

Bitter fruit



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Australian photographs
to 1963

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with Jonathan Dickson





Foreword

I love our history, you know, the black and the white of it.

—Leah Purcell, ABC radio interview

The photographs reproduced in this book were collected over the past decade or so. During this time, online archives have grown in number and size, raising questions about what should be made available to the general public, and who should decide. At the same time, it has become easier to find information about the people who took the photographs, the places they were taken, and, most importantly, the individuals depicted.

A survey, if representative of the plethora of Australian photographs taken up to 1963, would be weighted towards the commercial, and often exploitative, images disseminated by the major firms, like those of Charles Kerry and Henry King. We underestimate, in this age in which photographs are ubiquitous, how instrumental these were in creating and perpetuating damaging stereotypes, the effects of which haunt the present.

The images included here are inevitably skewed in viewpoint, most having been taken by non-Aboriginal men. But they have a value to the extent that they show actual people in actual situations. This publication does not to aim to fix interpretations, like butterflies on a specimen board. It relies on the power of the images themselves to convey emotions and to tell stories. It is a start rather than an end point.

If this book has a purpose, it is to offer a sequence other than the familiar one, to broaden and to texture our sense of the histories of the place we know today as Australia. In these photographs, we can find evidence of wrongdoing and suffering, but also of resistance, adaptation, and continuity. Then, too, the images frequently reveal the agency of their 'subjects'—a force that can transcend the problems associated with the moment of making.

Group

Mervyn Bishop

Sydney, NSW, 12 July 1963

Bishop was born in 1945 in Brewarrina, New South Wales. In 1963, he undertook a cadetship with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, becoming the first Aboriginal press photographer. This image was one of his earliest to be published. It was taken in Martin Place, Sydney, on National Aborigines Day, which had started in 1938 as a protest against Australia Day being held on the anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet. Shown, left to right, are the Rev. Arch Grant (obscured), New South Wales Governor Sir Eric Woodward, Harold Blair, Bert Groves, and Jimmy Little. A Yorta Yorta man, Little was born at the Government reserve of Cummeragunja, New South Wales, in 1937. He was the first Aboriginal singer to receive national recognition, his 'Royal Telephone' topping the charts in late 1963. Blair was an accomplished opera singer, who performed in Europe and the United States. Born at the Government settlement of Barambah (later Cherbourg), Queensland, in 1924, he was a lifelong advocate of Aboriginal advancement. In 1962, he founded the Aboriginal Children's Holiday Project, which started with 3,000 children from Queensland and later became an interstate organisation. Groves was still more important as an activist. Born in 1907 at the Government reserve of Carroona, New South Wales, he was an early member of the Aborigines Progressive Association, becoming president in 1963. He played a critical role in the campaign for the 1967 referendum, which resulted in the removal of distinctions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the Constitution. In 1974, Bishop was employed as photographer for the newly founded Department of Aboriginal Affairs. A year later he made what remains the defining image of the Aboriginal rights movement by persuading Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and Gurindji elder Vincent Lingiari to re-enact a symbolic soil pouring ceremony out of doors, in perfect light conditions.









**Hermannsburg School artists
with Queen Elizabeth II**
Alice Springs, NT, 15 March
1963

During a visit to Alice Springs in 1963, the Queen met Rex Battarbee and six artists of the Hermannsburg School: Richard Mocketarinja, two of the Pareroultja brothers, and Enos, Ewald and Oscar Namatjira. Today, the Royal Collection includes several Hermannsburg School works. There is a long history of communication between Aboriginal people and members of the British Royal Family, an early example being a petition sent to Queen Victoria in February 1846 by a group of Tasmanian Aboriginal people living in forced residence at Wybalenna, Flinders Island. Royal tours of Australia have typically involved meetings with Aboriginal people. The first visiting royal, Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, travelled to Point McLeay in 1867, where he was received by a group of some 500 Ngarrindjeri people.



Elliot Bennett and Snowy Hill
 Sydney?, NSW, May 1950

Usually known as Elley, Bennett was born in south-east Queensland, growing up on the Government settlement of Barambah. In the late 1940s and early 1950s he was a successful boxer, winning the Australian bantamweight title in 1948. An article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (3 July 2010) notes that Bennett ought to have been offered the chance to fight for the world title, after his triumph over the American Cecil Schoonmaker in 1949. However, South African law forbade him from competing with the current champion, Vic Toweel,

a white man. This image shows Bennett's coach, Hill, bandaging his hands during a workout in advance of his fight with the American Vic Eisen at Sydney Stadium on 29 May 1950. The *Cairns Post* (30 May 1950, 1) notes, 'Every round was packed with action and there were five knock-downs. Eisen was floored in the third round. He rallied remarkably and knocked Bennett down in the fourth. However, Eisen could not withstand Bennett's fierce attack and after he had been twice knocked down in the seventh the contest was stopped.'

**Boy with Valmai Fuller
 and Elliot Bennett**
 c. 1950







Stockmen with horse
Willi Mueller
Alexandria Station, NT,
early 1950s



Apma as the serpent
Ljaltakalbala
Theodor George Henry Strehlow
Kantowala, NT, 19 June 1933

Usually known as Ted, Strehlow was the youngest child of Lutheran missionary Carl Strehlow and his wife, Frieda (née Keysser). He was born in 1908 at the mission at Hermannsburg, Northern Territory, where he grew up with Western Arrernte children, learning their language, in addition to German and English. Following Carl's death in 1922, Strehlow moved with his mother to Adelaide, where he completed his education, graduating from the University with distinction in 1932. Strehlow then returned to Central Australia, where he began his decades-long project of studying and recording the language and culture of the region's traditional owners, which he believed to be under considerable threat due to pressures such as

missionary activity, disease, and the encroachment of the railway. Strehlow maintained that only senior men born before 1900 could have received full instruction, and could thus provide reliable information regarding ritual. The subject of this image is a Northern Arrernte man, credited as one of Strehlow's primary informants. He may be the Charlie Apma whose death at the age of 65 was recorded in February 1941, in a report from Jay Creek, west of Alice Springs, where Strehlow was Patrol Officer from 1936 to 1942. In his magnum opus, *Songs of Central Australia*, published in 1971, Strehlow admits to wavering as to whether to describe the traditions of the Arrernte and Luritja in terms of the past or present. At the same

time, he clearly lays claim to the immense archive of cultural material accumulated during his years of field work, including photographs, sound and film recordings, and items of material culture. There was, of course, much history ahead for Aboriginal people in Central Australia, and Strehlow's tenure of the collection increasingly came under question. His assertion of ownership was found to contradict the spirit of custodianship under which the material was entrusted to him, and, in 1991, much of it was deposited in the Strehlow Research Centre, part of the Araluen Cultural Precinct in Alice Springs. See Hill (2002) for further information. Note: Advice regarding the reproduction of this image was provided by Bruce Breadon.





Girl and man
1930s

Group with birds
1930s

The birds depicted are probably Australian bustards (or bush turkeys).



Two women with tank
Beringarra Station, WA, c. 1915



Man and woman with shelter
Milly Milly, WA, c. 1915



Group with goats
 Roper River Mission, NT,
 c. 1914

Inscribed verso 'Harry & Bob in foreground' and 'Rev. Wilkinson'. Established in 1908, the Anglican Roper River Mission had to be relocated to Ngukurr in 1940, following severe floods.



Children
 Roper River Mission, NT,
 c. 1914

Group
Roper River Mission, NT,
c. 1915



William Barak
Coranderrk?, Vic, c. 1900

Barak was ngurungaeta of the Wurundjeri. Born in present-day Melbourne about 1824, he studied at the mission school of the Rev G. Langhorne from 1837 to 1839, and was a member of the Native Police Force in early adulthood. He was a founding settler of Coranderrk in 1863, and was instrumental in its development into a successful farming community. Barak lived at the reserve for the rest of his life, becoming its acknowledged leader. When the break-up of Coranderrk was threatened, he coordinated a sophisticated and long-running campaign of protest,

ultimately calling not only for the retention of the reserve, but also for its conversion into a largely autonomous community. Though the campaign was of limited success, it represented one of the earliest self-determination and land rights movements in Australia. In addition to his work at Coranderrk, Barak did much to disseminate knowledge about his people, and to foster cross-cultural understanding. He is best known today as a painter who created many important works. He died at Coranderrk in 1903, and was buried in the cemetery there.





Group
Point McLeay, SA,
c. 1905



Group
c. 1900

following pages

Group
WA, c. 1900



Salvationists Adelaide?, SA, c. 1889

Blind inscribed with the names of four of the subjects. George Pantuni is standing at right, Mrs and Captain Henson are seated at centre, and Ephraim McLean is seated at left. About October 1887, Captain Henson was appointed by the Salvation Army to work with the people of Point McLeay. He was instructed to 'live among them and be one of themselves'. Mrs Henson wrote, 'I feel that a good work can be done among the black women, and am quite willing to do it. We have about 100 soldiers in the camp already ... They have had to suffer the cruellest persecutions for being Salvationists. One black soldier said to us "It would be better if they would shoot us down like they used to in days gone by than treat us as they do."' This image was probably occasioned by a meeting at the

Victoria Hall, Adelaide, on 28 June 1889 to farewell Commissioner Thomas Henry Howard of the Salvation Army. A piece in the *South Australian Chronicle* (6 July 1889, 9) notes, 'The hall was crowded, and those present cheered the commissioner on his appearance. Amongst those on the platform were four aborigines from the Coorong, one of whom, named Pantuni, has just been accepted as the first native cadet to assist in carrying on the work in the Coorong and surrounding districts. The four sang a piece together during the meeting.' A well-known figure in his day, Pantuni is mentioned many times in the journals of the Rev. George Taplin of Point McLeay Mission, in the correspondence of the office of Protector of Aborigines in South Australia, and in various

of the region's newspapers. An article in the *Advertiser* (13 January 1916, 9) indicates that the Salvation Army organised a trip to England for him in the late 1880s. There he gave talks, drawing considerable crowds. His obituary, also in the *Advertiser* (10 January 1918, 5), notes that he visited Buckingham Palace and sang before Queen Victoria. This was not his only brush with British royalty. In 1867, as a young man, he was selected to read a welcoming address to Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, on behalf of the Ngarrindjeri. In 1901, he is said to have organised and led a corroboree for the Duke of York (later King George V) at Campbell Park. Early 1916 saw Pantuni operating a vessel called the *Beta* on the lower Murray River. He was apparently then in his seventies.



Woman and two Salvationists
Brisbane, Qld, c. 1888

Inscribed on mount 'Eingeborne
Australierin. 2 weibl. Offiziere
d. Heilsarmee. Alte Frau.
Aufgenommen am Seegestade
bei Brisbane'. (Australian natives.
2 female officers of the Salvation
Army. Old woman. Taken on the
seashore at Brisbane.)



Eliza and William Poole
Victor Harbor, SA, c. 1885

Inscribed verso 'King & Queen "Poole"'. This image was probably taken by surveyor and amateur photographer Orlando Bingham Hutchinson, who was long based at Victor Harbor, and who may have known the Poole family personally. The South Australian Museum holds another copy (AA 295/1/29/4), inscribed on mount by Norman Tindale, who has

identified William as a Ramindjeri man. The State Library of South Australia holds an earlier image (B 26343), which apparently includes the same subjects. A well-known and respected resident of the Victor Harbor area, William was commonly called Billy or 'Old' Poole (a son, also called William, was known as Willie). He is mentioned in the correspondence of the office of

Protector of Aborigines in South Australia, and in several of the colony's newspapers. His obituary in the *Advertiser* (30 May 1896, 4) notes that he had worked with whalers in his youth, and from them had learned to box. Little is known about his wife, Eliza. Her obituary in the *Adelaide Observer* (4 August 1894, 30) indicates that she died about 60, and was survived by her husband.

Shearers

Samuel White Sweet
Canowie Station, SA, c. 1880

The National Library of Australia holds another copy of this image (PIC/3176/52), which lacks the figures at far left. The National Gallery of Australia holds a variant (NGA 89.1593), which shows Sweet's number 633. Sweet was a sea captain and photographer. Born at Portsea, England, in 1825, he spent his early adulthood at sea, before settling in Australia in the early 1860s. By June 1866, he was advertising his services as a photographer in Sydney. Later that year, he moved to Adelaide, where he immediately began practising. Between 1869 and 1872, as a captain and surveyor, he made several visits to the Northern Territory. There he presumably met Paul Foelsche, whose work shows his influence. In 1875, a ship under Sweet's command collided with another vessel in rough weather, and he retired from the sea. He turned to photography full time and, with the aid of a horse-drawn darkroom, took hundreds of views of South Australia. His wife, Elizabeth, is known to have aided him in some of his photographic work, particularly the printing.



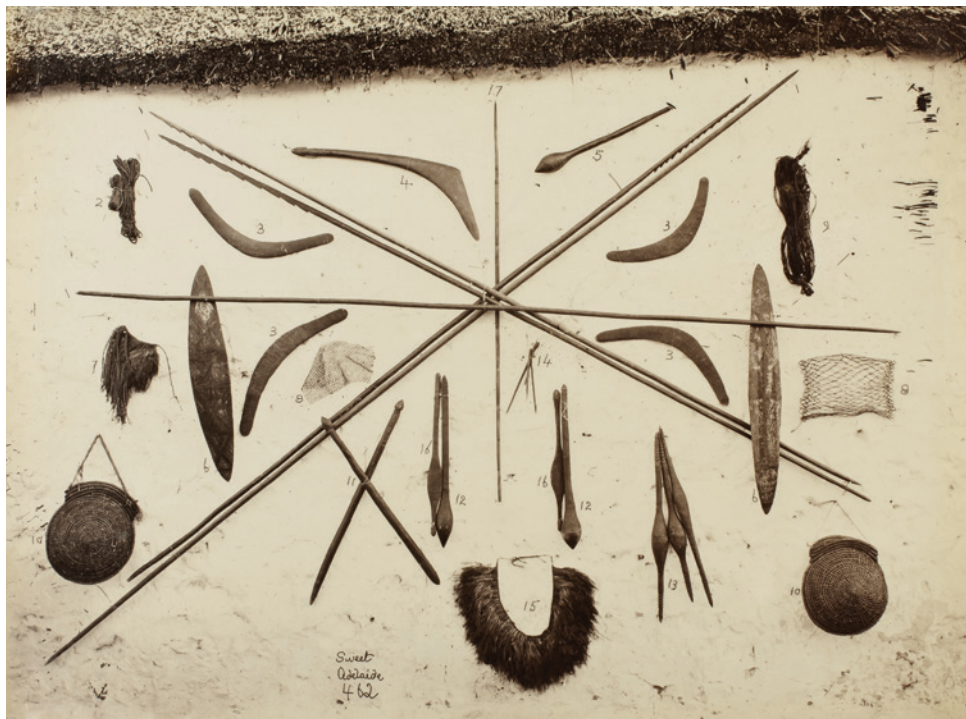




Group outside Mission building
 Samuel White Sweet
 Point McLeay, SA, 1878

The images illustrated on these and the following two pages were taken by Sweet during a visit to the Point McLeay area. A piece in the *Southern Argus* (18 July 1878, 3) reports, 'He came especially to take views of Bowman Brothers' Stations at Campbell House Park, and also of Mr. [W.] Richman's Stations at Narung [sic]. He also visited the Aboriginal Mission Station for the purpose of taking a view of it, for a frontispiece for the Rev. G. Taplin's book on the "Narrinyeri" [sic].' This image shows

about a third of the residents of Point McLeay Mission. The man prominently positioned towards the right of the second row may be James Unaipon (or Ngunaitponi), seated with his wife, Karatindjeri woman Nymbulda, and some of their eight children (one of whom was David Unaipon). James, who had been closely associated with the Rev James Reid in the early 1860s, was trained by the Rev. George Taplin as a teacher and evangelist. He was also the primary informant for Taplin's published works on the Ngarrindjeri.



Ngarrindjeri implements
Samuel White Sweet
Point McLeay, SA, 1878



Man

Thomas Bevan (attributed to)
Brisbane, Qld, c. 1865

Two men

Joseph Warrin Wilder
Rockhampton, Qld, c. 1870

Wilder apparently worked in
collaboration with his wife.







Woman
c. 1865

Man and woman
c. 1870

Girl
c. 1870

'Flora'

Francis Russell Nixon
Oyster Cove, Tas, c. 1858

Consecrated first Anglican Bishop of Tasmania in 1842, Nixon arrived in Hobart the following year. An enthusiastic amateur artist, he made numerous sketches and paintings of his diocese, as well as taking some of the earliest wet-plate photographs in Australia. This image forms part of a well-known series of photographs of Tasmanian Aboriginal people at Oyster Cove. See Gough (2014) for further information.

Lucy Beeton Tas, 1860s

Beeton was born on Gun Carriage (or Vansittart) Island, just south of Flinders Island, in 1829. Her mother, Emmerenna (or Bet Smith) came from Cape Portland in north-eastern Tasmania (then Van Diemen's Land). Her father, Thomas Beeton, came from a Jewish family of jewellers based in London. He had been a sailor in the British navy, but was sent to Australia as a convict for mutiny in 1817. Upon the completion of his sentence, in 1824, Thomas decided to move to Bass Strait, where he worked as a sealer, also receiving a comfortable allowance from his family in England. According to West (1984, 83), the family sent Emmerenna dresses until, following the death of her husband, she sent them a portrait photograph. In 1831, G. A. Robinson arrived on Gun Carriage Island with instructions to evict resident sealers

and to establish a government settlement. Thomas was removed, Beeton and her mother remaining as inmates until the Lieutenant Governor of Van Diemen's Land, George Arthur, agreed to allow the family to be reunited. When Robinson relocated the settlement to Flinders Island in October, they returned to Gun Carriage Island. Beeton was educated by private tutors, while her father taught her about business and how to sail. The government rejected a petition for a catechist and teacher in 1850, and Beeton assumed the role herself. Her efforts were praised by Bishop F. R. Nixon, who visited Gun Carriage Island in 1854 and was most impressed by the people living there. Between 1855 and 1860, Beeton and her parents moved to Badger Island, to the west. When her father died, in 1862, she took over his

business and ceased teaching. However, she continued to champion education in the islands. She initially appealed to the government through Archdeacon Thomas Reibey, agreeing that the residents would share the cost of paying any teachers, and even appointing two from Melbourne. However, the government dragged its heels. Frustrated, she established a school in a tent on Badger Island in 1871. The following year, the government finally appointed a teacher. According to Johnson and McFarlane (2015, 309), Beeton was given a lifetime lease to the Island for her services to the Bass Strait community. Subsequently, she and her brother, James, each purchased 50 acres of land. Beeton's status is underscored by her moniker, 'Queen of the Isles'. She was also referred to as 'the commodore', reflecting her role in the trading

life of the area. She frequently travelled to Launceston, in the north of Tasmania, with groups of vessels carrying large quantities of goods, including various products made from muttonbirds. Beeton was known for being a strong advocate of the rights of Tasmanian Aboriginal people. In 1872, she invited Truganini to come and live on Badger Island, but the offer was declined. She spoke out against the exploitative and 'unchristian' activities of many traders, and against the dispossession of her people by Europeans. She died on Badger Island in 1886. Although she never had children, she remains fondly remembered by the descendants of her two brothers and the various other individuals whose lives she touched. For further information, see Ryan (1996), West (1984), and Johnson and McFarlane (2015).





Map

This map shows the locations of the images illustrated in this book. For page numbers, please refer to the index.

background

Desert lilies
Murray River, 1915



Drysdale
River
Mission

Kimberley

Melville
Island
Wildman River
Station
Adelaide River
Darwin

Maningrida
Arnhem
Land
Mainoru
Roper
River
Mission
Centre
Island
McArthur River

Bentinck
Island

Aurukun

Atherton
Tablelands

Tennant Creek
Alexandria Station

Palm Island

Lake Mackay

Yuendumu

Hermannsburg
Palm Valley

Alice Springs
Kantowala

Uluru

Warburton Ranges

Oodnadatta

Coober Pedy

Marree

Trans-Australian Railway

Ooldea

Koonibba

Port Lincoln

Port Pirie
Canowie
Station

Kadina

Adelaide

Victor Harbor
Mannum
Murray Bridge

Point McLeay

Coorong

Murray River

Swan Hill

Cummeragunja
& Maloga

Temora

Orange

Dubbo

Taree

Sydney
La Perouse
Georges River

Bega

Coranderrk

Melbourne

Sale

Lake Tyers

Oyster Cove

