, that was mutually intelligible to the neighbouring groups who spoke the Ngoonawal and Ngarigo dialects of this same language. The Kamberri retained their connection to Weereewaa groups but were also closely linked to the Walgalu. This would explain, as noted in Chapter 1, why Fred Freeman and others referred to the people between Tumut, Queanbeyan, Lake George and the upper Murrumbidgee region as one group. Freeman, like other Wiradjuri-speaking people of his time (from the late 19th century), referred to this group as the 'now vanished Gurmäl'.

Domain. Pioneer settler Joseph Franklin, whose property was in the Brindabella Range (see Map 12), related the tale of a battle fought between 1000 men, 'the Queanbeyan, Monaro and Upper Murray blacks against the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee Blacks',⁵⁹ which he witnessed.⁶⁰ This suggests a battle for supremacy between the people Fred Freeman referred to as the 'Gurmäl' and their supporters and the invading Wiradjuri. Descendants of other pioneer settlers told historian Matthew Higgins of Aboriginal graves at the junction of Left Hand Creek and Naas Creek, containing the remains of Aboriginal warriors killed during a tribal encounter (such as the one Franklin described) in the 19th century. Onyong was said to have been one of the few survivors of this battle,⁶¹ in which case it must have happened in the late 1840s as Onyong passed away circa 1850. Onyong and his group also had a vested interest in fighting back the Lachlan and (lower) Murrumbidgee Blacks from their incursions into Walgalu-speaking areas.

Relationships with others. There are many other examples of territorial expansion and contraction in the surrounding regions. Gundungurra, Ngoonawal and Walgalu groups, for example, were constantly under threat of invasion from Wiradjuri groups in the early part of the 19th century.⁶² Gundungurra groups were engaged frequently in wars with Wiradjuri groups at Bathurst⁶³ while, to the west, other Wiradjuri-speaking groups had crossed the Kalara (Lachlan) and lower Murrumbidgee rivers around the same time and had established themselves in Yass, Tumut and Albury by the

59. He would have been referring to the Wiradjuri and also, perhaps, some of their Ngoonawal supporters.

60. 'The story of an Irish Pioneer', *Queanbeyan Observer*, 17 May 1898.

61. Higgins, Matthew, 1991.

62. See, for example, Jim Smith, 1992.

63. The Wiradjuri claim this area now. See Map 1.

1840s.⁶⁴ Clearly, the Kamberri joined Monaro and Tumut groups to try and fight the Wiradjuri off.⁶⁵

On the other hand, the Kamberri fought battles with Monaro groups as well as with other groups. Samuel Shumack records the story told to him by Joseph Brown, who had been a witness, of the great battle fought on the Narrabundah plains between the Kamberri and a 'visiting tribe of about 300 blacks from Cooma', the latter, after being defeated, disappearing 'as suddenly as they had come'.⁶⁶

Onyong's group. Onyong and his group appear to have asserted their dominance and/or leadership over neighbouring groups within the first 20 years of European settlement. They must have done this by pushing further back the limits of their territory, thus giving some family groups who closely identified with those areas the option to join the Kamberri or move back further into their own country or into the country of neighbouring groups.

Change. Change, even in pre-European times, was probably no stranger to the Kamberri, although comparisons between Kamberri culture, traditions and social relations in pre- and post-European settlement are almost impossible due to a lack of information. Many Kamberri fled to the mountains on the arrival of the Europeans and eventually joined other groups down the Murray and Murrumbidgee rivers.⁶⁷ A number of subsequent generations of Kamberri followed the same tracks in later years. The number of Kamberri deaths from European diseases introduced during the first 50-100 years after the arrival of the Europeans has not been recorded, but no doubt there were many. Certainly, the arrival of European settlers in their country and the dispossession of their lands forced very sudden changes upon the Kamberri – yet, wittingly or unwittingly, their leaders did manage to negotiate the survival of a core group that stayed in or near their homeland throughout the 19th century.

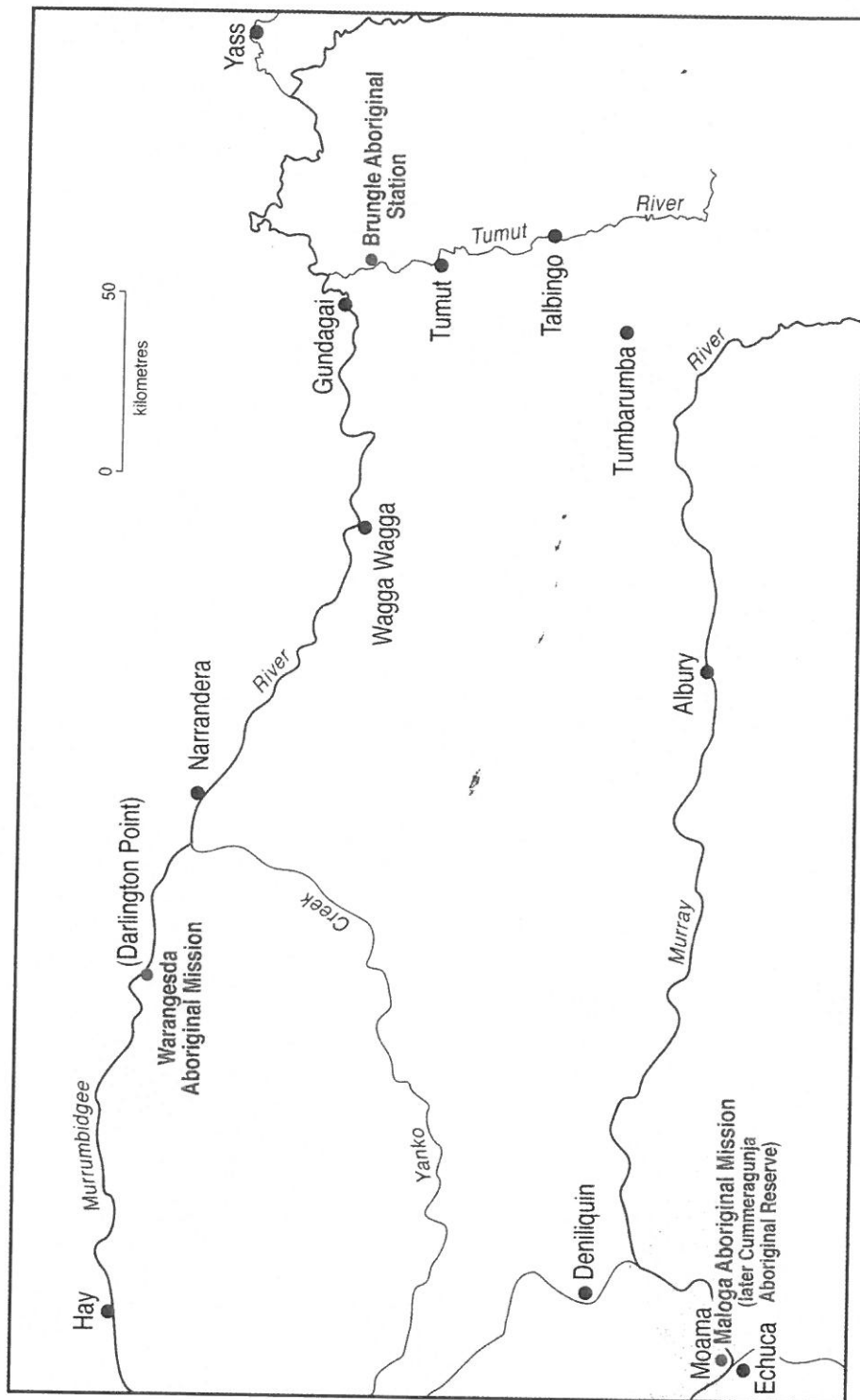
An account of the struggle for survival of the second and third generations of Kamberri is related in Part II.

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- 64. In his formal report to the Governor, Robinson noted that Aboriginal people in the Albury district spoke Wiradjuri. Mackaness, George (ed.), 1941.
 - 65. Musgrave, Sarah, 1984. Sarah Musgrave was a member of the first European settler family in the Young district and surrounds, and recorded details of Wiradjuri invasions across the Lachlan and, later, the Murrumbidgee. This is an eye-witness account and a primary source.
 - 66. Shumack, Samuel, 1977, p 95. Shumack appears to have appropriated this story and embellished it in the first person as 'Old Identity', *Queanbeyan Age* 21 March 1919. Bits of other battle stories similar to those told to Matthew Higgins have also been incorporated into this account.
 - 67. Jackson-Nakano, Ann, 1994b.

Part II

How the Kamberri
survived as the 'Canberra,
Queanbeyan and
Murrumbidgee Blacks',
1860s–1920s





Map 13: Circuit of movement among western New South Wales Aboriginal individuals and families, 1870s-1920s

Compiled by Ann Jackson-Nakano from various historical sources. Map reproduced courtesy of the Cartography Unit, RSPAS, Australian National University.