“That Was My Home”
Voices from the Noongar Camps in Perth’s Western Suburbs

VOLUME 2 of 2
Creative Work

by

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BA (Hons)

I acknowledge that this is Whadjuk Noongar land and recognise the strength, resilience, and continuing culture of Noongar people. I also pay my respects to Elders past and present.

A thesis submitted to Murdoch University
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Abbreviations

CNA  Commissioner of Native Affairs
DAA  Department of Aboriginal Affairs
DCNA Deputy Commissioner of Native Affairs
DNA  Department of Native Affairs
SROWA State Records Office of Western Australia
SWALSC South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council
Introduction: Noongar Camps Are Part of Our Shared History

Until the 1950s, and often later, many Noongar people lived in camps throughout the Perth metropolitan area. Camps were on the fringes of suburbs, often close to earlier, traditional campsites. Noongar people lived on vacant Crown land or the property of a sympathetic landowner, and where there was access to water, materials for building shelters, food supplies, and work. These camps are an important aspect of the shared history of our suburbs, but relatively unknown in the wider community.

We lived that kind of lifestyle, blackfellas, around metropolitan area 'til about, ooh, at least the '50s. There were some Aboriginal people getting houses around East Perth and West Perth and places like that. But say around Eden Hill, Bassendean, Bayswater, they were all camped out in the bush, same as we did down in Claremont, Swanbourne, just camped in the scrub.¹

Corrie Bodney, 2007

Figure Intro 1 Corrie Bodney at the former campsite and meeting place at Mary Crescent Reserve in Eden Hill, 2012. Photo: Denise Cook. Permission: Corrie Bodney

What is this book about?

Through the voices of Noongar people and others, this book explores histories of Noongar camps in Perth’s western suburbs of Swanbourne, Shenton Park, Jolimont, Daglish, and Fremantle. The focus is on the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, a time within living memory when many Noongar people lived in camps. In my work, I followed Aboriginal cultural protocols because the ways in which cross-cultural research is undertaken are just as important as the information that is uncovered. This was particularly relevant for me as a non-Aboriginal researcher working in the Noongar community.

The stories in this book are from oral histories and reminiscences, which I have edited, then checked and used with permission from the person or their family. Other sources include newspapers and government records, particularly Department of Native Affairs files.

This book investigates a number of questions:

- How were Noongar people displaced from their land?
- Where did they camp, and why?
- What was life like in the camps?
- What was the interaction between people in the camps and those in the wider community?
- How are the camps remembered today, both by Noongar people who have an ongoing connection to that country, and by the wider community?
- What is a respectful way for a non-Aboriginal woman to research and tell these stories?
Figure Intro 2 Dolores Fraser at Seagull camp, 1980s. Permission: Dolores Fraser

Figure Intro 3 Jetta family. Permission: Dennis, Doris, Doreen and Bruce Jetta (the Jetta Elders)

Figure Intro 4 Wandi. Permission: Joe Northover and Atkinson family

Figure Intro 5 Toopy (Bill) Bodney. Permission: Vivienne Narkle

Figure Intro 6 Fremantle family about 1863. Permission: Whadjuk Working Party and SLWA b4094689_1

Figure Intro 7 Granny Briggs. Permission: Anne Kidd and Freshwater Bay Museum

Figure Intro 8 Peter Randolph, Georgina Coomer, Beryl Hoffman, Lynnette Coomer. Permission: All

Figure Intro 9 Andy and Rose Nebro. Permission: Sandra Nebro

Figure Intro 10 Cyril Bodney. Permission: Corrie Bodney and © West Australian Newspapers Limited
The first chapter is about Perth since the Swan River Colony was established in 1829. It considers the tensions between the laws passed to displace and control Noongar people and Noongar traditional practices. The second chapter gives a detailed insight into the camps through the story of Corrie Bodney, who was born at the Swanbourne camps in 1932 and lived in camps around Perth until the 1950s. The third chapter is about the Fremantle area, focusing on the Smelters camps at South Fremantle. Chapter Four shares stories from the camps in Swanbourne and Claremont throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The last chapter focuses on the journey by a group of people to rediscover camps that they had known as children in Shenton Park, Daglish and Jolimont.

Each chapter is shaped around people’s stories, with subheadings and photos, so readers can dip in and out, and follow their interests. The book does not represent every Noongar person’s story, just the people who agreed to speak with me or allowed me to share some of their family’s experiences. Where possible, I asked permission before including people’s information so that limited the number of stories I could tell. There is much more to be said in the future.

Researching and sharing these histories helps us understand the past, and influences the ways we live together in the present. It will facilitate more inclusive community histories, for example in museum exhibitions, local history books, and signs at historic sites. Identifying and sharing photos, stories, and other information helps build connections between people, as well as preserving that material for future generations. I hope the information contained in this book will help both Noongar and non-Aboriginal people to heal some of the hurts of our shared history.
Following protocols

Many Aboriginal and other Indigenous writers have criticised non-Aboriginal researchers for not taking into account Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives.¹

In my work, I have been guided by Aboriginal cultural protocols, including the *Noongar Consultation Protocol Guidelines.*²


Following protocols included asking permission before I started this research, being guided by a Noongar steering group, and reporting back regularly to Elders on the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council’s Whadjuk (Perth) Working Party. I obtained permission from more than eighty families to use the photos and stories that are in this book. This was done by contacting the people involved or tracing and asking permission from their descendants. As well as following protocols, contacting descendants helped my work because many

people shared extra information and photos with me, and others gave their best wishes for the project.

**Who am I?**

My ancestors are English and arrived in Western Australia during the 19th and early 20th centuries. I was born in Fremantle, Western Australia, and grew up there in the 1960s and 1970s. As a social historian, I am interested in the experiences of all people in society, particularly those not represented in mainstream histories.

My first job after finishing my history degree was recording oral histories at Freshwater Bay Museum, then known as Claremont Museum. There I discovered that there had been Noongar camps at Lake Claremont until 1951. I was surprised that I had never heard about them, and wanted to know more.

In my work as an historian, museum curator, and oral historian I have collaborated in many Noongar history projects. These include recording oral histories with Elders, researching exhibitions and signage that tells our shared history, and working on the Noongar history and culture website, *Kaartdijin Noongar*. This book was written as part of my PhD at Murdoch University, while I also worked part-time at the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council.
Definitions

Noongar

Noongar country is in the southwest of Western Australia stretching from north of Jurien Bay to east of Esperance. Whadjuk Noongar people are the traditional owners of the Perth region, and are one of 14 groups in Noongar country.

There are many spellings of Noongar. I have adopted the spelling used by the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, but kept the original spelling if that is the preference of the speaker.

I write about Noongar people in the camps in the Perth metropolitan area but Aboriginal people from other places also lived there. This was generally after they had been removed from their own country for work, or sent to missions or prisons in the south. Noongar people from other parts of the southwest also resided in the Perth camps for work, to visit family, or receive medical treatment.

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Figure Intro 13 Map showing key places mentioned in text
What is a camp?

The term camp refers to both temporary and long-term structures that Noongar people built and occupied. In Noongar language they are known as karla, kwont or maya-maya.¹ The expression Swanbourne camps, refers to the general area where a number of people lived.

Figure Intro 14 Camps at Crawley photographed in the 1860s. Before Europeans arrived and in the early years of the colony, camps were made from brush, bush timber, and grass tree leaves. Permission: Whadjuk Working Party. Collection: State Library of Western Australia, 5033P.

Figure Intro 15 Camps at Herdsman's Lake, just north of Perth's western suburbs. This photograph was taken in the early 1900s as part of amateur anthropologist Daisy Bates’ research into traditional Noongar life. The camps appear to be built from bush timber covered with paperbark, and using leafy branches for shade and a windbreak. Collection: Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, MSS 572.994 B32t.
Corrie Bodney describes the camp he lived in at Swanbourne in the 1930s and 1940s:

Just an old tin shack with bits of bags and rags and I suppose that was it. … you go down the tips and pick up old tins. Used to get some of the old four-gallon kerosene tins and tin opener and open it up and make into sheets of tin. Rugs and wheat bags and chaff bags.²

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² Corrie Bodney oral history recorded for Claremont Museum by Denise Cook, 22 February 2007, 19.
Chapter 1 Background History

Claiming the Swan River Colony

One date for the beginning of my story is 2 May 1829. On that day, Captain Charles Fremantle took possession of the west coast of Australia for Britain. He did so on the understanding that it was “effectively unoccupied,” or terra nullius, and the British government did not need to negotiate with Noongar people. This was based on racist attitudes that Aboriginal people, as hunters and gatherers, were at the earliest stage of human evolution and hence did not have property rights. The same assumption of terra nullius underpinned Captain Cook’s claiming of the east coast of Australia in 1770.

1 RT Appleyard and Toby Manford, The Beginning: European Discovery and Early Settlement of Swan River Western Australia (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1979), 119.
Captain James Stirling, the first governor of the Swan River Colony, arrived at the end of May 1829, with officials and colonists. As you can see from the map, within three years Stirling had granted most of the land around Perth to the new arrivals. For every £3 of stock, farm, and other work implements they brought with them, colonists received 40 acres of land (16.2 hectares). Additionally, colonists who brought labourers to the colony received a further 200 acres (80.6 hectares) for each one. After seven years, they received title to the land if they had “improved” at least a quarter of the property by cultivation, erecting buildings and other works. Land that was required for public purposes or was not allocated remained Crown land.
Figure 1-2 By 1832, much of the land around Perth had been allocated to the colonists. The long narrow shaped blocks provided river frontage to as many colonists as possible. Map: J.M.R. Cameron, “Alienated Land, Swan Coastal Plain 1832”
Noongar people, however, already occupied this country. According to Noongar lore, they had rights to live in campsites scattered all over what is now the Perth metropolitan area.\(^6\) Connection to country also entitled Noongar people to hunt kangaroos and other animals, and collect bush foods such as warrein (bush

potato).\textsuperscript{7} As Noongar Elder, Tom Bennell said in 1978:

the Nyungars never call it Western Australia. Ngulla Boodjar [our land], they call, this ngulla boodjar, … nitcha ngulla koorl Nyinniny [This is our ground we came and sat upon].\textsuperscript{8}

Noongar names show connection to places. In the early 1900s, Daisy Bates recorded cultural information from two elderly traditional owners of the Perth area, Balbuk and Jubaitch. Amongst the extensive information she recorded was the following:

Ma’ta-garup—literally “leg deep”—was the old native fording place where the Causeway now stands. … If Shenton’s Mill [the Old Mill

\textsuperscript{7} Neville Green, “Aborigines and White Settlers,” in A New History of Western Australia, ed. CT Stannage (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1981), 88-89; Daisy Bates, Aboriginal Perth, 51-52.

in South Perth] is to be kept intact, its old native name–Kareenup–might be given to the site.⁹

“Gabbi darbal” was the name given to Perth (or any) estuary. Round about the gabbi darbal were many camping grounds or “fires” (kala).¹⁰

Figure 1-5 Jubaitch and his family with Daisy Bates at Bellevue, near Midland, on the eastern outskirts of Perth, in the early 1900s.
Jubaitch has a long white beard and is sitting in the centre, with Daisy Bates behind him. Permission: Noel Morich. Collection: Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, MSS 572.994 B32t

**Tensions**

The tension between both groups’ claim to this country was expressed in different ways over time. In the early years, there were spearings, shootings and thefts. Later police and welfare officers removed children from the “undesirable” camp environment.¹¹ Noongar people set up camps where it

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¹¹ See Mary Inman’s story in the Fremantle Camps chapter.
suited them best and at times local government demolished camps.\textsuperscript{12} Many of these stories are in the chapters that follow.

In the early 1830s, British colonist John Butler often reported large groups of Noongar people gathering on his property.\textsuperscript{13} This was a traditional campsite in what is now Peppermint Grove in Perth’s western suburbs. The land contained fresh water springs and was next to the river, features desirable to both Noongar people and the new colonists. In February 1832 Butler wrote to Governor Stirling asking for soldiers for protection after Noongar people almost burnt down his house and then broke into his workers’ cottage.\textsuperscript{14} Burning land was a traditional Noongar practice to promote new growth and drive animals into the open for hunting.\textsuperscript{15} However, it was not acceptable for the settlers whose homes were put at risk. Generally, Butler attempted to maintain peaceful relations by supplying Noongar people camped on his property with rations. Butler also reported that in January 1833, a large group of Noongar people fled to his property for safety, after Europeans fired on them without provocation in

\textsuperscript{12} See the Smelters camps and Swanbourne camps chapters.
\textsuperscript{14} John Butler to Governor James Stirling, 18 February 1832, CSO 20/132 cited in Bolton and Gregory, \textit{Claremont}, 8.
the Dalkeith area. Nevertheless, conflict arose again in 1834 when Noongar people tried to take his larger animals, spearing the last of his pigs and setting dogs on his goats and cattle.

In 1840, Governor Hutt appointed a town constable and official interpreter, Francis Armstrong. Armstrong’s duties included seeing that Noongar people “covered their nakedness when approaching Europeans,” did not carry spears or fight in Perth, and did not put up camps or light fires on the roads or paths in the town. In this way, Noongar people’s access to traditional country and practices was restricted even in public places.

This type of European intervention continued. As recently as 1978, a police patrol moved on a group of Aboriginal men for being disorderly in a public place. They had lit a fire to cook turtles caught in the lakes at Hyde Park just north of Perth city. Around that time, an elderly Aboriginal man recalled that Hyde Park used to be:

a main camp … An olddays living ground. Meeting place. People from York, Northam, right back through the hills came there to camp. Used to follow food and caught plenty of turtle there.

Laws to control

The new settlers enacted laws to govern the colony through the parliament. The most controlling pieces of legislation were the Aborigines Act, 1905 and its even more draconian successor, the Native Administration Act, 1905–1936. These laws determined many aspects of Noongar people’s lives in towns and

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16 Butler to Colonial Secretary, 16 January 1833, CSO 26/42 in Bolton and Gregory, Clarendon, 8.
18 CSO 1840, 83/20, quoted in Green, “Aborigines and White Settlers,” 90.
19 Rory O’Connor, Corrie Bodney and Lorna Little, “Preliminary Report on the Survey of Aboriginal Areas of Significance in the Perth Metropolitan and Murray River Regions,” Unpublished report for the Centre for Prehistory at the University of Western Australia, 1985, 34.
20 Laws aimed at Aboriginal people included The Aborigines Protection Act, 1886; the Aborigines Act, 1905; the Native Administration Act, 1905-1936; the Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act, 1944 and the Native Welfare Act, 1963. Other laws had provisions aimed at Aboriginal people, such as the Publicans Act, 1843, which prohibited the sale of “distilled or fermented liquor to any Aboriginal native for the use of such native.” (Section 1)
around the camps. They were altered many times but not repealed until 1963.\textsuperscript{22} There is a good description of laws that affected Noongar people on the Australian Human Rights Commission website 
https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/site-navigation-21.\textsuperscript{23} Particularly from the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth centuries, laws restricted Noongar people’s rights by specifying more restrictive conditions than those applied to the general population.\textsuperscript{24} Non-Aboriginal people, for example, were able to buy alcohol, live where they chose, and care for and make decisions about their children, while Noongar people generally could not. Noongar people found many ways to avoid the laws, but much tension between Noongar people and colonists arose from Noongar resistance to these laws.

### Removing children

A.O. Neville was Chief Protector of Aborigines from 1915 until 1940. He was influential in developing government policy to assimilate Aboriginal people of mixed descent into the wider population. This was to be done through training children to become domestic and farm workers and controlling marriages to “breed out the coloured population”.\textsuperscript{25} Under the *Aborigines Act*, 1905 the Chief Protector was the “legal guardian of every aboriginal and half-caste child until such child attains the age of sixteen years”.\textsuperscript{26} The 1936 Act extended this control further, extending the definition of “Aboriginal” to children who had “one-quarter (‘quadroon’) Aboriginal blood”.\textsuperscript{27}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[26] *Aborigines Act*, 1905 Section 8.
\item[27] *Native Administration Act*, 1936, Section 2.
\end{footnotes}
The Commissioner shall be the legal guardian of every native child notwithstanding that the child has a parent or other relative living, until such child attains the age of twenty-one years.\textsuperscript{28}

This control was used to remove children from camps to missions and government-run settlements. The aim was to bring them up away from their Noongar culture so that they could assimilate better into non-Aboriginal society. For example, Lynnette and Georgina Coomer, whose story is told in the Shenton Park camps chapter, were removed from their parents to a mission when they were only seven and five years old.

The Chief Protector of Aborigines, A.O. Neville, defended his policy of removing children from camps in his evidence to the 1934 Moseley Royal Commission.

I say emphatically there are scores of children in the bush camps who should be taken away from whoever is looking after them and placed in a settlement … If we are going to fit and train such children for the future they cannot be left as they are. … I want to give these children a chance.\textsuperscript{29}

However, as Bernadette Kennedy points out in the book she wrote jointly with Rene Powell about Rene's removal from her family, by 1959, a senior official from the Department of Native Welfare could see another side to this.

The obvious physical advantage of having the children raised and educated in the Missions, instead of the squalor and neglect of the camps, has, I am afraid, tended to overshadow the tremendous psychological disadvantages to the individual children of denying them the emotional security of family love and acceptance.\textsuperscript{30}

This has been well documented in accounts of the stolen generations and is referred to in several stories throughout this book.

In prosecuting someone under the \textit{Aborigines Act}, 1905, it was sufficient to simply state that the person was Aboriginal or half-caste unless there was evidence to prove otherwise.\textsuperscript{31} For Mary Sargeant, later Inman, whose story is

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Native Administration Act}, 1936, Section 8.
\textsuperscript{29} AO Neville, oral evidence to the Moseley Royal Commission, 1934, cited in Pat Jacobs, \textit{Mr Neville} (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1990), 235.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Aborigines Act}, 1905, Section 52.
told in the Fremantle camps chapter, the struggle to keep her family together depended on arguing in court that she was not Aboriginal as defined by the Act.

In 1915, an Aboriginal settlement was established on a reserve at Carrolup, near Katanning, south of Perth. In 1917 the notorious Moore River Native Settlement was established on a reserve near Moora north of Perth.32 These, along with church missions, became places of incarceration for Noongar people. Escapes, especially from Moore River, were punished.33 The 1905 and 1936 Acts both stated that Aboriginal people could be moved from where they were camping to a reserve, or from one reserve or district to another, and then kept there.34 This included forcing Noongar people to go to Moore River Native Settlement or be sent from the city back to the country.

Figure 1-7 Children at Moore River Native Settlement, early 1930s. Permission: Yued Working Party. Collection: State Library of Western Australia, 4965B/29

32 Reserve number 9089 and 16370 for Carrolup; 16833 and 17702 Moore River Native Settlement in Anna Haebich, For Their Own Good: Aborigines and Government in the South West of Western Australia, 1900-1940, 2nd ed., (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1998), 379-380.
33 Michael C Howard, Aboriginal Politics in Southwestern Australia (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1981), 17.
34 Aborigines Act, 1905, Section 12; Native Administration Act, 1936, Section 12
Noongar people move to Perth in the 1930s

In the early 1930s, the Depression and collapse of the rural economy in WA made it very difficult for Noongar people to support their families. Like non-Aboriginal workers, many moved from the country to Perth in search of work. While there had been 110 Aboriginal people in Perth and Fremantle in 1901, the numbers had dropped to 39 in 1929 but rose again to 154 in 1934. These statistics only count Aboriginal people who were controlled by the Aborigines Act, 1905 so those who were judged less than “half-caste” were not included.

As part of efforts to reduce the numbers of Aboriginal people living in the metropolitan area during the Depression, Mr Taylor, a clerk in the Department of Native Affairs, was sent in 1937 to inspect the camps around Perth. In his report, Taylor described who lived in each camp, what “caste” they appeared to be, whether they were working, and if so where, the age of the children, any health problems suffered by family members, sanitary arrangements, what the camp was made from and the condition in which it was kept. He made recommendations about which people should be moved to Moore River Native Settlement and told those who had come from the country that they had to return home. After writing in detail about the people and conditions in each camp, Taylor summarised his findings by district. While not all these removals were followed through, the report indicates the level of control the Department exerted over Noongar people in the camps.

- Fremantle – no action required.
- Claremont/Swanbourne – Action not warranted unless it is intended to make drastic clearance of natives.
- West Subiaco [Shenton Park] – complete disbandment.
- Jolimont – complete disbandment.
- North Perth and Tuart Hill – Removal of … and his family.
- Guildford and Caversham – Removals where recommended. This is a very old “settlement” and most of the natives are law abiding and give no trouble (this is supported by the Police).

35 1901 Census, cited in Haebich, For Their Own Good, 9.
36 Haebich, For Their Own Good, 284-5, 292.
37 Department of Native Affairs, file 105/37, Native camps in the Metropolitan Area – Reports on Inspection of by Head Office Inspector, SROWA, Cons 993, fol.1-10.
Corrie Bodney remembers a raid on the Bassendean and Guildford camps around the 1930s.

Native Welfare Department made a sort of raid on the camps and in the Bassendean and Guildford areas and all people who weren’t working, unemployed and things, they just grabbed them all, kids who didn’t go to school, and just chucked ‘em in a big sort of cattle trucks and took them all up to Moore River Settlement. And ‘cause two of my sisters were rounded up at my grandmother’s place and they grabbed them too, and my aunty and chucked them all on a truck and took ‘em up to Moore River.

… my mother, she went up there and run away with them. She got on a train and went to the Mogumber Siding and jumped out and snuck into the Moore River Settlement at night and went into the camps along the river side, along the Moore River. And of course she asked an old lady there about her girls because she was one of the old ladies that got knocked off from Guildford too. … And she told them what dormitories they were in. And of course she waited ‘til nightfall and she snuck in and got them out and took off and headed for the coast from the Moore River Settlement along the river.

… And she walked for days and ‘cause they came out looking for them … and ‘cause [the tracker] was trying to track ‘em down because … mother was a bit smart and ‘cause when they come out of the river, she’d say look, you know, in the sand plain country, walk backwards, you know, don’t walk forward, just walk backwards. And ‘cause she fooled him with her tracks and they thought that she was going the opposite way, but she was going back the other way. She’s too clever for him. And they’s climbing the trees and watching and having a good laugh because they see him on horseback with the Superintendent and trying to track ‘em down but they’re going the wrong way. She come right back to the coast and come right back to Swanbourne, to the camps.39

38 DNA, 105/37, Native camps in the Metropolitan Area, SROWA, Cons 993, fol.1-10.
Relationships

The 1905 and 1936 Acts restricted relationships between Noongar and non-Aboriginal people. For example, non-Aboriginal people could not be within 5 chains (100 metres) of an Aboriginal camp or reserve and so could not visit or live there.¹ This aimed to prevent sexual relationships between non-Aboriginal men and Aboriginal women, in an attempt to maintain the purity of the white race.² As is clear from Beryl Anderton’s story in Chapter 5, the legislation made other kinds of friendships difficult as well.

Despite the restrictive legislation, there is a long history of Noongar people camping at or near traditional campsites on privately-owned land. Often this was in return for work on the property, but in other cases it was out of friendship or recognition that Noongar people belonged on that land. For example, from the 1840s, the Hamersley family owned property containing important traditional campsites near the Swan River and Bennett Brook, north of Success Hill in Bassendean. Like a number of other landowners in the Swan Valley, they had Noongar people working for them and allowed others to camp there. The Swanbourne camps chapter also has stories about camps on private land, including Granny Briggs’ property. Trevor Walley offers another perspective on this, describing his grandfathers as slave labour living and working on private land.

So I used to sit round campfires with the grandfathers, and they were slaves to the people that enabled them to live there, because they worked for them. So I saw slavery and I used to sit and listen to the old people talk. And we come from slavery, it was slavery; if you didn’t work, the kids were taken away and removed.³

In both traditional and recent times, many camps were located near rivers and swamps. One such example was the camp at what is now Mary Crescent Reserve in Eden Hill east of Perth. The rising ground around the swamp was an important meeting place and camp from the 1920s until houses were built in the

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¹ Aborigines Act, 1905, Section 14, 36 and 43; Native Administration Act, 1936, Section 14, 39 and 46.
² Editorial, The Bulletin, 1901, in Milnes, From Myths to Policy, 44-5.
area in the 1950s.

[T]his was one real famous meeting place. Nyungars never used to camp in the swamp there; just in the hills around. They had their water wells dug on the other side of the hills. All houses now. Used to play two-up here, and cards. Used to hold corroborees too.\(^4\)

![Figure 1-8 Mary Crescent Reserve in 2012, looking towards where Corrie Bodney remembered the two-up games in the 1930s and 1940s.\(^5\) Photo: Denise Cook](image)

**Exemption from the legislation**

It was possible for Noongar people to obtain an exemption from the 1905 and 1936 Acts if they were considered to be living in the same way as others in non-Aboriginal society.\(^6\) However, these were difficult to obtain and could be revoked. For example, between 1937 and 1944, 276 exemption certificates


\(^5\) Corrie Bodney, oral history recorded by Denise Cook, 24 February 2012, 3.

were granted and 75 were revoked.\(^7\)

In 1944, the *Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act* made it slightly easier for Noongar people to become citizens of Western Australia.\(^8\) They had to sign a statutory declaration stating that for the past two years they had not associated with other Noongar people except for immediate family, provide two written references from “reputable citizens” regarding their “good character and industrious habits,” and have an honourable discharge from the armed forces or otherwise be a “fit and proper person”.\(^9\) If granted:

\[
\text{the holder of a Certificate of Citizenship shall be deemed to be no longer a native or aborigine and shall have all the rights, privileges and immunities and shall be subject to the duties and liabilities of a natural born or naturalised subject of His Majesty}.\(^{10}\)
\]

These were the same rights that Noongar people had in the early days of the colony but which had been gradually taken away by legislation in the intervening years.\(^{11}\)

### More recent legislation

From the 1950s, assimilation into the non-Aboriginal population was aim of government policy. As in the wider population, the ideal was nuclear families living in suburban houses with children at school, fathers at work and mothers at home.\(^{12}\) There was a push to close the camps and move people in to houses, which is discussed in the Fremantle and Swanbourne camps chapters.

In 1963 the *Native Welfare Act* repealed the 1905 *Act* and its various amendments, including the 1936 *Act*. At last, Noongar children were again the responsibility of their parents rather than the Commissioner of Native Welfare.


\(^8\) From 1954, citizenship was extended under certain conditions to anyone who had received an honourable discharge from the armed forces.\(^9\) *Native Administration Act Amendment Act*, 1954, Section 2.

\(^9\) *Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act*, 1944, Section 4.

\(^10\) *Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act*, 1944, Section 6.


In recent times, the *Aboriginal Heritage Act, 1972* and the *Native Title Act, 1993* have made it a legal requirement for anyone wanting to develop a site that may be significant to consult local Noongar people first. This means that Noongar people are paid a consultant’s fee to provide information about the site and advise whether the development may go ahead. While this is only a recommendation and the minister approves most applications to damage a site, it has raised awareness of the Noongar heritage of Perth as well as offering financial recognition of Noongar people’s knowledge. As a result of this legislation, many former campsites in the metropolitan area have been registered as heritage sites.
In recent years, Noongar people have been more vocal about their displacement from the land. A 54 year old woman, speaking in 1989 at the protest over the development of the former Swan Brewery site, expressed it succinctly:

The white fella have their land but it not belong to them. It’s ours and it always will be ours. No matter what the white fella do. He build his house and plant his trees and it still Aboriginal ground.
He can build it up and pull it down, he can never take away Aboriginal land.\textsuperscript{13}

Louise Walsh, nee Bodney said it a different way. “It was yours once and somebody takes it away. We still do [think it’s ours], it’s in your soul, it’s magical.”\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} Ansara, Martha, \textit{Always Was, Always Will Be} (Sydney: Martha Ansara, 1989), 70.

\textsuperscript{14} Louise Walsh, phone conversation with Denise Cook, May 23, 2013. Permission: Louise Walsh.
Chapter 2 Corrie Bodney’s Story

Why Corrie’s story?

Born at the Swanbourne camp in 1932, Corrie lived in camps in the Perth metropolitan area until the 1950s. At that time, he moved with his wife Violet Mippy and children into a house in Eden Hill. Corrie is widely respected for his knowledge of Aboriginal heritage around Perth. He has been involved in protecting Aboriginal sites here since the Aboriginal Heritage Act was passed in 1972.

I first met Corrie in 2006 during Aboriginal consultation for the housing development at the former Lakeway drive-in at Lake Claremont. Lake Claremont is a registered Aboriginal site so Elders with connections to that country were asked for their views about whether the land should be made available for housing.

I worked at Freshwater Bay Museum, part of the Town of Claremont which was doing the development. I was keen to know more about the camps, both for my own interest, and to have a more representative history in the town. The Town of Claremont wanted to include information about Noongar history in signs at the housing estate. I recorded several oral histories with Corrie, his brother Toopy Bodney, and Robert Bropho, all of whom had grown up in camps around Lake Claremont. Afterwards, I stayed in contact with Corrie and recorded oral histories for other projects as well.

This story is drawn from the oral histories I recorded with Corrie at that time and more recently. It is almost entirely in his words but I have chosen the stories and sometimes edited his words to link them together or to take out the question I asked him. Corrie has listened to me read back the chapter, thinks it is good and is happy for me to use it.
Corrie’s story

My name is Christopher Robert Bodney, but my blackfella name is Koori. Koori here means a spider, because when I was born I had extra long legs and arms, so they called me Koori. When I went to school in Swanbourne and the teacher asked me what my name was and all I knew was Koori – she couldn’t say Koori. So anyway she says Corrie, so now they call me Corrie, you know.¹

I was born on the first or the second of November in 1932. It was night-time so they didn’t know what time it really was. But my Dad told me it was on the day the Melbourne Cup was run in 1932 and a horse called Peter Pan won the

¹ Corrie Bodney, oral history recorded for Claremont Museum by Denise Cook, 18 January 2007, 1.
Melbourne Cup.²

![Peter Pan with jockey Darby Munro, 1934. One of Australia's greatest racehorses, Peter Pan won the Melbourne Cup in 1932 and 1934.³ Collection: Leshaigh (Family Collection), via Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PETER_PAN_III_VRC_MELBOURNE_CUP_1932_6_1934.JPG)

I was born in the bush off Alfred Road and what they call Narla Road now. It’s where the Swanbourne Primary School is now built. It was Crown land in that part of the country. We just camped all through it, and it’s been a camping ground for thousands of years, you know, of Aboriginal people there.⁴

We moved from place to place – moved into Neil’s paddock close by, because he had a pump there. We moved round and round until they bulldozed the camps down and then we moved to Bold Park on the corner of Rochdale Road

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² Corrie Bodney, oral history, 18 January 2007, 1.
⁴ Corrie Bodney, oral history, 18 January 2007, 1.
and Stephenson Avenue.⁵ After we left there we went over to Jolimont and camped there a while,⁶ then went over to Daglish, Shenton Park, you know all around that area there. One bush camp to another bush camp. As they started to develop here, we'd move somewhere else.⁷

We really enjoyed life in the bush, you know, we were bred and born to live in the bush, because things were just sort of free and easy, we could do what we wanted to do.⁹ You got no commitments, you know, you don’t pay rent, you don’t pay gas, you don’t pay electricity. You don’t have to pay for water.¹⁰

Figure 2-3 This fig tree (right) was planted by Corrie’s mother Melba Bodney when they lived at the Stephenson Avenue camp in the early 1950s.⁸ Photo: Denise Cook, 2013

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⁵ Corrie Bodney, oral history, 18 January 2007, 1.
⁷ Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 40.
¹⁰ Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 37.
Our camp

Our camp was made of scrubs and sticks and bits of tin we picked up here and there, old hessian bags, and so on. Just a pair of old sticks put up, and just sort of made us some sort of framework to put the other piece across in the forks. And just put the other boughs across and made some kind of little bit of a roof thing. Put tin or bag on top of the boughs. So, it was pretty rough. No beds, just lay on the sandy ground. We had some old blankets and stuff to keep warm, because years ago you used to be able to get some government blankets and rations I think from the Native Welfare Department.\textsuperscript{11}

The tip used to be like a shopping centre where we’d go to get a lot of stuff. Wire, sometimes clothes, and all. Everything else, things that people threw away, we’d pick it up.\textsuperscript{12}

We had open fires for cooking and my mother ended up getting some old pots and pans from the lady she used to work for.\textsuperscript{13} Mum used to make dampers and stews and ’cause we used to come in to Claremont to the fish shop and buy all the fish bones and fish heads and used to cook them up. Get the sheep heads and pig heads at the butchers. Flaps, that used to be our main food, the old flaps, you know, ’cause used to be cheap, but they used to be good meat for us.

\textsuperscript{11} Corrie Bodney, oral history, 18 January 2007, 4-6.
\textsuperscript{12} Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 13.
\textsuperscript{13} Corrie Bodney, oral history, 18 January 2007, 6.
Vegies were mainly potatoes, onions, some tomatoes. Dad used to grow onions himself in the bush. He’d make a garden nearly everywhere we moved. We used to eat onions like apples, we loved raw onions. The only time we used to get fruits was when you come and say to your mother, used to be working, some of the people had fruit trees growing in their yards, they used to let us get a few apricots or plums and things like that.¹⁵

For lighting, Mum used to make fat lamps. They were made out of fat from the butcher, and soap. She used to mix it all up and put a bit of a wick, like a bit of old blanket stuck in the middle. There was a strip of blanket wrapped around the outside of the fat.¹⁶

Some of the non-Aboriginal kids used to come back to the camp and play me marbles. There’s one boy now, his name is Ronny Burrows, we’re both in our

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¹⁶ Corrie Bodney, oral history, 18 January 2007, 6-7.
seventies and we used to be kids over here, ten year olds, having a play at
marbles and things. We still have a laugh and a joke about what happened – if I
beat him it was all right, but if he beat me, I'd chase him back to Allen Park.17

Old Granny Briggs was very good to Aboriginal people. We always went into the
yard with her. She always used to give us cold water, stuff like that if we was
passing through, like coming into town to Claremont or something like that. Call
in and have a drink of water. Sometimes she’d give us a scone or something.
But she was an old battler lady herself, fair age she was too.18

Wartime

During the war the Army personnel used to come through the bushland
between Narla Road and West Coast Highway and do a lot of sham fighting,
pretending they’re at war and things like that. Even a lot of the American
soldiers and that used to come through there too, and Australian soldiers. And
they used to march along on the Alfred Road and we’d be all sitting up there
with these kids singing songs: “All the soldiers live on bread and jam –”.19

Round the war time period there was a few problems ‘cause a lot of the
American sailors and seamen used to come out to the camp. ‘Cause a lot of
Aboriginal girls used to come down from around Guildford and Bassendean
area and get tangled up with the sailors and stuff like that. ‘Cause that’s how the
problem started ‘cause then the girls started fighting amongst each other. My
mum and dad used to tell the girls to behave themselves, you know, and don’t
fight around that place and things like that because it was bad. Because the
police used to come out now and again and sort of break things up. So they
said, “Don’t cause too much trouble”.20

The Americans always had the grog and stuff, and cigarettes. I remember some
of the girls smoking Lucky Strike I think it was, some American cigarette, or
Camels cigarette. The girls used to have a good time. They used to like having

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17 Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 44.
19 Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 47.
a good time because the sailor would spend money on them, buy things for them. Take them down into the town to do the shopping. When they went out at night they couldn’t so much go in the city; mostly they’d go down to Fremantle. It wasn’t so bad down there because the seamen, all the ships were there. And I think the police were a bit tolerant with some of the American sailors. They used to have their own sort of police, what do they call them? Shore patrols, or something like that.21

**Guildford area, Mary Crescent on the weekends**

We used to have big turnouts around the Guildford area, what you call Mary Crescent, on the weekends. Because it used to be a gathering spot and everybody used to just come there because they knew things were going to be on. There’d be all different sports, running and jumping and playing rounders and stuff like that, put on a dance. Used to have an old whitefella dance, they had sets and things like that. There used to be a big fire and ‘cause the dust, we all used to dance barefoot, they never had any shoes, just danced barefoot all night, and of course the dirt – it was dirty, in the swamp country and the black dust fly out. But we thought it was great fun.22

Church of Christ people would come there and we’d have a big church service in the bush. They’d break off branches for the church people to sit on so they didn’t get their clothes dirty. They came from a church down in Bassendean in Ivanhoe Street.23

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22 Corrie Bodney, oral history, 22 February 2007, 7.
Figure 2.5 Church service at Mary Crescent, Eden Hill, 1935. Corrie Bodney, far left, standing on his mother’s knee, has identified people in the photo.

Front row L–R: unknown, Desmond Parfitt, unknown, Betty Armitage, Christine Armitage, organ, Benfoot Morrison, unknown, unknown, unknown.
Middle row L–R: Melba Bodney, Corrie Bodney, Rosie Walley, unknown, unknown, unknown, unknown, Doris Warrell (on L behind organ), Annie Stack, unknown, Tina Parfitt (Ollie’s daughter), unknown, Mrs Winch with unknown children.
Back row L–R: unknown, unknown, unknown, Mr Cutler, unknown, Tommy Bung Bung, Toopy Bodney (baby—held by Bill Bodney), Willie Worrall, Mercy Worrall, Cyril Armitage, Ned Mippy, Ollie Worrall, unknown, Alf Mippy, Minnie Armitage nee Shaw, unknown behind her, Maitland Armitage, Mary Pilkington (Maitland’s wife, with baby), Bill Armitage (in light coloured hat with dark band—Melba Bodney’s father), remainder unknown.

We used to walk out to Guildford to see my old grandfather and uncles. They lived on Pyrton Estate, Hamersley family. My old grandfather used to work for Hamersley, had a cottage by the Bennett Brook.\(^1\) It was a treat to get on a train now and again, but nine times out of ten we walked to Midland from here, where I was camping at Narla Road.\(^2\)

![Image](image_url)

Figure 2-6 William and Minnie Armitage, Melba Bodney's parents, lived on Hamersley’s property, Pyrton. Permission Lynnette Coomer. Collection: Coomer family

**My mum, Melba Bodney**

My mother used to do some washing and ironing two or three times a week at different places. She used to get ten shillings a day for washing and ironing. She washed in the old tubs with the washing boards. Ironing, they used to have the old irons, put on the fire and warm ‘em up, you know, get ‘em hot.\(^3\) She used to sell flowers too – that’s how I started getting into the flower game because I used to go with her selling flowers. We used to pick them all over the

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\(^1\) Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 7.
\(^3\) Corrie Bodney, oral history, 18 January 2007, 5.
place. One of our main places was Bold Park because they used to have a Parks and Gardens engineer bloke called Tooker, and he gave us permission to pick there, not pick everything, but pick something just to keep us alive. Because he says the way we pick it, do it the right way, it's just like pruning.⁴

![Figure 2-7 Melba Bodney. Permission: Corrie Bodney. Collection: Corrie Bodney](image)

She couldn’t read and write, my old mother. We had to learn her to write her name on her endowment cheques so she could cash them.⁵ When she was young she just sort of moved around the metropolitan area, here and there, wherever he could find some work, old Armitage, her father.⁶

⁵ Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 27.
My old mother was a happy-go-lucky sort of woman, you know, she was always laughing, joking, tell stories about different things and about different people and we’d all have a laugh. My father was a serious sort of fellow, you know. He was always battling and trying to do the right thing for all of us, to look after us. And trying to send us to school and try to feed us so he was the only battler, you know, always was a pensioner. And he always looked old from when we were young. He still look old when he was young and he looked the same when he died.\(^7\)

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\(^7\) Corrie Bodney, oral history recorded for Claremont Museum by Denise Cook, 29 February 2008, 4.
My dad, Bill Bodney

Figure 2-9 Corrie’s father, Bill Bodney, about 1958. Permission: Corrie Bodney. Collection: © West Australian Newspapers Limited, AGP10881 (detail).

My father was always on a walking stick, see. When he was young, he used to be a horse rider, and he used to do a lot of horse track work for a bloke in Belmont, he was a big horse trainer, T.J. Stratton, I think his name was. And ‘cause he end up – they used to have sort of steeple races there years ago around the old Goodwood Racetrack and of course he had a nasty fall there. A horse fell on top of him, when he jumped the hurdle, see, hurdle races. And that’s finished his legs, so he was always on a walking stick after that. He used to ride up to Midland on an old pushbike and it was heavy as hell too. I don’t

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8 A search on TROVE indicated that TJ Stratton was a horse trainer in Perth between at least 1914 and 1931. See for example, The West Australian, 30 July 1923, 9, and The West Australian, 12 June 1930, 10.
know how he used to ride it, but he used to tie his walking stick on the crossbar, you know.⁹

In the early days he used to do wool classing. That was round about, oh, ‘20s – and he used to – I’ve seen a lot of letters he wrote about the treatment of the Aboriginal people in the Moora district and places like that. At the time he was working there.¹⁰

![Image](image.png)

Figure 2-10 Deputation to Western Australian Premier Collier asking for better conditions for Aboriginal people, March 1928.


‘Cause he was always trying to do something for Aboriginal people, sort of more or less moving amongst them in the metropolitan area. They used to have a like a main meeting place in Perth in Wellington Street. There used to be a white seat there, just before you get to Beaufort Street. But this white seat, a lot

of the people used to come there and talk and discuss issues and things like that. Because my old man used to go there to pick up the news of the day and what’s happening here and what’s happening there, stuff like that. He’d catch the old Beam bus into town and back. They all needed permits to be in town but he’d find some good excuse for not having a permit. Although he wasn’t Aboriginal a lot of people didn’t know that. Some thought he was Thursday Islander. The police harassed him as though he was Aboriginal.\(^{11}\)

Well my father was involved in later years, around about the 1940s, setting up the Coolbaroo League in Perth. It was an Aboriginal organisation – they wanted some thing where they could have a meeting place, a drop in centre where they can come in and have a cup of tea or something, a yarn and stuff like that. And ‘cause they wanted to get that, so the only way they could get it, he started organise – put on a dance every week or fortnight. And there used to be an old place down in East Perth near the railway station there. He set up something there because all the blackfellas used to travel from around the suburbs and come down there Friday nights and have a big dance there. Used to fight [laughs] at the end of the dance.

We all ended up learning to do the English sort of dance, well the old Barn Dance and Gypsy Tap, Gay Gordons, Valeta Waltz. We did the Maxina, you know. I was about fourteen, something like that. Fifteen. I had to peep through the windows all the time and watch ‘em. There’s lot of blackfellas there, some of them couldn’t get in, it was that popular, you know, because there’s a lot – all Aboriginal people around the Perth metropolitan area, just turn up there, big night. It cost a shilling or something like that. If you didn’t have a shilling, oh, go in, go, you know.\(^{12}\)

Dad used to be a pretty good punter. He knew a lot about race horses and things like that. And just, he used to have his two and six each way or something like that, on the horses. We more or less survived. There used to be some old SP bookmakers in those days. So starting price bookmakers used to be down the lanes and around the corners and up behind pubs. Used to be one

\(^{11}\) Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 24-25.  
\(^{12}\) Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 5-6.
old bloke in East Perth call Jerry Higgins. And he used to be one of the main players where all the blackfellas used to go and have their bets.\textsuperscript{13}

**Swanbourne Primary School**

![Figure 2-11 Corrie Bodney, back row, in Class IV at Swanbourne Primary School, 1940. Permission: Corrie Bodney. Collection: Freshwater Bay Museum, 07.98](image)

If I went three days a week to school, I’d be lucky. The teachers said if I keep going, I’ll do good later on in life. But I’m a bit of a restless sort of fellow, you know, who couldn’t settle down too long doing the one thing. They didn’t worry much about Aboriginal kids in those days, whether they got education or not. It was left, see, to your family or yourself whether you go to school or not. And sometimes they thought we were going to school and of course we’d duck off down the beach.\textsuperscript{14}

Our main stretch of beach was between Swanbourne Beach and Floreat Beach, or City Beach. There were certain times of the year when the salmon were running there. They came in close to the shores and my mob, we know what time of the year and we’d go down and do the fishing there. It was the time of

\textsuperscript{13} Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 21-22.
\textsuperscript{14} Corrie Bodney, oral history, 18 January 2007, 10.
the year when the wardang (crow) used to let the ngoorlak (black cockatoo) know and that would tell us that the fish were running close in to the shore. Could either spear the salmon or throw in a line because they were so close to shore.\textsuperscript{15}

**Work**

Some days I would work instead of going to school. Mr Neil, the bloke who had the paddocks down from where we lived, used to give me a couple of shillings sometimes on every second Friday, to take some of his stock to market over in Subiaco sale yards. I used to trot along behind him leading some horse or bullock.\textsuperscript{16} Then I used to do a bit of caddying sometimes up at the golf course on top of the hill. We had to carry the golf bags around and do the eighteen holes. Only used to get a couple of shillings and ‘cause I had to come back and buy a packet of cigarettes for my dad, that used to be half of it gone, you know.\textsuperscript{17}

If people didn’t get rations, they used to go do the propping, cut wood props like for the clotheslines. It used to be a big long piece of wood, oh, I suppose two or three inches thick, twelve foot long or something like that, the fork at the top, to hold up the clothes lines to put the washing on. I had to go and sell them myself with my uncles; you know make the streets, calling, “Prop oh, clothes oh,” ‘cause I used to beg for clothes too, when I used to do the run. I had to carry two, you know, not real heavy ones, but my uncles carried three or four, no worries. And say we used to only get two and six, 25 cents for them in those days, but that was a lot of money.\textsuperscript{18}

I probably left school because I was sick of it. I thought I knew enough, I could read and write and that was it.\textsuperscript{19} After I left school I got a job in Claremont, in Bay View Terrace, at a pram factory where they used to make cane prams. I stayed there for about eighteen months. I used to thread the cane and make the

\textsuperscript{15} Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 19.
\textsuperscript{16} Corrie Bodney, oral history, 18 January 2007, 9-10.
\textsuperscript{17} Corrie Bodney, oral history, 18 January 2007, 10.
\textsuperscript{18} Corrie Bodney, oral history, 18 January 2007, 8-9.
\textsuperscript{19} Corrie Bodney, oral history, 18 January 2007, 9-11.
hoods and things like that. I used to get around thirteen shillings a week and I'd give it all to my mother.20

My uncles and my mother and I used to go up and do all the grape picking up around Caversham and West Swan, places like that. That was in about January and February we'd pick the grapes.21 And then later years when I left school, we used to go and dig potatoes down the southwest. We used to go down twice a year for that. In May, digging in the swampy country around Benger, you were up to your knees in mud trying to dig potatoes. In the summer months, we used to go down in October to Roelands, Brunswick Junction and Burekup and 'cause they get the potatoes growing on the side of the hills more or less.22

Figure 2-12 Potato pickers at Roelands, 1957. Back row from left: Percy Garlett, Harold Gidgup, unknown, Corrie Bodney, Claude Parfitt and Barney Parfitt. Front row from left: unknown, Willie Warrall, Tommy Bropho, Johnny Pickett and Dese Parfitt.

Permissions: Jennifer Narke (for Percy Garlett), Ron Gidgup Snr, Corrie Bodney, Sharleen Garlett (for Claude, Barney and Des Parfitt, and Johnny Pickett), Marlene Warrell, Bella Bropho and Woolkabunning Kiaka Inc. Collection: Woolkabunning Kiaka Inc. (Roelands Village)

20 Corrie Bodney, oral history, 18 January 2007, 11-12.
22 Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 27; Corrie Bodney, conversation 17 April 2013.
And ’cause there used to be a bloke called Cliff Bell. We used to go and dig for him sometimes, and Cliff Bell was son of Albany Bell, and he used to be one of the main big men here. Started the Seven Hills Mission down in Roelands. And my father and old Alfred Mippy and old Barney Parfitt all went down to be with him to help get the thing established. They were sort of Christian people, Bells, and they wanted to do something, what they could for Aboriginal people. My father used to go to church and things like that, he wasn’t a real staunch Christian, but he always was involved in helping Christian people if he could.  

Figure 2-13 Albany Bell, 1928. He operated a chain of tearooms throughout Perth and in the goldfields. Cakes were made at the Albany Bell Castle on Guildford Road in Maylands. In 1928, Bell sold his share in the business and bought land at Roelands near Bunbury, part of which later became Roelands Mission.  

Collection: State Library of Western Australia, 047955PD

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Married life with Violet Mippy

Well, I eventually got into my teens and I started to going up to Guildford and Bassendean and I seen my wife, Violet Mippy, when she was younger and I start to chase her. So I moved to where her great-grandmother’s camp was. That was Ollie Warrell, *Koongi*.¹

![Image](image_url)

Figure 2-14 An elderly Ollie Worrall seated at her camp in Bassendean about 1951. With her are family members Charlie Nettle, Blanche Anderson, Mary Nettle (nee Alone), Doris Mippy (nee Worrall) and Billy Warrell. The children are Elaine and Valerie Hedland. Photo: Ronald H Armstrong. Permissions: Nick Abraham, Sharlene Garlett, Joanne Parfitt, Nola Bolton nee Mippy, Dolores Flowers, Rhonda Flowers, and Brendan Moore. Collection: State Library of Victoria, H2002.199/87

Violet and I got married in 1956 in Midland Junction in a registry office. We had twelve children, six boys and six girls.²

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¹ Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 40.
² Corrie Bodney, oral history, 22 February 2007, 1.
I used to work over in Maylands at Regal Cement. And ‘cause I got on very well with Mr Gordon, the boss there. And ‘cause they didn’t want to put on blackfellas because when I went and asked for a job, he said, “Oh,” he said, “Look,” he says, “Will you work, will you come to work every day?” And I said, “Yeah, I’ll come to work”. Being a blackfella they thought I was going to work for two or three days and that was it. And go back payday and collect my pay. And so I worked there for quite a few years and I got really in sweet with the old boss was because if I wanted to do any overtime, he’d say, “Oh well, come in on the weekend”. He’d give me the keys, open his place up and he said, “Make what you want to make”. I’d make cement wash troughs, and bath tubs and flower pots and stuff like that. I’d be working there on my own mixing all of the cement up and had all the moulds there and just squish them up, put them together, and tip all the stuff inside. Used to do that quite a lot. And a couple of

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3 Corrie Bodney, conversation 17 April 2013
times when I took a mad fit ‘cause I say, “Oh, I’m sick of it, I’ve had enough of working,” I’d say, “I’m finished”. And of course he’d look at me and say, “All right”. Anyhow, ‘cause I was living in the bush camp in Bassendean, me and the wife, couple of kids. And after three or four weeks, you know, the boss come walking through the bush, you know, and he said, “Right-oh, you ready to come back to work?” I said, “Yeah, I’m ready to come back to work,” because we’d run out of money you know, couldn’t keep going. He says, “Right-oh, see you in the morning.” That’s gone on for years. I only left because he died and some other people took the business over. And I just didn’t feel more or less at home, you know, because I used to just come and go as I pleased and things like that. And he never used to tell me what I had to do because I knew what I had to do and I’d just do it.⁴

**Moving into a house**

When we lived in Eden Hill there for a while, they built some houses there for Aboriginal people. We were still in the camp at that time. They said, “Do you want to move into one of the houses?” I said, “I got no money for furniture and stuff like that”. The old bloke who told me about it, he said, “You move into the house,” he said, “I’ll put the money up”. “Don’t worry about it,” he said, “I’ll loan it to you, get in the house”. And he done all that.⁵

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⁵ Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 29.
I got a job in the Perth Shire after that, in the City of Stirling I think they call it now. But they used to have a yard over in Maylands too, Meltham. I was working with the Chief Surveyor, a bloke called Gavin Rice, English gentleman. He used to be white as your blouse, he was. We’d go out on these days, 100 degrees or something else, and the flies used to get on him – unbelievable. We done all through Dianella and Mt Yokine. There was nothing. It was all bush. I mean you had Dog Swamp, but all the rest of it was scrub. I was working as an anchor man, whatever they call it. So this is hold up the things that he’d take his readings off and levels, set things up for final levels to start construction. We were working on roads, buildings, everything. We ended up doing the survey to set up the big place where the Stirling City Council’s now out at Eric Street or something. It’s Osborne Park now.\textsuperscript{7} And later that year I went back there and

\textsuperscript{6} Corrie Bodney, oral history, 24 February 2012, 7.
\textsuperscript{7} Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 31-32.
worked on the rubbish carts in the City of Stirling.⁸

I worked in the Belmont Shire for two years. We did road construction, laying footpaths, kerbing, stormwater drainage and stuff, laying pipes. I say, I was the leading hand there, you know, had seven or eight different blokes working. They didn’t worry, I just another one of the boys. We had some really good people.⁹

I was a field officer with the Aboriginal Medical Service for a few years. I just had to more or less go out and pick up patients who had to be picked up and brought in to see the doctor. That was around ’70, 74, I worked there for those four years.¹⁰

**Wildflower business**

After that I got back into the wildflower business again. So bought myself an old truck and got some of my boys. Then they was all in their teenage years, and some of their friends, some of my brother-in-laws. And so I had them all picking contract for me picking wildflowers. I was paying them so much a bunch, ‘cause I had big orders – from big exporters and sending all overseas on the world market. I used to cart into some of the big distributers here.

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⁸ Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 32.
⁹ Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 32.
¹⁰ Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 32.
Ooh, we picked stirlingia, dryandra, golden dryandra and tea-tree and boronia, anything, kangaroo paws, sea cress, diamonde, all of them different flowers. Whatever was on the market, we knew where certain stock were growing, just go to the truck and just load her up and bring it back and said, “Think you can get another load in before knock-off?” So, they’d take about fifteen hundred bunches at a time on the truck. We were allowed to pick on all Crown land – and I used to get special written permission from the landowners so I could go on their property and pick whatever I wanted to pick. In those days you didn’t have to pay, but now you’ve got to pay through the nose I believe. I used to take up six, seven boys and see, we used to go all up around Cataby and places like that, picked all of them. They got a yellow kangaroo paw that grows up there. Come back Gingin, Muchea and pick all of the morrison flowers, the dried flowers like everlasting, keeps for twelve months, eighteen months. But you treat it with glycerine it stays longer. And stirlingia’s the same. It used to be a big market and the German people used to buy stirlingia.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{11} Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 32-33.
Figure 2-18 From the 1970s Corrie Bodney had a wildflower picking business employing his sons, their friends, and other relatives. Everlastings like these were among the flowers they picked.


I had to retire in '94 because I had a couple of heart attacks and a stroke. I’d try and pick a bunch of flowers, and I’d fall over. I was in a pretty bad way there for a while. I haven’t completely given it up though. I still do a bit of it now and again. It’s just something I can’t get away from. I just love being out in the bush.¹²

Aboriginal heritage work

I’ve always been involved in Aboriginal heritage in regards to places of sacred significance to my people, you know, different places where there’ve been traditional camping grounds or ceremonial corroboree grounds or hunting grounds and stuff like that. And burial grounds. The Western Australian Museum made me an honorary warden in 1970s in regards to Aboriginal sacred sites throughout the southwest division. That involved looking out to see that

¹² Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 33-34.
people don’t destroy or encroach or interfere with Aboriginal places of sacred significance. I had to just explain to people what, you know, what was the importance of that particular area when they were there doing things.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Afterword}

In 2016, Corrie Bodney is the sole survivor of the three men whose oral histories about the Swanbourne camps I recorded in 2007. His support for this book has been a great encouragement for me. His stories about the camps, as well as people and events have shaped the way I look at the landscape and understand much of the shared history of our suburbs.

There is more about Corrie’s story, including his involvement in native title, in the Swanbourne camps chapter.

\textsuperscript{13} Corrie Bodney, Oral history recorded for South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council by Denise Cook, 24 October 2008, 6-7.
Early Fremantle history

The port of Fremantle was one of the places of first contact between Noongar people and colonists. Settlers lived there in makeshift accommodation for months waiting for their grant of land for farming.¹

Tensions developed early. In May 1830, Captain Irwin and a group of soldiers attacked a Noongar camp north of Fremantle in retaliation for a raid on the house of a man called Paton. Over the next few days a number of Noongar people were killed and wounded.² There were other deaths on both sides, including Midgegooroo’s son Domjum, who was shot attempting to break into a shop in Fremantle. In reprisal a group of Noongar men, including Midgegooroo and his better known son Yagan, killed two non-Aboriginal servants travelling from Fremantle to Maddington. Midgegooroo, a senior Elder south of the Swan River, was executed by firing squad for this. Yagan, a folk hero, was shot dead by a young non-Aboriginal friend in return for the government reward.³

Tom Bennell or Yelakitj, was born in 1908. In 1991, Glenys Collard from the Nyungar Language and Culture Centre compiled some of his extensive knowledge of Noongar history, language, and culture into a book, Kura, meaning “a long time ago”.⁴ In Kura, Tom tells of the arrival of soldiers and colonists who killed Noongar people. This is an extract from his story.

I bin talkin’ to the ol’ fullah
they father bin ’live
when the white fullahs come (hand moving circular)

² CSO Vol. 6, 1830, 146-7, cited in Stannage, The People of Perth, 27.
⁴ Tom Bennell, Kura, compiled by Glenys Collard (Bunbury: Nyungar Language and Culture Centre, 1991).
from over there (pointing)
still 'live like …

in the boat see
they seen 'em come on the boat
they all bardang kurlangany
from there
Yaarl kurliny Nyungars
kurl baminy see
Killin' 'em
shootin' 'em
cuttin' they throat
knockin' they 'eads off h'an’ all
see thas what they bin doin’
h'an’ this never bin said
Red coat fullahs …

Figure 3-1 Fremantle in 1831-32, showing two Noongar people on the edge of the swamp. The Round House prison is on the hill and Rottnest Island is in the distance. Artist: Jane Currie. Collection: [Panorama of the Swan River Settlement/watercolour drawing by Jane Eliza Currie], Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, a631002h (detail)

In 1842, the Rev. George King established the Anglican School, a mission for Aboriginal children in Fremantle. It had 18 children who came from the Mandurah and Pinjarra areas, as “King despaired of doing anything for the fringe-dwellers of Fremantle”. The children lived and went to school in a large house in Fremantle. In 1848, in St John’s Church in Fremantle, four of the girls married boys from the Wesleyan Native School in Perth. In 1851, after the

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6 Reece and Pascoe, A Place of Consequence, 12.
arrival of convicts, the mission closed and the remaining pupils were sent to the Wesleyan Mission in Perth.⁷

Convicts were sent to Western Australia in 1850 at the request of landowners who wanted cheap labour as well as the roads, bridges and buildings they would construct. At the same time, British gaols were overflowing with prisoners. New South Wales had refused to take more convicts and the British government was looking for somewhere to send them.⁸ All the convicts sent to Western Australia were men, greatly increasing the imbalance of the sexes in the colony.⁹

Almost half of the colony’s convicts were based in Fremantle: in 1859 there

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were 487 convicts in Fremantle, and 700 in 1865.\textsuperscript{10} There they built the Fremantle Prison, originally known as the Convict Establishment, and constructed other buildings, roads, and the bridge over the Swan River at North Fremantle.\textsuperscript{11} The convicts, guards and other staff increased Fremantle’s non-Aboriginal population to over 2,300 during the 1850s, five times the number before convicts arrived.\textsuperscript{12} By the time convict transportation ended in 1868 at least half the men living in Fremantle were former convicts.\textsuperscript{13}

Many convicts were granted a ticket-of-leave when they arrived, enabling them to work for colonists. This greatly increased the number of labourers in the colony, reducing wages. With cheap convict labour colonists were less interested in employing Noongar people to undertake menial jobs.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10} Western Australian Blue Books, cited in Appleyard, “Western Australia,” 214.
\textsuperscript{11} Appleyard, “Western Australia,” 213-214; Reece and Pascoe, \textit{A Place of Consequence}, 18-19.
\textsuperscript{12} Reece and Pascoe, \textit{A Place of Consequence}, 22.
\textsuperscript{13} Reece and Pascoe, \textit{A Place of Consequence}, 35.
\textsuperscript{14} Green, “Aborigines and White Settlers in the Nineteenth Century,” 92.
Tensions continued as Noongar people and colonists lived their lives alongside each other. In 1848, two Aboriginal women were shot when taking produce from a vineyard in Fremantle. One later died. Fremantle Court records show that in

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15 Reece and Pascoe, A Place of Consequence, 47.
1861 Naberin was fined for being drunk\textsuperscript{17} and Ned for being drunk and assaulting police.\textsuperscript{18} In 1862, Polly was imprisoned for one month for stealing and selling clothes belonging to Elizabeth Vincent and Amelia Vennard.\textsuperscript{19}

Traditional practices continued as well. For example, Perth resident John Watson recalled that in the 1850s and 60s, dozens of Aboriginal people used to come to the Point Walter spit when the tide was low to spear the many fish stranded on the sand.\textsuperscript{20} At that time the most popular Noongar camp area in Fremantle was the scrub that later became Fremantle Park.\textsuperscript{21}

Figure 3-4 James Walsh, *Spearing Fish* c1860s. State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia. Purchased 1976. Permission: Whadjuk Working Party

For much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Aboriginal men who

\textsuperscript{17} CSR 1861/Vol.486, 145 in Ward and Strawbridge, “Index to the Colonial Secretary’s Office Letters Received 1860–1864, Battye Library, Western Australia,” 22.

\textsuperscript{18} CSR 1861/Vol.486, 87, in Katie Ward and Lynda Strawbridge, “Index to the Colonial Secretary’s Office Letters Received 1860–1864, Battye Library, Western Australia” (Perth: Western Australian College of Advanced Education, n.d.), 9.

\textsuperscript{19} Fremantle 29/3/1862 Thomas Brown JP and George Clifton JP. Information and complaint of Sergeant Thomas Ryan, CSR 1862/vol 503, 109 in Ward and Strawbridge, “Index to the Colonial Secretary’s Office Letters Received 1860–1864,” 4.

\textsuperscript{20} “Perth’s Oldest Son. Death of Mr. John Watson. Saw Village Become City,” *The West Australian*, 17 September 1938, 18. Note: Watson was born on 5 June 1846.

\textsuperscript{21} Reece and Pascoe, *A Place of Consequence*, 46.
broke non-Aboriginal laws were transported to the Rottnest Island prison. Although they might have been brought there from anywhere in the colony (usually the frontier of contact), after their release they were left in Fremantle to make their own way back to their country. In the 1870s, some who did not get back ended up living in bush camps south of Fremantle and working occasionally as shepherds and pit-sawyers.²²

![Figure 3-5 Noongar people, possibly from Fremantle, photographed about 1863 by Fremantle photographer SM Stout. Permission: Whadjuk Working Party. Collection: State Library of Western Australia, b1911664_5](image)

Jesse Hammond, who lived in Perth for much of the 1860s and 1870s, wrote in his recollections about Noongar people, *Winjan’s People*, that Aboriginal people often visited the place they were born and stayed there as long as food supplies were available. He wrote that North Fremantle and Bibra Lake were among the places with the best food supplies and consequently had the largest numbers of Aboriginal people living there, and the most births.\(^{23}\)

Introduced diseases such as measles, influenza and whooping cough killed many Noongar people, as they did not have immunity to them.\(^{24}\) For example in 1841, an influenza epidemic spread through Perth, Fremantle and Guildford. While the numbers of deaths are not known, 11 of the 24 children in the Aboriginal school in Guildford died.\(^{25}\) In 1883 there was a measles epidemic in Fremantle, which is said to have killed many of the Noongar people living there.\(^{26}\)

From the early 1890s discoveries of gold inland from Perth led to huge numbers of gold seekers arriving through the port of Fremantle. The population of Fremantle tripled from 7,077 in 1891 to 20,444 in 1901.\(^{27}\) To accommodate the increased numbers tent camps were established at Ferry Point (now part of the wharf), Monument Hill and Fremantle Park.\(^{28}\) Fremantle Park had been a popular Noongar campsite in the mid nineteenth century.\(^{29}\) The other sites may also have been Noongar camps. According to Daisy Bates, who recorded information from Noongar people in the early 1900s, there were also old camping areas at “Manjarip, the old Fremantle tunnel, and Wal’yuulup, the point near Fremantle old jetty.”\(^{30}\)

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\(^{24}\) Green, “Aborigines and White Settlers,” 119-121.

\(^{25}\) *Aborigines, Australian Colonies*, 1884, printed despatches, State Library of Western Australia, cited in Green, “Aborigines and White Settlers,” 119.

\(^{26}\) Reece and Pascoe, *A Place of Consequence*, 47.


Camps around East Fremantle

From the 1890s to about the 1920s there were Noongar camps in the vicinity of the East Fremantle Football Oval. For example, adjacent to the oval, Pearse’s Slaughter Yard in East Fremantle was a well-used Noongar camp. The area later became Richmond Raceway and is now housing. Dick Flanagan, who moved to Fremantle as a child in 1890, remembered:

Oh, yes, a good campfull out at Pearses Paddocks as they call it. Yes, always a blackfellows camp there. And they’d go about the streets selling props, for keeping clothes lines up. … or go from house to house to chop a bit of wood up – for tea and sugar.31

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31 Arthur Dick Flanagan, Oral history recorded for Fremantle City Library History Centre, 1975.
In the same general area, in 1899, Chowall killed Curenit after a quarrel at the Noongar camp near what was then Plympton, and is now East Fremantle. Chowall, who was known as Hoppy, was from the Esperance area. Plympton was located between the river and Marmion Street, west of what later became the Richmond Raceway. This was the first part of East Fremantle to be developed when workers' cottages were built there from 1890.

Other stories also tell of Noongar camps in this area. Rusty Christensen, a long time Fremantle resident, was told by his father that around 1900 there was an Aboriginal camp just south of the football oval, on the rise on the corner of Chudleigh and Forrest Streets. Ted Miller, whose family had a bakery in Hubble Street in Plympton, heard from his father that about 1915 the Aboriginal

32 “A Dangerous Native,” The West Australian, 6 October 1899, 4.
camp was on what is now East Fremantle Oval.\textsuperscript{35}

![Figure 3-8 This photo of a woman outside her camp may have been taken near Fremantle, about 1890.\textsuperscript{36} Permission: Whadjuk Working Party and UWA Publishing. There is some confusion as an almost identical photo is described as being from the Coolgardie goldfields east of Perth.\textsuperscript{37} It is difficult to know so long after the photo was taken, especially since names of Aboriginal people in photos were rarely recorded and photos could be reproduced out of context.]

\textbf{1930s camps}

By the 1930s, the Noongar camps were mainly in the industrial area between the smelters and the abattoirs south of South Beach; at the back of the Fremantle Cemetery near the sanitary depot; and at Bibra Lake. Bibra Lake was a campsite stretching back to pre-contact times,\textsuperscript{38} although it is possible the other sites had been used earlier too. The remainder of this chapter comprises stories from the camps at the back of the cemetery and near South Beach.

\textsuperscript{35} Ted Miller, oral history recorded by Denise Cook, 17 September 2012, 1. Ted Miller, email communication, 14 January 2016. Ted’s father was born in 1911. Permission: Ted Miller.


\textsuperscript{37} State Library of Western Australia catalogue, 72B/171, listed in a series of views of the Coolgardie goldfields.

\textsuperscript{38} Judy Jackson in Cathy Drake and Shona Kennealy, \textit{Recollections of the Beeliar Wetlands} (Cockburn, WA: City of Cockburn, 1995), 37, 41.
Camps behind the Fremantle Cemetery

As a child in about the 1930s, Rusty Christensen remembers Aboriginal people walking down Marmion Street from the direction of what is now Willagee, east of Fremantle, selling clothes props. At that time, the area to the east of the cemetery was heavily wooded. His older brother and friends spent time around that area, where they saw an Aboriginal camp and witnessed corroborees.\textsuperscript{39}

In the 1940s, there were complaints about camps on Carrington Street, on the Fremantle side of the Cemetery. As was common, the needs of non-Aboriginal residents overrode that of Noongar people in the camps. The Police District Officer gave instructions for his Constable.

\begin{quote}
Inspect the Native Camps and if necessary get them to camp elsewhere. They should not be permitted to camp in places where they cause annoyance to local residents.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

The constable reported he “found that the camps were very small, constructed of bags, leaves, and rushes, and in a dirty condition. The natives although sufficiently clothed were dirty and tattered.” In addition, when he had told them to move, they replied that they wouldn’t, saying, “It is our country, and I can speak English as well as your best Lawyers, I know what I am talking about!”\textsuperscript{41}

A few weeks later the inhabitants of the camps were given fares to go to Pinjarra and Carrolup, thus clearing the camp.\textsuperscript{42}

In the 1950s, Doreen Nelson’s Uncle Tom Yarran had a house on Stock Road in Willagee. A couple of years in a row, when her extended family came for visits in the summer, they camped next to Joyce Brothers, behind the cemetery. One of her cousins worked for Joyce Brothers, making mattresses.\textsuperscript{43} The camp was:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{39} Christensen, “The Blocks,” \textit{Fremantle History Society}, 11.
\textsuperscript{40} Department of Native Affairs 382/33, \textit{Native Matters – Fremantle}, Sgt Coppinger, Acting District Officer to Constable Capstick, 4 April 1941. SROWA Cons 993, fol.15.
\textsuperscript{41} DNA, 382/33, \textit{Native Matters – Fremantle}, Constable Taylor to Constable Capstick, 14 April 1941, SROWA Cons 993, fol.15.
\textsuperscript{42} DNA, 382/33, \textit{Native Matters – Fremantle}, File Note: Clerk in Charge, 21 May 1941, SROWA Cons 993, fol. 24.
\textsuperscript{43} Doreen Nelson, oral history recorded by Denise Cook on 1 November 2012, 16-17. Permission: Doreen Nelson.
Straight over from the shopping centre, on Stock Road, right in the bush there, right next to – there was a big mattress factory there.44

That’s when my Uncle Tom had one of the houses at Willagee so probably because you know, there was too many of us, we couldn’t stay with him in the house so we just lived over the road there, because his house wasn’t far from the camp there. But it was good too, staying there. We had tents there too.45

Her family would carry tents and everything they needed from the Fremantle Railway Station. Water came from a tap close by at the cemetery. When it was pension day or her parents had money, Doreen remembers going to the open air cinema in Willagee. Otherwise they would walk down to the beach or to the Esplanade, spend the day there, then walk back.46 Doreen remembers:

There was a couple of racist remarks sometimes, when we was around Willagee there, they’d call us the “witchetty grubs” because we used to walk around a lot and we lived in the bush there also at Willagee.47

Today, the camps at the back of the cemetery are commemorated with a plaque on the edge of Stock Road near the corner of Absolon Street in Palmyra.48 It marks the campsite of the “last traditional Aboriginal” from that place, Peter Jackson.49 Although Peter Jackson may have come from outside Noongar country,50 he did spend considerable time in camps in the Perth metropolitan area.51 As well as commemorating the camp, the plaque refers to a nearby increase site, which is a “sacred site … with spiritual powers able to help renew certain species of living … plants and animals”.52

44 Doreen Nelson, oral history, 15.
45 Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 16.
46 Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 15-17.
47 Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 15.
48 The plaque was organised by a local Elder who has recently passed on.
49 Permission to tell Peter Jackson’s story from Darryl Jackson.
50 Conversations with anthropologist Eddie McDonald, 19 July 2013 and 21 January 2016.
51 See for example, Robert Bropho, Oral history recorded for Claremont Museum by Denise Cook, 7 March 2007, 1, 3; Robert Bropho, Oral history recorded for Claremont Museum by Denise Cook, 26 March 2007, 18. Permission: Bella Bropho.
After the Second World War it was difficult for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to get accommodation. What had been the Melville Army Camp east of Fremantle became Melville Camp. Many non-Aboriginal families lived there including Brenda Pittman’s family. Some Noongar people may also have lived there. Brenda remembers Peter Jackson and his camp, which was less than a kilometre from where they lived on the corner of Stock Road and South Street in O’Connor. Jackson used to sell props and rabbits to Brenda’s mum. Brenda remembers that his camp was in the bush a little further back from Stock Road than the plaque. It was made from sticks and bits of tin, like a little cover, and Jackson lived there on his own. Brenda remembers that Peter Jackson fought and fought to stay in that camp, but in the end he was moved on. This could have been by the local council, possibly as a result of the post-war housing development in the area.

55 Brenda Pittman, telephone conversation, 15 November 2012.
Voices from the Smelters camps

Among the new houses by South Beach, south of Fremantle, there is little evidence of the Noongar, Aboriginal, and non-Aboriginal community that lived and worked there for much of the twentieth century. At that time, cattle from the northwest came down by ship to be killed at the abattoirs at Robb Jetty and north Coogee. Sheep were brought from Midland Stockyards to be slaughtered for the local market. In the days before cold storage, stock were pastured all around Hamilton Hill, Coogee and adjacent areas, as far south as Ten Mile Well. Skilled stockmen, including Aboriginal men such as Wandi, Black Paddy and Simon Gentle lived in the area and moved them into holding pens and paddocks.

The Fremantle Smelting Works in Island Street, later the ANI Bradken Foundry, also offered employment. As well as the abattoirs and associated industries, up to four hundred racehorses from local stables trained on the beach at South Fremantle. For camp residents, work could be found with the horses, and at the

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abattoirs, skin stores, and other industries in the area.\textsuperscript{57}

Figure 3-11 Fremantle Smelting Works, about 1920. Some of the camps were between the smelters and the beach. Collection: Fremantle City Library History Centre, Print No. LH001662

The camps were called Robb Jetty camps\textsuperscript{58} (after the abattoir), Smelters camps\textsuperscript{59} (some were close to the Fremantle Smelting Works, later the A.N.I. Bradken Foundry in Island Street), Hollywood,\textsuperscript{60} or Poverty Point\textsuperscript{61} (for the difficult financial situation of the non-Aboriginal residents living there). Much later, in the 1980s, a group called their home in the same area Seagull camp.\textsuperscript{62}

We know that unemployed non-Aboriginal men camped near Robb Jetty in 1898 because Chas Fitzsimmons wrote to \textit{The West Australian} protesting that

\textsuperscript{57} Jerry Patterson, Daly Street Stable owner, telephone conversation, September 2012. Permission: Jerry Patterson.

\textsuperscript{58} O’Connor, Bodney and Little, “Preliminary Report on the Survey of Aboriginal Areas of Significance in the Perth Metropolitan and Murray River Regions,” 83.

\textsuperscript{59} Tom Ford, oral history recorded by Marnie Richardson for Fremantle City Library History Centre, 23 February 2004. Permissions: George Ford and Maureen Ford.

\textsuperscript{60} Bill Marks, \textit{The Fall of the Dice} (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1990), 8.


\textsuperscript{62} Dee Fraser, \textit{Freo Yorgas}, DVD. Directed by Paul Roberts, produced by Paul Roberts and Blanche Quartermaine (Fremantle, Western Australia: Excalibur/FTI, 2010). Permissions: Delores Fraser and Blanch Quartermaine.
police had asked the men to leave following complaints about them being there. In his letter, he described the area.

A number of us are camped between the smelting works and Robb’s Jetty which is Crown land, and as this narrow strip of sand bank is covered with scrub the men out of employment, and who are promised work when the smelters start, have naturally taken up their camp there.\(^\text{63}\)

He went on to say that the cleared areas around, and including the smelters site, offered no protection for the men’s tents from the rain or drifting sand.\(^\text{64}\)

The earliest remembered Aboriginal occupants of the camps are Black Paddy and Wandi, Aboriginal men from the northwest who are believed to have lived here around 1910. As with other long-term campsites, however, there may have been a Noongar camp here long before that.\(^\text{65}\)

**Wandi**

Wandi is believed to have been one of the earliest Aboriginal residents at the Robb Jetty camp.\(^\text{66}\) Robert Bropho remembered him as a “full blood Aboriginal from the Leonora Sandstone area … [who] got a job down at the abattoirs”.\(^\text{67}\)

Once in Fremantle, Wandi had a long association with the Atkinson family who lived near South Beach. George Atkinson had a stable of 46 racehorses and was a partner in Anchorage Butchers, with slaughter yards at Robb Jetty and north Coogee.\(^\text{68}\)

The earliest known record of Wandi in Fremantle is in September 1916 when George Atkinson was prosecuted for employing Wandi and another Aboriginal man, Tony, without a permit. According to the *Daily News*, “A proclamation had been made ordering ‘all persons on and after July 31, who shall employ aboriginals’ to have the permission of the Protector of Aborigines to do so.”\(^\text{69}\)

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\(^\text{63}\) Chas. Fitzsimmons, letter to the Editor, *The West Australian*, 29 October 1898, 10.
\(^\text{64}\) Chas. Fitzsimmons, letter to the Editor, *The West Australian*, 29 October 1898, 10.
\(^\text{66}\) Permissions for Wandi story: Joe Northover and Atkinson family.
\(^\text{68}\) Bryan Atkinson, oral history, 31 October 2012, 1.
This provision had first come into force with the *Aborigines Act, 1905.*\(^7^0\) Wandi, who was in the court, was asked if he would apply for a permit but declined, saying, “all he wanted was work”.\(^7^1\)

Wandi worked with the racehorses owned by the Atkinson family. He also did stock work, for example taking sheep over to paddocks at the Manning Estate, now Manning Park in Hamilton Hill, and bringing hay from Coogee to Robb’s Jetty to feed the nor-west cattle there.\(^7^2\)

![Figure 3-12 Wandi holding George Atkinson junior, grandson of the original George Atkinson, 1947. The Atkinson family part-owned Anchorage Butchers and employed Wandi as a stockman. Permission and collection: Atkinson family](image-url)

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\(^{70}\) *Aborigines Act, 1905,* Section 17.


\(^{72}\) George Atkinson, oral history recorded by Denise Cook, 8 October 2012, 1-2. Permission: Atkinson family.
Wandi later lived in a room in the stables of the Atkinson family home in South Fremantle. After George Atkinson’s death in 1938, he is recorded as living in two rooms at Anchorage Butchers. Although Wandi continued to work for George Atkinson’s son, George, he was also associated with the Dixon family who owned extensive land nearby in Hamilton Hill. He took the name Wandi Dixon.73

In 1933, Wandi was fined £3 for receiving beer from George Harwood outside the Newcastle Club Hotel in Fremantle. In the newspaper report of the case, he was described as an elderly Aboriginal who had lived and worked in Fremantle for a number of years.74

Wandi used to visit his friends Sammy Broomhall and Tommy Bropho at the Swanbourne camp. Tommy’s son Robert Bropho was a child at the time and remembered:

[Sammy would] come up to our camp of a night time. He’d sing us these Aboriginal songs, his dreamtime he called it … He had a friend called Wandi who was another full-blood Aboriginal man, used to work down Fremantle. He used to come up and spend weekends with us. We called him Uncle Wandi. He used to bring us chocolates and biscuits and oranges and apples and he too used to sing us Aboriginal songs. When Uncle Wandi and Sammy Broomhall used to get together round the fire with Dad and start singing their songs we’d forget about our worries and our misery. We’d relax and listen to them singing late into the night. We’d go to sleep to the sound of their songs, of their dreamtime.75

Wandi was still working for the Atkinson family in the 1950s. George Atkinson’s grandchildren, George, Wayne and Bryan remember Wandi coming for Sunday breakfasts. George Atkinson explained:

Sunday we do stock work and all that. The stock have to be put up for Monday’s kill. Always done on Sunday, so it’s ready to start … early in the morning at the abattoirs. Dad would have been using him on that or he might have been breaking in a horse for Dad or

73 Bryan Atkinson oral history, 31 October 2012.
75 Bropho, fringedweller, 7.
something like that. And Dad … would have brought him home and had a meal.⁷⁶

Bryan Atkinson remembered:

All I know is that when I was three or four years old, he came to our house for breakfast and he was well received into the house and we all loved him.⁷⁷

In 1955, after suffering a stroke, Wandi died at the Moore River Native Settlement at the age of 76.⁷⁸ He was widely liked and respected and in 1978 a new suburb southeast of Fremantle was named Wandi in his honour.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ George Atkinson, oral history, 8 October 2012, 7.
Black Paddy: famous boxer and stockman

Black Paddy is believed to have lived at the Robb Jetty camp from about 1910.\(^1\) He may also have been at the camp at the East Fremantle football oval from about 1915.\(^2\) Black Paddy worked occasionally as a police tracker and later as a stockman at Robb Jetty.\(^3\) Black Paddy is best known as a boxer who fought all around Australia, drawing great crowds. He is still remembered today as a great fighter.\(^4\)

![Figure 3-13: Black Paddy (right) with Jerry Jerome, about 1913. They were Australia’s two best Aboriginal boxers in the early 1900s. Photo: Brand, 178 Castlereagh St, Sydney. Collection: Arnold Thomas boxing collection, National Library of Australia, nla.pic-vn3060844-v](image)

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\(^1\) O’Connor, Bodney and Little, Preliminary Report’, 83, 85 state that the camp was populated since about 1910 and that Black Paddy is among the earliest people recorded as living there.

\(^2\) Ted Miller, oral history with Denise Cook, 17 September 2012. Ted’s father was born in 1911.


\(^4\) Ted Miller, oral history, 17 September 2012. Ted’s grandfather and great uncles were also boxers and fought with Black Paddy.
Despite his fame, as an Aboriginal person, Black Paddy was under the surveillance of the police and the Native Affairs Department. This is illustrated by the extract below from a 1937 report on Aboriginal people camping in the Perth metropolitan area. The initials F.B.M stand for Full Blood Male – at that time people thought to have one-quarter Aboriginal blood or more came under the control of the Department of Native Affairs.⁵

Figure 3-14 DNA, 105/37, *Native camps in the Metropolitan Area*, Mr Taylor, “Inspection of Native Camps in the Metropolitan Area,” 8 April 1937, SROWA Cons 993, fol. 2. Permission: Department of Aboriginal Affairs

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Simon Gentle: stock agent representative

Another Aboriginal man who worked at Robb Jetty was Simon Gentle. He was born in 1893, probably at the New Norcia Mission north of Perth. He spent much of his childhood at the Swan Mission on the eastern outskirts of Perth. In the 1920s, Simon Gentle was a skilled rodeo rider who worked at White City, the entertainment venue on the foreshore in Perth. There, unusually, he was paid the same wages as non-Aboriginal men and won several competitions.

From 1935, Simon Gentle held an exemption from the legislation that controlled Aboriginal people. It was cancelled in 1956 when it was discovered that as a “quadroon” he was not covered by the Act anyway.

Simon’s nephew, Cedric Jacobs, remembers coming to Perth with his dad, Les Jacobs, possibly in the late 1940s. They walked all around looking for Uncle Simon, but they never found him. He did hear that Simon had a large vegetable garden near the Walley Bridge area in Wellard, 31km south of Fremantle. Simon also worked for the Kwinana Roads Board. Gentle Road, in Calista, just north of Wellard, was named after Simon Gentle in 1964.

Although there is no specific evidence that Simon lived at the Smelters camp, he did live in camps in the Wellard/East Rockingham/Medina area so it is most likely that he did.

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1 Permission for Simon Gentle story: Cedric Jacobs.
3 Swan Native and Half Caste Mission Maintenance Returns, 1906, AIATSIS MS3612, Part 3. He was there from 1898 until at least 1906.
4 Haebich, *For Their Own Good*, 264.
6 Cedric Jacobs, telephone conversation, 3 October 2012.
Figure 3-15 Simon Gentle, stock agent representative for Emmanuel Bros., waiting to drive cattle to Robb Jetty meatworks, 1930s-40s (detail of photo below) Permission: Cedric Jacobs. Collection: Fremantle City Library History Centre, Print No. LH002486

Figure 3-16 Stock agent representatives waiting to drive cattle to Robb Jetty meatworks, 1930s-40s. Simon Gentle (right) stock agent representative for Emmanuel Bros. Permission: Cedric Jacobs. Collection: Fremantle City Library History Centre, Print No. LH002486
“A plucky fight to live their own lives”: Mary Inman’s story

Mary Inman moved to the Smelters camps in 1946 when she was ten years old. She loved living with her family in a tent and tin shack near the beach. But it was a hard time for her mum, also called Mary, who was very unhappy; for her dad, Arthur, who kept losing jobs; and for Mary and the other children when they couldn’t get enough to eat or had to hide from their parents fighting. It was also difficult because of ongoing problems caused by the Department of Native Affairs.

Figure 3-17 Miss Mary Inman (now Kemenade), late 1950s. Permission and collection: Mary Kemenade nee Inman

But their story had started long before …

Mary parents, Noongar woman Mary Sargeant and non-Aboriginal man Arthur

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*Permission for Mary Kemenade nee Inman’s story: Mary Kemenade*
Inman met in Perth in 1930. After they had lived together for just over a year, her father was prosecuted under the 1905 *Aborigines Act*, because under that law it was illegal for a non-Aboriginal man to live with an Aboriginal woman. In court, their lawyer won the case by arguing that Mary was “quarter caste” and therefore was not defined as Aboriginal under the Act. A.O. Neville, Chief Protector of Aborigines, did not accept this and wrote the following note on her file.

The suggestion that [Mary] Gladys Sergeant is a quarter-caste is doubted and we shall have to try to prove that she is otherwise.

In 1936, the family was living in a house in Katanning. When it was condemned as unfit for occupation they moved to a small tent in the scrub nearby. Arthur and Mary now had three children, including young Mary Edith Veronica, who was born in June 1936. The local policeman, Constable Jones, visited the camp in early 1937 in response to complaints about the conditions in which the family were living. He wrote that:

In my opinion these people are living worse than [Aborigines] on the reserve and seeing that Inman is a relief worker on the roads here he should be compelled to provide at least decent housing for his children, or otherwise he is not a fit and proper person to have control of children.

Since they were living as a non-Aboriginal family, the official view seems to have been that they could not live in the same way as local Noongar people.

In 1936, the *Native Administration Act* extended the definition of Aboriginal, generally including anyone greater than quadroon or quarter caste. Mr Neville

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10 Department of Native Affairs, 310/30, *Half-Caste – Mary Gladys Sergeant (nee Mindemarra) Personal File*, Mary Gladys Sergeant statement to police and Mrs John Fowle statement to police, 21 December 1931, page 21 of 212.


13 Mary’s birth date is given as 1935 in DNA, 310/30, *Half-Caste – Mary Gladys Sergeant*, Report of Eric George Jones, Constable, Reg. No. 1754 relative to Arthur Inman living with half-caste woman Mrs. Mary Gladys Sargent, page 73 of 212; Mary was told by the mission that she was born in 1936. Mary Kemenade, conversation, 5 April 2013.


15 *Native Administration Act* 1905–1936, Sec 2.
had also undertaken research to dispute Mary Sargeant’s claims about the Aboriginality of her parents and grandparents. Using the new law and the extra information, in August 1937 the Department successfully prosecuted Arthur Inman for cohabiting with Mary Sargeant, who was now defined as Aboriginal. This was despite the fact that they had been living together for seven years and had four children. The court also found the children to be neglected because of “their deplorable living conditions and outlook” living in a camp environment.  

Mary Sargeant and the four children, including young Mary Edith Veronica, were sent up to Perth for the children to be taken into care. As they were light skinned, the children were sent to Sister Kate’s, a home which aimed to teach near-white Aboriginal children to live in the same way as non-Aboriginal Australians.

Mary Sargeant was sent out to work but she didn’t want to be there and didn’t stay long. Back in Perth in October 1937, she tried to get the Department’s permission to marry Arthur Inman; as an Aboriginal woman she could not marry without that permission. It was refused because they were both still married to other people although both spouses had been missing for many years and so legally were presumed dead. In addition, Mr Neville didn’t consider Arthur a suitable person though he would not say why. In November, Arthur Inman was arrested again for cohabiting with Mary Sargeant and a warrant was issued for Mary’s removal to the Moore River Native Settlement. With the help of a lawyer, Mary appealed to a magistrate to overturn the Department’s decision and allow her to marry Inman. The Sunday Times called it “A Plucky Fight to

16 DNA, 310/30, Half-Caste – Mary Gladys Sergeant, Commissioner of Native Affairs to Inspector J McDonald, Protector of Natives, Narrogin, 24 June 1937, page 92 of 212.
18 DNA, 310/30, Half-Caste – Mary Gladys Sergeant, Protector, Merredin to CNA, 27 September 1937, page 134 of 212.
19 Native Administration Act 1905–1935, Section 45.
20 DNA, 310/30, Half-Caste – Mary Gladys Sergeant, CNA to Mrs Mary Sergeant, 10 November 1937, page 154 of 212; DNA, 310/30, Half-Caste – Mary Gladys Sergeant, Richard Haynes to CNA, 10 November 1937, page 160 of 212.
Live Their Own Lives” and when they won cheered:

And thus a gallant fight against the hitherto all-powerful Mr Neville has terminated in a victory for the half-caste, and nearly everybody except Mr Neville applauds the result.22

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Although they were now allowed to marry, the Department refused to withdraw the charge of cohabitation, so for this Arthur Inman was cautioned and fined costs.\textsuperscript{23}

On 17 December 1937, Arthur Inman and Mary Sargeant were married but the children were still in care.\textsuperscript{24} Two days later Mrs Inman went to the Children’s Hospital and succeeded in taking back her youngest child Arthur from a staff member who didn’t know that she wasn’t allowed to have him.\textsuperscript{25} Throughout the next year, Mrs Inman kept trying to get back her other three children. Finally, on 27 December 1938, she and Arthur Inman went to Sister Kate’s Home and took the children, brushing aside one of the staff who tried to stop them.\textsuperscript{26}

Within a few weeks, police had been sent out to the family’s camp on the railway line at Wyening to bring the children back into care.\textsuperscript{27} It was the Depression and Arthur Inman and a number of other unemployed men were doing sustenance work there, earning enough to support their families and living in tents rented from the government.\textsuperscript{28}

Young Mary tells the story of her parents taking back the children.

I was a baby, Beatrice, she was seven or eight and Pauline was about eleven. … My Dad come and grabbed us and the police come chasing him (laughs) and he took us in the car and took us away from there and then they come and got us back again, put us back in the Sister Kate’s convent.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{23} Sunday Times, 12 December 1937, 5; DNA, 310/30, Half-Caste – Mary Gladys Sergeant, Inspector, File Note re Inman/Sergeant Case, 10 December 1937, page 210 of 212.

\textsuperscript{24} Department of Native Affairs, 14/1939, Half-Caste – Mrs. Arthur S Inman (Formerly Mrs Sergeant) Personal File, Department of Native Affairs marriage particulars for Arthur Stanley Inman and Mary Gladys Sergeant, 16 June 1938, page 28 of 122; DNA, 14/1939, Half-Caste – Mrs. Arthur S Inman, File Note DCNA 30 December 1937, page 10 of 122.

\textsuperscript{25} DNA, 14/1939, Half-Caste – Mrs. Arthur S Inman, CNA to The Secretary, Children’s Hospital, 11 February 1938, page 20 of 122.


\textsuperscript{27} DNA, 14/1939, Half-Caste – Mrs. Arthur S Inman, DCNA, File Note, 24 January 1939, page 37 of 122.

\textsuperscript{28} DNA, 14/1939, Half-Caste – Mrs. Arthur S Inman, Constable, Moora Police Station to CNA 25 January 1939, page 43 of 122.

\textsuperscript{29} Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, nee Inman, oral history recorded by Denise Cook, 16 November 2012, 3.
Sister Kate’s would not accept the children again, so they were sent to the East Perth Native Girls’ Home.\(^{30}\) This was a Department of Native Affairs run home for young Aboriginal women, as well as a place for Aboriginal children to stay while waiting for permanent placement.\(^{31}\) Mrs Inman kept trying to get her children back but the Department stalled while they sought legal advice about prosecuting Arthur Inman for taking the children.\(^{32}\) Sister Kate and Miss Lefroy, the staff at Sister Kate’s Children’s Cottage Home, complicated this situation by saying that they would not give evidence against Arthur Inman because he “had a perfect right to take the children”.\(^{33}\)

Eventually Mrs Inman was told she could have the children again if she could provide a house for them in Perth; they would not be allowed to go back to living in a camp.\(^{34}\) It seems that a camp was evidence of living a “native” lifestyle and wasn’t acceptable to the Department of Native Affairs. Consequently, Mary Inman obtained two rooms in a house in Florence Street, probably in West Perth, in early March 1939. An inspection report by Mr Campbell stated that despite the cramped rooms:

> Mary could be given another chance to mother and rear her children along white standards. I consider she should be given this chance and if she fails her children should be committed to the State and placed in an institution.\(^{35}\)


After receiving this report, as well as legal advice that there wasn’t enough evidence to prosecute Arthur Inman, the Department released the children to Mrs Inman’s care on 8 March 1939.36 This was almost 18 months after they had first been taken. As the children were in fact not legally Aboriginal (they were less than “quarter caste”), once they had been released from care the Native Welfare Department had no further authority to act. They asked the Child Welfare Department to keep an eye on the children.37

The family lived in several locations in Perth and the country, but by 1943 they

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37 DNA, 14/1939, Half-Caste – Mrs. Arthur S Inman, CNA to Secretary, Child Welfare Department, 23 February 1939, page 58 of 122.
were at 25 Douro Road, South Fremantle. In 1944, Arthur Inman was working on the wharf. At the end of that year police arrested Mrs Inman at the house for being drunk, and Arthur Inman for brandishing a large table knife while trying to stop a policeman getting into the car taking away his wife.

By 1946, there were reports of the parents drinking and the children not getting enough to eat. Also, that “coloured” seamen were spending time with the family although an investigation found no evidence of that. Mary has quite a different perspective on the help her family received from sailors.

Mum had a hard time there [at Smelters camps]: really hard. Couldn’t get no food or nothin’. People wouldn’t help those days. That’s what’s wrong. The only one who’d help Mum was the sailors. She made a friend with a sailor, sailors there. David was one that – he was in the war and the Japs cut his ear right off and he come to Mum and told Mum what happened in the war time.

Mrs Inman, having been determined to be 3/8\textsuperscript{th} caste, was classified as Aboriginal according to the Native Administration Act, 1936. However, being married to a non-Aboriginal man she was expected to live according to non-Aboriginal standards and was not allowed to socialise with other Aboriginal people unless they were close relatives. A 1944 memo about a visit to the Inman’s house stated:

Inman was told that his wife’s relatives had a right to visit her, but we did not want the visits to be of a long or indefinite period. I think now that he knows how he stands with this Department he will be careful about having native non-relatives at his house.

In April 1947, Mr Bisley from the Department of Native Welfare made an inspection of the Smelters Camp. He noted that:

\begin{footnotes}
39 DNA, 14/1939, Half-Caste – Mrs. Arthur S Inman, Clerk in Charge to DCNA, 17 July 1944, page 100 of 122.
41 DNA, 14/1939, Half-Caste – Mrs. Arthur S Inman, Commissioner of Native Affairs to Secretary, Child Welfare Department, 24 July 1946, page 106 of 122; DNA, 14/1939, Half-Caste – Mrs. Arthur S Inman, Unknown, for Acting Secretary, Child Welfare Department to Commissioner of Native Affairs, 13 September 1946, page 107 of 122.
42 Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 3.
43 DNA, 14/1939, Half-Caste – Mrs. Arthur S Inman, Clerk in Charge to DCNA, 17 July 1944, page 100 of 122.
\end{footnotes}
Before I located the Inmans I received a number of complaints regarding the conduct of the Inmans. Several people informed me that Inman … had natives around his shack during week ends. I warned Inman that a strict watch would be kept on his premises and in the event of natives being found in his camp, action would be taken against him for a breach of the *Native Administration Act*.44

Fortunately, the Inmans were never prosecuted for socialising with friends and family.

Mary was told that it was really difficult for her father to get work since he was married to an Aboriginal woman.

Well, every time he gets a job, they put him off; he couldn’t work, ‘cos he was with a dark woman. … I mean, Mum’s like me and ‘cos Dad was married to my mum they wouldn’t give him a job.45 … He got a job there [at Robb Jetty abattoirs] and then they found out he was married to my mother, they put him off.46 … He had to go all the way up to Carnarvon, working on the bridge, build that big bridge up there, yeah.47

By late 1946, the family had moved to Smelters Camp just south of South Beach.48 Mary remembers that:

Dad built a camp cos people kept kicking us out all the time so Dad got some tin from the tip and Dad bought a tent and put it up in the Smelters camp, that’s the place, yes, and we lived there for two years.49

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45 Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 5.
46 Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 17.
47 Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 5.
49 Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 1-2.
Mary remembered only two other people living at the camp at the time. One was Maudie Westcott, an elderly non-Aboriginal woman who lived near the beach and helped the children by giving them food and taking them fishing. The
other was an old non-Aboriginal man who lived next to Maudie, probably her husband William Westicott.\(^{50}\)

To keep out the snakes:

Dad built the floor up about that high [about 10cm]. Yeah, and then he put a tent up and he put a floor in the shed for Margaret and Albert and he built a floor up from the tent to the other shed and then he made a little square window in there.\(^{52}\)

Margaret G Doughty nee Sargeant, Mary Inman’s eldest daughter from her first marriage had been living at Smelters Camp with her husband Albert.\(^{53}\) During his 1947 inspection of the camp, Bisley noted that:


\(^{53}\) Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 10.

\(^{53}\) Heather Munro, conversation, 24 January 2013. Permission: Heather Munro.
About ½ mile beyond the camping area [at South Beach] there is a small colony of small shacks. The Inman family occupy one of these. Mrs Inman is married to a whiteman [Arthur] Stanley Inman.

The family that were occupying the American Bell Tent have departed on a woodcutting contract. Mrs Inman stated that it was one of her daughters [Margaret] who is married to a whiteman named Albert Doherty [Doughty] who had been living in the tent.\textsuperscript{54}

![Figure 3-22 Margaret G Doughty nee Sargeant and Albert Doughty. Permission and collection: Heather Munro](image)

Young Mary liked the camp.

It was lovely, better than living in a house. Mum used to keep it clean all the time. I used to sweep the floor, my sisters used to do the dishes and that; it was nice. \textsuperscript{55}

Every night Dad used to make a big fire outside. Didn’t put it in the camp ‘cos it was too dangerous so he’d make a big fire and we all sat out there.\textsuperscript{56}

As was usual in camps, there wasn’t much space.

\textsuperscript{54} DNA, 14/1939, \textit{Half-Caste – Mrs. Arthur S Inman}, JH Bisley to Acting Commissioner of Native Affairs, page 108 of 122.

\textsuperscript{55} Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 9.

\textsuperscript{56} Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 4.
Mum put us in the tent. Mum and Dad slept down the other end and [my older sister] Margaret slept in the shed ... we [kids] all slept in the double bed – that was the only way we could fit in.57

Drinking water was collected in a kerosene tin from the taps at South Beach.56 Clothes were washed in seawater in a big tub using a washboard. They were hung on a clothesline made by Arthur Inman.59

In March 1947, Mary and Arthur Inman were convicted of neglecting their seven children. They were released on a twelve-month good behaviour bond. The West Australian reported:

It was stated in evidence that the parents lived with their children in a three-roomed corrugated iron shack and that the children were not kept clean and that they were not kept sufficiently under control. It was further stated that the parents frequently drank.60

It is hard to tell how much this was prejudice against near-white Aboriginal children living a “camp” lifestyle or whether the parents’ struggles were seriously impacting on their children. Mary does remember that it was hard to get enough food to eat. At times, they caught fish, rabbits and kangaroo. In season, they found figs in the trees at the big oil tanks near South Beach, grapes on somebody’s farm and watermelon growing in the bush. Stealing wasn’t allowed but sometimes they did.

We didn’t know what to do for ourselves, because we take the apples off the train [at Robb Jetty], big green apples, took ‘em home to Mum and had to take ‘em back. Mum made us take ‘em back. She said, “You don’t steal nothing,” she said. “If somebody give it to you, it’s all right, but don’t steal. Put it back there.”

I said, “But we got to have something to eat, Mum.” “No, take it back, take it back.” “All right, we’ll take it back,” and we’d stick ‘em back in the train. We wouldn’t go back the second time. …

Then the bakery come around with bread – ‘cos you go and pinch the bread out of the bakery shop, the baker, and take off with it ‘cos we hungry, eat all the middle of it, thrown the crust away.61

57 Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 4.
58 Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 21.
59 Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 21.
61 Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 15.
Sometimes a stranger gave them food.

The beach – we’d stay there all day and the lady give me a pie ‘cos she saw me laying there all the time, not eatin’ nothing so she gave me – it was about midday – and she said, “You silly girl, would you like to have a pie?” and I said, “Oh, yeah,” and I went, “Bblibbb”. I was hungry, I’d been down the beach all day with nothing to eat.62

Food was also scrounged from the rubbish tip near Fremantle, about 1½ hours walk away.

We used go to the tip then and get jam, tins of jam, tin of baked beans, spaghetti. Yeah, It’s chucked out. Mum looks at the jam and looks at the thing and says yeah, they’re all right to eat so we had them. Tomatoes been chucked out. She picks the good ones out, and washes ‘em and cleans ‘em up and give us that.63

By this time, Mary’s parents seem to have had a drinking problem. On his April 1947 inspection of the camp, Bisley was advised by neighbours that “Inman was often under the influence of drink”.64 In October 1947, Mrs Inman was convicted of being drunk; it was the sixth time she had been charged with drunkenness that year.65

Despite the difficulties, Mary has fond memories of playing at the camp.

We had a good time there but. Playing dolls and shopping shops66 … you know, making shops and then we’d go down and take the money [stones] from the people, get some stones and play with stones, then we used to go down the beach and have a swim in the beach and we’d just go along the beach; start from one end and you go up to the other end. The sand was lovely and white then.67

The children had three horses given to them by Johnny Cockell, who had stables in Daly Street near South Beach.68

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62 Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 8.
63 Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 20.
64 DNA, 14/1939, Half-Caste – Mrs. Arthur S Inman, JH Bisley to Acting Commissioner of Native Affairs, page 108 of 122.
66 Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 2.
67 Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 5.
We used to ride on horses and go down and ride along the beach and one horse used to buck me off. He was a bad horse that one. … I got on him [with my brother] and ride it all the way down to the beach, he’d gallop all the way down to the beach and he threw me off. I went straight under the bridge [jetty], he was going to bounce on me.

And then we had an old white horse, old grey and white horse, he was a good horse. We used to stand on the back of his legs and get up the top, the four of us, and go for a ride on it all the way down to Bibra Lake. He’d take us all the way down there without a bridle and bring us all the way back by 5 o’clock at night.69

The tanks that held drinking water for the animals at Robb Jetty were also good for swimming in when it was very hot.

And we used to go and climb on the tanks there, big tanks, go for a swim in it and we’d jump in there, and swim in it, round and round and round.70

From her mother Mary learned traditional skills, such as how to deal with the many snakes in the bush around the camp.

I stood up to a snake, a big brown snake from there [about a metre away] and I was here and he stood up like that, staring at me, his eyes were going up and down, big eyes. I just stayed still and I didn’t move, I didn’t breathe, nothing, and he slowly put his head down and went that other way. I was lucky with that day. My mum told me to do that when you come face to face with a snake. “Stay still, don’t move.” I do what my mum told me.71

She also learnt how to keep warm sleeping outside. After accidentally hitting her sister in the face with a stone, Mary escaped and stayed out all night.

I threw a stone and hit my sister [in the face]. I meant to hit my … other sister Phyllis’ son who was giving me, tormentin’ me all the time so I threw a stone and tried to hit him and I hit my sister there. That’s when Dad chased me. He chased me.

[I went] straight to the beach. This was about 3 o’clock, 4 o’clock in the afternoon, and it was getting’ dark and I swam out to the boats, paddled all the way to the boats, and I stayed in the boat and Dad kept saying, “Come back, come back.” I wouldn’t come back; I stayed there.

69 Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 6.
70 Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 17.
71 Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 9-10.
In the morning I woke up, I slowly got the anchor, made my way back into shore and got out. ... Mum told me [dig] a big hole and lay in there and you keep warm all the time; that’s what I did and it was good. I lay there, and in the morning when I got home Mum ... belt me.\textsuperscript{72}

Other times the children would sleep out to avoid their parents’ arguments. The structure Mary describes might have been an old industrial or water tank near the camp.\textsuperscript{73}

When Mum and Dad were having an argument me and my brother and my sister, we go up a big tower, with a round ring on it and make a bed in there and slept there all night and we’d go home in the morning when everything’s all right.

It was near Smelters camp – not a tower but a big round thing, it all got holes in it, a rusty old place. We just look for a hole about that big [as the space in her arms]. We’d crawl in there and go to sleep; make a bed in there and sleep.

You could see everybody walk past (laughs) and then we’d get up before Dad come lookin’ for us. We stayed there, we became really quiet and then we come back down, we ran all the way home and then he say, “Where have we been?”\textsuperscript{74}

Sometime in 1947, the children were placed in care. The youngest children, including Mary, went to St Joseph’s Orphanage in Subiaco (now Wembley). The older girls were sent to the Home of the Good Shepherd in Leederville. Mary only saw her mother and father once after that.

Only once he came up to see us. Mum come once, after that didn’t see them no more. I didn’t know where Dad was, I didn’t know where Mum was, didn’t know but there was something telling me there was something wrong, going wrong.\textsuperscript{75}

On the night of 7 January 1948 Mrs Inman was drinking with a group of people at the Smelters camps. The next morning after drinking some more, she went for a swim. She was later seen to be in difficulties on a sandbank a distance from the shore. Two women helped her to the beach. At 11.45am, the

\textsuperscript{72} Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 10-11. Mary changed this from the original recording on 5 April 2013.
\textsuperscript{73} Not a gun emplacement as I had previously thought. Robert Mitchell, Curator, Army Museum, conversation, 11 April 2013.
\textsuperscript{74} Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 11.
\textsuperscript{75} Mary Edith Veronica Kemenade, oral history, 16 November 2012, 12.
Fremantle St John Ambulance answered a call for help, taking her from the beach behind Smelters camps to Fremantle Hospital. There she was placed on a rocking stretcher but did not respond to treatment. Mrs Mary Inman was 39 years old.\textsuperscript{76}

The Nebro family from Collie

In the 1940s and 1950s the Nebro family lived at the Smelters camps. As Tom Ford recalled:

Just on the side from Fremantle, down from the smelters, people used to live there, Aboriginal people used to live there. My brother-in-law’s mother and father, [old Don Nebro and his wife], lived there. Not only Aboriginal but a lot of white people, they were like squatters had little camp. They had a well there. They used to get water. I suppose it would be about – not far from the beach. Opposite the smelters … on the beach side – between there and the beach, they ’ad shacks and they used to get water there.

Figure 3-23 This camp photographed by WA Newspapers shows how close people lived to the beach. Collection: © West Australian Newspapers Limited, T6958

The Smelters camps are unusual because both Noongar and non-Aboriginal

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1 Permission for Nebro family story: Sandra Nebro
2 Tom Ford, oral history, 23 February 2004, Tape 2, Side A. Permission Maureen Ford
people lived there. Possibly the Aboriginal people living at the Smelters camps had exemptions from the legislation.

Don and Addil’s granddaughter, Sandra Nebro knew her grandfather later when they lived in Collie:

My grandfather, Donald Nebro, was born in the Kimberleys, then moved south and married a Williams woman, by the name of [Addil] Cowcher. He was banished from the Kimberleys for fighting
his brother who died and my grandfather was punished by a spear in the hip.

My grandfather was a Christian. He was a tall man of seven foot, dark, strikingly high cheekbones, very proud forehead; very proud, quietly spoken, never ever was loud.

Pop was a hardworking man, lived in the mining town of Collie and was a very proud member of the community, the Noongar community, as well as the wadjela, because he got his rights.³ [He was] a unionist, the flag, he was the first of our family [who was a unionist] and I was the second.⁴

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³ Rights refers to Citizenship Rights, discussed in Chapter 1.
In the early 1950s, Andy Nebro, Don and Addil’s son, lived at the Smelters camp with his wife Rose. Andy was a well-known boxer, “a one-hit knockout man” who was undefeated throughout his career.\(^5\) He also worked at other local jobs. In the film *Black Magic*, Rose said that Noongars had to take any work because they could be locked up if they were found on the streets without work. Andy also described having to take on anyone who challenged him, regardless of size, when he worked for Stewart’s Boxing Troupe. He would fight four

people during the day and another four in the evening.\textsuperscript{6}

In 1953 Andy was quoted in a newspaper article about the Smelters camps.

We’re moving out of this shanty shortly. I don’t mind so much but my wife has just got nothing here. Anyway, I think we’d have to go sooner or later – some big buildings are going up and some bulldozers are coming through in some area they tell me.

We’ve been here for ages: I think Mum bought the joint for £50.\textsuperscript{7}

Figure 3-26 Andy and Rose Nebro, when they were living in Norseman in the late 1950s.
Collection and Permission: Sandra Nebro


Jetta family holidays at South Beach

As a child in the 1950s, Doreen Jetta (now Nelson) used to come each summer with her grandmother, Hannah Yarran, and extended family to camp at South Beach.¹

The first couple of times we came there it was really a lot different from where we come from, living in the bush and not being exposed to the sea and all the things that live in the sea. But we used to have a great time, coming down there and swimming all day. And our skin was really dark by the time we went home from holidays.²

Figure 3-27 Hannah Yarran. Permission: Dennis, Doris, Doreen and Bruce Jetta (the Jetta Elders). Collection: Doreen Nelson

¹ Permission for Jetta family story: Dennis, Doris, Doreen and Bruce Jetta (the Jetta Elders).
² Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 1.
As well as having a holiday by the beach, they probably came to visit her uncle.

Mr Tommy Yarran, that was my mother’s brother, so we do know that he spent a lot of time in Perth, him and his family and they eventually got a house in Willagee. Him and his family must’ve been living at the South Beach there; that’s probably why Grandma used to come down and visit him.³

At the time Doreen lived at the Doodlakine camp with her parents, uncles, aunties, and grandmother.

Our parents, they were only pensioners, so we could only come down on a pension day … and we’d stay for about a month and then we’d go back when they got their pension later.

Figure 3-28 Doreen Jetta (now Nelson), her mother Chrissie Jetta (behind), Doris Jetta, Beryl McPhee, Dolly McPhee and May Jetta at the Doodlakine camps, 1950s. Permission: Dennis, Doris, Doreen and Bruce Jetta (the Jetta Elders). Collection: Doreen Nelson

Doreen remembered the permanent residents of Smelters camps.

There was a few huts there from some of the – I don’t know what you’d call them … we used to call them the old swampers that lived around there. And there was one old lady there [Maude

Westcott] that I used to visit all the time and go and see because she had a little dog. So, I spent a lot of time goin’ over and visiting her when I wasn’t playing on the beach. \(^4\) … Yeah, there was a lot of little shacks, looked like beach huts and that. \(^5\)

They stayed in the same general area as the shacks, but in tents and a lean-to.

**Tent poles came from the rubbish dump.** \(^6\)

[I] just remember that we were always in the tents there; we stayed in the tents and my uncle, when he went to the rubbish tip, he got three big sheets of iron and he made his little camp out of that so he thought that was okay, and enough for him, yeah. \(^7\)

We had one big tent which usually Grandma and our Auntie Dolly and all the girls would camp in and then I think there was another tent there for Mum and Dad and then Uncle Gordon had his little tin shed, … but in those days, that’s how Aboriginal people lived, you know. If they had a camp, there’d only be one room and that had everything in it – the kitchen, the bedroom, and all (laughs). But the tent was a really big army tent and it used to be really heavy to lift around and take to the stations but we managed to do it because our grandmother was that determined, you know, she wanted to come for a holiday and bring all her family and that’s what she done, yeah. \(^8\)

We just slept on the ground, yeah. We’d just put down some bushes sometimes, to make the bed a bit softer – some of the saltbushes that were around there … and some of the grass trees … we had blankets … some pillows, sometimes I suppose, but not much because when you’re travelling around I guess you can’t carry too much. \(^9\)

\(^4\) Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 2.
\(^5\) Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 5.
\(^6\) Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 10.
\(^7\) Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 5.
\(^8\) Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 10.
\(^9\) Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 21.
There was freshwater.

[T]here was an old well there, freshwater well – must’ve been some sort of spring there next to the ocean, just over in the sand hills and they used to get water out of there, yeah.\textsuperscript{10}

Although they were never hungry, it was an effort to get food.

\textsuperscript{10} Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 2.
But things were really hard those days and we survived by just going along to the soup kitchen which was on the Esplanade down in Fremantle. We used to go down there and get a feed and also some of the older ones would go up to the rubbish tip and there’d be a lot of stuff there which we, they’d pick up, things like clothes and shoes and sometimes even cooking gear. But also out of date foods too which the shopkeepers, when they came out, they didn’t actually throw them into the rubbish, they gave them to the people that were standing around there, like just out of date bread and eggs … we also walked around a lot because there were lots of fig trees and grapevines and mulberry trees so we’d go to pick those and eat those too. It really helped us I guess. But no, it was really good times, yeah.¹¹

They would also catch fish, and sometimes crabs and mussels.¹²

To keep food cool:

Sometime we were lucky enough to get margarine, most of the time we didn’t have margarine but when we did have margarine or milk, but it was mainly the powdered milk so that was in a tin so that was okay but the margarine, you know, and the dripping, they used to just wrap it up in wet rags and store it in a cool place so most of the food that we got I suppose you ate straight away.¹³

Robb’s Jetty abattoir had a big impact on the area.

It was a very busy place, by the looks of it, but there was also other sheds there in between the slaughter house and the power station and where we were camping. There was a big tanning shed there where they must’ve cut all the skins from the slaughter house and took them there and tanned ‘em, yeah, but it was a very bad smell and we didn’t like the smell much (laughs).¹⁴

The abattoir used to release blood into the water.

Yeah. Well, we used to get up early and go swimming but our parents used to say, “You can swim all day but at 3 o’clock when you hear —.” I think there was some sort of siren that went off, I’m not too sure, but they knew anyways, or they might’ve seen them going down to the sea to empty the stuff but they used to empty probably the blood, the stuff that came from the abattoir which was very close nearby there, and our parents used to say, “Well, don’t

¹¹ Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 1-2.
¹² Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 6.
¹³ Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 7.
¹⁴ Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 9.
go in the water then, because if there’s blood there, it’ll attract the sharks. And I heard that there were a lot of sharks there but I’ve never ever seen one while we were swimming.

Being close to Robb’s Jetty had advantages too:
Yeah, we could see the animals there, the sheep and I think the cattle was there too but definitely the sheep because my uncle used to go and get the sheep – the tripe, they call it. It’s sheep guts, yeah. They’d give him all the ones that after they’d done the killing for the day and he’d bring that home and we’d clean them and cook them so that was another food, you know, that we ate and we really loved that because it was very tasty.

Damper and dip was also a good meal:
Oh yeah, we had damper, yeah. There wasn’t much bread because Mum couldn’t afford to buy bread but they always had bags of flour so we’d always have damper, yeah. … If we just had damper and a dip that would be a meal for us, we didn’t really – kids didn’t eat a lot, I guess, those days, they just seemed to get full and that was it; they were too busy out there doing their own things.

To make the dip:
Sometimes they’d just put dripping and a bit of Holbrooks sauce or some tomato sauce they might have. Yeah, but that was mainly the main one. We used to have a lot of tins of golden syrup, so just some damper and golden syrup. A lot different now than them days (laughs), yeah.

The men played two-up, an illegal, but popular form of gambling for both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal men. A look-out would be posted in case of a police raid on the game. In this case, the lookout gave the warning only in Noongar:

Oh the two-up school, yeah – our uncle Tommy Yarran, who I see was staying there before we went there, he used to go and play two-up with a lot of the other men, a lot of the wadjela men. They used to come out, probably South Beach, and play two-up around the sandhills there because they probably wasn’t allowed to play it near the towns, yeah. So he used to go to the two-up and also a couple of the other men – I don’t know whether my dad went, but I

15 Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 7.
16 Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 8.
17 Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 8.
18 Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 8.
know our uncle, Uncle Gordon, he used to go there and they used to give him a little bit of money to stand on the hill and watch if the police were coming. He’d do that and then one day they tell us the story that he saw the police coming and he shouted in language – he said, “Manatj, manatj,” and because the Aboriginal men understood him they all ran but the wadjelas didn’t so they all got caught. (laughs) They probably had to pay a fine, I don’t know.19

The family used the nearby rubbish tip regularly. Noongar people commonly obtained items from the tip. Corrie Bodney described the rubbish tip as a shopping centre.20 Doreen continued:

That was part of our life and even though our grandkids and our kids say, “Nanna, you didn’t go to the dump, did you, pickin’ up things?” it’s an entirely different life now, lifestyle now. I mean, they’ve got the money and they’ve got the means of getting all these things but at that time we didn’t, yeah.21

The tip was still important for people camped there in later years. In the 1980s a group of seven couples lived near the old South Fremantle tip, building their shelters from material found there. Dolores Fraser recalled that she had a double bed, lounge chairs and white carpet on the floor of the camp, all from the tip.22

Poverty Point or Smelters Camp

In the mid 1950s, the Sunday Times published a series of articles arguing that the camps at South Beach should be closed. They had headlines such as “Shanty Town is Disgrace to W.A.” (1953),23 “Clean Out This Slum Or Someone Will Be Killed!” (1954),24 and “Notorious Beach Camp Must Go” (1955).25

The first article in 1953 argued that the more than 50 residents, including aged and war pensioners, should not have to live under such terrible conditions “in this age of scientific and social development”.26 Moreover, the rubbish strewn

19 Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 10-11.
20 Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 10.
21 Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 6.
22 Dolores Fraser, conversation, 21 September 2011. Permission: Dolores Fraser.
about the site and the rudimentary sanitary facilities were a threat to public health.\textsuperscript{27} Photographs and captions emphasised reporters’ horror.

People of all ages were found living in an assortment of dwellings constructed almost exclusively of used sheets of galvanised iron and old bags. Majority of these places afforded little or no protection from the weather and floors were of sand with chaff bags as mats.\textsuperscript{28}

It will come as a shock to many – even in days of housing shortages – to find that people still live in conditions like this.\textsuperscript{29}

These criticisms reflect the post-war push for better housing for all. However, they also highlight the double standards between what was considered suitable housing for Noongar people and what was acceptable in the wider community. For Noongar people, such housing and much worse had long been ignored and even at this time took lower priority than providing housing for non-Aboriginal

people.\textsuperscript{30}

The second article 18 months later, in October 1954, restated the same concerns but added that a criminal element was present, increasing the problems in the camp.

Poverty Point is a scattered collection of ramshackle huts, improvised cottages and bedclothes under the bushes on a wide expanse of sandy scrub bordering the coastline at South Fremantle.

There, a colony of permanent residents and assorted vagrants and undesirables come and go in a living area described by widely travelled reporters as worse than Sydney’s Happy Valley of the depression era.

Dwellings mostly have crude sanitation, and are without water, gas, or light. Since the Sunday Times criticised the area last year, some of the worst places have been cleaned out.

But an additionally undesirable feature has been the increased influx to the area of a vicious criminal element resulting in its coming to be regarded not only as a threat to health, but a threat to life as well.\textsuperscript{31}

Only a few months later, in January 1955, the Sunday Times celebrated the Fremantle Roads Board decision to push for demolition of the camp by the Lands Department, which owned the land. This time the article’s emphasis was on the criminal element in the camp.

Although some decent, respectable people – some pensioners – live at the camp, generally it is a dangerous, shameful refuge. …

It’s a filthy eyesore, a disgrace to the authorities, a threat to health, and a hideout and entertainment place for a vicious criminal element.\textsuperscript{32}

However, it appears that the camp was not closed at this time: Doreen Nelson remembers her family continued to spend time there each summer until 1959 or 1960.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{30} See for example, Frank L Mann, Anglican Rector of Carlisle, letter to the Editor, The West Australian, 18 April 1951, 15. \url{http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article48192897}.

\textsuperscript{31} Sunday Times, 24 October 1954, 3 \url{http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page4530284}.

\textsuperscript{32} Sunday Times, 16 January 1955, 4 \url{http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article59700333}.

\textsuperscript{33} Doreen Nelson, oral history, 1 November 2012, 13.
Seagull camp

By the 1980s, Mrs and Mrs Inman’s daughter, Beatrice, who had lived at Smelters camps as a child in the 1940s, was back living there again with her grown up daughter Dolores, their partners and other friends, making a total of seven couples.¹

Figure 3-31 Dolores Fraser and partner Yalla at Seagull camp near South Beach, early 1980s.
Permission and collection: Dolores Fraser

¹ Permission for Seagull camp story: Dolores Fraser.
Dolores talked about the experience of living at Seagull camp in the film *Freo Yorgas*.

I came to Fremantle in 1976 but I started living in South Fremantle in the camp across the way there we called Seagull camp in [1981]. … There was seven couples and we had little camps in and out of those castor oil bushes there. We lived there for three winters. And you couldn't see our camp because it was camouflaged; you couldn't see it from down here or anywhere around. You could hear us, but you couldn't see us. We used to party there all the time. … Geoffrey, he had a guitar and it had one string on it. When he used to get drunk he used to rattle a tune out with that. …

We used to dive for shells down 'ere and pick up mussels. …
It was a good life, no one interfered with us. We used to poach water from one of the buildings down on Hulbert Street there. We used to do all our washing and everything up here. It was good till they told us to leave. …

They bulldozed the place. I had a big tea box full of all my cooking gear. I had a camp oven and I had primus and everything like that. And when I come back they bulldozed the place so I came back to pick my stuff up and there was nothing there. I even had a toilet built up there with a 44 gallon drum sunk into the ground so I didn't have to go sitting around behind the trees and stuff. ²

Figure 3-33 Seagull camp, early 1980s. Permission and collection: Dolores Fraser

In November 1983, the *Fremantle Gazette* published a sympathetic article about the challenges Beatrice and the others faced living at the former rubbish tip and the challenges they experienced trying to find better housing.

² Dolores Fraser, *Freo Yorgas*; Dolores Fraser, conversation 28 October 2011. Permission: Dolores Fraser and Blanch Quartermaine. “Freo Yorgas” means “Fremantle Women”.

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Beatrice is 49. The deep lines in her weather-beaten face have been etched by years of wandering the state, from makeshift homes to sharing with relatives – and now a former Fremantle City Council dump. … But Beatrice is still not beaten. Witty and likeable, this Aboriginal woman has seen the worst. Things must get better. …

Beatrice and her de facto husband Jeffrey, a Thursday Islander, live in a crude, but solid humpy constructed from sheets of corrugated iron and timber, salvaged from the tip. This has been home for more than two years. … Beatrice is desperate to get away from the current situation. She craves privacy and some home comforts of her own. It is incredible that she can still laugh. … We’re sick of living like this. We can’t get a house, we’ve tried before but they’ve turned us away.\(^3\)

Former Fremantle Council staff member Ken Posney recalled visiting the tip with a Homeswest (State housing) officer in the 1980s. This was after complaints of about 30 Aboriginal people living there. Ken didn’t like moving them on and “felt he was going back in time and had committed a great sin”.

The day they went there to do so, they found that the residents had set fire to their humpies rather than be moved away.⁴

Now this area has been developed for high-end housing, which enjoys ocean views and proximity to the beach. It is a lovely part of the city, with a well-used beach and a popular café on approximately the location of the Smelters camps. But the development has displaced the camps. As Dolores Fraser said:

> It's taken away all our bush life and where we used to roam round, we used to walk through there. Now you can't see any wild life or anything, it's just all buildings there.⁵

Traces of the Fremantle camps are hard to find in the port and tourist city today. I hope that these stories will help to preserve their memory and encourage residents and visitors to see these places through new eyes.

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⁵ Dolores Fraser, Freo Yorgas.
Chapter 4 Camps at Freshwater Bay and Swanbourne

*Minderup,* or Freshwater Bay, and *Galbamaanup,* or Lake Claremont, previously known as Butler’s Swamp, were campsites in traditional times, before European colonisation.\(^1\) Despite the land being granted to colonists from the 1850s, Noongar people maintained a connection to this country, often through relationships with the new landowners. They continued to camp, particularly at the swamp, until the Nedlands Road Board bulldozed the last camps in 1951.\(^2\)

After the camps were removed, Noongar people continued to care for country. Family members visited regularly over the years, there have been several native title claims over the area, and both the Swan River, Lake Claremont and several other sites are registered under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act, 1972.* In addition, there have been several joint projects relating to the area between Noongar people and the Freshwater Bay Museum.

Early contact

The earliest European record of Noongar people in the Claremont area is from 1697. At that time, Dutch explorer De Vlamingh’s expedition to the west coast of Australia visited the Swan River and Freshwater Bay. While the Dutch were unsuccessful in making contact with Noongar people, at Freshwater Bay they saw footprints in the sand, soaks containing brackish fresh water and traditional camps.\(^3\) De Vlamingh’s journal described such a camp elsewhere on the Swan River as:

\(^1\) Corrie Bodney, oral history, 18 January 2007; 1; Edward MacDonald, conversation, 19 July 2013; Extract from journal kept by skipper Willem De Vlamingh on his voyage with the ships De Geelvinck, Nijptangh and T’Weselthe via Trestan Da Cunch, the Cape, the islands of Peter and Paul, and the Southland to Batavia, begun May 3, 1696 and ended March 20, 1697, in Willem CH Robert, *Willem De Vlamingh’s Explorations of Australia, 1696–1697* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1972), 66.

\(^2\) Department of Native Affairs, 283/1931, *Native Affairs – Swanbourne and Claremont Camp, Cadet Patrol Officer–Central to A/Patrol Officer–Central and A/District Officer–Central,* 19 September 1951, SROWA, Cons 993.

\(^3\) Extract from journal kept by De Vlamingh, in Robert, *Willem De Vlamingh’s Explorations of Australia,* 66.
small huts which were covered on one side with wild-reed, about a foot high and the huts were 2 feet high, in which lay a lot of bark of trees which they used as beds.\textsuperscript{4}

As discussed earlier, in 1830, the land on the edge of Freshwater Bay in what is now Peppermint Grove, was granted to British colonist John Butler. However, the area with its freshwater springs was already a regular campsite for Noongar people.\textsuperscript{5}

**Tommy Dower’s request for land**

In 1886, Tommy Dower requested a ten-acre grant of land for Aboriginal people “in the neighbourhood of Freshwater Bay”.\textsuperscript{6} Originally from the Rockingham and Cockburn Sound area south of Fremantle,\textsuperscript{7} Dower was well known among the non-Aboriginal community of Perth. He had been a guide on Alexander Forrest’s expedition to the Kimberley in 1879, and in 1881 was with John Forrest on the survey of land between Beverley and Albany.\textsuperscript{8} However, unlike the non-Aboriginal Kimberley expedition members, Dower did not receive a land grant in appreciation of his work.\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{4} Extract from journal kept by De Vlamingh, in Robert, *Willem De Vlamingh’s Explorations of Australia*, 74.
\textsuperscript{5} Bolton and Gregory, *Claremont*, 7-9.
\textsuperscript{6} *The Inquirer and Commercial News*, 29 September 1886, 3.
\textsuperscript{9} Bolton and Gregory, *Claremont*, 8, 44.
Tommy Dower was often quoted in the newspapers. By the 1890s he was called King Tommy Dower, a title given by non-Aboriginal colonists to an Aboriginal man they considered a leader.\textsuperscript{10} His figure was included in a display of waxworks of living people in Fremantle in 1894, along with a number of other celebrities, including Sir Henry Parkes, former NSW Premier and leader in federation negotiations.\textsuperscript{11} This fame no doubt contributed to support Dower received for his claim for land.

A letter in 1886 to the editor of \textit{The Inquirer and Commercial News} signed “Justice” stated that Dower had asked the government for ten acres of land in Freshwater Bay to “build a ‘Myah’ (house) and cultivate a garden.”\textsuperscript{12} “Justice” quoted Dower as giving the following reasons for wanting the land.

\textsuperscript{10} See for example “King Tommy Dower and the Whiteman,” \textit{The Daily News}, 4 July 1891, 4.
\textsuperscript{12} “Justice, “A Native’s Complaint,” letter to the editor, \textit{The Inquirer and Commercial News}, 13 Oct 1886. 5.
That white man take all black-fellows’ country, and that black-fellow no place sit down. That white man build houses, fence land, run cattle, sheep, horse on black-fellows’ country. But poor black-fellows, no house, no kangaroo or emu left. That plenty black-fellow die and no notice taken of him by white man.¹³

A few years later, “Gumsucker” wrote to the Daily News in support of Tommy Dower’s complaint.

One cannot read Tommy Dower’s ideas of the white man’s treatment of the natives without feeling convinced that he is very nearly, if not quite, right. … In short, the white-man has taken the blackfellows’ country and destroyed his game for sport, as well as exterminated his race with rum, tobacco and disease.¹⁴

In the end, Dower was granted land at Gnangara north of Perth rather than Freshwater Bay, but he remained living close to Perth and Fremantle.¹⁵

In 1881, the railway line was built between Perth and Fremantle, with a station at Claremont. As a result, land around Claremont began to be subdivided and houses built. In the 1890s, the great increase in population brought by the gold rushes accelerated development in the area.¹⁶ This expansion of housing reduced the bush available to Noongar people for camps. While some continued to live on undeveloped Crown land, others made arrangements to camp on private property. Often they did this by working for the new landowners on the property or in the house.

¹⁵ Colonial Secretary’s Office, 1886/4592, Grant of land for camps, vegetable gardens, etc. Petition of various Aborigina ls for, SROWA, Cons 527; Neville Green, telephone conversation, 8 March 2013.
Balbuk, also known as Fanny

In the late 1890s, a Noongar woman called Balbuk, also known as Fanny, and an Aboriginal man Jimmy, had a camp for some years by the river in Claremont. It was on Victoria Avenue between Chester and Bay Roads, possibly lot 256 on this map. They also spent time at Guildford, moving between the two camps.

Figure 4-2 Balbuk and Jimmy possibly camped on lot 256 Victoria Avenue, then known as Pensioner Terrace. This map is from 1903, a couple of years after this story so there may be more houses marked on the map than were there in Balbuk’s time. Collection: Part of PWD map 117… (detail), held Freshwater Bay Museum.

Balbuk was a Noongar Elder for the Perth and Fremantle areas. Before she passed on in 1907, she shared with anthropologist Daisy Bates important information about Noongar traditional practices. This included Noongar language, cultural information, and details of camps used by family members throughout Perth. Balbuk had been born on Heirisson Island, now part of the causeway over the Swan River adjoining the centre of Perth. Even after houses and fences were built in Perth, she walked in a straight line from there to the swamp where she gathered gilgies and vegetable food, using her digging stick.

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1 Melba White, oral history recorded for the State Library of Western Australia by Ronda Jamieson, 27 September 1979, OH386, 8-9.
2 Bates, Aboriginal Perth, 10, 22.
to break down fences. That swamp is now covered by Perth Railway Station.³

It is not known who Jimmy was, and researchers think he may not have been Balbuk’s husband, as described below.⁴ Without a Noongar name or other information it is difficult to trace him more than one hundred years later.

Fanny Balbuk and Jimmy worked for a number of years for William and Louisa Caporn who lived in the house next door to their camp. The Caporn’s youngest child, Melba, was born in 1895. In 1979, Melba talked about her life to oral historian Ronda Jamieson, including her memories of both Fanny and Jimmy.⁵ She told Ronda that her family lived in the third house along from the Claremont Baths, towards the police station, now Freshwater Bay Museum, and that Fanny

⁴ Janet Osborne, Anthropologist, SWALSC, email communication, 14 October 2013; Mark Chambers, Department of Aboriginal Affairs, email communication, 6 November 2013.
⁵ Melba White, oral history, 27 September 1979.
and Jimmy lived on the vacant block next door. Since there are no written records of house locations at that time, I have used this information to suggest the location of the camp.

![Figure 4-4 Five-year-old Melba Caporn with her family, 1900. This photo was taken at the time that Balbuk and Jimmy had a camp next to their house. Collection: State Library of Western Australia, 25335P](image)

In writing this story based on her oral history, I have kept Melba’s words almost exactly as she said them, but have rearranged and selected from a longer account. While her family appear to have had a good relationship with Fanny and Jimmy, some of her language is patronising and reflects the attitudes of the day. Melba said:

> I can remember mother had two natives working for us. Fanny and her husband Jimmy, they had a tent on the other block next to the house. I think they had two camps there, one for sleeping in, and one for cooking. As far as I can remember they must have been living there for a long, long time.

Fanny and Jimmy used to spend time in both Claremont and Guildford. Melba continued:

> they’d go walkabout. Mother wouldn’t see them for about a fortnight; they’d walk up to Guildford, to some of their clan

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suppose, and back they’d come. Others used to walk from Guildford down there to Claremont.

Fanny and Jimmy did the kind of domestic work that many Aboriginal people did at that time.

She used to help with the washing and he used to chop the wood and sweep the paths and all that kind of thing. And she would do any messages and that for mother.

I don’t really know whether they paid them wages or just kept them. I think their night meal went from our place; she’d come over and get it – mother would cook enough. I know mother used to make Fanny a frock and go up to Claremont and buy some material and father would buy him a pair of boots and things like that. Perhaps a shirt that had worn a bit. I can remember mother saying, “Oh, Jimmy can have this.”

When the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York visited Perth in 1901, a large group of Noongar people, including Fanny and Jimmy, went to the zoo for a picnic. Melba recalled her mother’s story about Fanny at the picnic. This account shows the racist attitudes of the time.

She wanted a white frock and mother said, “Alright, we’ll see what we can do”. So, I suppose mother searched around and got one off an aunt or something. And when mother came to get Fanny into it, it was too tight, so mother got a pair of corsets, I don’t know whether they were hers or not, and got Fanny into them with much struggle and much ado. And “Oh,” she said, “She couldn’t breathe”. And mother said, “It will be all right”. So when they got to the zoo, they were wandering around looking at the animals and all at once mother said she saw Fanny with the corsets off. She had them underneath her arm, this way around and the suspenders were dangling down. She’d taken her boots off, they were hurting her, and she had the two boots hanging around her neck with the laces tied, and this pair of corsets under her arm. Mother said she must have got her petticoat caught up because you could see her black legs through the bottom of this white frock. My aunts were all there helping I suppose to dish out the buns and what have we, and mother said you never saw anything so funny, and Fanny was quite happy then. She’d never had a pair of corsets on in her life.

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7 Melba White, oral history, 27 September 1979, 8-11.
8 Melba White, oral history, 27 September 1979, 12.
Melba continued:

But in Claremont in those days, people treated them just the same as we would treat one another. They'd stop and talk to them in the street. There was no class distinction with them, and they were quite friendly. I can remember if mother and father went somewhere, Fanny and Jimmy would mind us kids, and play with us and come down to the beach. They were more, I suppose, treated as part of the family. And I think they were very upset when we were leaving Claremont.¹¹

About 1901, when Melba was six, her family moved from Claremont to Queens Park. The friendship between Fanny, Jimmy, and her family continued.

The natives used to walk from Guildford out there to see us, and I think mother used to spread a table out the back for them and they'd take home sugar and tea and things like that. And father would buy them a bit of tobacco, if I can remember rightly. They

⁹ Fanny Balbuk is identified in this photo in Melba White, oral history, OH386, 12, footnote 10. ¹⁰ Information that William Caporn was the photographer from Leonie Stella, email communication, 20 November 2009. Leonie was told this by a Caporn family historian; There is also a suggestion that the photo was taken at Kings Park. Theresa Walley, SWALSC Metro Working Party meeting, 20 July 2011. ¹¹ Melba White, oral history, 27 September 1979, 10-11.
would walk all the way from Guildford, right out there, and they’d arrive there about eleven in the morning and they’d leave about five at night and they’d just sit on the back verandah and talk to mother and talk to father. And she had learnt a bit of their language and I suppose they taught her a bit and they enjoyed seeing them. Even one of them was called Melba, one of their grandchildren. And there’s several of them now, Melba’s, which I’m very proud of.

Figure 4-6 Camp near Guildford, about 1911. This may be similar to the camp that Fanny Balbuk and Jimmy had lived in earlier. Photo: C Walker. *The Western Mail*, 18 February 1911, 23. Collection: National Library of Australia, 59228a. [http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article38369640](http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article38369640).

Actually, Corrie Bodney’s mother Melba Armitage was born in 1903 at Maamba, or Welshpool Reserve, close to Queens Park. She may have been one of the Melba’s named after Melba Caporn. Melba continued:

They’d have a billy of tea with them. I suppose they drank it on the way and then mother’d make them a big billy of tea and they’d really enjoy the day out. And I think they used to come about, oh perhaps every couple of months or something. And I know I used

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12 Although she was commonly called Melba, she was actually Melville or Melva Caporn. Melba Armitage (later Bodney) was also called Melba or Melva on occasion. Melba White, oral history, 27 September 1979. 2. *Police Gazette*, August 1952, “318. Bodney, Melva, @ Bodney, Melba”.

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to be very fascinated with them, to hear them talk. No boots and stockings on them or anything, as tough as could be. But mother was very fond of the natives.13

**Summer camps at Freshwater Bay**

Other records exist of Noongar people camped around Freshwater Bay. Thomas and Adeline Smith, who moved to Claremont from Victoria in 1895 recalled “when the area from Stirling Highway to the Swan River was bush and when a tribe of Aborigines would hold a yearly camp on the river banks near Claremont”.14

A 1920s resident of George Road (now Victoria Avenue, Dalkeith) also remembered Noongar people in the area.

A group of Aborigines used to camp each summer in a fairly large stand of wattle trees which ran down to the beach near our place.

We did not see much of them except when they occasionally asked for water. This was not often and we worked out they must have got their water by digging a hole in the beach sand a yard or two from the high tide mark anywhere along the beach. This water was a bit brackish but quite drinkable. Hence the name Freshwater Bay.15

In 2009 the spring in the corner of Freshwater Bay was still visible at low tide.16

Toopy Bodney was a Noongar man who was born in 1935. He grew up with his extended family, including parents Melba and Bill Bodney, in the camps at Freshwater Bay and Lake Claremont. He recalled later that his mother Melba had also spent time in that area as a child.

My mum told me that she used to go fishing and swimming and camping in the same area that she took us as children when she was a girl. So she knew that area very well.17

Corrie Bodney, Toopy’s older brother, told me about fishing, swimming and

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13 Melba White, oral history, OH386, 13.
14 “They Wed in 1893,” recollections of Thomas and Adeline Smith, unreferenced newspaper article, [approx. 1959], Freshwater Bay Museum, PAS Aborigines Camps/Housing.
camping at Freshwater Bay, just below Freshwater Bay Museum, in the 1930s and 1940s.

Freshwater Bay is one of our regular places where we’d come here sometimes, stop weekends. Camp down, just down from ... what’s now the museum, used to be the old police station at one time.... But we used to be all down the bottom. Sometimes we’d come here in the Christmas time and have a bit of a Christmas here.\footnote{18}

At Christmas time at Freshwater Bay, Toopy Bodney recalled that:

my old man, he used to bring us toys, and every Christmas I used to get a steam roller. I used to wind it up and let it run into the water. And about three times and that would be the end of it. It wouldn’t go no more. ... I always wondered why he didn’t buy me something else.\footnote{19}

They wouldn’t build a shelter at that time of the year. Corrie continued:

Just lie on the ground. Used to bring a couple of old blankets and things like that, yeah. But I say, in the summertime, it was beautiful here. Yeah, we used to have fires going.\footnote{20}

The fishing was great.

We’d come here fishing all the time, you know, as the main place. We get mullet and stuff down here. Sometimes cobbler. ... there used to be big schools here one time, of fish. It’s unbelievable how they used to be – crabs, get plenty of crabs here. The blue manna crab too, the big ones.\footnote{21}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[18] Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 10-11.
\item[21] Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 11.
\end{footnotes}
Lake Claremont or *Galbamaanup*

Figure 4-7 Lake Claremont, 1921. There are no photographs of Noongar people or the camps at Lake Claremont. Collection: Freshwater Bay Museum, 80.63a

Lake Claremont was for many years called Butler’s Swamp and John Butler from Peppermint Grove may have unofficially grazed animals there in the early 1830s.22 Most of the land around the swamp was granted in the 1850s and 1860s to pensioner guards. These were former British soldiers who guarded convicts on the ships to Fremantle. Still generally in their forties, the men had been pensioned off from the British armed forces when no longer needed for combat. At Lake Claremont the pensioner guards, as well as later farmers, established farms and dairies with horses, cattle, pigs, and crops. In some cases, through friendship or working arrangements, Noongar people were able to camp on these properties. In 1955, the name was changed to Lake Claremont reflecting the gentrification of the area.23

23 The name was changed from Butler’s Swamp to Lake Claremont in 1955. *The Yargine Track*, Claremont: Town of Claremont, [c.2010]
Figure 4-8 Leonard boys bringing in the crop at Lake Claremont. Permission: Anne Kidd. Collection: Freshwater Bay Museum, 98.636
Camps in the way of development

In 1899, the newly formed Claremont Municipal Council wrote the following letter to landowner J.W. Hardwick asking for permission to move Aboriginal people from the camps on his land at Lake Claremont. The blocks mentioned, P1058 and P1061, were each 9.5 acres (3.8 hectares). They were among those that had been allocated in the 1850s to pensioner guards.

Sir,

We are much annoyed here by a lot of blacks. They have a large camp on P lots 1058 and 1061 held by Mr Blake and yourself. Will you kindly give me authority to have them shifted. I cannot move them without, and they are a nuisance to the neighbourhood. ¹

By 1903, just four years later, the land on blocks P1058 and P1061 had been

subdivided to form Central Avenue, Swanbourne, and housing blocks.\(^2\) This is probably the underlying reason the council wanted the camps moved.

**Shelter shed for Noongar people**

In 1897, the Claremont Local Board of Health asked for a shelter shed to be built for Aboriginal people on government land.\(^3\) Tenders were called in January 1898, specifying wood and iron quarters.\(^4\) Shortly after this, police records show that there were twenty Noongar people living in the camps at Lake Claremont.\(^5\) Around this time there was at least one outbreak of measles, an often fatal disease for Aboriginal people who didn’t have immunity to introduced diseases. It is not known whether any of the people in the Swanbourne camps died but records show that they were issued rations while they were ill.\(^6\)

Unfortunately, we don’t know what the shelter shed or sheds looked like. They could have been similar to the 12 foot long by 10 foot wide corrugated iron hut built for Ngilgee at Maamba, also known as Welshpool Reserve, in the early 1900s.\(^7\)

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\(^2\) Real estate agents’ plans of subdivisions [cartographic material], “Claremont: Showing subdivisions to 31st Dec. 1903,” compiled by GA Harris, published by CH Evans, Claremont, scale 10 chains to 1 inch. SLWA 102c/188, 123. Copy held Freshwater Bay Museum.

\(^3\) Colonial Secretary Office, 2492/1897, “Index 1891–1899,” letter, Claremont Local Board of Health, SROWA.

\(^4\) The West Australian, 5 January 1898, 2.


\(^6\) Police Department, 39/1898, Police, Claremont. Suggesting relief to Aboriginals suffering from measles at Claremont, Constable E Huxtable, “List of Sick Aborigines [sic] Natives that drew Rations from the Claremont Police Station to the amount of 6d per draw while suffering from measels [sic] in accordance with instructions received from Colonel Forbes Secretary for the Aborigines,” 31 May 1898.

\(^7\) “An Aboriginals Adventures – Ngilgee,” The Western Mail, 8 February 1908, in Bates, Aboriginal Perth, 107. This reference to Ngilgee is used with permission from Barry McGuire.
Glen Doepel was a child living nearby in the early 1900s. In 1988, at the age of 93, he shared with me his memories of that time.\textsuperscript{8}

The Aborigines lived in a wooden house at the swamp [though] he never saw the house. They had built a mia mia a little way from this at the edge of the swamp. They would spend the day sitting in the lean-to (mia mia) and go back to the shack to sleep. On a cold day the kids would be right inside the mia mia huddling up to the dogs, the men would be nearer the outside and there would be a fire burning outside.\textsuperscript{9}

The mia mia was made from paperbark strips interwoven together as indicated in this sketch drawn from Glen Doepel’s memory:

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\textsuperscript{8} Permission for Glen Doepel’s story: the Doepel family.

\textsuperscript{9} Glen Doepel, oral history written down for Claremont Museum by Denise Cook, 16 March 1988, 20.
Camp of Aborigines at Butlers Swamp, one family 1904 living under mia mia (shelter).

- Forked sticks holding one sheet of wattle toen bark against the wind.

Figure 4-11 Camp at Lake Claremont, early 1900s. Sketch by Sally Anne Hasluck from Glen Doepel’s memories. Permission: Doepel family. Collection: Freshwater Bay Museum PAS PEOPLE Individuals/Families Doepel.

Figure 4-12 Lake Claremont, showing location of mia mia and wooden shack occupied by Aboriginal people about 1905-1910. Drawn by Glen Doepel, 1988. Permission: Doepel family. Collection: Freshwater Bay Museum PAS PEOPLE Individuals/Families Doepel.
Kut-a-wei-rah (King Billy) and the Doepel family

In 1920 Glen’s father Alexander Doepel wrote to the Premier offering to sell a life-sized bust of Kut-a-wei-rah, who he described as chief of the Geraldton tribes. Kut-a-wei-rah, also known as King Billy, did sittings for the bust when he was living at the Swanbourne camp in 1913. Doepel suggested the bust would make a suitable gift to the Prince of Wales from Western Australia for his visit that year. The response from the Premier was “No”.10

Figure 4-13 Kut-a-wei-rah, also known as King Billy, from the Swanbourne camp, modelled by Alexander Doepel in Claremont in 1913. Permission: Doepel family. Collection: Freshwater Bay Museum, 07.190

10 Premier’s Department, 326/20, Mr. Alex Doepel offers life sized bust of “Kut-A-Wei-Rah” (Chief of the Geraldton tribe of natives) for presentation to the Prince, Letter Alexander Doepel to the Premier, 16 June 1920, State Records Office of Western Australia. Cons 1496.
Alexander Doepel was an artist who taught painting, carving, and geometric drawing at Scotch College and other local schools. He won a competition to design Claremont Park on the corner of Stirling Highway and Bay View Terrace.\textsuperscript{11} The family lived in Bay View Terrace on the site that later became the Princess Theatre. In 2015, it is occupied by Old Theatre Lane.

Glen Doepel remembered many years later that King Billy used to sit on a kerosene box in their kitchen while his father created the clay model.\textsuperscript{12} Glen helped with casting it.\textsuperscript{13} After Kut-a-wei-rah’s death the bust was popular with Aboriginal visitors.

At Easter a lot of Aborigines came down from the country to the show and visited friends at Butler’s Swamp [now Lake Claremont]. Ten or more of them would be brought around to the Doepel house where they would all crowd into the garden. Dad would bring out the head he had done of King Billy. They were thrilled to see it and came up and touched it. This happened year after year until once he brought out a head which he had coloured copper-coloured for an exhibition. They never came again. This was because of their belief that they would lay down blackfella, jump up whitefella.\textsuperscript{14}

One copy of the head was discarded as imperfect. Children played with it, threw stones at it, set it up with sheets to scare the policeman, and eventually it was buried on the property. In 1977, when builders undertook renovations of the Princess Theatre, they found the damaged head under the stage and it was donated to Freshwater Bay Museum.\textsuperscript{15} The museum also has the undamaged sculpture pictured above.

\textsuperscript{11} Glen Doepel, oral history written down for Claremont Museum by Denise Cook, 9 March 1988, 1.
\textsuperscript{12} “Memories of Mr G Doepel,” oral history written down for Claremont Museum by Sally Anne Hasluck, nd, [1980s?], Freshwater Bay Museum PAS, People Individuals/Families Doepel.
\textsuperscript{13} Glen Doepel, oral history, 16 March 1988, 19.
\textsuperscript{14} Glen Doepel, oral history written down for Claremont Museum by Denise Cook, 23 February 1989, 1.
\textsuperscript{15} “Memories of Mr G Doepel,” nd, [1980s?].
In the early 1900s Aboriginal women from the Swanbourne camps earned a living by washing for non-Aboriginal families in the area; men cut wood and sold clothes props. Kut-a-wei-rah’s granddaughter, Sally, washed for a different family each day, including the Doepel family in Bay View Terrace on Mondays. Payment was a feed at lunchtime for her extended family. Glen Doepel recalled the following story.

16 “Memories of Mr G Doepel,” nd, [1980s?].
17 “Memories of Mr G Doepel,” nd, [1980s?].
Every Monday at 7am there would be a knock on the back door and a young Aboriginal woman (Sally), would be standing there. When she ascertained that they were going to wash that day she would go down and set the copper going in the shed in the back yard.

Glen was given 3 shillings and sent off to get three sheep’s heads (complete with wool). He had to skin them and get the brains and tongue out. They put in barley, potatoes and onions with it to make a lovely stew. It all made about half a kerosene tin full.

![Kerosene tin](image)

Figure 4-15 Kerosene tin. Collection: Freshwater Bay Museum, 93.64

About a quarter of an hour after Sally arrived Topsy would knock on the door with Sally’s baby on her hip, saying that the baby needed a feed. Three or four minutes later her mother knocked on the door. A little while later one of the husbands arrived selling props and he went down to the laundry. Then all the other husbands came. Finally King Billy would arrive. If Alexander
Doepel (Glen’s father) was home he would be invited into the kitchen so he could model his head.\textsuperscript{18}

When the girls came to do the Doepel family washing they would sing Aboriginal songs. They sang them like duets, either together or in harmony. Father said he never heard such clear voices in his life; they were a joy to listen to.\textsuperscript{19}

At dinnertime Glen had to carry the kerosene tin down to the laundry and King Billy would go down too. Usually the Aborigines picked the meat out of the stew and put it on the grass.

King Billy would put his crutch behind him when he was sitting eating lunch. There was a clump of bamboos behind the washhouse – the boys had cut a cubby in the centre. They used to creep through the bamboos to try and get King Billy’s crutch. Once, when they got there he turned around and let out a great war-whoop. He had put his feathers in his nose and frightened the life out of them.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{18} Glen Doepel, oral history, 16 March 1988, 19.
\textsuperscript{19} Glen Doepel, oral history, 23 February 1989, 1.
\textsuperscript{20} Glen Doepel, oral history, 16 March 1988, 19-20.
The search for a “regular place to camp”

Figure 4-16 Bimba, also known as Pimber or Tommy Pimbar photographed with men who performed a corroboree for the Perth Carnival in 1909. The group was organised by Daisy Bates, who wrote each person’s name on the newspaper clipping about the event. Collection: The Western Mail, 12 February 1910, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, MSS 572.994 B32t, 9-41. Note: the original (unannotated) photo, dated Christmas 1909, is nla.pic-an23167201.

By 1912, the camps were on private property at the back of Lake Claremont, and the Claremont Local Board of Health complained about the “most unsatisfactory” state of the camps.21 In response the health inspector, police constable and the secretary of the Department of Aborigines and Fisheries made a visit, and the secretary wrote the following in his report.

21 Note: the complaint letter is not on file; it is described in the response. Department of Aborigines and Fisheries, 1912/1644, Aborigines, camping ground at Claremont for …, Secretary, Aborigines and Fisheries Department to Chief Protector Aborigines, 9 December 1912. State Records Office of Western Australia, AN 1/3, Cons 652, fol.2-3.
There were only about 20 natives there, including men, women and children, and the place was fairly clean. The nearest houses are a few chains away from the camp [3 chains is 60 metres], and the camp itself is not far away from a reserve belonging to the Claremont Municipal Council. As you are aware, large numbers of natives come down every year to the Agricultural Show, and I think that some definite action should be taken to provide these natives with a suitable camping ground.\(^{22}\)

Aware that housing was “encroaching”\(^{23}\) on the camps, the Department approached the Claremont Council to request that part of the nearby reserve be set aside for, as they put it, “a camping ground for natives”.\(^{24}\) This was reserve P1063 on the north side of Mitford Street in Swanbourne.\(^{25}\) However, the Council’s response was that the land was not available because it had been offered to the Workers Home Board in case they wanted to build houses there.\(^{26}\) The centre of the reserve later became Maclagan Park.

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\(^{22}\) Dept. Aborigines and Fisheries, 1912/1644, Aborigines, camping ground at Claremont for …, Secretary, Aborigines and Fisheries Department to Chief Protector Aborigines, 9 December 1912, fol.2-3.

\(^{23}\) Dept. Aborigines and Fisheries, 1912/1644, Aborigines, camping ground at Claremont for …, Secretary, Aborigines and Fisheries Department to Chief Protector Aborigines, 9 December 1912, fol.3.

\(^{24}\) Dept. Aborigines and Fisheries, 1912/1644, Aborigines, camping ground at Claremont for …, Secretary, Department of Aborigines and Fisheries to Town Clerk, Claremont, 12 December 1912, fol.4.

\(^{25}\) Dept. Aborigines and Fisheries, 1912/1644, Aborigines, camping ground at Claremont for …, letter, Secretary, Claremont Local Board of Health to Secretary, Aborigines Department, 20 December 1912, fol.5.

\(^{26}\) Dept. Aborigines and Fisheries, 1912/1644, Aborigines, camping ground at Claremont for …, letter, Secretary, Claremont Local Board of Health to Secretary, Aborigines Department, 20 December 1912, fol.5.
The Lands Department was then approached to find suitable land for a reserve, but took over three months to respond. In the meantime, Bimba (Tommy Pimbar), spoke to Sir John Forrest, Federal Treasurer and former State Premier. According to Daisy Bates, Bimba was from northeast of New Norcia, outside Noongar country, and was not welcome among Noongar people camping at Maama Reserve in the early 1900s. Nonetheless, by 1913 Bimba was actively involved in finding land for a Noongar camping place. Forrest wrote to the Under Secretary, Colonial Secretary’s Office.

The bearer, my old friend “Tommy Pimbar” is anxious to have a reserve of 10 acres made, for “a camping place for Aborigines” near Claremont. He says they have no regular place to camp, and seem to be in peoples [sic] way. I really think there should be a

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27 Dept. Aborigines and Fisheries, 1912/1644, Aborigines, camping ground at Claremont for …, Secretary, Department of Aborigines and Fisheries to Under Secretary, Colonial Secretary’s Department, 17 January 1913; Under Secretary, Colonial Secretary’s Department file note to Under Secretary for Lands, 20 January 1913, both fol.7.


camping place reserved, in a locality that is liked by these fast “disappearing” people. Please see what you can do.\textsuperscript{30}

Forrest wrote that Bimba had a place in mind “in Claremont, somewhere near 'Mayhews' place and he mentions Butlers Swamp, the Rifle Range, etc”.\textsuperscript{31} The Under Secretary for Lands was asked to consult with him to identify it.

Eventually, possibly at Bimba’s suggestion, the Lands Department suggested the southern half of Reserve 8150. This reserve, and the other possible campsites discussed here, are marked on the large map “Noongar Camps Swanbourne Area”. District Surveyor A.W. Canning described Reserve 8150 as “very suitable for a camping ground for aboriginals, having on it a number of fine, large, shady trees”.\textsuperscript{32} However, there were houses nearby and as was usual when there was conflict over access to land, the needs of non-Aboriginal residents came first. Canning continued:

there is a number of residences erected to the west of it with their backyards to the road abutting on to this Reserve, and there would probably be a strong objection to a camp being formed here. The Claremont Council also may not be agreeable. If there were no objection by either the residents or the Council, this area is suitable in every way.\textsuperscript{33}

In fact, the Council turned down the request, “not deeming the site suitable”.\textsuperscript{34} This land is now housing, located between Graylands Road, Lapsley Road, and Motteram Avenue.

The Chief Protector of Aborigines also wrote to the Trustees of the University Endowment Land. Large parcels of land in what are now the western suburbs had been set aside for the use and financial benefit of the future University of Western Australia.

\textsuperscript{30} Dept. Aborigines and Fisheries, 1912/1644, Aborigines, camping ground at Claremont for …, John Forrest, letter to Under Secretary, Colonial Secretary’s Office, fol.9.
\textsuperscript{31} Dept. Aborigines and Fisheries, 1912/1644, Aborigines, camping ground at Claremont for …, Colonial Secretary’s Office to Under Secretary for Lands, fol.10.
\textsuperscript{32} Dept. Aborigines and Fisheries, 1912/1644, Aborigines, camping ground at Claremont for …, A.W. Canning, District Surveyor to C. Hill, Officer in Charge, Roads and Reserves Branch, Department of Lands and Surveys, 14 March 1913, fol.4.
\textsuperscript{33} Dept. Aborigines and Fisheries, 1912/1644, Aborigines, camping ground at Claremont for …, A.W. Canning, District Surveyor to C Hill, Officer in Charge, Roads and Reserves Branch, 14 March 1913, fol.4.
\textsuperscript{34} Department of Lands and Surveys, 623/1913, Reserve for Camping Ground Claremont, Town Clerk, Municipality of Claremont to Secretary, Aborigines Department, 4 April 1913. State Records Office of Western Australia Cons 652, fol.6.
As I am finding some difficulty in getting a suitable place for aborigines, who make Claremont their home, to camp on, I am approaching you with the object of getting your Trustees’ consent to my making a camping ground for natives on the South East corner of [Location 2105]. … I am given to understand that there is but little likelihood of your Trustees making any use of the ground for many years to come. … [You will be] thereby benefiting some of the original owners of the soil, who recognise this part of the State as the centre of their tribal district, but have at the present moment no place that they can call their own to live on.  

Nothing came of this either. On 1 May 1913, Hugh Hamersley, the Under Secretary for Lands, replied to Sir John Forrest’s request, saying “it does not seem that anything can be done in the way of reserving land for the Aborigines in the vicinity of Claremont”.  

35 Dept. Aborigines and Fisheries, 1912/1644, Aborigines, camping ground at Claremont for … , Letter CF Gale, Chief Protector Aborigines to EA Randell, Secretary, Trustee University Endowment, 28 March 1913, fol.13.  
36 Dept. Aborigines and Fisheries, 1912/1644, Aborigines, camping ground at Claremont for … , Letter H Hamersley, Under Secretary for Lands to Under Secretary, Colonial Secretary’s Office, 1 May 1913, fol.8.
1930s camps at Lake Claremont

By the 1930s, the main camps were on the northwest side of Lake Claremont, on Mr Neil’s and Granny Briggs’ properties, as well as on Crown land in the bush between Narla Road and Alfred Road.

Camps at Mr Neil’s

Mr Neil had horses and cattle on his property on the west side of Lake Claremont and usually employed an Aboriginal man to look after them. Neil himself lived near the beach at Swanbourne. About 1934, Sammy Broomhall came to live on Mr Neil’s property after being in the Rottnest Island prison. Corrie Bodney recalled that:

Well, when he finished his time, he was one of the last prisoners on Rottnest, and they let him out and they just put him out in Fremantle and said, “Find your way home”. So he just walked up the coast, he knew which way was the north. And so he came along the coast and he run into my group on Swanbourne and on the beach there, salmoning, catching fish, as they pull them in and he yarmed with them. And they says, “Oh, they asked him where he’s going,” and he says, “He’s going home, back to Roebourne,” and they said “Oh, you can stop here for a while with us”.

He ended up camping ’round there, yeah, ’cause a bloke by the name of Neil, … whitefella, used to have a block of land just down further east of where we were. So, old Sam started to ask could he camp on his block, “Yeah, you can do some work for me and then you can camp there”. So anyhow, he cut a whole water tank in half and made a little shack out of half a water tank. And he used to feed his horses and cows what he had in the paddock. He give him a couple of bottles of wine and a few shillings now and again.

Mr Neil also had a bore with a hand pump where families from nearby camps came to get water. Robert Bropho remembered getting water from the pump in the 1930s and 40s.

They had an old pump in the ground there, old hand pump. We used to walk down with our kerosene buckets and pump the water up. That water used to come from underground, but just over the hill was Butler Swamp. But this water was drinkable, and yet the swamp was over the other side.

Toopy Bodney also remembered carrying buckets of water from Mr Neil’s to

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1 Corrie Bodney, oral history, 22 February 2007, 19.
3 Robert Bropho, oral history, 7 March 2007, 3.
their camp, one kerosene bucket at a time. But I went to the pictures one night, we all went to the pictures, and I seen these Chinamens with a stick across his shoulder and he had a bucket in the front and a bucket at the back. I said, “That’s it.” So I made – chopped down one of these peppermint trees, young peppermint trees, and I carried two buckets instead of one. … It was easier to carry. … I was indebted to that Chinese bloke.

The Bodney family, and their relations the Armitage’s, camped on Mr Neil’s property, but eventually they had to leave. Toopy Bodney recalled:

My mother just said, we’ve got to shift camp. We had a few dogs, we had about five dogs and they used to breed fleas and the fleas used to breed in the sand and anyway Mr Neil had horses as well in the property, and they used to come around the camp, make a lot of noise and the dogs used to chase them. It was a kind of hectic life around the camp.

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4 Toopy Bodney, oral history, 7 May 2007, 2.
5 Toopy Bodney, oral history, 7 May 2007, 17.
6 Toopy (Bill) Bodney, oral history recorded for Claremont Museum by Denise Cook, 17 April 2007, 5; MacIntyre Dobson and Associates, and Tom O'Reilly, "Report on an Ethnographic/Ethnohistorical and Archaeological Survey of the Swanbourne Project Area, with Senior Representatives from the R Bropho and W Bodney families, Nyungah Circle of Elders and other Families," unpublished report for the Education Department of WA and Department of Contract and Management Services, 2000, Figure 4. Permission: Barbara Macintyre and Ken Dobson.
Granny Briggs - shared land

When Robert Bropho talked to me in 2007 about the camps at Lake Claremont, we sat close to where his grandmother, Clara Leyland, had lived in a large camp with her sons Ned and Alf Mippy and Alf’s wife Dorrie Warrell.¹

Figure 4-19 Robert Bropho in 2007 near the Briggs property where his grandmother, Clara Leyland, lived in the 1930s. Photo: Denise Cook. Permission: Bella Bropho

Just in front of me … was my grandmother’s camp, old Clara Leyland. She was my mother’s mother. And she had a bag camp.

Well a camp means, in case people don’t know what a camp means now when I talk about a camp, especially in the year 2007 here now, it’s made up of galvanised tins and bits of old bags and some forks cut from the pepper trees or the flooded gum trees that are around here, and some shape of roof is put up and a lot of paperbark is gotten from the swamp.²

² Robert Bropho, oral history, 7 March 2007, 1.
But in this corner of the fence, the property was held and owned by an old white lady name old Granny Briggs. She had an old brick white mortar building, old-fashioned house. She had a daughter, Katie Briggs. And they lived not far from this camp. But they gave permission for my grandmother to live here. Granny Briggs and Katie … used to come up and sit around on the tins talking to my grandmother.

Figure 4-20 Annas Briggs, known as Granny Briggs, was born in 1851. She was a midwife in the local area.

Her father, John Atkinson, was a Pensioner Guard and had been granted land at Lake Claremont in return for military service and guarding convicts sent to Western Australia.

Permission: Anne Kidd. Collection: Freshwater Bay Museum, 98.777

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3 Robert Bropho, oral history, 7 March 2007, 1.
4 Robert Bropho, oral history, 7 March 2007, 10.
Anne Kidd, a descendant of the Briggs and Atkinson families, moved with her parents to live with Katie Briggs after Granny Briggs died in 1943.\(^5\) In 1988, she told me that:

> when we were kids, up here in the corner apparently it was an understanding of Annas Atkinson, and that was the daughter of John Atkinson, it had been passed down and the understanding was that the Aboriginals were allowed to camp in this top corner.\(^6\)

By 1947, the camps appear to have moved to Mr Neil’s property, and Katie and her niece (Anne Kidd’s mother) were complaining to police of drunkenness and threats of violence, and asking to have the camps removed.\(^7\)


\(^7\) Department of Native Affairs, 283/1931, Native Affairs – Swanbourne and Claremont Camp, [Mrs Leonard], letter, 29 July 1947, no fol. Permission: Anne Kidd nee Leonard.
In 1937, an Inspector from the Department of Native Affairs visited the Mippy’s camp at Swanbourne. His report indicates the level of surveillance of Noongar people in Perth camps at this time.

At the Claremont camps I found Alf Mippy half-blood native, legally married to Doris Worrell, half-blood female and their child Violet, half-blood female, aged 6 months.

The camp is comprised of old galvanised iron and bags. The surroundings are tidy and clean and there is a small vegetable garden set out. Sanitary arrangements are OK. Health of all three apparently good.

This young couple have lived here for some years, at least Mippy has and his wife since they were married last year.

Mippy earns a few shillings collecting bottles etc. which I might suggest is a doubtful occupation for a native. He conducts himself
well and has never caused any trouble in the district. On rations when up against it.\textsuperscript{8}

Alf’s sister Isobel Bropho had a different perspective on the usefulness of collecting bottles. In 1989, she recalled that her brother:

used to go to the tip and they’d gather all the bottles and so on. That’s how they used to get the food. They’d cart all the bottles, and get the bottle—oh used to come and count them up and give them the money. Well, they’d go and buy the food with that.\textsuperscript{9}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig_tree.png}
\caption{In 2007 Toopy Bodney showed me this fig tree on what used to be Granny Briggs’ property, near where the camps were located. By 2013, it had been removed, possibly as part of the bush rehabilitation for the Lakeway housing subdivision. Photo: Denise Cook}
\end{figure}

In early 1936, when Doris Warrell and Alf Mippy wanted to get married, as Noongar people they had to ask permission from the Chief Protector of Aborigines.\textsuperscript{10} It took some months for the question to be resolved: Alf, Doris, Alf’s mother Clara Leyland, and Doris’ grandmother Ollie Warrell all had to go in

\textsuperscript{8} DNA, 105/37, \textit{Native camps in the Metropolitan Area}, Inspection of Native Camps in the Metropolitan Area, 8 April 1937, fol.2.

\textsuperscript{9} Isobel Bropho, oral history recorded for State Library of Western Australia by Ronda Jamieson, OH 2086, 21-22 March, 1989, 40. Permission: Bella Bropho.

to the Aborigines Department and discuss the issue.\textsuperscript{11} The Catholic priest in Guildford also needed a letter from the Department before he could marry them.\textsuperscript{12}

There had initially been opposition to the marriage from Doris’ uncle, who asked for Doris to be removed to Moore River Native Settlement to prevent it.\textsuperscript{13} However, in response, A.O. Neville, the Chief Protector wrote:

I do not think that I have any right to interfere. Mippy might be an aboriginal in law, but I doubt whether Doreen [Doris] is although she is living with aboriginals. As she has lived so long with Alf Mippy, I think we had better let matters take their course. In other words, I am not going to oppose this most unsuitable marriage.\textsuperscript{14}

I asked their grandson, Nick Abraham, why he thought it might have been seen as an unsuitable marriage. He didn't know, but thought they were only allowed to marry because one was light and the other dark skinned. At this time, the Department of Native Affairs controlled marriages to try and “breed out the colour”. Dark and light could marry, or two lights, but dark and dark was a no no.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{Narla Road camps}

The best-known campsite around Lake Claremont was in bush between Alfred Road and what is now Narla Road. In 2015, it is the Swanbourne Primary School but in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s it was Crown land. The Bropho and Bodney families both camped there for long periods. In his 1980 book \textit{fringedweller}, Robert Bropho described the site of the camp as it was then.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Native Welfare Department. File 403/52. \textit{Half Caste Alfred Mippy of Bayswater Personal File}. C Taylor, Clerk in Charge, Aborigines Department, file note, 5 March 1936.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Native Welfare Department. File 403/52. \textit{Half Caste Alfred Mippy of Bayswater Personal File}. Superintendent, Moore River Native Settlement to Chief Protector of Aborigines, 10 February 1936.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Native Welfare Department. File 403/52. \textit{Half Caste Alfred Mippy of Bayswater Personal File}. AO Neville, Chief Protector of Aborigines, to Clerk in Charge, Aborigines Department, 17 March 1936.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Nick Abraham, telephone conversation, 27 July 2015. Permission: Nick Abraham; Jacobs, \textit{Mister Neville}, 256-257.
\end{itemize}
The exact spot where we camped at Swanbourne is covered over now with a school sportsground. The ground has been flattened over with green lawns on it, but as I sit today on the hill where I walked over many times when I was in short pants, I look down at the sportsground and I see the camp with the old scraps of tin on the roof, and the chaff bag linings on the walls and the side and the wheat bags. They can cover over the camping ground where it was but they can never shut out my memories and the visions of my mother and father and my sisters and brothers.\footnote{Bropho, \textit{fringedweller}, 12.}

Robert Bropho told me that the camp was made from:

four forks, two taller than the others … so it’ll give it a slant. And they just nailed the tins on, leave the bottom ones loose at ground level in case it’s a hot summer day, you just lift them up. Prop them up with a stick, you got the ventilating.\footnote{Robert Bropho, oral history, 26 March 2007, 10.}

Mattresses were “pepper tree leaves, or flooded gum leaves or the red gum leaves, bits of coats, rugs, shirts, whatever. You lay down.”\footnote{Robert Bropho, oral history, 26 March 2007, 10.}

![Figure 4-24 Robert’s mother, Isobel Bropho at the Saunders Street camp in the Swan Valley, 1970s. Permission: Herbert and Bella Bropho. Collection: Herbert Bropho](image)

Mrs Bropho was famous for her ocean pie, popular with the family, as well as
with Mr Neil’s children Jimmy and Alex. It was cooked in the camp oven in the ashes of the fire and eaten sitting around on a rug. Robert described it as follows.

Now ocean pies were rolled up bit of plain flour, make sure it’s rolled and a bit moisty, put it down in there and she used to unload bits and pieces of meat and bits and pieces of potatoes and carrots and whatever in there. And she’d make sure that there’s a little bit of butter in them days. Margarine was hardly talked about then, but butter and things, and bit of fat, salt, and she’d put another layer of mixed up dough over the top, make it all nice with her finger marks, make a little hole in the top. Main thing was mince to go in that, and chops if you had it or sausages. And then you put it in the ashes and you’d cover it over. When the ocean pie was cooked and brought out, it would be a scramble. You didn’t have to wash the pots. And we even had Jimmy Neil, the white boy, and Alex, used to come along regular, Mrs Bropho, you got any ocean pies?19

Mrs Bropho recalled receiving government rations to supplement the family’s food supply.

The Protection Board give you rations that was £2- worth. It was only so many ounces of salt, so many ounces of tapioca, so many ounces of sugar, tea and a meat order. Then you’d go to a butcher and he’d give you whatever he wanted to give you – any meat he can’t sell, I s’pose that was it. We used to go and get the ration order and take it into John Wills, the grocers, in Perth and say to the bloke at the counter, “Can you change this order?” And if he was a good sort of bloke, he’d say, “Yes!” He’d say, “Now what do you ’ave?” He used to change it, they’d change the rations, but they weren’t supposed to, so we could get what we wanted! Meat the same. Some would refuse you, they say, “No, we couldn’t do that!”20

**Camps and the police**

Police were in a position of power over Noongar people. They acted as both

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Protectors, whose role was to defend Aboriginal people, and prosecutors.\textsuperscript{21} Mr Bateman wrote in his 1948 “Report on Survey of Native Affairs” that “the aborigines are as a rule in fear of the police,” where “[a policeman’s] word is law and if he happens to be unsympathetic towards the natives then it is a poor look-out for them’.\textsuperscript{22} Toopy Bodney recalled that “the police, they seemed to prey on Aboriginals in those days’.

The local policeman, Sergeant Beard, was friendly with the Bodney family, but was still a bit frightening for the children. Cyril Bodney was Toopy’s younger brother and Bill Bodney was their father. Toopy recalled:

And one day me and Dad was wrestling with Cyril. [Dad] was wanting to give him castor oil – we were rolling with him and he was kicking and jumping here and there. We spilled nearly half a bottle of castor oil and this copper came along, Sergeant Beard. “What are you trying to do to the boy, Billy?” “They’re trying to give him some castor oil for his guts.” He said, “Look like they’re killing him,” he said. “Give him here to me,” he said, and he grabbed him, and he sat down on this drum, fill the spoon up. “Open your mouth”. He opened his mouth and put it in. He says, “That’s the way you do it Bill. You don’t have to kill him”. He said, “No,” he said, “I’ll kill him when you go”. He said, “Little mongrel, look at him. He took it.” I couldn’t believe it. God, mad, you know. He wouldn’t do it for us, but you know, a copper, he was frightened of the policeman, old Beard.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{21} Rosemary van den Berg, “Aboriginal Protectors,” in \textit{Historical Encyclopedia of Western Australia}, ed. Jenny Gregory and Jan Gothard (Crawley, Western Australia: University of Western Australia Press, 2009), 36-37.
\textsuperscript{23} Toopy Bodney, oral history, 17 April 2007, 40.
\textsuperscript{24} Toopy Bodney, oral history, 17 April 2007, 46.
Sergeant Beard could also be a good ally, turning a blind eye to the theft of chickens for food. Mr Seed, on the property next door to Mr Neil, kept chickens and sold eggs.\textsuperscript{25} When Toopy Bodney’s uncles, the Armitages, and his older brother, Johnny Coomer, had had a bit to drink they used to go at night and steal chickens from Mr Seed.\textsuperscript{26} Afterwards, as Toopy recalled:

> The coppers used to come out. You know the sergeant in charge at Claremont [old Beard], he could smell the chickens boiling in the big camp oven. “Oh geez, you got something good in there Mrs Bodney,” he’d say. “It smells good.” And she’d say, “Yes, bit of flaps from the sheep.” “Oh yeah. Yes, very good,” he’d say. And

\textsuperscript{25} Toopy Bodney, oral history, 7 May 2007, 10.
\textsuperscript{26} Toopy Bodney, oral history, 17 April 2007, 39.
then he’d go back and see Seed and they’d have a talk and say, couldn’t find nothing, couldn’t arrest no-one, because there was no evidence, and that was it.27

**Royal Show at Claremont**

The Royal Show moved to Claremont from Guildford in 1905.28 At Royal Show time, the camps around the swamp would get busy with visitors from the country. Visitors for the Show often camped between the swamp and Davies Road, on the site of the present day Claremont Pool.29 Desmond Abraham described the area in the 1910s and 20s:

Oh yes, the Aborigines at Show time, the Aborigines used to come and camp the other side of the Power House where the present swimming pool is. There is a swimming pool on Davies Road on the left hand side there. Now that used to be thick bush there and every year a week before the show commenced, a whole group of Aborigines would come and squat in there. … Man [?] and women and children with their dogs, plenty of dogs. … There’d be quite a family group – twelve, fourteen including children. … In fact we used to be a bit scared of them actually because they were pretty wild looking!

They’d put up bits of humpies and bits of old tin and whatnot, anything they could find for a humpy. … They’d stay there, be there perhaps a week or ten days before the show and they’d stay there perhaps for three or four weeks after the show and finally you’d go on your way to work in the morning and find the place deserted and gone.30

Robert Bropho recalled when their friends Peter and Kitty Jackson used to come with their family and camp for the Show in the 1930s or 40s.31 Their camp was in the same area described above: near the Showgrounds, between the road and the east side of the swamp.32 Robert recalled:

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27 Toopy Bodney, oral history, 7 May 2007, 3; Toopy Bodney, oral history, 17 April 2007, 46.
30 Desmond Abraham, oral history, 10 March 1988.
31 Permission for Peter and Kitty Jackson story: Darryl Jackson.
We’d always be looking forward to the coming of the Royal Show at Claremont Show Grounds. A couple of weeks before the Royal Show we’d have our friends and relations coming to camp with us. Our main visitors would be an old fullblood couple [Peter and Kitty Jackson] and their sons and daughters.\(^{33}\)

No-one had much money – Desmond Abraham remembered Noongar people cutting and selling clothes props, offering to do odd jobs and asking for tucker:

Some of them used to come round – they would go into the surrounding bush there and cut clothes props and try and sell all the ladies in the district clothes props for their clotheslines.\(^{34}\)

Robert Bropho again:

When the Royal Show would come we’d be allowed to go in free. We’d go and try every gate until we found a sympathetic white man. When we’d find one, he’d say to us, “I never seen you,” and he’d point his finger and we’d get through the gate as quick as possible and get lost in the sea of faces. The day would be tiring

\(^{33}\) Bropho, *fringedweller*, 10.

\(^{34}\) Desmond Abraham, oral history, 10 March 1988.
for us but the end of the day would be just rewards for us, when Peter Jackson and Kitty would come home with their sugar bag full of left over baked fowls, sandwiches, cakes, and fruit and salad that they couldn’t sell. We’d eat like kings then and queens.35

Corrie Bodney remembered that at Royal Show time the operator of the flea circus used to come and catch fleas in their camp:

The fleas never used to worry us. They’d bite us and things, but we never bothered, they were just sort of part and parcel of life. … Sometimes when the bloody Royal Show used to come, the blokes used to come out and buy the fleas from us. They said, “I don’t want off the dog, because they jump too much, but the ones off your blankets and things like that”. He’d catch them and he’d pay us for them, my mother and father, pay ‘em for the fleas because he’d take them over to his [flea] circus what he had in the Royal Show. … he’d want about four or five for a penny … there used to be fleas galore.36

Fleas were common in the camp.

I remember once we went up to my grandfather’s place and we stopped there for about a week or so, and of course we come back and we jumped off out at Swanbourne because we want to get some fish and chips. … We went back to our camp and ‘cause we had no lights, got in the camp and spread out the paper and you could hear the fleas jumping – cause they missed us for about a week and they were starving because they’re all jumping on the bloody paper trying to get the fish and chips too. Unbelievable.37

People in the camps might have been used to the fleas but for a non-Aboriginal visitor they were a shock. Bill Dowding remembers going to visit his friend Cyril Bodney at the camps, taking his dog with him. Bill and Cyril were both boxers at the Claremont Police Boys Club. That night, Bill’s dog slept with him in his bed and Bill was bitten by fleas all night.38

38 Bill Dowding, telephone conversation with Denise Cook, 10 September 2012. Permission: Bill Dowding.
Women’s work

Noongar women in the camps earned money washing and cleaning for local non-Aboriginal women. The Sherwood family, who lived in Devon Road and later Victoria Avenue, employed a Noongar woman from the camps cleaning and a man working in the garden.¹ Isobel Bropho recalled working for the Oldhams and Sherwoods.

Washing white people’s clothes for so much an hour. Swanbourne, I used to wash for the office people. Oldhams, I used to go and wash for them. I used to wash for the bank manager. I used to go and do all the washing and hanging all the clothes out, because the bank manager’s wife was very lazy. She was big and old. I used to polish her floors. … They used to give me a dollar and I’d go down to the next lady and do her washing. She had two children. Oh, they used to like people doing their work for them. … I used to do the work because I knew the money was wanted. I’d do whatever I could.²

Her son, Robert Bropho, described Mrs Sherwood as follows:

She was in that early day dressing, high white socks and frilly dresses and white hats and all that sort of thing. … Like you know in the deep south America, yas master, no boss, yas master, and that type of thing. … Bridiya whitefellas. Bridiya means they got plenty of money. And they got money to employ these coloured women. Mum was one of them, over the road, doing a bit of washing, ironing, for a little bit of money, to get a bit of food.³

Melba Bodney also worked for Mrs Sherwood. Corrie Bodney remembered that while his mother was doing the washing and ironing at their house on Victoria Avenue the children would be playing down on the river.

The old lady used to make us a lot of beetroot cordial, old Mrs Sherwood, ‘cause my mother would bring it all back down … sometimes we was playing around down the bottom of the Bay.⁴

Heather Baikauskas, nee Atkinson, lived on her family’s property at Lake Claremont from the early 1940s. She remembered Melba Bodney coming to do

⁴ Corrie Bodney, oral history, 18 January 2007, 5.
their family’s washing.

And Melba Bodney, she used to do Mum’s washing, if Mum was sick or had a new baby, Melba used to come down and do the washing. [She was a] big lady. A fine looking lady from what I remember. She used to fascinate [me] when she was doing the washing. Her hands were as pink as mine, you know. She was dark elsewhere. No, she was really a nice lady. You know when we had meals, she was washing, she used to come and sit at the meals with us.⁵

**Men’s work**

Noongar men mostly worked at making and selling clothes props and cobweb brooms, and caddying at the Cottesloe Golf Club on Alfred Road near the camps. They were hard times and it sometimes was a struggle to get enough to eat.⁶ Toopy Bodney remembered the challenges of selling props with his uncles and brother Corrie.

Me and my uncles and Corrie we used to [go] out the back of the asylum and cut props and take them down over Stirling Highway down towards Freshwater Bay and sell these props. They used to get four shillings a prop, and I used to get two and six a prop because my props were smaller. I was little. And we had a job getting across Stirling Highway because cars were coming and you had all these props on you, you had go across sideways like you’re ballet dancing. You had to otherwise they’d knock you over.

I remember one day we were going down, shouting out, “Proppo, proppo, proppo,” loud as you can. And this guy came out and he spotted me. He said, “How much are you selling your props for today?” I said, “Three and six”. I put it up. … “Oh,” he said, “They’re nice props”. He said, “My wife’s a small woman, you got smaller props too,” he said. … My uncles come along … and he said, “I want the little props for [my wife], but he’s asking too much.” He said, “I’ve got some oranges around there, … oh beautiful oranges.” … And he said, “If he doesn’t want the money, perhaps he can do it in oranges.” Cause my uncle they looked at me … and they said, “Yes, he’ll take the oranges.” I said, “No, I won’t.” They said, “You’ll take the oranges, now you take the oranges.” I said, “Oh yeah, right-oh then, I’ll take the oranges,”

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⁵ Heather Baikauskas, oral history with Heather Baikauskas, John Atkinson and Victor Atkinson recorded for Claremont Museum by Denise Cook, 4 November 1988, 16-17.
‘cause I know I’d get a hiding down the park.” Oh, I was crooked on them. You wouldn’t believe it … I walked from home and out the back of the asylum with those props, and walked all the way down there to give it away for about a dozen oranges. … I ended up with no money.⁷

Robert Bropho’s dad Tommy (also known as Nyinda) Bropho made and sold cobweb brooms:

The brooms would be made up of long lengths of bamboo stick and bullrushes that grewed around edges of swamps and laid out in the sun and dried. There was a lot of work in making them brooms, not like the ordinary prop. The bullrushes had to be tied on to the end of the bamboo with copper wire, and folded back again and tied again, then the edges cut smoothly with a tommyhawk. A tommyhawk was the black man’s living in them days, without a tommyhawk he’d be lost. The broom was something similar to the modern day straw brooms. Their price would be four shillings.⁸

![Figure 4-27 Charles Bunning, 1935. Collection: © West Australian Newspapers Limited, GP2748](image)

The Noongar men and boys also earned money caddying at the golf course or searching for and selling lost golf balls. Robert Bropho recalled that when his father couldn’t sell clothes props he caddied for wealthy Charlie Bunning:

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⁷ Toopy Bodney, oral history, 17 April 2007, 45-46.
He’d fall back on going to the Swanbourne golf course to do some caddying for a well known white man in them days, who was Charlie Bunnings, who was a sympathetic man then, to Dad specially. He’d pay him extra, two pounds for carrying his caddy bag around the 18 hole golf course in them days. At the end of the game he’d give him ten shillings extra for his tip for being a good caddy so all told he’d end up with thirty shillings.

He’d come home with the money and then we’d have a feast. In them days what we’d call a feast would be four loaves of bread, a tin of treacle, half a pound of butter, a packet of milk arrowroot biscuits, and if there was any change over naturally us kids would have some lollies.9

### Drinking with Muscle Guts

From 1843, in the early days of the Swan River Colony, it was illegal for anyone to supply alcohol to an Aboriginal person.10 By 1911, the penalty was a fine of £100 or six months gaol.11 After 1936, it was also illegal for Aboriginal people to receive alcohol, and there were many prosecutions for both supplying and receiving.12

The groundsman at Scotch College used to buy wine for Noongar people at the camps in return for alcohol to drink himself. Luckily for him and the Noongars, he was never caught.13 This man was also famous for his physique and was popularly known as Muscle Guts. Toopy Bodney recalled him in the early 1940s.

He used to get my uncles and my brother, older brother, Johnny, … of course they couldn’t get wine in those days, it was forbidden. Anyone supplying with wine, six months in gaol.14

… he had a hut over there [near the Scotch College grounds], a caretaker’s hut. … And they’d go and knock on the door and he’d come out and “How are you going boys, God, what are you doing

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11 Licensing Act, 1911, section 118.
13 Toopy Bodney, oral history, 17 April 2007, 3.
14 Toopy Bodney, oral history, 17 April 2007, 2.
here this hour of the night, this hour of day, you know?” Glad to see him, of course. “I’m bloody busy today, you know.” Yeah, you know, just a put on thing. “Yeah, we want to know if you can get a couple of bottles for us.” “Oh, well, right-oh then.” He’d go and put his shirt on, because he had no shirt, he never used to wear shirts much. And he’d go down and get six bottles or whatever it was, come back, and they’d get drunk and they’d come back here and steal old Mr Seed’s fowls when they was on the booze.15

And they used to call him Muscle Guts because he could make his muscles and guts roll. … We used to bump, you know, uncles, “Make him move his muscles and guts”. And they’d, you know, get him going with a couple of drinks. And he’d take his shirt off, his coat off, and then he’d start rolling his stomach. And oh, we’d laugh like hell, you know, Muscle Guts.16

Swanbourne Primary School

Children from the camps went to Swanbourne Primary School in Devon Road. There they had mixed experiences of both racism and friendship. Corrie Bodney played marbles back at the camp with kids from school.17 Toopy Bodney had kids nearly fighting to get his damper and butter at morning tea.18 In the story below, the boys who ate Toopy’s damper didn’t laugh but others did.

I know that one teacher, she was an old teacher, I’m quite sure she was told by the Education Department to brainwash me. My Aboriginal language, like my mother taught me, she used to belittle me in the classroom if I said the wrong thing. Such as one day there was a bird outside, a honeysuckle bird, Noongars call them dungarungs. And nobody knew in the class what they were called. … And she said, “What’s that bird outside the window making a noise? Does anybody know his name?” Well, naturally I put my hand up like a bloody idiot. “Oh,” she said, “Yes Bill, what is it?” I said, “He’s a dungarung.” She looked at the class and said, “Bill Bodney, little Bill Bodney’s back on his mumbo jumbo again.” And she bust out laughing and all these girls and boys, half of them laughed. The boys, they wouldn’t laugh, like half of them wouldn’t laugh.19

15 Toopy Bodney, oral history, 17 April 2007, 46. 
16 Toopy Bodney, oral history, 17 April 2007, 2-3. 
17 Corrie Bodney, oral history, 31 January 2007, 44. 
18 Toopy Bodney, oral history, 17 April 2007, 40-41. 
19 Toopy Bodney, oral history, 17 April 2007, 40.
Getting ready for school, Robert Bropho washed his face and hands with water. If there wasn’t any water, he ran through bushes or peppermint trees to wash in the dew. He wore faded shirts, patched trousers, and no shoes to school.22

We didn’t get on well at school. The barriers were always there, such as, “Nigger, nigger pull a trigger, bang bang bang” from the white kids. My brother Tom and my sister Ruth and myself didn’t last long at the school. I only went through First Standard in them days and Ruth and Tom was in Second Standard. One day in my class an incident happened. Someone pinched two shillings off the

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21 In the Noongar Dictionary wattlebird is listed as dongkarak. Whitehurst, Noongar Dictionary, 8; Bates, Aboriginal Perth, 9, 69; Corrie Bodney, oral history 18 January 2007, 2.

22 Bropho, fringedweller, 8.
teacher’s desk, and I was the first one to be questioned over it by the teacher, Miss Hill. I was scared being the only black kid in the class.23

Robert also remembered feeling shame about not having food to eat at school:

There were other bad times at school, such as when we had no dinner. My sister Ruth and I used to feel real shame over it. We’d get in some corner of our own and sit in the shade. My oldest brother Tom seemed to know how to cope with it. He’d either get a ball and start playing and make believe he wasn’t hungry.24

Many non-Aboriginal children remember going to school with Noongar children from the camps. Dick Cairnes was at Swanbourne Primary School in the 1930s and 40s and not only remembers Corrie from school but has had contact with him in recent years.

We had Corrie Bodney in our class at school and Corrie Bodney is now one of the Elders. When they’re looking for opinions on the western suburbs and so on Corrie Bodney is one of the spokespeople. Well, he was in our class at Swanbourne Primary.

I think he was, you know, an ordinary sort of a kid. He probably didn’t come to school as well equipped as the rest of us in terms of having books and that sort of thing. I can’t remember that he attended as regularly as the rest of us but he came from a humpy … it was just you know really bush timber and bits of corrugated iron that they could get hold of. They probably did their cooking with a camp fire and they wouldn’t have had running water and so if they didn’t come to school turned out particularly clean and well fed then you could understand that, because they weren’t coming from the sort of home that the rest of the kids were coming from. …

I think they were seen as different but tolerated. I don’t think at school we had any sense of racism towards them. I think we just saw them as other kids.

But you know it’s hard to say from this perspective nearly sixty years on. But I did meet Corrie Bodney again in the early 1980s when I was Principal at Girrawheen Senior High. Corrie visited the school because he had a younger relative who was a student at

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Girrawheen Senior High, and you know, we exchanged some memories of the days back then.25

Toopy Bodney, artist

As a child in the mid 1940s, Toopy (Bill) Bodney was one of the best artists at Swanbourne Primary School. This gave him opportunities not offered to other

Noongar children, including studying sign-writing at Perth Technical College. However there were a few challenges. Toopy didn’t start primary school until he was nine because before that he helped his mother doing domestic work for non-Aboriginal women around the Swanbourne/Claremont area. And when he started studying sign-writing in Perth, he fell foul of the laws forcing Aboriginal people to be out of the city by 6pm. Toopy recalled his time at school:

All I could do was paint. And that used to get me to the headmaster every week. … ’Cause it got around from the primary school that I was one of the best artists there see, and every Thursday used to have art class. He goes, “Take my painting up to the headmaster,” or the bloke in charge of the top two classes. And, “Oh yes,” he’d stamp the thing, the painting, “Very good.”

And the bloke in charge, Mr Bunny they always called him … he used to use me as a shaming instrument to the other class, these big kids. “Jesus Christ, you know, I wish you could paint half as good as Bill.” And he’d pick on someone who was a rotten painter and he’d give it to him and talk about him, how you’ll have to go back to third grade and sit with Bill for a couple of months or so, and then come back when you can paint and all that, you know.

And then the next – a couple of days time, he’d be giving me the caning, six – he had a big cane like this. Yeah, it was a funny old school.

Through Toopy’s art, a teacher from Scotch College took an interest in his work, and had him visit his orchard at Roleystone. This was an opportunity not offered to others. The teacher was a friend of Geoff Harcus, a non-Aboriginal man who was active in the Aboriginal community through his relationship with a Noongar man. Scotch College playing fields were very close to the Swanbourne camps.

And this guy up here, he heard about me. This college, Scotch College. Oh, I think he might have been a teacher. He was married anyhow. I know that ‘cause he had a wife. And he heard about me being a painter, so he took me up to his place in Roleystone. I didn’t want to go but he conned me into this and there were a lot plums up there, you know, tonnes of plums. So

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27 Toopy Bodney, oral history, 17 April 2007, 5.
28 Toopy Bodney, oral history, 7 May 2007, 42.
29 Toopy Bodney, oral history, 7 May 2007, 18.
30 Toopy Bodney, oral history, 7 May 2007, 42; Corrie Bodney, oral history, 24 February 2012, 19.
and I go and I started painting, he bought the painting books and all of this stuff, and he good bloke. He had the right idea for me, but after a while I gave it away and when I finished school, I didn’t go up here.31

Geoff Harcus, who worked as a sign-writer, helped Toopy get in to Perth Technical College to study sign-writing. Unfortunately, as discussed below, Toopy was only able to do three months of the course.

![Image](Figure 4-30 Geoff Harcus about 1954. Permission: Mandy Corunna)

A white bloke, Geoff Harcus, he had a job as a sign-writer and I was an artist and he said, “I’ll get you in to the Tech in Perth.” So they took me in, and oh yes, sized me up and all that.

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31 Toopy Bodney, oral history, 17 April 2007, 18.
And in those days, Aboriginals weren’t allowed in town after dark. I was going to this Perth Tech and I was painting there. And I used to go from the Tech up to the old Metro Theatre and then get a couple of cool drink … and then I go home, catch the bus at St Georges Terrace. …

And the people from the Metro Theatre were all collar and tie guys. … And one night I was there and this copper came. He was a detective. … And he says, “What are you doing in town after dark?” I said, “I go to the Tech … I’m going to be an artist, or signwriter.” “Oh yeah.” The other bloke, the copper said, “I don’t think you’ll be going to go to the Tech very long. He said, “You knock off?” “Oh,” I said, “About eight o’clock, half past eight, nine.” “Oh,”
he said, “You’re breaking the law,” he says. He said, “Five o’clock you should be out of town.” And he said, “I’m telling you to go.”

… This wadjela, he’s about sixty, he had a collar and tie on too, he was one of the main men I suppose out of all these rich people. … He went off at him. He said, “You took his country, now you’re trying to take the white man’s habit of sign-writing.” And he said, “As far I can see, you can go and get stuffed.” And the other blokes, all these collar and tie guys, they took it up for the old bloke in there.

And the copper, he got up and he looked, and he said, “I’ll see about this,” he said, “And I’ll see to you too,” he said to me. … “You won’t be in the Perth Tech too long.” And he took off.

And sure enough, a week after, the two guys come from the Technical College, they told Mum that I wasn’t allowed into the Tech because the police reported me for being in town after dark. And that was that. I thought, “Oh.”

And then my other mate, and his people was there, they put in a complaint, I don’t know, checked that out, and these guys from the Tech came again, two blokes. They said, “We’re sorry about that Mrs Bodney, of what we said last time and about Bill. He’s welcome back there. It was only through one policeman that we found out that laid the report.” …

And my mother said, “Yeah, well you can stick the Tech up your backside and if you don’t remove yourselves from this camp in a hurry I’ll set all the dogs on you.” And the dogs, they were ready to bite somebody. Yeah. They took off. They didn’t wait. They got in their motor and away they went. …

I never went back. She wouldn’t let me go back. … “Oh well,” and that was that, I didn’t go back to be a sign-writer. But I took painting up.32

Toopy learnt a lot about painting from his cousin Revel Cooper.33 Revel was one of the well-known child artists at Carrolup Native Settlement in the southwest of Western Australia in the 1940s. As an adult he went on to achieve fame as an artist.34 When they were both in their twenties, Revel visited Toopy Bodney and his family at the Shenton Park camps. While he was there, Toopy’s

33 Toopy Bodney, oral history, 7 May 2007, 15.
stepfather took Revel around knocking on doors and offering to paint people’s cats. Revel made enough money in about two hours for half a wheat bag of wine.\textsuperscript{35}

Toopy painted in his spare time, his art influenced by Albert Namatjira.\textsuperscript{36} Through a woman from Native Welfare his work was in an art exhibition at Guildford Grammar School.\textsuperscript{37} He did sell some work over the years but was often cheated.

I’ve been ripped off for more than I sold. Oh, shocking, my own colour, they ripped me off.\textsuperscript{38}

You meet a lot of them [con men] if you’re an artist, a painter. But the painters are getting now more and more – they know who the con men are. But there are still con men around who prey on good artists.\textsuperscript{39}

In 2007 when I recorded Toopy’s story, he was painting bush scenes, including swamps, turtles and spirit figures.\textsuperscript{40} In 2009 Freshwater Bay Museum purchased two of his paintings. This is one of them.

\textsuperscript{35} Toopy Bodney, oral history, 7 May 2007, 15-16.
\textsuperscript{36} Toopy Bodney, oral history, 7 May 2007, 14.
\textsuperscript{37} Toopy Bodney, oral history, 17 April 2007, 19-20.
\textsuperscript{38} Toopy Bodney, oral history, 7 May 2007, 13.
\textsuperscript{39} Toopy Bodney, oral history, 7 May 2007, 14.
\textsuperscript{40} Toopy Bodney, oral history, 7 May 2007, 14.
Figure 4.32 Toopy Bodney’s painting based on memories of time in his teens when he worked on a station northeast of Carnarvon. Permission: Vivienne Narkle. Collection: Freshwater Bay Museum
Dogs at the picture theatre

The picture theatre in Swanbourne was in Railway Street, opposite the Swanbourne Railway Station. When Toopy and other kids from the camps went to the pictures, they took dogs to protect them walking home in the dark. They were scared of people from the Claremont Mental Hospital, who would make noises like lions, tigers and chickens. The non-Aboriginal kids they knew from school took their dogs to the pictures too.¹

When Toopy and his friends arrived with their dogs they would be told that the dogs couldn’t come in and to take them home. But as he said:

    Couldn’t take them home, it was too far, and it was dark, and we wanted the dogs to protect us during the night when we go home through the bush. So, the dogs would just stand back and wait there. As soon as the white people walk in, they’d be straight under their legs and inside and then the guys is running around with torches looking for these dogs.²

As soon as the lights went out and the picture came on, the non-Aboriginal kids, “used to take their dogs in and let them through the door down near the screen, exit.”³

    All of a sudden, you know, you’re sitting down watching the picture and the dogs are into it. The blokes are running around with torches and the dogs seemed to know when the blokes are running around with torches, they’d hide under the seat, even the white kids’ dogs would do the same. You’d get sick of it yourself because the dogs, “You shut up,” you start shouting at the dogs to keep them quiet ‘cause you’d be too busy watching the picture and these things are fighting.

    Golly. Used to be a laugh when I get home, you know, they were good, too, and they used to protect us going home.⁴

¹ Toopy Bodney, oral history, 17 April 2007, 37.
² Toopy Bodney, oral history 17 April 2007, 37.
³ Toopy Bodney, oral history 7 May 2007, 8.
⁴ Toopy Bodney, oral history 17 April 2007, 37-38.
Demolition of the camps

Figure 4-33 Newspaper report about camps on Alfred Road, Swanbourne, 1949. The Nedlands Road Board decided that the owner of the land must provide properly-constructed toilets if the camps were to remain.5

In April 1951, the Nedlands Road Board asked the Minister for Native Affairs to have the camps at Swanbourne closed. This was after a few years of complaints about poor sanitary conditions and disturbances to neighbours.6

The issue was covered in detail in the newspapers. On 4 April 1951, the West Australian reported that:

The Nedlands Road Board decided last night that the Nedlands road district was not a fit and proper place for a native camp [because] the white population was spreading in the Swanbourne

6 See Department of Native Affairs, 283/1931, Native Affairs – Swanbourne and Claremont Camp.
area and … the board could not allow a “black camp in a white area”.7

However within the Road Board there was some opposition to the decision.

Speaking against the motion Messrs. T Kendall and W Kensitt said that the natives should not be harried from one place to another. They had been treated badly enough in this country already.

In addition, Councillor Moyle said that sanitary facilities should be provided to allow them to stay: “After all, they have as much right to live there as we have”. However, Councillor Milner argued that:

If the camp were improved and the necessary facilities provided it might encourage the department to bring more natives to the district.8

The Minister for Native Affairs stated that the Road Board had the power to remove people from the camps using the Health Act or their own by-laws. The Department of Native Affairs’ role:

was to act as a welfare agency if and when, as a result of action by the Board, families within the jurisdiction of the department were destitute.9

The Public Education Endowment owned the land on Narla Road where the camps were located – it was the future site of the Swanbourne High School. The Endowment Secretary wrote to the families in the camps ordering them to vacate the land within 14 days.10 They did leave – the Bodney family moved to the Shenton Park camps, others went to Collie, Brookton and Upper Swan. None chose to take the Department’s offer of transport to Widgee Road reserve in Bassendean – the only gazetted “native reserve” in the metropolitan area.11

A few weeks later, the Nedlands Road Board sent in a bulldozer to destroy the

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7 Mr TG Heydon, who moved the motion, reported in “Swanbourne Natives,” *The West Australian*, 4 April 1951 in Department of Native Affairs, 283/1931, *Native Affairs – Swanbourne and Claremont Camp*.

8 *The West Australian*, 4 April 1951 in Department of Native Affairs, 283/1931, *Native Affairs – Swanbourne and Claremont Camp*.


10 Department of Native Affairs, 283/1931, *Native Affairs – Swanbourne and Claremont Camp*, A/District Officer-Central to Commissioner of Native Affairs, 21 September 1951.

11 Department of Native Affairs, 283/1931, *Native Affairs – Swanbourne and Claremont Camp*, A/District Officer-Central to Commissioner of Native Affairs, 21 September 1951.
camps, including beds, furniture, cooking utensils and a tin trunk containing personal possessions.\textsuperscript{12} When former residents complained about their loss of furniture and goods, the Native Welfare Department District Officer concluded:

The action taken by the Board seems to be within the law and I can only express my opinion that the method chosen by them was rather brutal and inhumane.\textsuperscript{13}

His Cadet Patrol Officer also wrote on the file that “I do not believe, had the shack been the property of a white person, it would have been destroyed in this manner”.\textsuperscript{14}

The site is still important

Since the demolition of the camps at Lake Claremont, Noongar people with connections to the camps have continued to take an interest in this significant place. The camps have also been recognised in a range of publications and projects.

In 1961, the Swanbourne High School was built on the corner of Servetus Street and Alfred Road, close to the site of the Bodney and Bropho camps in Narla Road.\textsuperscript{15} Photographs show that the school was built on a bush site.\textsuperscript{16} In 1986, students from the school talked to Robert Bropho about his experiences in the camps and produced a report “The Aborigines of Claremont Lake”.\textsuperscript{17} In 1970, Clarrie Makin’s PhD thesis identified Lake Claremont as a “site, where

\textsuperscript{12} Department of Native Affairs, 283/1931, Native Affairs – Swanbourne and Claremont Camp, Cadet Patrol Officer-Central to A/Patrol Officer-Central and A/District Officer-Central, 19 September 1951.

\textsuperscript{13} Department of Native Affairs, 283/1931, Native Affairs – Swanbourne and Claremont Camp, A/District Officer-Central to Commissioner of Native Affairs, 21 September 1951.

\textsuperscript{14} Department of Native Affairs, 283/1931, Native Affairs – Swanbourne and Claremont Camp, Cadet Patrol Officer-Central to A/Patrol Officer-Central and A/District Officer-Central, 19 September 1951.


\textsuperscript{17} “The Aborigines of Claremont Lake,” Swanbourne High School Study, 1986, Freshwater Bay Museum PAS ABORIGINES.
Aborigines have had their camps in the near past”.¹⁸ In 1980, Robert Bropho’s *fringedweller* was published with the first chapter giving a detailed account of hardships he and his family experienced at the Swanbourne camp.¹⁹ With his family’s permission, some of the stories from that book have been included in this chapter.

The Western Australian *Aboriginal Heritage Act*, 1972 was a significant step forward in recognising places that are important to Noongar people. Lake Claremont, the Swan River, as well as several smaller sites in Claremont have been listed under the *Act*. As a result, anyone wanting to develop or disturb the ground at these sites is required to undertake consultation with Elders before works may go ahead.

**Freshwater Bay Museum**

Freshwater Bay Museum has recorded and represented Noongar history in the area since the museum was established in 1975, although the ways it has done so have changed over time.

Early displays included a diorama of scenes from nineteenth century Claremont. One scene depicted a farm at Lake Claremont with Noongars in traditional dress looking on from the edge of the property. Its message was that Noongar people were friendly, present, but not actively involved. In fact, Noongar people camped on some farms at Lake Claremont – at least those of the Briggs family and Mr Neil. They also worked for Mr Neil in return for the right to live there.

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¹⁹ Bropho, *fringedweller*, 5-17.
Freshwater Bay Museum also has many oral histories and memoirs of early non-Aboriginal residents of the district. Many of these tell of Aboriginal people in the area and some are included in this chapter.

In 1994, Freshwater Bay Museum commissioned Noongar Len Collard to write “A Short Discussion on the Nyungars of the Claremont Area” based on archival research and Noongar language. In it, Len wrote “nitcha Whudjuck Nyungar budjor … this is Whadjuk peoples ground.”20 Three years later, again for Freshwater Bay Museum, and this time together with Lorne Leonard and Grant Revell, Len produced a map showing Noongar names and tracks around Freshwater Bay, drawing on early European references that include Noongar place names.

KAU NYUNGAR BOODJAR GABBEE GNARNING QUOBBERUP
Oh, A Place within Aboriginal Country where the Drinking Water is Very Good

Figure 4-35 “Kau Nyungar Gabbee Gnarning Quobberup: Oh, A Place Within Aboriginal Country Where the Drinking Water is Very Good.” Collection: Freshwater Bay Museum
In 1995, Freshwater Bay Museum published *Dan-Joo: Together*, an educational package about the history of Claremont from 1830 to 1870. Comprising photographs, early documents and discussion aimed at high school students, it includes a section, “Mo-an–Djundal (Black and White): Early Nyungar–Colonist Contact”.\(^{21}\) Elder, Corrie Bodney was among those consulted and who attended the launch.\(^{22}\)

The Town of Claremont undertook extensive consultation with Noongar people in 2006 and 2007 prior to developing the former Lakeway Drive-in site for housing. As part of this, I recorded oral histories with Corrie Bodney, Toopy Bodney and Robert Bropho, who had all lived as children in camps at Lake Claremont. Extracts from the oral histories were used in signs at the new Lakeway housing development in 2008 as well as in a 2009 exhibition at Freshwater Bay Museum telling the history of the museum site.

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\(^{22}\) “Nyungars tell their Claremont story,” *Post*, 7 February 1995, 94.
Hello, I’m Koori Bodney

Koori in our local language means spider, though in other parts of Australia it means blackfellas. When I was born, I had extra long legs and arms so they called me Koori.

I was born in 1932 in the bush off Alfred Road – it's currently the Swanbourne Primary School. We camped all through that part of the country and my mother had camped there when she was young. It’s been a camping ground for Aboriginal people for thousands of years, you know.

Down by the river here was one of our main camps for fishing and crabbing. Our people were fish eaters – mullet, cobblers, bream, crabs and prawns.

It was beautiful here in the summertime. We'd sleep in the long grass - didn't worry about blankets. We got water in an old kerosene bucket from a tap at the back of the police station.

My mother used to do washing and ironing for the ladies around this area. One of them was Mrs Sherwood who made us kids beetroot cordial. We thought it was a real treat.

Everyone needs to respect the river – it’s important because it’s part of the Waugal dreaming track.

Figure 4-37 Noongar history of the museum site, Freshwater Bay Museum, 2009. Collection: Freshwater Bay Museum
Native Title

With the advent of the Commonwealth *Native Title Act*, 1993, Corrie Bodney and Robert Bropho, as well as two other groups, lodged native title claims over the Claremont/Swanbourne area, the first in 1995.23

![Corrie Bodney pointing](image)

Figure 4-38 Corrie Bodney claimed 6km of the coast between Swanbourne and City Beach in 1995. Permission: Corrie Bodney and Post Newspapers. Collection: Post Newspapers, 19 September 1995, 1.

These opposing claims highlighted tensions within the Noongar community. Newspaper publicity for the claims also brought letters to the editor from the wider community, both for and against. In 2000, Robert Bropho was quoted in the local *Post* newspaper as saying that the area “contained Aboriginal spiritual dreaming”24 and he had:

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23 “This beach is ours, says Bodney family,” *Post*, 19 September 1995, 1, 71.
These newspaper clippings were accessed through Freshwater Bay Museum Public Access System, ABORIGINES
lodged the native title claim for future generations, whom he said would one day step out into white society to do battle with the white government, as he and his ancestors had done.25

This article brought a flurry of letters to the editor in response. Chris Mews wrote:

Well, Mr Bropho, I’m sure you must be dreaming, because we don’t remember you at all. My family have lived continuously on the water’s edge in Claremont since 1912 and I can assure the readers of the POST that none of us ever set eyes on you or any of your Nyungah tribe in this area.26

In response, a number people sent in letters in support of the Bropho family presence in the area and their right to a native title claim. Lloyd Davies wrote:

My family settled in Peppermint Grove in 1893 … I was born there in 1922. During my childhood I well remember the Bropho family wandering the streets of Peppermint Grove, selling clothes props for a meagre living.

Aboriginal occupation of the whole of the Swan River pre-dated all non-indigenous families by many thousands of years and by virtue of the Mabo decision entitles Aboriginal people to make a claim to enjoy traditional rights to non-alienated land along its shoreline.

Only very mean-spirited people would deny them these rights.27

In 2016 native title was still unresolved in the metropolitan area. In 2015, the six agreement groups from Noongar country all voted to accept a settlement negotiated with the state government. The package includes Noongar recognition legislation, land, housing, and funds for Noongar social, cultural and economic development.28 It is currently going through the appeals process.

25 “‘Freshwater Bay … I remember it well’,” Post, 26 August 2000, 63.
26 “Stop dreaming, Mr Bropho,” Christopher Mews, letter to Editor, Post, 2 September 2000, 2.
27 “Bropho entitled to make claim,” Lloyd Davies, letter to Editor, Post, 16 September 2000, 3.
Development at Lake Claremont

In 1999, the State government began negotiating to move the Swanbourne Primary School from Devon Road to the former Swanbourne High School site, between Narla Road and Alfred Road. This had been a campsite for the Bodney and Bropho families for much of the 1930s and 1940s. The Education Department consulted with Noongar Elders as the development would damage a significant Aboriginal site, registered under the Aboriginal Heritage Act, 1972. At that time, Corrie Bodney said to anthropologists Macintyre Dobson and Associates, that “to know that development is intended for this area gives me a deep inner feeling of despair and powerlessness”.

As part of the negotiations, in 2001 a group of 18 Noongar Elders (which included Robert Bropho and Toopy Bodney, but not Corrie Bodney) negotiated an agreement with the State government to recognise the cultural importance of the site. The agreement was valid for five years, with possible extension. It covered both the construction of the new school: for example, ground-probing radar to be used before construction to find possible artefacts or burials; part of the site being preserved as a bushland cultural ground to highlight the Noongar significance of the area, and payments to Elders for consultation.

The agreement also incorporated measures to be put in place once the school was operating. These included Noongar Elders presenting a pilot programme of local Noongar history at the school, a Noongar history and archive area in the school’s library, a possible separate Noongar history and archive building at

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1 Macintyre Dobson and Associates Pty Ltd, “Report on an Ethnographic/Ethnohistorical and Archaeological Survey of the Swanbourne Project Area, with Mr C Bodney, Seniormost Representative of the Ballarak Aboriginal Corporation and Native Title Claimant,” prepared for the Education Department of WA and the Department of Contract and Management Services, 2000, Section 2.4.
4 Deed between the State of Western Australia and Robert Bropho et al., Sec 4B.1
5 Deed between the State of Western Australia and Robert Bropho et al., Sec 2.
6 Deed between the State of Western Australia and Robert Bropho et al., Sec 3.1a.
7 Deed between the State of Western Australia and Robert Bropho et al., Sec 3.1b.
the school or on the cultural ground;\(^8\) Elders’ to be allowed access to the school and cultural ground, subject to the safety and operational requirements of the school;\(^9\) and a sign to be erected at the school or on the cultural ground recognising the importance of the site to the Noongar community.\(^10\) Many of these points had been included as conditions of the development approval, issued in February 2000 by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, under Section 18 of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act*.\(^11\) These measures offer guidelines for future partnerships associated with the development of significant Noongar sites.

In 2007 the development of the former Lakeway Drive-In again raised the issue of mutual benefit from a development on a registered Aboriginal site. In this case, the outcome was the oral histories I recorded and sculptural signs telling the history of the site. Unfortunately the piece about the camps was located away from the path, and is now hidden by vegetation. However, stories of school, work and shared use of the landscape are visible.

\(^8\) Deed between the State of Western Australia and Robert Bropho et al., Sec 3.1c.
\(^9\) Deed between the State of Western Australia and Robert Bropho et al., Sec 4A.1.
\(^10\) Deed between the State of Western Australia and Robert Bropho et al., Sec 6.
\(^11\) Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Letter, Kim Hames, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to Mr Ron Mance, Acting Director General, Education Department of Western Australia, 15 February 2000. Copy held Freshwater Bay Museum PAS ABORGINES Camps/Housing
This chapter has detailed the long history of camps around the Claremont area, both at the river and at Lake Claremont in Swanbourne. The written records of the camps start with de Vlamingh’s expedition in 1697 and there is evidence of continued connection today.

The places available to Noongar people for camps have depended on the availability of vacant Crown land, such as the bush at the corner of Alfred Road and Narla Road before 1951. Other camps have been on private property, made available through friendship or work relationships. The *Aboriginal Heritage Act, 1972* recognises the importance of both Lake Claremont and the Swan River to Noongar people and provides some opportunity to negotiate benefits in return for development approval. Nonetheless, Noongars are greatly restricted in access and use of land that was once entirely theirs.
Chapter 5 Revisiting the Shenton Park, Jolimont and Daglish Camps

I, myself, today, my healing journey is talking about my home in the bush before I was institutionalised. Other siblings of mine, they prefer not to talk about it, but I, myself, I feel I need to. And it helps me on my journey. That was my home.

Lynnette Coomer, 2013

Introducing Lynnette, Georgina, Beryl and Peter

Figure 5-1 From left: Peter Randolph, Georgina Coomer, Beryl Hoffman and Lynnette Coomer, 7 April 2013. Photo: Denise Cook

In April 2013, a group of people met to share their memories about the Shenton

523 Lynnette Coomer, oral history recorded with Lynette Coomer, Georgina Coomer, Beryl Hoffman and Peter Randolph by Denise Cook, 7 April 2013, 16. Permission: Lynnette Coomer. Note: "That was my home" has been incorporated into the title of this thesis with permission from Lynnette Coomer.
Park, Daglish, and Jolimont camps. To tell the “untold” stories. Their recollections are those of young children with little context for what had happened. But put together – shared – they create a bigger picture.

The group comprised Lynnette and Georgina Coomer, Beryl Hoffman, Peter Randolph, and me. Lynnette and Georgina are Noongar women who had been children in the Shenton Park camps in the mid to late 1950s. When Lynnette was seven, a brother Christopher (known to the family as Poonie) was six, and Georgina was five, they were taken away from their family to Roelands Mission. Sometime later, the three younger children in the family were also taken and placed in the Mission. Beryl Hoffman is a non-Aboriginal woman, whose father, Reg Anderton, had a farm over the road from the Shenton Park camps. From 1947, when she was very young, Beryl had contact with people living in the camps. Peter Randolph is a non-Aboriginal man who grew up near the Jolimont camps and went to school in the early 1950s with Lynnette and Georgina’s older brother Malcolm Coomer, and uncle Cyril Bodney. Peter also worked for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs for many years and has a broad knowledge of the camps.

This gathering was an opportunity for us to meet and share stories. I had talked to everyone separately, and recorded Beryl’s story, which I had given to Lynnette and Georgina. But, as Lynnette said, “It’s good when you can meet up with people, you know, and put all the connections together.” Georgina added that the camp was “where a lot of our roots are. The roots is where you all start.” Beryl commented that, “It was a period of our history that none of us can be complacent about, none of us can be proud of, it really was”. Peter added that, “Yeah, but as a little kid, you didn’t really understand”.

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524 Lynnette Coomer, oral history, 7 April 2013, 16.  
525 Lynnette, Georgina and Malcolm’s father, John Coomer, is Cyril Bodney’s older half-brother.  
526 Lynnette Coomer, oral history, 7 April 2013, 31.  
527 Georgina Coomer, oral history, 7 April 2013, 16. Permission: Georgina Coomer.  
528 Beryl Hoffman, oral history, 7 April 2013, 35. Permission: Beryl Hoffman.  
529 Peter Randolph, oral history, 7 April 2013, 35. Permission: Peter Randolph.
Where were the Shenton Park Camps?

![Shenton Park camps map](image)

Figure 5-2 Shenton Park camps (approximate location marked by red triangles), 1953. From SWALSC, "Noongar Camps Shenton Park Area," 2015 (see larger map). Aerial photography Metro Oct–Nov 1953 Mosaic, Landgate. Not to scale.

The Shenton Park camps were in bush off Lemnos Street, just west of the Victoria Hospital for Infectious Diseases, more recently known as Royal Perth Rehabilitation Hospital – Shenton Park Campus. Although there is still some bush in the area, roads have changed and there has been a great deal of development, making it difficult to place the camps in today’s landscape. However, Corrie Bodney, whose mother, Melba Bodney was a long-term resident at the camps, and who also lived there himself at times, has located the camps off Lemnos Street, just east of Bedbrook Place. The site is now the Westcare Accommodation Village, built in 1979 as the Florence Hummerston Hostel for people with disabilities. There were also camps just north of this

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area, in what is now known as the Underwood Avenue Bushland and two campsites there have been registered under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act*, 1972.\textsuperscript{532}

![Figure 5-3 Bedbrook Place off Lemnos Street, looking west, 2011. This remnant bush is in the general area of the Shenton Park camps. Photo: Denise Cook](image)

From 1855, the land that became the Shenton Park camps was part of the Perth Commonage, granted to the Perth Town Trust, and stretching from the city to the coast.\textsuperscript{533} The commonage provided income to the council through fees for the collection of firewood, quarrying stone, and leases for grazing and farming.\textsuperscript{534}

After the railway line was built through Subiaco in 1881, commonage land east

\textsuperscript{532} Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Site file 19934, “Underwood Avenue Camp 1”; Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Site file 19935, “Underwood Avenue Camp 2.”


of the railway began to be subdivided. In 1893, smallpox patients were nursed there in tents on the site that became the Infectious Diseases Hospital. In 1896, the Karrakatta Rifle Range was established on adjoining land. The Rifle Range was closed in 1913 as the area was further developed. This followed a number of near misses of passers-by and after one man walking some distance from the range was shot through the knee. In 1904, much of the commonage was set aside as University Endowment land to be used for the financial benefit of the future University of Western Australia.

For much of the twentieth century, this area housed facilities that most people wanted kept out of sight. To the east of the camps was the hospital for patients with infectious diseases. On the edge of the hospital closest to the camps, Beryl rememberd in the 1950s seeing cages of monkeys and guinea pigs. These were probably used for medical research. On the west of the camps was the sewage works, with open sewage ponds. Beyond that was the rubbish tip. To the north was the Sewerage Vent, known locally as the “stink pole”. To the south, over the road, was the Dogs Home, very noisy with barking dogs. In

539 Fred Alexander, Campus at Crawley: A Narrative and Critical Appreciation of the First Fifty Years of the University of Western Australia (Melbourne: FW Cheshire for the University of Western Australia Press, 1963), 335-6. Edmund Thomas Anderton, Beryl’s grandfather, leased one of only six Endowment blocks let between 1912 and 1927. The lease for his farm, lot 1 of location 2119, is from the University of Western Australia and dated 1920. Tom Mason (where Beryl’s Aunty Amy lived) almost certainly also leased his block from the university. Beryl Hoffman, oral history recorded by Denise Cook, 27 September 2012, 2-3. The land between the camps and Underwood Avenue is still owned by the University of Western Australia – see UBD, 2008 Perth and Surrounds Street Directory, (Osborne Park: Universal Publishers, 2008), Map 267.
540 Beryl Hoffman, conversation, 10 September 2012.
541 Dr Malcolm Lawson, Director Animal Care Services, Biomedical Research Facility, University of Western Australia, email communication, 13 July 2015. Permission: Malcolm Lawson.
542 Beryl Hoffman, oral history, 27 September 2012, 33-34.
1937, Mr Taylor, a clerk with the Native Affairs Department wrote of the Shenton Park camps that:

This camp is situated in the worst spot I have ever had the misfortune to inspect – almost alongside a Rubbish tip, Sanitary Site and Sewerage Works. … On returning to Subiaco I had the misfortune to break a ball race in the steering gear box of my car, caused by the awful road.\footnote{CT Taylor, “Inspection of Native Camps in the Metropolitan Area,” April 8, 1937, in “Native Camps in the Metropolitan Area – Reports on Inspection of by Head Office Inspector,” SROWA, Cons 993, 1937/105, fol. 3.}

Figure 5.4 Map from about 1904 showing the rifle range, University endowment land, Victoria Hospital on Location 2290, and the Claremont Asylum. Collection: Public Works Department, 1902/13930, Vol. 1, SROWA Cons 3640.
Figure 5-5 Section of Beryl Hoffman's sketch map showing the approximate locations of the hospital and camps, 1950s. Not to scale. Permission: Beryl Hoffman
Stories from the Shenton Park camps

According to Noongar Elders consulted for an Aboriginal heritage survey in 1998, the camps in the Lemnos Street area were occupied from about the 1920s until the 1950s. There is no natural source of water here so the camps were probably only established as the expansion of settlement pushed Noongar people further to the fringes of suburban development.

Alisa Waghorn, one of the first non-Aboriginal people to move in 1927 into the new suburb of Daglish, recalled the camps at Shenton Park.

There was an Aboriginal settlement in a pretty glade adjacent to the old Infectious Diseases Hospital which occupied the site where the Rehabilitation Hospital now stands. I understand these people carted their water from either the Dogs Home or the hospital. They periodically came round selling beautifully fashioned cobweb brooms and kangaroo paw plants. They were gentle, well-behaved people, their camp neat and orderly, and their children well cared for. One young girl from this camp subsequently became a prefect at the old Perth Girls’ School, a school of very high standard in those days.

546 McDonald, Hales and Associates, “Aboriginal Heritage Study UWA–Shenton Park: Report of the Archaeological and Ethnographic Survey,” unpublished report for the Centre for Western Australian History, University of Western Australia, 1998, 15, 17-18. Although no names are given in the report it appears from the description that this is the Bodney family.

Alisa may have mentioned the girl becoming a prefect because at the time education wasn't compulsory for Aboriginal people. In addition, families often moved around, leading to disrupted schooling. While some children had a good experience at school, others experienced racism. All this made it less likely that children would do well or take a leadership role at school.

There are other accounts of the camps. During the 1937 official inspection, Mr Taylor found four families living between the sanitary site and the Infectious Diseases Hospital. He wrote in his report that he later saw one of the men and "ordered him to disperse the camp immediately. No proper structure was even attempted." It is not known whether this was carried through.

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549 DNA, 105/37, *Native camps in the Metropolitan Area*, CT Taylor, "Inspection of Native Camps in the Metropolitan Area,” April 8, 1937, fol. 3.
Judy Mitchell remembered similar camps. Before she started school in 1939, Judy used to walk with her grandmother from her home in Nicholson Road, Subiaco, across to the airfield, which is now part of McGillivray Oval, west of the camps. She remembered that there were no roads, it was all bush, with big trees. In the bush, they came across isolated camps; there was never anyone there. Some camps were tin humpies; others were made from rags – stuff people had thrown out – resting on a framework of big sticks. The rag and stick camps were a curved shape, like a quarter of an apple resting on the ground.

Figure 5-7 Louise Walsh, nee Bodney, 1970s. Permission: Louise Walsh. Collection: Corrie Bodney

In the mid 1950s, Lynnette and Georgina’s Aunty Louise Walsh, nee Bodney,

was a child living with her mum Melba and family at the Shenton Park camps. She remembered them being in the bush just behind the hospital.

The camp was made from old tins, sheets of tins, whatever they could find. Had the poles, just chop them down. The big brothers used to build it. Mum always had a little rockery out of sandstone – it was quite beautiful.551

There was a water pipe or fire hydrant nearby that had to be accessed using a special tool.552

One of the boys must have worked for the Roads Board and give Mum the thing to turn the water on. It was a T shape. Boys must have opened up kerosene tin to make a bucket; boys built a little cart for her. She’d go and get water and water her garden every morning. Then she’d get water for the rest of the camp for the day.553

Without refrigeration, people in the camps ate lots of tinned food. Lynnette remembered “tinned beef and damper. Damper that was cooked in the ashes.”554 Bush food was also on the menu. Georgina added, “I remember coming here [to Jolimont Swamp] as a little girl and a little person, playing in the mud, and trying to dig the giglies out and grab the turtles and eat the bobtails.”555

Beryl Hoffman remembers quite a lot of her impressions of the camp:

The front of the camp – on the left-hand side it had a very big enamel “No Entry” sign.556 But as you went into the camp from the sign, you passed down a long stretch before you got to where they were. You couldn’t hear people or see anything. There was bush, there was scrub, there was taller trees behind their houses. The dwellings were mainly on the ocean side, and the Floreat Park side. There was very little on the Infectious Diseases Hospital side.557

Where we drove the truck in, there was a very, very big open area. Like if you drove out in the bush, you would get bogged; this was packed hard. It was immaculately clean. Some of the

551 Louise Walsh, nee Bodney, telephone conversation, 23 May 2013.
552 Toopy Bodney, oral history, 7 May 2007, 16.
553 Louise Walsh, nee Bodney, telephone conversation, 23 May 2013.
554 Lynnette Coomer, oral history, 7 April 2013, 57.
555 Georgina Coomer, oral history, 7 April 2013, 57.
556 Beryl Hoffman, oral history, 7 April 2013, 4.
557 Beryl Hoffman, oral history, 27 September 2012, 24-25.
structures were made of metal. By that, it was scrap metal from
the dump. Most of them were just boughs; a frame put up with
boughs over the edge of them and things inside that people may
have laid on or something like that.\footnote{Beryl Hoffman, oral history, 27 September 2012, 23-24.}

There were a heck of a lot of fires out away from the huts in this
area. The fires weren’t flamey fires, never ever, and we would’ve
been in there you know, between six and seven o’clock. I should
imagine that if they had had food that day, they would be cooking
at that time, unless they had their main meal in the daytime; I don’t
know.\footnote{Beryl Hoffman, oral history, 27 September 2012, 23-24.}

It’s hard to determine how many people lived in the camps. In 1937, the Native
Affairs Department Inspector listed 10 people as living there.\footnote{DNA, 105/37, Native camps in the Metropolitan Area, CT Taylor, “Inspection of Native Camps in the Metropolitan Area,” April 8, 1937, fol. 3.} Louise Walsh
remembers Chrissy and Corrie, her older sister and brother, and their partners
living there.

We never ever lived with other people. Mum, she just wanted to
have her family. Chrissy and Donny lived in a little camp further
over. Corrie and Violet at one stage.\footnote{Louise Walsh, nee Bodney, telephone conversation, 23 May 2013.}

In contrast, as a very young child in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Beryl
remembers seeing a lot of people at the camps. By the early 1950s, this would
have been one of the few camps still available in the western suburbs of Perth
and was probably well used.

At that time, non-Aboriginal people in Shenton Park knew the camps were
there. During the 1950s, Frank Cherry would walk with his mates up Lemnos
Street towards the Claremont rubbish tip and Asylum hospital. The boys would
walk past the track leading into the camps but didn’t dare to go down it – they
were afraid if they went there they might not come out. Frank remembers being
only about ten or eleven when the camps were disbanded in the late 1950s.\footnote{Frank Cherry, telephone conversation, 13 September 2012. Permission: Frank Cherry.}

**Lynnette and Georgina remember**

Lynnette and Georgina’s parents, John and Sylvena Coomer lived at the
Shenton Park camps for at least some of the 1950s.\footnote{563} Having been removed from their parents and sent to Roelands Mission, the women don’t know the details. Lynnette remembers walking from that camp to the Jolimont Primary School when she was six, in 1959. At the time her dad’s mum, Melba Bodney, lived at the Shenton Park camps with her extended family. Lynnette speculated:

\begin{quote}
After I was born, did they come from Collie up to Shenton Park here? Was grandmother Melba there before? And she got Mum and Dad to move in with her because they were actually starting up a family? Because I would have been six when I came here to Jolimont School. I remember walking along the track, and along that gully there and coming here.\footnote{564}
\end{quote}

Memory both offers insight, and is shaped by what has happened since. Of the group who met that day, Beryl Hoffman has the most detailed recollections of her contact with the camps. She has an exceptional memory, and as a curious observer had no reason to forget. Peter Randolph had some contact with Malcolm Coomer at school but had only visited the Jolimont camps when no one was there. Lynnette and Georgina’s memories are associated with the painful experience of being taken away from their family and sent to an institution. As Lynnette said, “You block a lot of things out of your head, you know. You only remember certain things that you want to remember.”\footnote{565} Despite this, Lynnette, who worked for many years as an Aboriginal Education Assistant, recalled:

\begin{quote}
With all the things that they’ve told you, not to talk your language, not to do any Aboriginal things or anything like that, but bible, bible, bible. I’m just spinning out that I remember; I’ve taken my camp with me as a child, into that institution with me.\footnote{566}

And I think what really kept me going, and the thing I say to the children when I’m talking about my childhood journey. Is the thing that kept me going at night times. ’Cause night times was the longest time when you’re separated from your family. Remembering the smell of my mum. Remembering. And remembering my camp.\footnote{567}
\end{quote}

\footnote{563} Before her marriage, Sylvena’s surname was Khan. Georgina Coomer, conversation 19 Mary 2013.\footnote{564} Lynnette Coomer, oral history, 7 April 2013, 17.\footnote{565} Lynnette Coomer, oral history, 7 April 2013, 17.\footnote{566} Lynnette Coomer, oral history, 7 April 2013, 16.\footnote{567} Lynnette Coomer, oral history, 7 April 2013, 16.
Lynnette added:

I find that children are fascinated that I used to live in the bush. I said, “But that was the best home, that was my first home, that’s my best home I’ve ever had”.\textsuperscript{568}

She remembers some of the details about her home:

The camp was made from tin. When you walked in there was a blanket hanging down. My parents slept up one end with a blanket

\textsuperscript{568} Lynnette Coomer, oral history, 7 April 2013, 16.
closing off their area. The kids slept in another section, with another blanket closing it off.

For play we used to climb trees and make little mia mia’s from gum leaves.569

The Lemnos Street farm

Another perspective on life in the Shenton Park camps comes from Beryl Hoffman. Beryl’s dad, Reg Anderton had a farm on Lemnos Street in Shenton Park from 1947. Reg’s parents also had a farm behind the Dog’s Home on Lemnos Street; and his sister, Beryl’s Aunty Amy Anderton, lived on a third farm on Lemnos Street. The farms were leased from the University of Western Australia and were part of their Endowment lands, used to raise funds for the university.570

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569 Lynnette Coomer, conversation, 11 November 2011
Figure 5-9 Beryl Hoffman at her Aunt Amy's farm on Lemnos Street in Shenton Park, about 1948. She is standing in the rock melon patch holding gladdies. Permission and collection: Beryl Hoffman
Figure 5-10 Section of Beryl Hoffman’s sketch map showing the approximate locations of the farms and camps, 1950s. Permission: Beryl Hoffman
Beryl and her parents lived in Maylands, her father travelling to the farm each day. Her grandparents and Aunty Amy lived on their farms. Due to a difficult home situation, Beryl used to go to the farm with her father at least once a week, starting in 1947, when she was two.\textsuperscript{571}

Beryl’s dad, Reg Anderton (always known as Sandy), knew a number of people in the camps. Perhaps his contact with Noongar people had started when he lived as a teenager with the Brockman family near Manjimup, together with Noongar man, Charlie Burns.\textsuperscript{572} Reg and Charlie remained good friends all their lives. Later Reg worked as a navigator for MacRobertson Miller Airlines, and had contact with Aboriginal people when delivering the mail by plane between Broome and Darwin.\textsuperscript{573}

![Figure 5-11 Charlie Burns, later in life. Charlie and Reg Anderton had both lived with the Brockman family near Manjimup when Reg was young, and they remained friends all their lives.](image)

\textsuperscript{571} Beryl Hoffman, oral history, 27 September 2012, 1-2.
\textsuperscript{572} Beryl Hoffman, oral history, 27 September 2012, 14-15.
Secrets

In an era when it was illegal for non-Aboriginal people to associate with Aboriginal people or go into a camp, Reg’s contact with people in the camps had to be kept secret. Beryl commented that:

The camp was something that only was acknowledged between my father and myself, and my father told me whatever happened there never happened afterwards, I was never to tell anyone about it.

Figure 5-12 Reg (Sandy) Anderton, about 1945, shortly before Beryl was born. Permission and collection: Beryl Hoffman

Beryl recalled Noongar people coming from the camp to the farm to give her dad a message.

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574 They could have been prosecuted under the Native Administration Act, 1936.
On numerous occasions, I’d be down there [with my horse at the back of the farm] and though I don’t recall ever seeing these people walking down the track or through the scrub, all of a sudden in this one particular spot that my father had cleared the ground on, there would be just someone there. I would walk up to them and the man would say – my father always had a nickname, his name was Sandy. There would just be, “Could you tell Sandy I’m here?”

If there was someone on the farm, they weren’t allowed to know; visitors, my father’s brothers or anything, weren’t allowed to know this person was down there. Dad and I had a code – lots of things were done by code in those days on the farms and everywhere else.576

Lynnette commented that staying out of sight was something she also learnt.

I remember as a child when we used to do a lot of walking, we always automatically would crouch down, whether it was when the police went by or if the Department went by or what, I don’t know.

But I do remember, and you automatically do that now. Even when we went into the institution, we all used to go walkabout on the property, on the farm, on the mission, and we’d see anything and we’d automatically all teach each other to bob down when something was coming.577

Locked up for being out after curfew

Between 1927 and 1954, Aboriginal people had to be off the streets in central Perth by 6pm, but sometimes they were late. Beryl shared this story about women domestic workers, which I have not heard anywhere else.

My father used to say that the women used to get cajoled, made to stop back and serve up dinner, he used to say, or finish off some extra work so that they’d be late home for the curfew. If they were late home from curfew and they were out on the street, they used to get picked up and put into the lockups overnight.

But what my father objected to was the women used to get picked up getting off public transport before curfew was done, because they couldn’t walk back to the camp and it was easier for the policemen.578

Beryl explains how her father used produce from the farm as a bribe for the police to get the women out of the lockup and back to the camps. Since they never talked about it, Beryl reflected that “I honestly don’t know what his role was, why he did it. I just do not know; I’ve never ever known”.579 She continues the story.

Many times, we’d be going home to Maylands and my father would all of a sudden get in an awful huff, and tell me to either go up to my auntie’s – or sit quietly when I got older – and wait for him to come back.580

Anyway, prior to my father leaving the farm, he would always put eggs, lots of eggs, that he always had in reserve. He used to keep all of those back from the pullets [young hens] that we had out the back. We used to have to tell the government men that those pullets were too old for laying eggs; we only used them for dog

577 Lynnette Coomer, oral history, 7 April 2013, 10.
578 Beryl Hoffman, oral history, 27 September 2012, 12.
579 Beryl Hoffman, oral history, 27 September 2012, 12.
food which wasn’t true at all, my father never ever fed chickens to dogs.581

Her father couldn’t dispose of the eggs as he chose because of rationing.

But anyway, the eggs used to go on the truck and also other pieces of meat. All of this would come out and be thrown into clean sugar bags and he’d take off with these eggs and this tarpaulin.582

Dad used to know before he left how many eggs to put on there. I can clearly remember him coming back one day and being very, very angry because he was short of eggs for the delivery and they’d doubled up the balance of it.583

My father would come back from these jaunts absolutely furious saying, “Christmas is coming up, they’re short of money, the tucker in [the police] kids’ bellies is more important than the food the mothers are bringing home. It’s absolutely wrong, they shouldn’t be doing that.”584

Beryl did go with her father to the police station two or three times to pick up the women who had been caught out just before or after 6pm.

Anyway, when I went with my father on these jaunts a couple of times, we’d pull up around the back of a police station. Women would be ready there, immaculately dressed women would come out of the police station often with shopping bags – brown paper sacks that you used to get from the shops – and their handbags.

They would crawl under the tarpaulin, we’d come up between the Returned Soldiers’ [Lemnos] Hospital and the Infectious Diseases Hospital. Vic Adamson from the Dogs Home would be out on the driveway looking over his shoulders in both directions in a very, very worried manner, beckoning. He never ever stopped my father, he’d just beckon him straight into the camp, we’d drive into the camp.

582 Beryl Hoffman, oral history, 27 September 2012, 7-8.
583 Beryl Hoffman, oral history, 27 September 2012, 12.
584 Beryl Hoffman, oral history, 27 September 2012, 8.
They had to be so careful because under the Native Administration Act, 1936, it was illegal for a non-Aboriginal person to be within 100 metres of an Aboriginal camp. In this way the legislation not only controlled Aboriginal people’s behaviour, it restricted people like Reg and Vic who wanted to help.

My father would tell me to look down, I wasn’t allowed to look at anything that was in there. My father used to get out and I’d hear him and see the tarpaulin flick over the cabin of the truck. If I looked out the window which I did very rarely, I’d see the women getting down from the back of the truck and hear children running up to them.

With that, I don’t remember my father talking to anyone very much and he’d get into the cabin again, we’d drive in a circle out of the camp.

It is difficult to establish how often this occurred. Police activity like this is not likely to be recorded in any official documents and the adults concerned have all passed on. Neither Corrie nor Louise Bodney remember Sandy Anderton

585 Native Administration Act, 1936, Section 39.
and the children in the camp may never have known about it.

**Collecting food**

Others in the community were involved with the camps through Reg Anderton, who picked up unwanted food from a local greengrocer and a bakery. While much of the food was for the animals on the farm, Beryl recalled that:

> Often there would be a box there and the guys would just say, “Can you use this? I think you can use this.” My father would look in the box and say, “Oh, you haven’t got any spare potatoes, have you?” Sometimes they would rustle around and get some spare potatoes and Dad would say, “Never ever throw the potatoes out; they love potatoes”. 587

Beryl also remembered trays of slightly burned bread and coconut macaroons from a bakery in Shenton Park, all of which Sandy would deliver into the camp late at night. 588

When Beryl went into the camps with her father, she remembered being looked at strangely by the kids in the camp.

> When I went into [the camps] with Dad on a couple of times, the children used to get with their carers around the edge and I was the weird kid. They’d be looking at me like this. And it was so weird to be the weird kid when Dad was delivering things. 589

Lynnette commented that it was probably:

> More curiosity than anything else. Because, looks like us but different colour. Something’s different. ’Cause colour would not have been a thing. It would have been looking, looking. Because see that you were like them. Might have thought you was a sick child. 590

Peter Randolph added:

> Probably slightly different clothes and different things like that. 591

**Georgina Coomer:**

589 Beryl Hoffman, oral history, 7 April 2013, 33.
590 Lynnette Coomer, oral history, 7 April 2013, 33.
591 Peter Randolph, oral history, 7 April 2013, 33.
Yeah, like different colour – albino, yeah. Funny Aboriginal.  

**Work**

Some of the women in the camps worked in laundries. Georgina remembered her Aunty Louise Walsh saying that Georgina’s Aunty Betty and Aunty Chrissie: “They were young girls doing some of the laundry”.  

Peter recalled being told by Corrie Bodney that the men in the camps herded cattle for a local man, Delamere, but he wasn’t sure of the name. He checked with Beryl.

> Were there any people who simply herded cattle? Because one of the stories that Corrie Bodney told me was when his family lived out the back here, the men worked for that guy, helped him herd his cattle. And he apparently drove his cattle from Herdsman Lake through this area, or maybe as far as Butler Swamp which is now Lake Claremont, and they went and looked for pasture along the way.  

Beryl remembered Mr Delamere, and that he lived on the west side of Herdsman’s Lake.

> But he was a nice old guy. By the time I knew Mr Delamere, he would have been in his 80s or 90s. He’d gone away from cattle and he was certainly just concentrating on pigs at that time.

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592 Georgina Coomer, oral history, 7 April 2013, 33.
593 Georgina Coomer, oral history, 7 April 2013, 26.
594 Peter Randolph, oral history, 7 April 2013, 26-28.
595 Beryl Hoffman, oral history, 7 April 2013, 28.
Peter, like almost everyone else who remembers Noongar people in the area, also recalled the men from the camps earning some income from selling clothes props.

And like I said before, they used to cut the saplings – when the rains came, for props for clotheslines. And my mum used to buy them and most people in Jolimont probably had a prop or two they bought.596

The Shenton Park camps were the main focus of our meeting and sharing stories, but we also looked at the sites of the nearby Daglish and Jolimont camps.

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Camps in Daglish

Back in the 1950s, between the Shenton Park camps and the Jolimont Primary School, there was a long, deep drainage gully. When Lynnette and I went back there in 2011, we were surprised to find that the gully is still there. It is used for storm water drainage and is now part of a popular dog-walking park, Cliff Sadlier V.C. Memorial Park.
Sadlier V.C. Memorial Park. 597

Lynnette remembers walking along the edge of the gully in 1959 going from their Shenton Park camp to Jolimont Primary School and back. 598 She commented that it has changed a bit since then.

They have spread the gully out, ‘cause it used to go much deeper. Yeah, yeah. And it used to be just all sand, you know. You were able to walk up and look down and when there used to be no water, you see all the rubbish on the ground. And then next time you come back again, coming to school, walking along on the top of it, the water would be up. So the kids couldn’t ride their bikes. They had to go the long, long way around. 599

Lynnette remembers that there were often people from the Claremont Asylum in the area. They didn’t do anything but she was warned not to look at or talk to anyone who might be hanging around. Frequently her mum or one of the other people from the camps would meet her at the end of the gully. 600

597 Peter Randolph, oral history, 7 April 2013, 37-8.
598 Lynnette Coomer, oral history, 7 April 2013, 17.
599 Lynnette Coomer, oral history, 7 April 2013, 39-40.
600 Lynnette Coomer, conversation with Denise Cook, November 11, 2011.
Peter Randolph remembered the gully too. He and his friends used to crawl for about a mile (1.6km) back through the stormwater drainage pipes from what is now Cliff Sadlier Park to the Subiaco subway.601

At Subiaco Museum, a mud map of unknown origin indicates an Aboriginal camp in Cliff Sadlier Park. It is drawn just southeast of the present-day bridge and outlet for the storm water drains.

601 Peter Randolph, oral history, 7 April 2013, 38.
Lynnette and Georgina’s Aunty Louise Walsh, the youngest of the Bodney children, lived with her family in the camp at Daglish, probably in the early 1950s. The camp was in the bush behind the school, perhaps between the

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602 Louise Walsh, telephone conversation, 31 August 2015.
school and Cliff Sadlier Park. Louise told me on the telephone from Adelaide that:

When we moved from Swanbourne we lived at Daglish, in the camp by the school. There were lots of banksia trees there. They dug for water there once. Mum knew what plants to dig around.

Past the school was a hall. Mum used to book up at the shop near the hall, then pay it off at the end of the fortnight. 603

Lynnette remembered the shop too, and on our first visit to the campsite we enjoyed lunch at a café located close to where the previous shop had been. 604

Friends

Louise Walsh remembered going to Jolimont School. This story is probably from the time she lived in the Shenton Park camps.

603 Louise Walsh, telephone conversation, 23 May 2013.
I had good little mates at school. Glenys Suter, white girl, was my friend. She used to come home with me, we’d play marbles in the camp. Then we’d walk back half way, and she’d go home. We were friends when I was nine or ten. She lived in Daglish near the bridge from Shenton Park. I would love to get in contact with her again. Girl named Kay, little blonde girl, was quite nice to me. Barry, other children – they all lived around by me – we’d go off to school together.605

Not everyone was friendly though. Louise remembers being “the only little black kid in the school at the time”. She said, “I used to get called ‘nigger’ quite constantly.”606 When they walked down the street, “kids would say, ‘Nigger, nigger, pull the trigger.”607 Louise said that in response, “Mum would go banging on the door and tell the people, ‘Teach your children some manners’. No-one stood on her, she stood up for herself.”608

Helen Van Leeuwen moved to Munsie Avenue in Daglish in 1954 when she was nine years old. She remembers seeing the camp about 1955.

    My beautiful school, Jolimont School, my sister and I went there. I befriended an Aboriginal girl, and she used to live in the middle of, as we called it, the bush. I used to walk her home from school. And there it was, this little humpy with the little camp fire burning, with white puffs of smoke. I thought, how cosy, how comfy it looked, how lucky she was to live like that. The humpy was just well, branches and bits of tarp, and looked like a little igloo really. Just sort of round and you had this little fire going outside—it just looked really, really lovely, yes.

    I'll always remember that memory. And when I see people in the park, they’ve got a memorial there for the Aboriginals, and I see people sitting there. I always tell them my little story, that I actually knew the Aboriginals that lived in the park.609

605 Louise Walsh, telephone conversation, 23 May 2013.
606 Louise Walsh, telephone conversation, 23 May 2013.
607 Louise Walsh, telephone conversation, 23 May 2013.
608 Louise Walsh, telephone conversation, 23 May 2013.
609 Helen Van Leeuwen, oral history, 19 October 2010, 3-4.
Louise Walsh is a bit younger than Helen and doesn’t remember this story so it may have been one of her relatives or another family that Helen knew. Helen was in Year 5 at the time and remembered that when the girl started school she had no books and that the lead pencil she was given on her first day was a treasure that was carried home carefully. Helen’s younger sister was in Year 2 and got to know the boy from the family in that class. Her memories are more dramatic: in particular that the boy had two bees that he used to let fight; and that one day he said he was going to get some honey but didn’t come back to school for 4 days. When he did his face was swollen from bee stings.\textsuperscript{610}

Helen had fond memories of the bush, where the Daglish camp was located.

I really, really loved what was called Cliff Sadlier Park, but to us children it was just the bush, and it was absolutely beautiful. All of our friends in Daglish, that was our playground, and the flowers were in abundance. Donkey orchids with their brown and their tan colouring with the little faces looking up at you. They were

\textsuperscript{610} Helen Van Leeuwen, telephone conversation, 10 May 2013.
everywhere. Spider orchids, blue enamel orchids which were very rare, and when we did find one, we'd press them in our school books. Pink myrtle with its unbelievable scent. Big spider orchids. Cow slips. Milk maids. And rainbows which we'd make into halos, and put on our heads. And the bob-tailed goannas, they were everywhere. There were hundreds of them, each with its own coat of shimmering colour.⁶¹¹

Figure 5-21 Spider orchid and cow slips at Shenton Park Bushland close to Cliff Sadlier VC Memorial Park. Photos: M. Owen

I don’t know how often this camp was used or how long it was there for. It’s possible it may have been a short-term camp, or perhaps only used occasionally. It is one of many in the district that were occupied until the 1950s while the area remained bush.

⁶¹¹ Helen Van Leeuwen, oral history 19 October, 2010, 2.
Jolimont camps

In the 1860s, 40 acres (16 hectares) of land which later became Jolimont was purchased by Joseph Perry and used for grazing livestock. The northern end, while dry most of the time, had a small, swampy watering hole for part of the

Figure 5-22 Site of the Jolimont camps (approximate locations marked by red triangles), 1953. In the 1930s, the camps were to the north of the swamp in what is now Mabel Talbot Park. By the 1940s, the camps had moved to the bush west of Peel Street. From SWALSC, “Noongar Camps Shenton Park Area,” 2015 (see larger map). Aerial photography Metro Oct–Nov 1953 Mosaic, Landgate. Not to scale.

Early history

In the 1860s, 40 acres (16 hectares) of land which later became Jolimont was purchased by Joseph Perry and used for grazing livestock. The northern end, while dry most of the time, had a small, swampy watering hole for part of the
year.\textsuperscript{612} Adjoining Perry’s land was the Perth Commonage, granted to the Perth Town Trust.\textsuperscript{613} In 1902 the Perth Commonage was divided between the councils of Leederville, Subiaco and Perth, as well as the University Endowment trustees.\textsuperscript{614}

Following the subdivision and sale of Subiaco land in the 1880s, what had been Perry’s grazing land was subdivided for housing in 1891. Blocks were sold on Peel, Roseberry, Lansdowne and Jersey Streets between Jolimont and Cardigan Terraces.\textsuperscript{615} The Municipal Endowment to the north and west of the subdivision remained bush.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{jolimont_swamp.jpg}
\caption{Jolimont Swamp (now Mabel Talbot Reserve) was formed when low-lying land was flooded from 1907. Photo: Fred Flood. Collection: Donald Gimm}
\end{figure}

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\textsuperscript{612} Spillman, \textit{Identity Prized}, 69, 235. \\
\textsuperscript{614} AH Chate, “History of Subiaco,” unpublished typescript, 1950, 6. State Library of Western Australia. \\
\textsuperscript{615} Spillman, \textit{Identity Prized}, 69.
\end{flushleft}
From 1907, the water level rose dramatically in the low-lying northern corner of Jolimont, flooding houses, and creating Jolimont Swamp, now Mabel Talbot Reserve. It was probably caused by the construction of a drain to clear water from low-lying parts of Subiaco, West Perth and Leederville. The drain emptied into the endowment land behind the Jolimont School, now Cliff Sadlier Reserve.\textsuperscript{616} Extensive land clearing for houses in Jolimont, Wembley and the Subiaco industrial estate exacerbated the problem.\textsuperscript{617}

**Jolimont camps**

Jolimont Swamp (now called Mabel Talbot Reserve) is remembered as “a central turtle, mudfish and gilgie area” for Noongar people living at the Claremont, Bassendean and Guildford camps in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{618} Clara Leyland, known as Daglish Granny, Melba Bodney and Annie Morrison spent long periods of time there.\textsuperscript{619} European residents remembered Aboriginal people selling clothes props and living in the bush around Jolimont from about 1900.\textsuperscript{620}

In the 1930s, the Jolimont camps were in bush at the edge of the swamp, just northeast of Peel Street.\textsuperscript{621} At that time, Thelma Duke and her friend Joan Collinson were at primary school in West Leederville.\textsuperscript{622} After school, they would often walk the few blocks from their homes in Holland Street, Wembley to sit under a tree in Henderson Park and watch in the distance the women and children in the camp at Jolimont swamp. There would be other children, such as boys kicking a football, in the park.

\textsuperscript{618} O’Connor, Bodney and Little, “‘Preliminary Report on the Survey of Aboriginal Areas of Significance in the Perth Metropolitan and Murray River Regions,’” 27.
\textsuperscript{619} O’Connor, Bodney and Little, “‘Preliminary Report on the Survey of Aboriginal Areas of Significance in the Perth Metropolitan and Murray River Regions,’” 27. Names included with permission from Bella Bropho, Corrie Bodney and Adrian Ugle.
\textsuperscript{622} Thelma Duke, telephone conversation 10 May 2013; Joan Collinson, nee Le Cras, telephone conversation 15 May 2013; Lindsay Carter, email to Denise Cook, 15 September 2012.
Thelma and Joan stayed well back from the camps because their parents were always saying, “Don’t go near those camps,” so they would immediately think, “What are they going to do to us?” Around the same time, Joyce Reed, who lived in Jolimont Terrace overlooking the swamp, remembers being on the verandah or in front garden of her house and seeing smoke from camp fires through the bush near the swamp. She was also told not to worry the people in the camps and she never went over there. However, she would wave to people walking past her house and remembers waving to one of the Aboriginal men from the camp until he waved back.

Thelma remembers the camps as mostly canvas tents with lean-tos made from bush timber. They were close together and Thelma thought there might have been several families and seven to ten children in total. Patricia Pola, who lived in Peel Street, came across different, temporary camps, where two trees had been bound together to create a shelter. Occasionally she would see a billy or enamel cup and an old rug or groundsheet under a bush. Joyce Reed also remembered seeing a little humpy made out of strong trees and bushes, with a fire out the front. She saw turtle shells once or twice although non-Aboriginal kids also caught turtles and gilgies in the lake.

Thelma saw the women at the camps cooking in the open and the children playing. Corrugated iron was used to make tables and for cooking on the fire. The girls wondered where they did their washing since there was always washing on the line at home and they didn’t see it hanging around the camps. And where they went to the toilet. They couldn’t see any lean-to toilets.

624 Joyce Reed, telephone conversation, 12 October 2015.
625 Joyce Reed, telephone conversation, 12 October 2015.
626 Thelma Duke, telephone conversation, 10 May 2013.
627 Thelma Duke, telephone conversation, 10 May 2013.
628 Patricia Pola, telephone conversation 9 October 2015.
629 Joyce Reed, telephone conversation, 12 October 2015.
630 Thelma Duke, telephone conversation, 10 May 2013, and conversation 28 October 2015.
631 Thelma Duke, conversation, 28 October 2015.
Daglish Granny

Clara Leyland, known by Noongar people as Daglish Granny, had a camp at Jolimont in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{632}\textsuperscript{632} In the 1937 Native Affairs Department report on the camps, Clara and her son Ned Mippy are described as living at the Daglish Camp (Jolimont).\textsuperscript{633}\textsuperscript{633} The report stated that:

This camp, which is situated in the bush between Jolimont and Wembley, is only of recent years standing and is not a suitable site. Only very few natives are camped here at present and the camp should be closed.\textsuperscript{634}\textsuperscript{634}

This is likely one of the camps described above. In \textit{fringedweller}, Robert Bropho, who was born in 1930, described his grandmother Clara’s camp as:

in the scrubs at Daglish. It was no house, it was a camp made up of old sheets of tin and bags that was carried a mile away from the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{633} DNA, 105/37, \textit{Native camps in the Metropolitan Area}, CT Taylor, "Inspection of Native Camps in the Metropolitan Area," April 8, 1937, fol. 3. Names used with permission from Diane Mippy.
\textsuperscript{634} DNA, 105/37, \textit{Native camps in the Metropolitan Area}, CT Taylor, "Inspection of Native Camps in the Metropolitan Area," April 8, 1937, fol. 3.
\end{footnotesize}
local tip in the Shenton Park area, but it was her home. She was proud of it.\textsuperscript{635}

In 1939, Arthur Neal, another staff member of the Department of Native Affairs, inspected the camps in Perth. In Jolimont he found that houses were being built nearby. As usual, it was camp residents who were expected to move.

Everything seems to be all right about this camp, no complaints, but as far as I can see this camp will have to be shifted in the near future as buildings are going up close handy.\textsuperscript{636}

By this time, her camp was described as having three compartments, and three of Mrs Leyland’s children and their families were living there as well. About ten metres away from Mrs Leyland’s camp, a son and his wife had their own small camp. They were sharing this with a woman and her three children, who were probably also related. The woman was waiting to go to King Edward Hospital to have a baby.\textsuperscript{637}

When I spoke to Robert in 2007, he shared the following memories of visiting his grandmother.

I go to Daglish, I can see her there walking with her from there through the high scrub to the old Shenton Park rubbish tip, digging through there, looking for bottles, copper wire again, and things. And on her way home, looking through the bush tracks to see if any green grocer loads had been dumped with fruit. We’d go over, rattle through it, get the best of apples, the best of oranges, if there’s any there, bits of carrot and a bit of potatoes, clean them up, have a good feed, that type of thing. … So in them days, a lot of bush, hardly any help, and you had to walk miles.\textsuperscript{638}

Getting enough water in summer was an issue for these camps. Mr Neal wrote in his report about the problem and the unwillingness of the Department to do anything about it.

Mrs Laylan states that the water supply is not good, in the summer she has to get water from a house about 150 yards away and they will only allow her two buckets per day as these people have to

\textsuperscript{635} Bropho, fringedweller, 12.
\textsuperscript{636} DNA, 105/37, Native camps in the Metropolitan Area, A Neal, “Inspection of Native Camps in the Metropolitan Area,” August 7, 1939, fol. 13.
\textsuperscript{637} DNA, 105/37, Native camps in the Metropolitan Area, Neal, “Inspection of Native Camps in the Metropolitan Area,” August 7, 1939, fol. 13.
\textsuperscript{638} Robert Bropho, oral history, 26 March 2007, 5.
pay for excess water. The water supply Department may erect a
stand pipe and tap, say on the next block to the present house,
which is the last house in that street, Peel Street, but by doing so
you would be making the camp more or less permanent, which is
not advisable.639

In fact, that was the decision of the Deputy Commissioner of Native Affairs, who
wrote “in principle we do not agree with any permanency of camps in the
Metropolitan Area … therefore it is not possible for the Department to do
anything in the nature of giving Mrs Layland a permanent water supply”.640

By the 1940s, the camps had moved from the swamp further into the bush, west
of Peel Street. This was probably because of the increased housing
development in the area. Lindsay Carter, who also lived in Holland Street,
Wembley, visited the swamp a few times in the 1940s and saw no trace of a
camp.641 Toopy Bodney described life at the Jolimont camps in the 1950s.

We stayed in humpies of iron and timber. My mother used to tell
me that plenty of Aborigines used to be there, the … and the
Leylands.

We stayed in the bush behind Jolimont Hall – West where the
hockey field is now. Two big pipes brought in drain water there.

We got our water from the hall or the school. Turtles were good
eating from Jolimont lake. We sometimes had duck eggs and carp
and goannas. Brushes (kangaroos) we would trap near City
Beach. That was before we became civilised!

Our family was the last to be there – the early 1950s.

My Uncles sold clothes props and I went with them. We would cut
the props with tomahawks from Jarrah trees – they had to be
Jarrah. I sold small props for 2/6d but my Uncles got 3/6d for their
big ones. I wanted 3/6d.642

Peter Randolph, who lived in nearby Peel Street also remembered a camp at
Jolimont in the 1950s.

639 DNA, 105/37, Native camps in the Metropolitan Area, Neal, “Inspection of Native Camps in
the Metropolitan Area,” August 7, 1939, fol. 13.
640 DNA, 105/37, Native camps in the Metropolitan Area, Frank Bray, DCNA, to Mr Neal, 18
August 1939, fol. 19.
641 Lindsay Carter, email, 19 September 2012. Permission: Lindsay Carter.
642 Toopy Bodney, in Margaret Putt, Wembley: It’s People and It’s Past (Wembley, WA: M Putt,
The camp was located to the west of Peel Street. It was at a soak also known as Red Swamp to my elder brother because it was in sand that was very red. It was a soak, not a spring. There was literally an excavation through the red sand to the water table.

The camp was semi-permanent and made of bough shelters and corrugated iron but it wasn’t occupied all the time. There were several old wire bed frames, kero tins, flour bag and old army blankets. Sunflowers and potatoes grew in a roughly fenced garden patch.  


In 2011, new signs were installed at Mabel Talbot Reserve, including one seat plinth labelled “Granny Clara Layland, 1930s". Although it does not say much about her time there, she is the only Noongar person named on the signs; others relate to Joseph Perry’s dairy farm, the Noongar seasons, and the turtles and water birds that use the swamp.

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644 Erica Boyne, Coordinator Museum Services, City of Subiaco, email 13 October 2015.
Cyril Bodney, State boxing champion

The Jolimont camps and particularly Cyril Bodney, who later became state boxing champion, are remembered by many of the children who grew up in the area. Donald Gimm was friends with Cyril when they both went to Jolimont School. Donald lived at 36 Peel Street, which was then the last street in Jolimont before the camps. He was born in 1940 so his memories are of the late 1940s. Donald shared this story.

At school I had a good friend, Cyril Bodney, an Aborigine. He lived in the bush at the back of Peel Street. I can’t remember bringing him home, I don’t know why. Perhaps it wasn’t the done thing in those days. But we used to go out the back and we’d play hidey and muck around and do things. We had some good times together, it was great. I guess he was a bit of a free spirit too and he was a darned good footballer. We could spend hours playing football. I and a couple of other friends used to play footy in the
street. We used to go down to the swamp. He came down the swamp a few times with us.\textsuperscript{645}

\begin{figure}
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\textsuperscript{645} Donald Gimm, oral history, 28 November 2003, 5.
Donald continued:

He used to be a very good fighter and I can remember some kids picking on him and he’d belt them up. They’d all gang up on him and come down and get him at the side of the bush. When I think back, “Goodness me, how did we ever get away with all of that you know?” But I read later on in life that Cyril Bodney became a professional boxer. I do remember seeing him once down at the Royal Show in one of those, I think it was Blum Troops of Boxers that used to go round, “In for a round or two, for a pound or two.”

Cyril Bodney won the Golden Gloves to become state lightweight boxing champion in 1958 when he was eighteen.\textsuperscript{647} A relative remembered that one promoter wanted to take him to the USA because he beat the champion they had brought over from there.\textsuperscript{648} Peter Randolph recalled seeing Cyril with Stewart’s Troop of boxers at the Royal Show at Claremont. He said, “The drum would pound as they got suckers from the crowd to take on the strapping young fighters. We knew what the outcomes would be and never volunteered for a round.”\textsuperscript{649} Cyril’s youngest sister, Louise, also remembered going to watch Cyril box.\textsuperscript{650}

\textsuperscript{647} Peter Randolph, “Jolimont Swamp – clarification of description,” DAA site file 3736, fol. 3.47; BoxRec, Boxing Records Archive, “Cyril Bodney.” \url{http://boxrec.com/boxer/113678}.; “West Australian Professional Boxing Champions,” 1990, flyer produced for Miller family reunion, Point Walter, Western Australia, from information compiled by I Richards; Funeral card for Cyril Floyd Bodney, Herbert Bropho photo collection.

\textsuperscript{648} Vivienne Narkle, Cyril Bodney’s sister-in-law, conversation 29 July 2015.

\textsuperscript{649} Peter Randolph, “Jolimont Swamp – clarification of description,” DAA site file 3736, fol. 3.47.

\textsuperscript{650} Louise Walsh, phone conversation with Denise Cook, May 23, 2013.
Donald Gimm remembered the camp where Cyril lived.

I used to go over to his place – it was really a humpy. It was just a sort of tent through the trees and they had all their belongings in it. They lived on a mat and they sat out the front of the tent. That was Cyril’s home.

When I think about it I don’t know where he slept because there was just this tent. Unless they all slept in the one tent. Made life pretty hard. And if you ever wanted to see how they’re going, I used to walk through the vacant paddock into the bush about, 50 metres and I’d yell out, “Cyril.” He’d come out of the bush and then we’d have a chat and go and do things.\footnote{Donald Gimm, oral history, 28 November 2003, 5.}

When Donald was helping to research the history of the Jolimont School he couldn’t find any record of Cyril having been there.

I’ve checked through the records and there was no record of him at Jolimont School. Now I find that amazing. It was almost as if he
didn’t exist, but I sat next to him so I know he was there. He was in our class but I can’t remember him coming all the time. I think sometimes he wouldn’t come to school and other days he would. But they certainly didn’t have a record of him. I think it’s a bit sad and I’m not sure if it reflects the time because I don’t know whether they were included in the census or that sort of thing. 652

In fact Aboriginal people weren’t included in the census until 1967. Neither could their parents vote before 1962. Aboriginal children were excluded from state schools until 1933653 and education only became compulsory in 1948.654

Peter Randolph also remembered that the kids from the camp didn’t always come to school.

We just came to school and there was this kid who, you know – and sadly, I don’t know that there was truancy per se, as in missing days of school, but the community, the people from the

652 Donald Gimm, oral history, 28 November 2003, 4-5.
653 Neville Green and Gail Barrow, “Aboriginal Education,” in Historical Encyclopedia of Western Australia, ed. Jenny Gregory and Jan Gothard (Crawley, Western Australia: University of Western Australia Press, 2009).
camp didn’t come for the whole year ever. They must have moved on some time to go somewhere else. Yeah. So, in that sense, they didn’t get a consistent education, which was a bit of a problem, I guess, in later [life].

However, as Georgina commented, “Everybody worked,” and Lynnette added “They travelled where the work was”. Lynnette also pointed out that:

A lot of them would have moved because of the Department following them all the time, taking the children away from the families.

Peter West, who went to Jolimont School in the early 1950s, had a different perspective. He said that he always wished he was an Aboriginal kid and could go off to Geraldton like the Bodney boy in his class did.

Another boy who was at the school at that time, Ross Bolleter, remembers Noongar kids catching dugites and bringing them to school alive, fangs flicking about.

And they’d chase the white kids with the dugites, they’d hold the dugite by the back of the neck. This was really exciting stuff. It’s one of my strongest memories of school.

Ross added that it was “great growing up close to Aboriginal kids. I mean, my house was very different from theirs but even the proximity, to feel that, … was important.”

Rediscovering the camps at Shenton Park, Jolimont and Daglish has added new stories to the landscape and built understanding across cultures. Louise Walsh said that it’s important to share that “we lived life – we just didn’t have electricity and all that – we just lived the best we could. As Lynnette Coomer said when the group met to share stories, “Oh, this has been really, really enjoyable, you know. It feels like you can feel the spirit of things.”

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655 Peter Randolph, oral history, 7 April 2013, 35-6.
656 Lynnette Coomer, oral history 7 April 2013, 36.
657 Peter West, telephone conversation, 10 September 2012. “Schooling in the 40s and 50s, Jolimont Primary School 1905–2005 Centenary Celebrations” photo caption. Permission: Peter West.
659 Ross Bolleter, oral history, 30 June 2015.
660 Lynnette Coomer, oral history, 7 April 2013, 35.
Conclusion

This book has taken us on a journey through the camps at Fremantle, Swanbourne, Shenton Park, Jolimont and Daglish. Many people have generously shared stories of both joys and hurts to help us understand many of the complex layers of history in our suburbs. These stories are an important, yet largely unknown aspect of our past.

A key element in researching and writing these histories is following Aboriginal cultural protocols, such as the Noongar Consultation Protocol Guidelines. In my work, as well as obtaining guidance from Noongar people, this involved getting permission to reproduce stories and photos, either from the person involved or their descendants, and sharing the benefits, both the research uncovered and any financial rewards from the book.

This book began by showing that land was allocated to colonists based on the racist notion of *terra nullius*, despite Noongar people having traditional rights to that country. Tensions over land were expressed in different ways at different times, from early spearings and shootings, to later establishment of camps on private or Crown land and sometimes forced demolitions. Oppressive laws restricted where Noongar people could live, who could visit them there, and whether they had the right to care for their children. Few people know that more recent legislation has given Noongar people the right to be paid for consultation on developments that might damage an important Noongar site, but that their objections are rarely upheld.

Corrie Bodney shares a different, personal side to this story. Corrie was born at the Swanbourne camps in 1932 and lived in camps around Perth until the 1950s. He has good memories of living in the bush, being free, and not having to pay bills. There are many details in this chapter: the fat lamps his mother made for lighting; the importance of flaps and other cheap meat for meals; and eating home-grown onions like apples. There is also information about building camps from sticks, boughs, bags and tin; and sleeping in blankets on the

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ground. Corrie’s family usually walked up to Guildford on weekends to visit his grandparents. Many people would gather there to play sport, dance whitefella dances in the dirt all night, and attend church services held at the camps by Church of Christ people. Without Corrie’s and other people’s stories, none of this would be known, as it is not found in official records about the camps.

The Fremantle Camps chapter offers a new perspective on Fremantle’s early history, including the camps around the East Fremantle oval, and the famous boxer Black Paddy. The oppressive laws that discriminated against Aboriginal people are highlighted through the injustice of Mary Inman’s story. Doreen Nelson shares tales of Jetta family holidays at the Smelters camp close to the abbatoir at Robb Jetty. This was a little further south than the better known campground and entertainment area at South Beach. And more recent history is reflected in the story of the 1980s Seagull camp, and the suburb named after Wandi, an early resident of the camps.

The Swanbourne and Freshwater Bay Camps chapter includes stories of two men, Tommy Dower in 1886, and Bimba in 1913. Both went through official channels to request land for Aboriginal people to live in the Claremont area. Each man had connections with Sir John Forrest, former land surveyor, State Premier, and later Federal Treasurer, but despite his support of at least Bimba’s application, neither was successful in obtaining land in the district. The official correspondence highlights tensions between Noongar people’s expectations of continuing to live in this traditional camp area, and the desire of residents in the developing suburb to exclude them. Nonetheless, Noongar people continued to occupy different camps in Claremont and Swanbourne, either by arrangement with private landowners, or on vacant government-owned land, until the Nedlands Road Board demolished the last camps in 1951.

This chapter also highlights the role of Freshwater Bay Museum in recording and sharing Noongar history. Their work has resulted in detailed records and a range of interpretation of Noongar stories. Both suggest a model for future work in museums and local history collections.

The last chapter focuses on the journey back to find histories of the camps at
Shenton Park, Jolimont and Daglish. As Noongar and non-Aboriginal people share stories about these camps, this chapter highlights the importance of building relationships in helping to make sense of the past.

In conclusion, this work emphasises conversations in developing relationships and sharing the rich, often funny, sad, and courageous stories of our past. Aboriginal cultural protocols give useful guidance, especially to non-Aboriginal researchers. It is important to show respect, especially since this is not always evident in the official records which focus on alcohol, poor housing, overcrowding, and insanitary conditions. Our suburbs have a long history of Noongar camps and I look forward to seeing many more histories that incorporate our shared stories.

**Healing the hurt**

I want to finish by highlighting some ways of moving forward. While most non-Aboriginal people are unaware of the histories of the camps in our suburbs, for countless Noongar people, the hurt continues today. Many children were taken from the camps to be raised away from their Noongar culture and families in a “non-Aboriginal” way. This has caused lasting hurt for the people involved, and often down the generations to their children and grandchildren. For parents left in the camps without their children, alcohol was sometimes a way of suppressing the pain. And homelessness continues to be an issue for Aboriginal people.

Today many of those who were in the camps, and their descendants, are working on projects to heal the hurts associated with earlier times. As Nick Abraham said, “The damage of the past is done. How do we as individuals have a bit of influence in healing the issues?” Nick’s mother, Margaret Abraham, nee Mippy, was one of Alf and Doris Mippy’s daughters. She was a child in the camps around Perth and was removed from her family when she was about

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662 Nick Abraham, telephone conversation, 7 August 2015.
663 Nick Abraham, telephone conversation, 7 August 2015.
eight years old. She later turned to alcohol, and died at a young age from alcohol-related issues. For Nick, undoing the intergenerational trauma involves addressing the hurt by coaching, mentoring and guiding people.

Lynnette Coomer was taken from her family at the Shenton Park camps when she was seven years old. After working for many years as an Aboriginal Education Assistant in schools, she took voluntary retirement in 2014. Lynnette now works as a community volunteer with the Red Cross Late Night Youth Programme in Kwinana. This offers a safe place for young people at night to spend time, and talk over problems. Staff also take a bus to check out railway stations, shopping centres, car parks, and buildings to see if kids are safe. If necessary, they will pick them up and take them home. In 2015, Lynnette won the Reg Henry Snr. Aboriginal Person of the Year Award in Kwinana.

In recent years, camps have been established in prominent places not just for housing, but to draw attention to issues. Bella Bropho, who, with her family, has a long association with the Perth camps, has been involved in many of these campaigns. In July 2015 the group had been camped at Matagarup (Heirisson Island) for 150 days. Initially this was to draw attention to their opposition to the native title settlement being negotiated between SWALSC and the state government. More recently, the focus has shifted to the proposed closure of Aboriginal communities throughout the state and “to draw attention to the enormity of homelessness that it will cause”. I am strongly opposed to the closure of Aboriginal communities and admire the group for continually drawing attention to the issue.

For myself as an historian, and others who work in the history and heritage sectors, I hope the stories, insights and protocols in this book will help to raise awareness and inspire others to tell these more complex histories of our communities.

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665 Nick Abraham, telephone conversations, 27 July 2015 and 7 August 2015.
666 Lynnette Coomer, conversation, 11 August 2015.
As Beryl Hoffman reflected after we met to share stories about the Shenton Park camps, “This work is bringing so much to everybody. I was absolutely blown over, I didn’t realise that my story was so important.” And Lynnette Coomer said, “It’s good to know all that. See, these stories, they go untold.”

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668 Beryl Hoffman, conversation, 13 April 2013.
669 Lynnette Coomer, oral history, 7 April 2013, 16.
More Information

For a Noongar perspective:


For a non-Aboriginal perspective:


For information about the laws affecting Noongar people:


For a detailed account of the camps in Eden Hill:


For a film about Aboriginal people in Perth in the 1940s and 1950s:


For a children’s book:


For a film about camps near Mandurah, just south of Perth in the 1940s:


For a more academic perspective:

For a film about camps in Fremantle in the 1980s:

*Freo Yorgas* (Fremantle, Western Australia: Excalibur/FTI, 2010). Producer Paul Roberts, director Blanche Quartermaine.

For film with a Noongar perspective on the early history of Western Australia:


For museum exhibitions:


For interpretation of campsites visit:

Eastway Crescent, near Lake Claremont, Swanbourne;

Maamba, or Welshpool Reserve, on Morrison Road, just inside Hartfield Park in Forrestfield;

Success Hill Reserve on Seventh Avenue in Eden Hill.

For information about Noongar and other Aboriginal cultural protocols:
