

John Imrie wrote what follows over an extended period, adding and adjusting as his readings and research expanded. The CHU3A Committee is not in a position to agree with every opinion put forward by John, but is of the opinion that this article presents an image of some of Australia's past that has not been a part of the educational background of most members, and, in line with our educational objectives, feels it is never too late for each of us to consider that the past may be different in part from that which we were taught, or believe.

(Kitch Morris, on behalf of the Committee)

U3A AUSTRALIAN HISTORY.

The Forgotten War.

Prologue:

As we advance further into the 21st. Century the relative importance of our involvement in two World Wars and in the Cold War will diminish as they lose their place in Global History.

The central story in the next Century will be the linked Histories of Imperialism and decolonisation which were paving the way for great shifts in power and wealth that is currently underway.

In that story the relationship between European Settlers and Indigenous Australians will become more important. It is a story that must be told.

Today I will try and give you a picture of how Australia was beginning to be developed and how there was conflict in the New Nation from its very beginning.

Today, there are many people trying to put right the many injustices that occurred in that period. There are many Historians seeking answers to the problem.

I wish to thank Professor Henry Reynolds for his many books on this important subject. His latest effort is ***The Forgotten War*** and it is indeed a fine read. I thank him for that.

This is a subject that many Australians do not wish to hear about and do not want to see discussion on the subject.

As intelligent, interested Australians I ask that you hear my words and then make up your own minds about it all.

John Imrie 2021

The Forgotten War.

In 1901 the new Nation of Australia came into being when the States, which were separate British Colonies, reluctantly merged into a Federation. It was to be a White Nation ruled from Britain by a Colonial Government.

There would be no mention in the new Constitution of the Aboriginal population who had occupied the Country for over 40,000 years.

Our Founding Fathers had decided that the Aboriginal population would die out by 1930.

In 1914, the new Nation would go to War as part of Britain. This was to be a new experiment to test the manhood of Australia's young men. It would prove that they were equal or even better than the young men of Britain and the rest of the World.

In 1919, with 64,000 dead and 250,000 wounded, mentally and physically, you must decide if the experiment proved anything.

In 1939 Australia was once again at War supporting Britain and surely, this time, we would show just what we were made of.

In 1946 we forgot about War and looked towards Peace but by 1994 we began to think about how we could remember past Wars and we began a programme to remember the Men and Women who had served in Australia's Wars since 1885. We have become swept up in a carnival of commemoration which will climax in 2015 with the 100 year Centenary of the Landing at Gallipoli.

The young people who were born after 1950 have not experienced a major War and must be encouraged to accept that Bravery on the Battlefield outshines the achievements made in civil society.

The Warrior not the Statesman has become the paragon of National achievement.

As all of this has been taking place we have had the conflict between the Aboriginal People and the White Settlers in Australia airbrushed out of our History.

We have been told that the White Settlement of our Nation in the 1800's was achieved without violence and there is not a stain on the way our Nation came into being.

Few Australians know about the frontier violence and the armed conflict that accompanied our pioneer Settlers who opened up the new Continent in this period.

It was a war that went on for over 100 years.

Today, we have our Military Parades with Bands Playing and Flags flying. We encourage former enemies to march with us.

The Tribal Warrior with his spears and clubs is not welcome at these parades.

We prefer to honour and remember the Wars that were fought far away in another person's Country.

We are only just beginning to be aware that the 1942 Battle to save our Nation at Kokoda is worth remembering.

Today we are starting to read about the role played by Aborigines who served in our Armed Forces in all of our Wars. These men and women are being remembered with the reverence that they deserve.

Aborigines who fought against the White men to stop him from taking away their land are not to be remembered with reverence.

As we move into the next century the importance of the role played by Australia in the two World Wars and in the Cold War will become less significant.

I believe that the History of the conflict between the White Settler and the Aboriginal Nation will become more important. As our devotion to London and Washington fades away and we become more a part of Asia, we will see that Asian and Aboriginal History will be more important.

The History of the War fought on Australia's frontiers in the 1880's will play an important role in how we are seen in the New World.

Today, we do not think of this period as –a War- but our Colonial Settlers and Pioneers certainly believed that it was- a War.

The Australian public of that time believed that they were at War. Even the residents of the major Towns believed that they were at War.

Today, we think of War as being fought with big guns and massed troops charging across battlefields. The War in Colonial Australia was not like that. It was similar to the battles with indigenous people in the far flung Empire or on the prairies of America. It was a guerrilla War.

The attacks were made with small groups of Aboriginal men who were related. They could not use large armies because they had to feed them for long periods. They had to live off the land.

The Aborigines knew that they could not attack with large numbers because the White Settlers were well armed with rifles and pistols. They would attack and then move away into rugged country where horses could not go. They understood the land and the White man did not.

The Aborigines watched the Settlers, observed their weaknesses and then attacked without warning, retreated into the bush and left no traces.

In Tasmania, Governor Arthur wrote;

The type of warfare that we are carrying on is most distressing. They suddenly appear and suddenly vanish. We pursue them but cannot surround them and capture them.

Attacks occurred some-time after the Settlers had built their huts, planted their crops and built yards for their cattle. The cattle were driven off and the crops and huts were burned. Some of the Settlers stayed and rebuilt but many moved away, back to the Towns.

Once the Settler had moved away the Aboriginal people moved back onto their lands once again. They did not attack Settlers who were not on their land.

For the Settlers, fear and a passion for revenge caused the problem to spiral out of control. The two sides had no way of communicating and could not sit down and talk about their problem.

Some Settlers, however, made contact with the local Clan and were able to come to an Agreement which enabled both parties to use the land and not fight over it. Many of these agreements were upset by outside groups of Settlers who attacked any Aboriginal group they came across, after an attack on their property.

Aboriginals did not retreat into another area after their land had been occupied. They stayed in their land and were prepared to fight for it.

There were no Peace Treaties such as the Maoris had in New Zealand. There was an uneven sharing of the land by the Government which gave preference to the White Settler.

The Aborigines may have given up on their rights but they never ceded their lands or accepted the idea that it had ceased to be their Country.

It was only by forgetting that White Australians were able to overlook the violent foundation of their new Nation. Conflict broke out between the White Settlers and Aborigines within a few weeks of the founding of Sydney Town. This would last until 1928 when there was the last recorded massacre of **Walpiri** people at Coniston in Central Australia. This was not the last act of brutality but it is the last recorded act.

In 1788 there was the belief that Australia was **Terra Nullius** and that Aborigines had no claim to any form of Land Title. There was , therefore, no need for any form of Treaty. This would be overthrown by the **Mabo Judgement** in 1992.

Settlers began to move out of the major Towns to take up land and remove the Aboriginal people who had occupied their Country for over 40,000 years. They started from Sydney in 1790 , from Hobart in 1803, from Perth in 1829, from Adelaide in 1837and Brisbane in 1840. There was a move by Squatters into the Murray/Darling area in 1840. In Northern Western Australia the move to the East started in 1880 and they would meet up with the North Queenslanders moving to the West.

With modern guns and plenty of horses the Squatters were certain to prevail but it would not be an easy task as they were outnumbered by the Aboriginals.

The White people could avoid contact with the Aboriginals but their animals were easy game as there were no fences. The conflict was at first on a small scale but it was persistent.

The city newspapers added to the fear of the Aborigines with regular stories of White men being speared and white women being attacked. There were also lurid stories of Aboriginals being punished and poisoned food and water being left out for them to consume. Most of the stories were untrue but when did that ever stop our Press.

When gold was discovered in the 1850's , miners moved into the remote areas and Aboriginal Clans who had never had contact with White men were being forced from their land. The miners were usually in large groups and were safe from attack but many lone prospectors were easy targets for Aboriginal Warriors.

Farmers who cleared land on the edge of the rain forests in Queensland were regularly attacked by Aboriginals who were rarely seen by the Settlers.

On the coastal areas the **Sealers, Pearl**ers and **beche de mere** hunters raided the small islands and some Coastal towns seeking women for sex and young men as slaves to dive in the deep waters.

The local Clans watched, waited and attacked these men as they came ashore

In the early years of the Nation,, most of the people were in the Towns on the Coast and the soldiers of the NSW Corps were there to guard the convicts and to put down any attacks by Aboriginals.

Governor Phillip had been given orders to; ***treat the Aborigines with Amity and kindness*** but there was no question of him allowing the local people's hostility to compromise the new Colony.

In December 1790 a white hunting party was attacked and a convict was speared. Phillip ordered a squad of soldiers, led by ***Lt. Watkin Tench***, to find the Aborigines responsible. His orders were to;

Capture two members of the offending Tribe and kill 10 others. The heads of these 10 men were to be brought back to Sydney.

Lt. Tench made two such expeditions but he failed to arrest any Aborigines or to bring back any trophies.

In 1816 Governor Macquarie was faced with the problem of several White Settlers being attacked in the SW. Sydney area. He ordered 20 soldiers to;

Drive the hostile Aborigines across the Mountains . Those killed are to be hung in trees as a warning to others. If women and children are killed in this action it will strike terror among the Tribes.

In 1835, Lt. Governor Sterling had a similar problem in Perth. He led a 25 man group of soldiers and Mounted Police to confront a large force of Aborigines at Pinjarra. The result was that over 60 Aborigines were killed.

In Tasmania in 1830, Governor Arthur led a force of 550 soldiers and 1,500 armed settlers on a campaign to kill as many Aborigines as they came across. This lasted for eight weeks and as well as taking most of the Islands men out of the workforce and costing half of the State's annual budget, it failed.

Arthur imposed Martial Law over Tasmania and this made Aborigines ***Enemies of the State who could be killed on sight by any citizen.***

The soldiers hated this operation as it meant that they had to spend many days tramping around in the bush and they knew that they were unable to match the Aborigines in this situation. Their bright red tunics made them easy targets for the silent spear thrown by an enemy that they could not see.

Most soldiers tried to avoid these patrols and preferred to spend their time working with the settlers who spent much of their time in the local pub.

Governors Sterling and Arthur encourage the local settlers to always carry arms and to use them to kill any Aborigine that they came across.

When killings were made they were covered up by settlers and the Authorities. Bodies were burned and the culprits were usually sent to distant parts of the Colony until all enquiries were over.

If they were brought to trial they were never convicted as they had juries of their friends and the local Magistrates were usually bribed or were their friends.

Once the settlers were able to arm themselves there was no way that they would give up their weapons. 100 years later it was a huge problem which was not broken until there was a massacre at Port Arthur and PM Howard passed legislation to curb the ownership of guns,

The Dispatches and the Diaries of Governor Arthur have constant references to;

The Lawless Warfare.

The Protracted Warfare.

The War with the Aboriginal People.

Faced with the overwhelming evidence of ***Frontier Conflict*** all over the Australian Colonies, The British Government tried to rein in the violence in 1837 by issuing instructions that directly contradicted those given by the Colonial Secretary, Lord Bathurst, in 1825.

The Colonial Secretary in 1837, Lord Glenelg , declared that;

Australian Aborigines are protected by the Law and cannot be declared Aliens with whom a War can exist and against Her Majesties Troops they may exert belligerent right.

This may have been the Legal point of view but in Australia it was another matter entirely. In 1856 the British Government gave the Eastern States of

Australia their own Parliaments and granted them a form of self-government. This would give the States total power over all Aborigines and this was despite the fact that there were many thousands of Aborigines living outside the boundaries of these States.

Frontier conflict continued as South Australian settlers moved North into the Northern Territory and Queensland which was no longer part of NSW.

In the 1820's Queensland was a penal settlement at Moreton Bay and settlers moved out to the lush Darling Downs in the 1840's. Many of these settlers had already been in conflict with the Aborigines in Northern NSW and they had many ideas about how to deal with them. They fully expected that there would be problems with the local Clans and they were ready to use any force that was necessary. They had decided that they would launch massive attacks on the Aborigines before they would attack them.

In Queensland the Aboriginal population was much bigger than in NSW as they had not been decimated by smallpox.

The Tribal Warriors were preparing for the attacks by the White settlers as the news of their coming was told by the NSW Clans. They also knew that the White men and women were armed with the latest rifles and pistols and that mass attacks were only likely to cause many deaths.

A Squatter from NSW told a mass meeting of settlers at Rockhampton that he and his family always carried guns wherever they went and were prepared to kill any Aboriginal that they saw. He said that this was ***because the blacks would take their lives if they could.***

Another Settler told the audience that he had a dozen loaded rifles hanging up at strategic places in his house and barns and was always ready for an attack.

Several prospectors said that to go without your gun, even for a few minutes, could cost you your life.

In 1864 there was a gathering of the Aboriginal Clans for peaceful purposes at Ipswich and there was over 1,000 men, women and children there. The local

Council advised all white families to fully arm themselves and be prepared for an attack.

The Moreton Bay Courier wrote in 1852;

The Aboriginal Tribes in this area are constantly in a state of war with white settlers.

In the Queensland Parliament in 1861 The Hon J. Watts said.

The people of Queensland must be considered to be at War with the blacks.

The Rockhampton Bulletin in 1870 wrote;

The Aboriginal dead are not murder victims but have been killed in battle and on the battlefield that is our State.

The main instrument of white aggression in Queensland was the Native Mounted Police Force. The horses enable the Troopers to run down the Aboriginals when they were seen in the distance. There was a Force of over 200 and they operated until the early 1900's .

They had a bloody reputation and they were used to clean out Aboriginal Camps. This was an illegal operation but it was never brought to the attention of the Courts or the Government.

There were many attacks made on Camps but there were never any witnesses.

In NSW and Tasmania farm workers were the target of Aboriginal attacks. Most of the workers were Convicts who had been allocated to the Squatters and the Settlers. They were forced to work as shepherds and farm workers in remote parts of the farms and were nor given guns to protect themselves. They worked in small groups and their living conditions were harsh. They were a long way from help if they were attacked. If they refused to do this work they could be sent to the chain gangs.

In the 1850's , Squatters took up land along the rivers of Queensland. In 1855 six stockmen were speared at Mt. Larcos Station. Eleven members of the Fraser family were killed and four women were raped at Hornet Bank Station.

In 1861 nineteen members of the Wills family and their servants were speared to death.

For all these deaths, massive reprisals were taken by parties of Settlers and Native Police.

In Perth in 1837 the Army left the Town unprotected when they marched away to search for Aboriginals inland. This alarmed the white population and Governor Sterling advised them to fully arm themselves and be prepared for attacks.

It is estimated that in the period from 1830 to 1900 over 2,500 Settlers were killed by Aboriginals and possibly double that number of Aboriginals were killed. There are fairly accurate records of the numbers of White people killed but there few records of the total number of Aboriginals who died.

There was very little interest shown by Australians of what was happening to the Aboriginal population after 1900 as it was widely believed that they would all die out by 1930.

By 1980 writers were producing books about the Frontier Wars and Professor Henry Reynolds caused a controversy when he wrote that at least 20,000 Aboriginals were killed in the conflict.

In 2005 a new work by Tony Roberts , ***A History of the Gulf Country to 1900***, was the result of 30 years of research and it gave a compelling picture of of the era of Pioneer settlement and the conflict with the Aboriginal Clans who were in 15 language groups.

Roberts listed 53 sites where there were massive killings of Aboriginals and calculated that there were many others. He concluded that there were 30 Aboriginals killed for every White Settler killed. He also stated that one fifth of the total Aboriginal population of the area was wiped out.

Another report by Rob Foster in South Australia came to a similar conclusion.

Queensland, however, is the Colony that had the most intense and enduring conflict. It was a vast area of 1.8 million square kilometres and before the White men arrived it had 250,000 Aboriginals in over 100 Tribal groups.

From 1856 to 1900 the political control was in the hands of the pioneers and the settlers. The distant Governments in Sydney and London played only a small part in the Laws that these men made.

There are many misconceptions in our Historical understandings of how and when sovereignty and property were taken over by Britain. There is a view that both passed into British hands when the Flags were raised and the Proclamations were read.

A High Court Judgement in 1913 by Sir Isaac Isaacs says it all.

So we start with the unquestionable position that, when Governor Phillip received his first Commission from King George III on the 12 October 1786, the whole of the Lands of Australia were already, in Law, the property of the King of England.

The conflict that followed was, therefore unimportant as the issue of who owned the Continent had already been settled.

Maybe the words; Lest we Forget.

Should be altered to; Best we Forget.

(John Imrie, ... Sept, 2021)