

Warangesda Mission Site Thematic History

Introduction – key themes

The site of Warangesda Mission and Aboriginal Station, on Wiradjuri country, is a place of deep significance in the history of Aboriginal communities in New South Wales. Intended by its founder, Reverend JB Gribble, as a refuge and place of safety for Aboriginal ‘waifs and strays’, it was an artificial community, one of only ten Aboriginal settlements in New South Wales that were truly the result of religious initiative. The missionary impulse was quickly lost, as sharp-eyed government officials became involved with it, defining what they called ‘the Aboriginal problem’, and testing new methods to deal with it.

The Aborigines Protection Board’s practices of involuntarily separating Aboriginal children from their families, started at Warangesda’s Girls’ Dormitory. Warangesda girls were the first to be taken to Sydney to work as domestic servants, and their experience formed the basis of the Protection Board’s policies of compulsory apprenticeship for Aboriginal youths.

Warangesda was the first place where adults who expressed dissent were expelled, until there were so few people left that the land, desired by desperate local farmers, was taken away.

Yet it was a home, for over 40 years. According to Peter Read, nine of ten Wiradjuri people have some family connection to Warangesda or Brungle.¹ These connections include the Bamblett, Glass, Murray and Edwards families, and legendary 20th century activists Bill Ferguson and Margaret Tucker (Liliardia, nee Clements).² Because the Aborigines Protection Board used it as a depot for cases of illness, infirmity and unemployment, Warangesda took in people from all over New South Wales, and it became a place where Aboriginal experience united in a common understanding. It was a crucible for the development of a sense of a specifically Aboriginal identity, tied less to country than to shared experience of the coercive practices of people, both religious and government, who offered themselves as protectors to Aboriginal people.

Warangesda has been well-served by writers. Peter Kabaila has given accounts of the archaeology of the site and Beverley Gulambali and Don Elphick have listed the staffing

¹ Peter Read, *Wiradjuri: A Hundred Years War*, Canberra: ANU Press, 1994, p. 46.

² Jack Horner, *Vote Ferguson for Aboriginal freedom: Bill Ferguson, fighter for Aboriginal freedom*, Sydney, Australia and New Zealand Book Company, 1974; Margaret Tucker, *If Everyone Cared: autobiography of Margaret Tucker*, Sydney, Ure Smith, 1977.

history and births and deaths on the station.³ Philippa Scarlett's long account describes the culture of the Mission and Station, and the development of a specific Warangesda identity.⁴ Peter Read has described the broader history of the Wiradjuri. This history does not seek to repeat that information but traces the development of the community and of its buildings and the external forces that shaped it. It incorporates oral history and contemporary primary sources, including the annual reports of the Aborigines Protection Association and the Minutes and Reports of the Aborigines Protection Board, as well as Department of Public Instruction correspondence. A later section incorporates the perspective of the King family, who have been custodians of the land and the Mission site for almost 90 years.

Phases of Management

I. Foundation: JE Gribble's Warangesda Mission – Home of Mercies, 1880-1886

Peter Read has written in *A Hundred Years War* that life for the Wiradjuri of the Riverina was particularly tough in the 19th century, as large tracts of land were alienated by squatters and people were, by violence and aggression, driven from their land and dreaming places.

Ceremonial grounds were abandoned and visiting anthropologists such as RH Matthews could only find 25 year old accounts. By the 1870s, dozens of Murrumbidgee family groups had camped near the river at Darlington Point.⁵

Reverend JB Gribble, a Congregationalist Minister from Jerilderie, had been travelling up and down the Murrumbidgee River, sometimes working with Daniel Matthews, a missionary who had established himself on private property at Maloga in 1874. He identified the precarious situation of the Aboriginal people of the Riverina, and thought The Point was 'the very *focus* of iniquity on the Murrumbidgee, so far as traffic in the blacks was concerned'.⁶ By 1878 Gribble had determined to do something for the 'present comfort and eternal good' of the

³ Kabaila, PR *Wiradjuri Places: The Murrumbidgee River Basin with a section on Ngunawal country, Volume One*, Jamison Centre ACT: Black Mountain Projects, 1995[1998]; Elphick, Beverley Gulumbali and Don, *Camp of Mercy : an historical & biographical record of the Warangesda Aboriginal Mission/Station Darlington Point N.S.W 1880-1925*, [Revised edition] Canberra, Gulumbali Aboriginal Research, 2004, reproduced by Gary Foley on *The Koori History Website Project*, <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/resources/pdfs/106.pdf>, accessed 1 March 2014

⁴ Scarlett P, *Warangesda Daily Life and Events 1880-1924*, 1994, reproduced in *Indigenous Histories*, <http://indigenoushistories.com/warangesda>, accessed 30 May 2014

⁵ Read, *Hundred Years War*, pp. 27-30

⁶ Gribble JB, *"Black But Comely:" or, Glimpses of Aboriginal Life in Australia*, (London: Morgan and Scott, 1884), pp. 42-43

Riverina Aborigines and in May 1879 he selected a portion of Crown Land near The Point for a Central Mission Station. He called it 'Warangesda', which was comprised of the Wiradjuri word for home and the word Bethesda, for mercy.⁷ In that same year he published *A Plea for the Aborigines of New South Wales*, a pamphlet that set out his proposal and focussed on the condition of women and girls, and particularly of 'half-castes', which Gribble saw as evidence of immorality between white and black. Gribble and his wife were determined to save the 'endangered youth' by liberal application of education, the inculcation of habits of industry, and the Gospel.⁸

Matthews had already sought sponsorship from people in Sydney, who were receptive to tales of the ruin of Aboriginal communities of the interior because they had been confronted by the arrival of bands of destitute Aborigines in Manly and Circular Quay. As Read puts it:

By 1877 Matthews was winning both hearts and cheques. In 1878 he gained official church support for Maloga, and from the Committee to Aid Maloga Mission rose the Aborigines Protection Association, which backed the fundraising and general publicity of the two stations.⁹

The Aborigines Protection Association was supported by the Governor and consisted of prominent clergymen, lawyers and members of Parliament. Its stated aim was to promote the 'Social, Moral, Religious, and Intellectual welfare of the Aboriginal Natives of the Colony of NSW and their descendants', which in reality meant stemming the sudden influx of Aboriginal people into Sydney and finding ways to encourage Aboriginal people to remain 'in their own districts'. The APA's first Annual Report highlighted what it said was the 'Aboriginal problem': the wretched dependency of the Colony's 'old blacks' and a rising population of people of mixed race:

Hundreds of young half-castes – the unmistakable tokens of the white man's sin – are now running wild in the interior, being destitute of all physical comfort, and sunk in the lowest moral degradation. The females, many of them mere girls, are ruthlessly ruined, and thereby forced into a course of utter depravity. And these unfortunate women have no protectors, and no open door of hope!¹⁰

⁷ Scarlett, *Daily Life at Warangesda*

⁸ Gribble, John Brown, *A Plea for the Aborigines of New South Wales*, Jerilderie: Samuel Gill & Co, 1879, <http://www.nla.gov.au/apps/doview/nla.aus-f10092-p.pdf>, accessed 1 March 2014

⁹ Read, *Hundred Years War*, p. 30

¹⁰ Aborigines Protection Association, Annual Report, 1881, p. 1

As Read says: 'there was always mileage in appeals to the sinister and the lugubrious.'¹¹

The APA asked the government to grant it control over all the land reserves that had been set aside for Aborigines in NSW.¹² Yet the Premier, Henry Parkes, did not approach the Aboriginal question with the same enthusiasm as he had approached the *Public Instruction Act 1880* and the *State Children's Relief Act 1881*. He made no legislation and granted no authority over land. He appointed George Thornton MP Protector of Aborigines, who joined the Association and endorsed its goal to establish supervised settlements for ameliorative and benevolent work, but brought no real funds. The hope was that the APA could fund itself, by subscriptions.¹³

For Gribble and Matthews the APA would become a cause of disappointment, a source of interference and, ultimately, a means to government takeover. In many ways Gribble was at odds with the government's perspective on charity. He had said in *Black But Comely* that he believed he had been sent by God to 'set up a place of refuge for those who were ready to perish.'¹⁴ His measures of success were dying declarations of faith.¹⁵ However, the government's aim was to encourage the destitute to become self-sufficient and industrious, not to support them in costly refuges. As administrators realised that Aboriginal people were not dying out, but were increasing, Warangesda became the testing ground for measures that would control this population growth, and ensure the rising generation fitted the vision of middle-class reformers for an independent Aboriginal community, occupying the underclass as domestic servants and farm labourers. In the process, the Mission station was lost.

Construction during the Mission Years

When the Mission opened in March 1880, Gribble was optimistic. The Department of Public Instruction committed to pay him £90 a year as teacher, which must have felt like a strong

¹¹ Read, *Hundred Years War*, pp. 29-30

¹² N Parry, 'Such a longing': black and white children in welfare in New South Wales and Tasmania, 1880-1940', PhD thesis, University of New South Wales Department of History, 2007.

¹³ J.J. Fletcher states Thornton thought Aborigines incapable of improvement, but Goodall acknowledges Thornton made positive recommendations about the utility of land grants, as he believed small-scale cultivation to be redemptive. JJ Fletcher, *Clean, Clad and Courteous: A history of Aboriginal Education in New South Wales*, Carlton: Jim Fletcher, 1989, pp. 53-54; H Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770-1972*, St Leonards: Allen & Unwin/Black Books, 1996, pp. 88-91.

¹⁴ Gribble, *Black But Comely*, p. 43

¹⁵ Gribble, *Black But Comely*, pp. 48-51

endorsement, particularly since the residents of Darlington Point had been trying to get a school established at Waddai since 1877.¹⁶ The school seems to have started in a small bark structure or tent. The Department of Public Instruction's Inspector at Hay, Mr Hicks, requested a three-roomed teacher's residence in July 1880, saying he expected a total enrolment of 50 pupils. However the Department was sceptical that the Mission would survive, and suggested Hicks look at installing a portable building. That September, Hicks again complained white children were attending school on the mission station and urged the establishment of a separate school at Waddai. On 25 October Gribble himself wrote to Department of Public Instruction:

Owing to the rapid increase of scholars to my school of both black and white I am at present greatly inconvenienced from want of a room. There are 42 on the roll with an average attendance of over 30 and our school room measures 20x12".

Gribble reported that he had 27 Aboriginal students and 15 white students but the Government Surveyor had not yet arrived. Hicks's response was that the numbers at the school were inflated by white children and to again urge the establishment of a school at Waddai for white children so 'Warangesda Aborigines Mission will no longer profit by the accidental circumstance which now favours it'.¹⁷ The matter appears to have been settled when the Lands Department granted Gribble a lease over 499 acres.¹⁸

For all Gribble's zeal, he was mercurial. Not all the local Wiradjuri wanted to live in the Mission, and a camp of as many as 50 people developed a kilometre from the mission gates.¹⁹ He resigned as teacher on 31 December 1880, although his hastiness and failure to find his own replacement kept him in the role over the summer. Fortunately Mrs Gribble's cousin, William Carpenter, was prepared to join the Mission. Carpenter was 22 years old and single, and had been educated at Fort Street High School and Sydney Grammar. Inspector Hicks interviewed him and declared him of pleasing appearance, 'well-conducted, animated by right motives, fairly energetic'. Carpenter's appointment commenced on 29 March 1881.²⁰

¹⁶ Andrew West, *Darlington Point Public School 1882-1982*, pp. 15-18; State Records NSW, Warangesda Aboriginal School File, 1876-1939, 5/18018.2.

¹⁷ State Records NSW, Warangesda Aboriginal School File, 5/18018.2.

¹⁸ Horner J, *Vote Ferguson for Aboriginal freedom: Bill Ferguson, fighter for Aboriginal freedom*, Sydney, Australia and New Zealand Book Company, 1974, p. 3.

¹⁹ Read, *Hundred Years War*, p. 38

²⁰ Warangesda Aboriginal School File.

Around that time Gribble took extended leave in Sydney, where he pursued more funds from the APA to better care for the 52 people living on the station. The School File, and accounts of diary written by Read and Scarlett, show he was losing heart, and patience. He had tried to get one girl admitted to the Biloela Reformatory saying she was 'beyond my power of control':

The mother who is half-caste and thoroughly civilised desires to get her away to the reformatory. The girl is $\frac{3}{4}$ white and about the age of 15 years. I am of opinion that if she could be placed under the restraining influence of high walls and bolts and bars for a year or two she would be better for it and besides such an example would do much to check the nomadic habits on the station.²¹

The trip to Sydney, however, recharged him. Although Gribble received advice to take the girl before a magistrate for committal, he took the girl into his own household on his return.²²

At this time, as the APA was constituted, it seems Gribble came to some arrangement to hand the managed land control over to them? June 30 1881, first report. Did APA absorb the land? The APA promoted its habit of separating children from their families as the key to the amelioration of the condition of the Aborigines, and said the dormitory attracted Indigenous parents to the settlement.²³

The survey for a new school site was completed in February 1882, with two acres set aside for the school and a ten-acre reserve. Hicks was still complaining about the presence of white children. Three weeks earlier Carpenter had written to Hicks:

On Sunday I sent you a telegram about Mr Gribble well then now he is completely out of his mind and he will not allow me hold school at all, he ordered me off the premises in his mad fit and since then he will not allow the school to be opened. He is going away and until then I dare not venture near the camp.

Gribble had fled to Manly, where he wrote to the Department of Public Instruction, to account for his actions. He was both contrite and despairing, saying that the paucity of food on the reserve and the conditions had frayed his nerves. The Station, superintended by George Bellinger, carried on until his return.

²¹ Warangesda Aboriginal School File.

²² Warangesda Aboriginal School File; Read *A Hundred Years War*, Scarlett, *Daily Life on Warangesda*.

²³ APA, Annual Report, 1881, pp. 3-4.

In *Black But Comely*, Gribble wrote that within two years he and the community had built a house for the missionaries, a school-house (which served as a church), two-roomed cottages for couples, a home for girls, a hut for single men, store-room, outbuildings and a school master's cottage.²⁴ The School File for Warangesda Aboriginal School makes it clear that the first 'school-house' was a tent.²⁵ Images collected by Peter Kabaila show that most early structures were rude constructions of slab and bark. The Mission was organised around a square, with the church at its centre, near where the tank stands today. Isobel Edwards, who was born on the Mission in 1909 told an interviewer in 1985 'I think the fellow who had it built was trying to make the place look very English.'²⁶ The cottages for the residents faced the central courtyard, as did visitors arriving along the driveway, which would eventually grow to be an avenue of pepper trees. The school reserve was on the left of the courtyard, and the dormitory, staff residences and store-room were to the right.²⁷

On the 23 March Carpenter occupied a new three-roomed slab hut he had built for himself, with the assistance of station residents.²⁸ He later described it:

The residence consists of a cottage of three rooms and kitchen, with outhouse built of slabs (red gum), sawn, iron hoop lined, and papered, properly floored and perfectly suitable for teachers' residence.

Gribble was still having heated arguments with residents, and tried to flog some, he travelled to Cootamundra and the Namoi to recruit more people. Food was poor on the mission, and there were periods without flour, meat or tea and the men had to be sent away to fish, but Gribble tracked and flogged escapees, punishing them to make them stay.²⁹ Despite the privations, he began building the centrepiece of the Mission, the Church. It was erected in the courtyard and consecrated on 22 October 1882, which Gribble said 'was indeed a red-letter day in our history'.³⁰

²⁴ Gribble, *Black But Comely*, p.

²⁵ Warangesda Aboriginal School File.

²⁶ Interview with Mrs Isobel Edwards about life on the mission conducted on the 23rd October 1985, Collection of State Library of New South Wales

²⁷ Peter Rimas Kabaila, *Wiradjuri Places: The Murrumbidgee River Basin with a section on Ngunawal country*, Volume One, Jamison Centre ACT: Black Mountain Projects, 1995[1998], p. 117

²⁸ School File Slab hut Teacher's Residence paid for and noted completed 26 June 1883, George Bellinger

²⁹ Read, *Hundred Years War*, p. 37

³⁰ Gribble, *Black But Comely*, p. 44.

On 1 June 1883 Warangesda was declared a Public School, and a school tent was erected. The next month the site for the Public School building was drawn out. However, the Department of Public Instruction held off their decision about the school building, as the Colonial Secretary Phillip Gidley King and the Police Superintendent Edmund Fosbery had visited Warangesda and Maloga and told the Government that Aboriginal children should be dispersed by being boarded out into family homes. Under the circumstances, the Department felt the ‘school tent’ was adequate or ‘one of Elford’s patent houses’ (Elford’s Patent Portable Houses) would suffice.

The effects of Gidley King and Fosbery’s 1882 visit were far slower to take hold than the Department of Public Instruction had predicted, but nonetheless, there was an immediate impact on the Missions. Their report was highly critical of Matthews, who they believed had discouraged the self-sufficiency of his mission residents by denying them the right to pasture horses or keep poultry. In their view Maloga was an ‘aboriginal asylum’.³¹ Gidley King and Thornton complained mission residents were ‘chiefly half-castes or quadroons, some of whom are so fair as to be indistinguishable from Europeans’ and that while it was ‘only reasonable that the aborigines should be allowed to remain on their native soil and in their tribal districts in due security and comfort’, they believed ‘younger half-castes should be withdrawn from their midst and gradually absorbed into the general community’ either by being institutionalised or boarded out. Older children, ‘of useful age’, could be handed to people ‘willing to avail themselves of their services – the girls for domestic work, and the lads for farm or station employment.’ The commissioners assumed this would be a simple task, stating the children had few family ties and their mothers would ‘willingly part with them if assured that it would be for their benefit’.³²

These ideas interested Matthews, who thought the Aborigines were morally weak, easily led and lazy.³³ Gribble, however, argued women had come to Warangesda to seek refuge from sexual abuse and avoid prostitution, and the Aborigines had ‘a clear code of morals amongst

³¹ APA, Annual Report, Appendix A, Commissioners’ Report, pp. 4-7.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

themselves'. While he was not opposed to boarding children out, he worried that sending women and girls out to service would endanger their morals.³⁴

The commissioners thought stations showed promise as a means of improving 'the unsatisfactory condition of the race' but predicted, correctly, the APA would run out of subscriptions and require government support.³⁵ They adapted the APA's idea of settlements, recommending a network of managed stations be established, using some of the 32 existing Aboriginal reserves, with schoolmasters, storekeepers and overseers to manage them. As Goodall has noted the reserve system was a partial recognition of Aboriginal demands for land - most places designated by the Department of Lands as Aboriginal reserves had been chosen because Aboriginal people valued them and refused to leave them - but reserves also functioned to contain Aborigines to specific places.³⁶ Rights of occupancy were determined by skin colour, rather than kinship ties: the commissioners stated that 'half-castes' were not to be given the right to occupy these lands, and that 'younger half-castes' and 'quadroon children' should be withdrawn from the stations and 'gradually absorbed into the general community'.³⁷

In 1883 Henry Parkes resigned and Thornton was removed from his position as Protector of Aborigines, amid a scandal over the starvation of the Aboriginal people at the reserve at La Perouse.³⁸ The new Premier, Alexander Stuart, responded to Gidley King and Fosbery by creating a new organisation, the Aborigines Protection Board, of which they were the first two members. The Protection Board took charge of the money allocated by the government to Aboriginal affairs and resolved to educate the young, support the aged, sick and infirm and encouraging the able-bodied to become self-supporting.³⁹ The Board argued, paternalism was necessary:

From these evils nothing can protect them but some controlling power which can, not only offer them what is for their good, but constrain them to the acceptance of it, which can, not only warn them of dangers, but restrain them from falling into them.⁴⁰

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-7.

³⁶ Heather Goodall reports persistent demands for land from Aboriginal people in the 1870s and 1880s, a period of land pressures owing to free selection. Prior to 1883 some 32 reserves were created, of which 28 were created in direct response to Aboriginal requests for land in areas of high pressure from white settlement. Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, pp. 75-87.

³⁷ Aborigines Protection Association, Annual Reports, Appendix A, Commissioners' Report, p. 4.

³⁸ Fletcher, Clean, Clad and Courteous, p. 56.

³⁹ Fletcher, Clean, Clad and Courteous, pp. 55-57.

⁴⁰ APB Annual Report, 1883, p. 2.

From the outset the Board asked the government to place it *in loco parentis* over the Aborigines of the state, of all ages and sexes, ‘in like manner as a parent has the right to the control and custody of his children of tender years’. It also sought control of Aboriginal reserves and their personal property and to superintend any agreements Aboriginal people might make with others.⁴¹ It would be 26 years before legislation was enacted to bring these demands into effect, but the Board’s agenda was clear.⁴²

The development of the Protection Board had little impact on Warangesda, or Gribble, in the beginning. Gribble wrote in 1884, ‘what is now quite a township occupies the spot where four years ago we lay down under a forest tree’, and the Board was content to support it.⁴³ In 1884 the Board stated in its Minutes that, although it controlled government money, the APA was the proper agency to run and administer the institutions. Schooling was no longer held in a tent, but in a proper weatherboard building.

on – in July 1884 the new Warangesda Public School building was occupied and the Architect for Public Schools signed off on it on 7 October.⁴⁴

Gribble had also returned to Warangesda. He had fought so badly with the Mission residents that some had gone to Sydney to complain and he had a breakdown. He travelled to London, where distance inspired him to publish *Black But Comely* and come home. Yet he did not come home to an easier life. In August 1885 Gribble had finally had enough. Peter Read quotes his diary:

Very ill at ease this morning. Mad with myself and everyone else. My nerves are in an awful condition. Must leave this place. It is a certainty that I can’t stand it. I am all unhinged again. Just as bad as before I went to England.⁴⁵

Gribble left Warangesda. The APA was now directly responsible for the Mission. A new era of management was to begin.

⁴¹ APB Annual Report, 1883, p. 2.

⁴² Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, pp. 89-90.

⁴³ Gribble, *Black But Comely*, p. 44.

⁴⁴ Warangesda Aboriginal School File.

⁴⁵ Read, *Hundred Years War*, p. 39

2. Warangesda Aboriginal Station: The Aborigines Protection Association, 1886-1897

After Gribble left the settlement, change was rapid. Stripped of its mission status, the place was now known as Warangesda Aboriginal Station. By March 1886 building works were taking place, and Carpenter wrote to the School Inspector to ask if he could use the school building as a church ‘as there are great alterations taking place in the Mission and the Church is being used for other purposes.’ The new school inspector, O’Byrne, thought the case was special as ‘the children attending this school are blacks or half castes.’ O’Byrne was less sympathetic when, six months later, Carpenter closed the school altogether owing to epidemics on the station, and docked Carpenter’s pay.⁴⁶

William Carpenter suffered directly from the change in administration. In March 1887 Ardill wrote to the Minister for Public Instruction alleging Carpenter had issued ‘a cruel beating’ to a ten year old girl. The Protection Association staff, superintendent Thomas Wales and the overseer McAllister, and their wives, were all closely aligned with Ardill and said the girl had run to them, bruised and battered. At first Inspector O’Byrne sided with the girl, but after police informed him that the case had been dismissed in court developed the view that Wales and McAllister were trying to be rid of Carpenter so Wales’ own daughter could take on the teacher’s role. Carpenter did not deny he had hit the girl: he had dutifully fulfilled the responsibilities of a public school teacher and recorded four strikes in his punishment book. The girl herself defended the teacher, explaining that she had been given strikes as she had been caught having sexual relations with a 15 year old boy, and this was a commonplace activity for girls of her age on the station. The community was also supportive of Carpenter. The Education Minister decided in June 1887 that he should take no further action: ‘it is a remarkable fact that while the officers of the Association are not well received by the blacks, the teacher is very popular’.⁴⁷

Peter Read writes that it was the children that made Warangesda home for so many families, because they were schooled there and lived there, imagining it as their first home.⁴⁸ The teachers must bear much of the credit for this. Carpenter, in particular, appears to have been a man of conciliatory temperament, for he coped with Gribble’s nerves and worked with

⁴⁶ Warangesda Aboriginal School File

⁴⁷ Warangesda Aboriginal School File

⁴⁸ Read, *Hundred Years War*, p. 38

Superintendent Wales throughout this dispute. When he closed the school to assist with the whitewashing of the dormitory O'Byrne reprimanded him for deferring to the superintendent. Still, O'Byrne agreed that Carpenter was the best-liked officer on the station.

O'Byrne did not, however, support the school. In September 1887 he reported that there were 5 boys and 19 girls enrolled and the school was 'a good weatherboard building lined throughout it is well-furnished and supplied with all necessary working appliances.' Although the residence was 'a very inferior building, the surroundings of the school were neat and tidy and Carpenter's organisation was 'very fair'. The students, however, were 'very unpunctual':

Practically, no one seems to be responsible for the personal cleanliness of these children. The schoolmaster cannot be expected to use the comb on the children's heads, and the black gins won't.

Although the children were as 'orderly and obedient' as whites O'Byrne thought they lacked 'power of steady attention and concentration of thought' and mumbled when they read:

I am strongly of the opinion that it is utopian to endeavour to get these people to act under the influence of Christian motives ... I estimate that the results of the school are indifferent, and the whole success of the Mission as failure ... this as an example:- there are 24 children on the books of the school, and out of 21 present only 6 were pure bred blacks. These people can come and go as they like, and the result is that the Mission is swarmed with half-castes. The Mission has been 8 years in operation and there is no one in that part of the country to say a good word for it. They have 2100 acres of the pick of the country and little or no work has been done on it. I was told by a resident that he would give £4 an acre cash for this land, so that capitalized that meant nearly £9,000. This property should nearly support blacks, but I am credibly informed that salaries amounting to nearly £600 a year are paid to Whites besides an unknown quantity for rations.

O'Byrne said he was sending his report because people in Sydney did not know anything about the mission, and he thought it should be part of the State Children's Relief Department. He said the Government should have full control over the children, and board them out. He said 'if this cannot be done I believe they are purer and better running wild in the bush.'⁴⁹

The Aborigines Protection Association was livid. Its Secretary, George Edward Ardill, claimed that O'Byrne had spent no more than four hours on the station. According to the Association, the hostility of neighbours was purely prejudice, the Mission lands were not viable for any more than sheep raising, and the Mission had been 'a decided success'. Ardill

⁴⁹ Warangesda Aboriginal School File.

called for a full investigation into the Mission, and as a result, the Department of Public Instruction sought an opinion from the Inspector of Public Charities, Hugh Robinson, who could see value in the Mission as a means of weaning people off camp life, and as a support for women and children while men were away earning good wages as shearers. The members of the Aborigines Protection Board also gave their views. Gidley King said he saw the mission as integral to the benevolent support of a dying race, and that the mixture of white blood in the Warangesda community was ‘only the natural process by which the pure black Aboriginal disappears.’ Other Board members, including Fosbery and Richard Hill, argued against detaining Aboriginal people on Warangesda, or ejecting the adults, as had been urged by the Bishop of Hay. But, with the exception of one Board member, AM Hutchison, all seemed agreed that the Station should be used to care for the aged and ill, and to educate the young to the point they could be sent out as domestic servants and station labourers.⁵⁰

Tragically, in November while the debate still swirled, poor dedicated William Carpenter died of a chill. He never knew that O’Byrne’s scathing views would be ignored. His young wife received just three months’ salary as compensation for her husband’s death.

In 1888, George Claudius Nash arrived to take up the post of teacher. O’Byrne’s criteria were:

The person selected should:- 1. Be a married man; 2. He need not have any very high attainments; 3. He must be extremely patient; 4. His sympathy with the blacks must be sufficiently strong to out [weigh] many unpleasantnesses that are inseparable from the position of schoolmaster at such a place; 5. He should, if possible, belong to the Church of England, and be imbued with a missionary spirit.

Nash walked headlong into conflict with Wales, who kept the children working in school hours, made them late for class, and ‘lost’ the keys to the schoolroom and book press. When Wales’ 12 year old daughter Ada ran away from the school room, Nash gave her two stripes from the teacher, but she yelled her head off and provoked a riot. The Superintendent engaged in other acts of bastardry, letting livestock wander into the teacher’s house and nailing fences against the walls of the church. Nash railed to his superiors:

Will the Aboriginal people submit to this? The people around are crying shame and term The Mission ‘Wales’ Home’, and to external appearance the title is not misapplied.

⁵⁰ Warangesda Aboriginal School File

This was the first clear indication that the people of Warangesda were chafing at the restrictions placed on them by the Aborigines Protection Association. Nash was on their side, writing to the Department to complain that Mrs Wales was taking children from the school to send them to service without his permission, but his pleas were ignored.⁵¹

Ardill was behind these removals and had tacit approval from the Aborigines Protection Board. In May 1889 he reported that two girls, Jane Murphy and Tammy Heland, had been placed in service in the suburbs of Sydney ‘in the custody of two well recommended ladies.’ Ardill said this was ‘a continuation of the usual plan of the Council’ and that they had, with a view toward placing ‘the elder girls of the Stations under a proper course of training for domestic service’, appointed a Matron in charge of a Training Home at Warangesda.⁵²

The situation eased for Nash when Wales succumbed to typhoid that was sweeping the station. The Protection Association’s Annual Report recorded that FW Clarke, ‘a practical farmer’ had been appointed in his stead and that Mrs Bridall, the wife of the overseer, had been placed in charge of what the Council was then calling a ‘Training Home’.

The Council took this as a trial effort, and a temporary arrangement, with a view to the extension of the scheme by the removal of the home nearer the city, and the withdrawal of a number of the half-caste girls between the ages of ten and fourteen years from the several stations and camp life, to be brought under distinct and special training for domestic service. Some of the girls have already been sent out to service, and reports have been received from their employers bearing testimony to their uniform and good behaviour, and willingness to learn and be useful.

The APA also asked the Minister for Lands to expand site by 250 acres and Mr GC Nash was considered an able teacher. With just 60 on the Mission, Warangesda seemed manageable.⁵³

The Protection Board was, however, increasingly frustrated with the state of affairs. During the debates about the Mission in 1887 Fosbery had highlighted the cost of the Missions. Its Annual Report of 1889 recorded that the cost of caring for the 265 people resident at the APA-controlled stations of Brewarrina, Cumeragunja and Warangesda was £3297, whereas the pool available to care for the 7264 people who resided elsewhere in NSW was just £9,200, including blankets. There were 71 adults and 35 children. By the early 1890s relations between the Aborigines Protection Board and the APA were severely strained. Creditors

⁵¹ Warangesda Aboriginal School File.

⁵² Warangesda Aboriginal School File.

⁵³ Aborigines Protection Association Annual Report 1890.

asked the Board to pay the APA's bills, its APA's subscriptions declined and questions were raised in Parliament about the starvation of Aborigines at the station it had established at Brewarrina in 1887.⁵⁴ The APA continued to promote the Mission as 'a great benefit to the aged, the sick, and the unprotected children, as well as providing a home and work for the men who wish to give up their camp life'. The dormitory 'helped to shelter otherwise unprotected girls and to train them as servants', although the Association argued it 'would be better quite away from the camps or the missions; then the children would be saved from the wandering habits of the older people'. Six religious services were being held a week and Clarke was trying to get land under crop and water tanks were installed at the school. But behind the scenes the APA was asking the Board to underwrite improvements on its stations and to pay the salaries of its officers and of secretary Ardill. The Board agreed to pay station managers, but refused to pay Ardill's salary and suggested the government take control of the APA and its assets.⁵⁵

By the end of 1891, a year of severe flooding, the Mission had grown to 99 people, including 42 children. The Board reported that 130 Aboriginal people lived in the district, but most men worked on the reserve. The Board said the cost of running Warangesda, at £15 per head, was unsustainable. Clarke had managed to get only 75 acres under crop then had died, and the year had seen disastrous flooding. The 25 children in the school were described as 'listless and talkative. The peculiar disadvantages connected with the school are considered', and the Board complained about 'habits of intemperance' and the supply of alcohol by station hands. Gribble had come back for a visit, but had offended station residents by trying to take Albert Murray with him to Queensland.⁵⁶

Throughout this period the school carried on: it was the heart of the Mission. Nash does not seem to have had the charisma of Carpenter, but he believed in his students and even sent samples of their work to the Chicago. After asking to receive his certificate (and a pay rise), Nash had an episode of what he called 'brain fag', but returned after several month's leave. In May 1894 he again clashed with a superintendent, George Harris, who wrote to the Department of Public Instruction:

⁵⁴ AWB Minutes, 4/7108, 22.1.1890, 19.2.1891, 26.3.1891, 3.9.1891, 22.9.1892.

⁵⁵ AWB Minutes, 4/7108, 19.2.1891; 30.4.1891.

⁵⁶ Scarlett, Daily Life at Warangesda.

Mr Nash the teacher of the Public School Warangesda is in the habit of allowing the residents of the mission to use the school house for the purpose of dancing. Mr Nash is well aware of my objection to dancing, it not being permitted in the cottages of the residents.

Nash's rebuttal was that allowing dancing at the Mission on the Queen's Birthday had prevented station residents from adjourning to the hotel at Darlington Point. In this he was supported by the police constables, who had spent Christmas night trying to keep Aborigines out of the hotel. The Department of Public Instruction decided the school was a special case, owing to the nature of its students, and allowed Nash to continue. A new school was completed, papered and lined, by 21 December 1894, and EJ Cummings of Darlington Point presented an account for £13 and 15s.

Scarlett notes that by this time the buildings, most of which had been humble structures built in the 1880s, were run down.⁵⁷ The conditions on the Mission were attracting negative attention from surrounding districts, including Narrandera, where the presence of a 'full-blood' population caused tension. In 1894 Narrandera's Hospital Board complained Warangesda people it treated were filthy.⁵⁸ The Board was increasingly using Warangesda as a depot for destitute Aboriginal people and children without guardians, which can only have led to local anxieties. Children were sometimes transferred over long distances, as in one case where children whose father had killed their mother were transferred from Tamworth, in New England, to Warangesda.⁵⁹ The Board was inching closer to taking control and Ardill was, consciously or unconsciously, the conduit. The first recorded instance of the APA's Secretary Ardill placing a girl in service on behalf of the Board was in April 1892.⁶⁰ He visited Board stations to escort girls to and from the Mission, and into service, or his own homes in Sydney and sorted out disputes girls had with their employers, and his staff took charge of children. In April 1895 he attended a Board meeting to share his designs for a "Dormitory for Girls" and a "Hut for Single Men". Meanwhile the Board established a local committee at the Point, which the manager, EW Pridham, called 'an Aboriginal Vigilance Committee' and began

⁵⁷ Scarlett, *Daily Life at Warangesda*.

⁵⁸ AWB Minutes, 4/7108, 16.4.1891, 14.5.1891; 19.7.1894; 4/7109, 14.12.1894.

⁵⁹ AWB Minutes, 4/7108, 29.10.1891; Other transfers include a girl escorted by Police from Hay to Warangesda, AWB Minutes, 4/7108, 19.7.1894; In 1895 a Mossgiel man requested his sister and three nieces be sent to Warangesda, as he could not support them and local Aborigines were under pressure to move there. AWB Minutes, 4/7109, 12.12.1895; 4/7109, 13.2.1896. Five destitute children were sent from Obley to Warangesda in 1896. AWB Minutes, 4/7109, 13.2.1896.

⁶⁰ AWB Minutes, 4/7108, 14.4.1892.

recommending that ‘refractory inmates’ who were able-bodied but refused to work should be deprived of rations or expelled. In its view, the tensions that were becoming evident on the mission could be defused by introducing sports.⁶¹

Nevertheless, a campaign of building improvements began. Nash established an evening school, that appears to have been popular, at the beginning of 1896, just before he retired. His replacement was Laynton Shropshire, remembered by William Ferguson as ‘the only decent teacher I ever had’.⁶² The new practice of expelling dissenters caused Shropshire problems, as those expelled could no longer cross mission land to attend evening school. Shropshire argued this was a public school, so a road was necessary to secure their attendance but he was rebuffed. Sadly, Shropshire was short of room in his book press, so decided to destroy Old Records referring from 1881-1893, including admission registers, daily reports, rolls and lessons registers: a list of names that would have told many stories of the school.⁶³

A new dormitory building was erected in 1896 and in January of the following year, according to the Elphicks’ diary extracts, a new Men’s Hut was started.⁶⁴ On 14 April 1897, the Department of Public Instruction made application for a road to access the School. But in the same year, the Aborigines Protection Association was wound up. The administration of Warangesda, and of Cumeragunja and Brewarrina, passed to the Aborigines Protection Board.

The broader context of the 1890s had been severe drought and crippling depression that particularly afflicted rural communities. This had led to increasing numbers of Aboriginal people within New South Wales who were out of work and required care and attention.⁶⁵

Many Aboriginal people were still in their first generation of contact with white settlers, and the Board accommodated traditional practices like birding on the Hay Plain and ceremony

⁶¹ Annual Report, 1896; AWB Minutes 4/7109, 14.2.1895.

⁶² Jack Horner, 'Ferguson, William (Bill) (1882–1950)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/ferguson-william-bill-6160/text10581>, published in hardcopy 1981, accessed online 5 April 2014; John Harris, [FERGUSON, William \(1882-1950\)](http://webjournals.ac.edu.au/journals/adeb/ff/ferguson-william-1882-1950/), <http://webjournals.ac.edu.au/journals/adeb/ff/ferguson-william-1882-1950/>

⁶³ Warangesda Aboriginal School File.

⁶⁴ Beverley Gulumbali and Don Elphick, *Camp of Mercy : an historical & biographical record of the Warangesda Aboriginal Mission/Station Darlington Point N.S.W 1880-1925*, [Revised edition] Canberra, Gulumbali Aboriginal Research, 2004, reproduced by Gary Foley on The Koori History Website Project, <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/resources/pdfs/106.pdf>, accessed 1 March 2014

⁶⁵ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, p. 111.

throughout the 1890s.⁶⁶ The last ‘wild’ tribe of Aborigines only ‘came in’ in 1893, at ‘Popilta’ Station near Wentworth.⁶⁷ In the 1890s the Board held on to the hope that it might yet convert the Aboriginal people of New South Wales to a European-style peasantry. While it refused to grant land to any Aboriginal individuals or recognise independent farms, it provided grants of farming implements, vegetable seed, livestock, plough-horse harnesses and tents, fishing equipment, boats and even tools for prospecting.⁶⁸ Children were induced to attend school by being given clothing, shoes, ‘trousers and Crimean shirts’. The Board provided blankets and rations to women with dependent children, and the destitute, elderly and sick, although the infirm and elderly were sometimes shifted away from their own lands to other stations, or to asylums in the city.⁶⁹ The goal was to create self-sufficient communities.

By the time the Board took over the APA, the expense of supporting traditional lifestyles with rations and rail passes become too much to bear, and it was decided Aboriginal people should remain in their own districts.⁷⁰ However the expensive methods at Warangesda were no longer seen as a viable solution to ‘the Aboriginal problem’. Warangesda would become the proving ground for new approaches. Yet, as Scarlett has pointed out, by this time the first generation of children had grown up at Warangesda, and a particular identity was forming, both on the station, and in the eyes of the station’s neighbours.⁷¹

3. Government management – the Aborigines Protection Board

When the Aborigines Protection Board took over the Protection Association’s stations it acquired its staff and the APA’s secretary, Ardill. Although there had been conflicts in the past, Ardill had been sufficiently cooperative with the Board to receive a genuine welcome. At a time when most Board members were MPs who were disinterested in Aboriginal issues, he filled an important policy vacuum.⁷²

⁶⁶ AWB Minutes, 4/7108, 1.6.1893; the bora was rationed at the behest of the local MP, J.H. Hassall. AWB Minutes, 4/7108, 1.2.1894, 31.5.1894.

⁶⁷ Parry, ‘Such a longing’, pp. 160-161. Rations were provided to a ‘making young men’ ceremony at Quambone ‘mole’, a bora on ‘Goondabluie’ Station and for ceremony at Mogil Mogil. AWB Minutes, 4/7108, 31.8.1893-12.10.1893; The Board provided rations for a corroboree of 300 at Wentworth. AWB Minutes, 4/7109, 14.3.1895.

⁶⁸ AWB Minutes, 4/7108, 3.11.1892; Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, p. 90; AWB Minutes, 4/7109, 6.1-27.2.1896.

⁶⁹ AWB Minutes, 4/7108, 25.9.1890-20.9.1894.

⁷⁰ Parry, ‘Such a longing’, p. 161

⁷¹ Scarlett, *Daily Life on Warangesda*.

⁷² Parry, ‘Such a longing’, p. 163.

By this stage, the Board was forced to admit that the old predictions that Aboriginal people would die out and merge into the dominant population were wrong. Although ‘full-bloods’ were declining in number, ‘half-castes’ and those of lighter colouring, which the Board offensively called ‘quadroon’ and ‘octoroon’, were growing rapidly in number. As far as the Board was concerned, the time had come to concentrate Aboriginal populations onto reserves, and to constrain them to taking on a European lifestyle.

The answer the Board sought was a scheme of apprenticeship and domestic training, and although Board members always espoused these ideas, their carriage into policy and law has been attributed by many historians, including Inara Walden, Victoria Haskins and Naomi Parry, to the arrival of George Ardill on the Board.⁷³ Historian Stephen Gapps, a relative, says Ardill was ‘a little man and apparently of unbounded faith’, who spruiked his causes via ‘religious auctions’ on street corners.⁷⁴ Ardill’s first involvement with Aboriginal people was as a member of the Petersham Congregational Christian Endeavour Society, which ministered to the reserve at La Perouse.⁷⁵ He had begun donating to the APA in 1881, then joined and quickly rose to Secretary. While he was working with the Aborigines Protection Association he founded the Blue Ribbon Gospel Society, which became the Sydney Rescue Work Society, and the Societies for Providing Homes for Neglected Children and Preventing Cruelty to Children, which operated many institutions for women and children.⁷⁶

Ardills’ charitable enterprises are important to the story of Warangesda, and Aboriginal children in New South Wales, because they shaped what the Board did during the crucial years of 1900 to 1915, when it laid down the policies of forcibly separating children from their parents, and consolidating populations of Aboriginal people onto reserves. The

⁷³ Parry, ‘Such a longing’; Inara Walden, “‘That Was Slavery Days’”: Aboriginal Domestic Servants in New South Wales in the Twentieth Century,” *Labour History* 69.Special Issue, *Aboriginal Workers* (1995), Inara Walden, “‘To Send Her to Service’”: Aboriginal Domestic Servants,” *Aboriginal Law Bulletin* 3.76 (1995), Inara Walden, “Aboriginal Women in Domestic Service in New South Wales, 1850-1969,” Honours, UNSW, 1991.; Victoria Haskins, “‘Could You See to the Return of My Daughter?’”: Fathers and Daughters under the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board Child Removal Policy,” *Australian Historical Studies* 34.121 (2003)..

⁷⁴ S. Gapps, ‘Mr Ardill’s Scrapbook: Alternative Sources for Biography’, *Public History Review*, 2, 1993, pp. 102-103.

⁷⁵ AWB Minutes, 4/7108, 7-14.9.1893, 5.10.1893; Brett, “‘We Have Grown to Love Her’”, pp. 10-12.

⁷⁶ The institutions Ardill ran included the All Night Refuge, the Home of Hope for Fallen and Friendless Women (South Sydney Women’s Hospital), Bethesda Home for Waiting Mothers, Discharged Prisoners’ Mission, Jubilee Home for Domestic Servants, Commonwealth Street Mission, Roslyn Hall, Rockdale Babies’ Home and Our Children’s Home. N Parry, Ardill, George Edward (1857 - 1945), Find & Connect, <http://www.findandconnect.gov.au/ref/nsw/biogs/NE00347b.htm>, accessed 1 March 2014

Warangesda Dormitory in this time became a place of compulsory confinement, and the model for the Cootamundra Training Home, which was itself shaped in the form of Ardill's institutions. He believed girls and women were reformed by labour, as 'The child of God must be useful.'⁷⁷ From 1897 until Ardill was forced to resign from the Board in 1915, the Annual Reports read like issues of Ardill's publicity newspaper *The Rescue*:

We specially care for the children. To rescue these from neglect and vicious surroundings and secure for them home-like care, education and religious training is a very pleasing and important department of our work.⁷⁸

By 1898, the Board had drafted a policy to apprentice girls from reserves.⁷⁹ The expected wage was 5s per week, and Ardill developed a 'form of application'. In 1900 the Board took several girls from Warangesda and placed them in situations found by Ardill, noting their performance 'with satisfaction'. Those same children would later complain they had not been paid and one of the girls was sent, mentally ill, to Parramatta Girls Industrial School.⁸⁰

On the Mission, now called Warangesda Aboriginal Station, the teacher, Shropshire, was still struggling to live in the residence Carpenter had built. A new residence was approved by the Department on 30 September 1898, 11 days before a gale tore the roof and chimney off the old hut, making the new residence 'extremely necessary'.

The Board's funding was cut in 1902, resulting in further measures to reduce the number of Aborigines requiring support.⁸¹ At that time Shropshire had qualified as police magistrate, and left the service. He was replaced by J Beatty, who brought a sick wife and employed his sister as sewing mistress in the dormitory, but appears never to have found his feet on the Mission.⁸²

The dormitory however, remained important to the Board's overall objectives. By 1906 the Board's Annual Report noted it was looking forward to new legislation which had been drafted by Ardill and a Board member, Robert Donaldson 'with a view of clothing the board

⁷⁷ *The Rescue*, 28.2.1903, 21.1.1905, 1909-1910.

⁷⁸ *The Rescue*, 6.12.1900, cited Parry, "Shifting for Themselves", p. 38.

⁷⁹ AWB Minutes, 4/7112, 21.4.1898, 26.5.1898; 4/7114, 7.12.1899, 11.1.1900.

⁸⁰ Apprentices often claimed they had been working without pay. AWB Minutes, 4/7114, 26.4.1900; 30.8.1900; At least one girl would later be called an 'imbecile' and be placed in Parramatta Girls' Industrial School. AWB Minutes, 4/7114, 4.1.1900. The father of one of the girls complained bitterly about her treatment in service at Fairfield, as she was not paid, but the Board accepted the employer's explanation that the girl's earnings had been spent on clothing. AWB Minutes, 4/7114, 25.1.1900; 4/7114, 31.5.1900.

⁸¹ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, p. 117.

⁸² Warangesda Aboriginal School File.

with full power over the aboriginal population and the reserves set apart for their use'. The Board was entirely replaced in 1906, as the Board's Annual Report described how the 1896 building had been demolished and recycled as stables for two horses, a cart shed and a machine shed. By that stage there was 51 acres under cultivation, and 13 horses, 75 cattle and 482 sheep. With a new manager installed, the Board stated it hoped the Station would become self-supporting.⁸³

By 1907 what the Board called the 'Girls' Training Home' was under the management of Emmeline Rutter, a former employee of Ardill. The Board reported that, at her suggestion, 'instructions were issued that all girls between the ages of 7 and 14 were to go into the home, otherwise the issue of rations was to be stopped.' The school was also under development. The removal of Carpenter's 'old residence' from the north side of the schoolhouse removed shade from that side of the building, and necessitated the installation of a verandah. The teacher, Beatty, asked for permission to do this, 'supposing I found the 13 sheets of iron required', and received funds to buy some extra iron from the Department of Public Instruction.

The year 1908 brought disastrous floods, and the population surged to 99 adults and 90 children: in all, 157 people were on rations. The new manager, Allan Naylor, painted the roof of the manager's residence and dormitory with 'refrigerating paint' to keep the heat down, and the work of the station revolved around repairing fences, clearing flood drift, and installing an Alston 12-foot windmill, with a 30-foot tower. At the same time, reticulated water seems to have been added to much of the station: this was unusual investment for any Aboriginal station. The butcher's shop, harness-room, stable and cart shed were all remodelled, a blacksmith's shop erected, and a new stove was installed in the dormitory 'which has proved of great value to the Matron teaching the children cooking.' Naylor reported that he hoped to crop 200 acres in the coming year.⁸⁴

This industry, however, obscured problems on the station. Naylor was both sexually and financially immoderate, and the teacher, Beatty, whose wife suffered a series of devastating miscarriages, also feuded with the local inspector. School numbers dropped and Beatty resigned in June. He was replaced by Balfour Morgan, who was not entitled to occupy the

⁸³ Aborigines Protection Board Annual Report 1906.

⁸⁴ Aborigines Protection Board Annual Report 1908.

teacher's residence as he was unmarried and the school had been downgraded. The residence was converted to a workshop for children to learn manual trades, and Mr Morgan was obliged to live in the hotel at Darlington Point and cycle to school. Morgan professed to have developed an appetite for the work, but felt he had to resign for his health:

In regard to the impairment of my health I beg to state that for several weeks I arrived daily at the school almost exhausted through excessive heat, frequently with a headache, and the vitiated atmosphere inseparable from Aboriginal school rooms nauseated me causing vomiting and diarrhea.⁸⁵

He was talked out of it, although he never won the right to live on the station. Morgan was the last qualified male teacher to work at Warangesda.

4. Warangesda Station under the *Aborigines Protection Act*

The Aborigines Protection Board secured the passage of the *Aborigines Protection Act 1909*, which conferred the powers it had sought to take control of Aboriginal reserve lands and remove children for 'training', as well as to stop more people entering the reserves.⁸⁶

Warangesda was in the Board's sights. It was sitting near its peak population, with 169 residents, of whom 106 were on rations. There were ten girls in the dormitory, although Miss Rutter had left her position after contracting eye problems, and 38 children on the school roll. Although manager Naylor had only managed to crop 135 acres the Board stated in its annual report that it was anticipating further progress.⁸⁷

Beneath the optimistic surface of the Board's report to government, there were deeper currents. The School File shows that Robert Donaldson and the Board's secretary, AE Pettitt, visited and that Donaldson spoke to Morgan about the low school attendance. He told superintendent Naylor to stop rations of any children 'who absented themselves from school without sufficient cause', recommended the school building be painted, lined and better ventilated, and acceded to Morgan's request that the vegetable garden be fenced with barbed wire, to stop food being stolen.⁸⁸ It seems that the school had lost the support of the station residents, and he was now an agent of Board coercion.

⁸⁵ Warangesda Aboriginal School File.

⁸⁶ Read, *A Hundred Years War*, p. 56

⁸⁷ Aborigines Protection Board Annual Report 1909

⁸⁸ Warangesda Aboriginal School File.

The following year, 1910, the Schoolhouse was repaired and painted. A new door was added at the eastern end of room to improve ventilation and spring roller blinds were put on the windows. A ventilation system was also installed, and the schoolhouse was rendered more comfortable. But what the Board reported the government as an improvement in the moral condition of the station owing to 'a considerable exodus of octoroons, most of whom are self-supporting' was, to teacher Morgan, a halving of the number of children on the school roll. He wrote to the Department of Public Instruction in July saying he now only had 16 children, and blamed the losses on the Act. The Superintendent's reports confirmed that the majority of those leaving were families with children, who wanted to avoid putting their children in the dormitory. The Department of Public Instruction's response was to question whether the teacher's salary was justified.⁸⁹ As the Board's minutes show, that August the manager was ordered to tell the parents they would be expelled under the provisions of the new Act if they did not place their daughters in the dormitory.⁹⁰

Expulsion was a terrible threat to Aboriginal family life, as if parents were rendered homeless it became easy for the Board or the State Children's Relief Department to declare the children were neglected and take them. Despite these threats, the situation at Warangesda does not seem to have improved. By the end of the year Morgan had left and the teacher was Miss Hill, a former employee of Ardill's who had come to Warangesda as a sewing teacher. The loss of a male teacher represented a significant downgrading of the school and there were no more serious investments of government money at Warangesda.

The Board was no longer particularly interested in the Station. In 1911 it opened its new Girls Training Home at Cootamundra. It was Ardill's creation, and he placed Emmeline Rutter in charge and appointed a female Home-Finder to tour reserves around New South Wales, sometimes with the State Children's Relief Department inspectors, and recommend children for removal for training or domestic service. The first girls sent to Cootamundra were the dormitory girls from Warangesda.⁹¹ On the Station, numbers hovered in the 80s, although Christmas time saw a doubling of the population, as people caught up with family.⁹² The

⁸⁹ Warangesda Aboriginal School File.

⁹⁰ Aborigines Welfare Board Minutes, 18.8.1910.

⁹¹ Parry, 'Such a longing'.

⁹² Scarlett, Daily Life at Warangesda.

Matron now inspected the cottages weekly and there were just 20 children in the school. Within a year the dormitory was closed.⁹³

The Board sacked Naylor, for inappropriate but unspecified conduct and poor accounting practices, in 1913, but under the subsequent manager, McAuslan, the Station erupted into rebellion. The year 1914 saw a total of 56 prosecutions of station residents for obscene language, assault, indecency, drunkenness, entering and remaining on the reserve, assaulting women, trespassing, and disorderly conduct and forty adults were ‘sent off to employment’. The disputes appear to have started when the men went on strike for higher wages, and were promptly expelled. Although new huts were added, along with an 8,000 gallon tank and new water services that provided huts with their own taps, life was becoming harder on the reserve. The girls’ dormitory was now closed and was converted to manager’s residence, after a coat of paint and the addition of a verandah. The teacher reoccupied the residence and the old manager’s residence was converted to a store-room. But there were just 65 people resident at Christmas, 17 children on the school roll and 10 attending.

The tenor of life on the Station shifted markedly at the time of World War I, largely due to the passage of Amendments to the *Aborigines Protection Act 1909*. Donaldson, a Board member previously closely aligned with Ardill and a co-drafter of the Amendments, was now the Board’s Inspector, and made his presence felt. The Board received complaints directly from station residents, but was dismissive of them, and the Home-Finder and State Children’s Relief Board were regular visitors to the Station. An incident that illustrates the ways the new regime cut across the culture of the Warangesda residents was a request from the station manager to shoot the people’s dogs. The Board understood the high value the community placed on their dogs, so said the manager should leave each cottage with one dog, so long as it was chained up.⁹⁴ At the same time the Local Committee was wound up. In 1916 the new manager, Mr GB Holmes, was supplied with a revolver and handcuffs by the Board.⁹⁵ Holmes left the following year for Cumeragunja, and was replaced by a couple called O’Brien for a year before the Board moved the Cumeragunja manager, HS Trotman, to Warangesda. This was a disastrous move: Trotman had already been counselled for shooting at residents at

⁹³ Aborigines Protection Board Annual Report, 1912.

⁹⁴ Aborigines Welfare Board Minutes 1915; Warangesda Aboriginal School File.

⁹⁵ Aborigines Welfare Board Minutes 1915 and 1916, cited Elphick, *Camp of Mercy*, p. 33.

Cumeragunja, and could hardly be expected to cope with Warangesda, which was riven by drought and struggling with increasingly angry residents.⁹⁶

Schooling was still going on at the reserve, but the teachers were now all female, and the emphasis was on cooking and laundry classes. By 1919 the Minutes of the Board show that it was struggling financially, as drought, government funding cuts and mandatory salary increases bit hard. It resolved to purge all people it considered capable of living independently from reserves and all people of less than half-caste, and began closing reserves all over New South Wales.

Mrs Isobel Edwards was interviewed at Darlington Point by Pam Young about life on the mission on the 23rd October 1985.⁹⁷ Mrs Edwards had been born there in 1909 and remembered the mission had been 200 to 300 strong at its height, with 17 houses and quarters for single men. By the time she was at school there was little Aboriginal culture at the Mission, but the people knew who they were, and took no notice of the colour of people's skins: she herself had a Scottish mother who was deeply religious. She also remembered language being spoken:

We used to hear them talk it a bit – my grandfather mainly. The men used to have a talk and we would listen. My father could talk it fairly well, but not like grandfather – he was really good. I think it was the Wiradjuri language. Grandfather came from the Lachlan when he was a boy though – I remember he used to talk about that. But they let the language go – like the Italians at Griffith, they let their language go.

Mrs Edwards' memories of the Mission were positive. She said people camped down by the river during summer, and the teacher would take the children for swimming lessons.

According to Mrs Edwards, the mission started breaking up because:

Nasty managers used to be there, and they treated everyone else as kids, they tried to boss them around. People used to come down and try to take the children—it was as bad as America and the slaves!

⁹⁶ Aborigines Welfare Board Minutes, 1917-1919.

⁹⁷ Interview with Mrs Isobel Edwards about life on the mission conducted on the 23rd October 1985, 1985, Collection of State Library of New South Wales.

She remembered quarterly visits from Inspector Donaldson and Board members, when children were removed ‘... they started taking any kids that were big enough. I remember the women crying because their kids were going away.’⁹⁸

The Education Minister, Thomas Mutch, visited Warangesda in March 1920, but it is not clear what he thought. However when Dr PL Quessy, the Principal Medical Officer, visited the station in August 1920 he issued a scathing assessment, saying the school was being conducted in ‘a shed’, and there was no good water supply or sanitation. Tenders were called for a school building, but never filled.⁹⁹ By March 1921 the teacher had been transferred to Cumeragunja, and Trotman was made teacher-manager. Isobel Edwards remembers him as particularly nasty.¹⁰⁰

The fate of the school and the station was sealed. In December 1922 the Secretary of the Board assured the Department of Education that he expected up to 12 pupils in the new year, and that closing the school was inadvisable, but just over six students turned up. The Department recommended the closure of the school, and the relocation of families to Moonahcullah or Darlington Point.¹⁰¹ Meanwhile the Board Minutes show ‘young idle half-caste youths’ aged 17-20 were expelled. On the 13 January 1923, the Chief Inspector of Primary Schools ordered the Aboriginal Public School at Warangesda closed and all Departmental property removed. The Board’s Minutes show it decided to close the station on the 17 October 1924. In December it notified the Education Department of its intention to relocate residents to other centres, and terminate Trotman’s employment.

5. Private management – the King Family, 1925 to 2014

When the Board closed the Station the property was handed back to the Department of Lands, who decided to put the 1612 acre property out to a ballot for a Homestead Farm Lease. The ballot was conducted in June 1926 and set records, with 3,949 applications from all over New South Wales and Victoria.¹⁰² *Freeman’s Journal* reported the sale attracted the attention of the

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Warangesda Aboriginal School File.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Mrs Isobel Edwards about life on the mission conducted on the 23rd October 1985, 1985, Collection of State Library of New South Wales.

¹⁰¹ Warangesda Aboriginal School File.

¹⁰² WARANGESDA MISSION. (1926, June 9). The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW : 1842 - 1954), p. 12. Retrieved June 2 June 2014, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article16297720>

firebrand Catholic Archbishop Daniel Mannix, and summarised his remarks on the sale of the last large holding in the Riverina:

As the farm has only been improved to the value of £915, it is no great prize. It is evidence, however, that the advice, 'Young man, go on the land,' is largely wasted because there is no land available for either the young or the old. The best of the country remains locked up, and squatterdom holds the key wherever the land is decently accessible.¹⁰³

The ballot was won by Mr Stewart AL King, of Junee Reefs.¹⁰⁴ The sale was confirmed by the Narrandera Land Board in August 1926.¹⁰⁵ At first the land was given under an Occupational Conditional Purchase, with the requirement that King pay 2.5% of the capital value of the land, per annum. On 25 July 1927 the property was mortgaged to the Commonwealth Bank, and on 17 June 1933 the lease was converted to a Homestead Farm Grant. The plans of the Grant show the cemeteries, which the Kings were expected to preserve untouched.¹⁰⁶

Isobel Edwards, in 1985, questioned the sale of the land:

They never sold it to [King] he balloted with a lot of others for it, and he won the ballot. He bought more land later ... Then they started all this mission thing going again, with land rights ... and they tried to get that land back off Geoff King. Anyway, there's ninety acres or something, that Queen Victoria granted to the aborigines there. Mr Gribble went over to London to see her. He had an audience with the Queen. He went to see her about land for the aboriginals and he was taking my grandfather with him. Grandfather said they got to the shipping office where they buy the tickets, and grandfather said to Mr Gribble, "Mr Gribble, how long is it before you see land?" He said "Three months, Jimmy". "Well", he said "don't buy me a ticket, because I'm not going!" That was in Sydney. So, grandfather didn't go to see the Queen. He was Jimmy Murray.

That same James Murray had written to *The Sydney Morning Herald* at the time of the ballot to complain about being removed from the Mission, alleging eviction by the Lang Government, which it said as 'indifferent as to where we live and is not likely to care much

¹⁰³ GOSSIP. (1926, June 17). Freeman's Journal (Sydney, NSW : 1850 - 1932), p. 18. Retrieved June 2, 2014, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article116760029>

¹⁰⁴ GOSSIP. (1926, June 17). Freeman's Journal (Sydney, NSW : 1850 - 1932), p. 18. Retrieved June 2, 2014, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article116760029>

¹⁰⁵ ON THE LAND. (1926, August 12). The Gundagai Independent and Pastoral, Agricultural and Mining Advocate (NSW : 1898 - 1928), p. 2. Retrieved June 2, 2014, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article121743744>

¹⁰⁶ Land Titles Office, State of New South Wales, Land Grant Register Book, Volume 4534 Folio 55, no 1931/1075.

where we die'.¹⁰⁷ Peter Read says local tradition has it that Jim Turner, who had accompanied Gribble on his journey to found Warangesda fifty years before, was the last to leave. He defended his home at gunpoint until at last the roof was pulled down on top of him.¹⁰⁸ But the land had never been granted by the Queen, and had never been set aside for Aboriginal people.

Most Warangesda families moved to The Point or the Narrandera Sandhills, and even as far as Erambie, in Cowra. The Aborigines Inland Mission had also developed a mission on the northern side of the river at Darlington Point, run by Retta Long, an old ally of Ardill's.¹⁰⁹

MRS EDWARDS: Well, it wasn't really a mission in the true sense of the word. A mission is where they have a chance to work as well as live. They only had houses over there – tin huts too, they weren't very nice at all. It had a bag church with a tin roof. A missionary was there, actually she was living in the town, and they ran cement and lime or something over the bags to make it waterproof ... it was that Australian Inland Mission ... I only remember the Longs running it.¹¹⁰

Photographs held in the State Library of New South Wales show this Mission, a set of bark huts, no better than those Gribble had made in the 1880s when he was trying to get Aboriginal people away from The Point.

But the Warangesda communities-in-exile found their own way. Read had written that the Sandhills community, in particular, became a traditional extended family community, in a way Warangesda never had. The Bamblets, Carrolls and Ingrams had learned at Warangesda how to build houses without irritating health inspectors, to avoid offering overt challenges without hanging their heads and to manage their own affairs. Gribble's 'waifs and strays' had become an independent community.¹¹¹ What bound them was the shared history of 46 years of life at Warangesda Mission and Aboriginal Station.

The buildings on the Mission Station survived, despite their fragile fabric and the harsh environment, because they were reused by the King family. The Dormitory, which had

¹⁰⁷ WARANGESDA ABORIGINAL STATION. (1926, June 5). The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW : 1842 - 1954), p. 9. Retrieved 2 June 2014, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article16296898>

¹⁰⁸ Read, *Hundred Years War*, pp. 70-75

¹⁰⁹ *Our Aim*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 5. 18 January 1945, http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/collections/exhibitions/missions/ouraim_years/docs/v38s5_a.pdf, accessed 20 March 2014; Image of Darlington Point Church 1930, <http://acms.sl.nsw.gov.au/DAMp/image/19/143/a731002p.jpg>;

¹¹⁰ Edwards, *ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

become the Manager's Residence, was Stewart King's first family home, and the School was converted to a shearing shed. The teacher's residence survived because it was useful as shearer's quarters. At least some of the cottages of the families were visible on site in 1952, presumably because they were also useful as accommodation. While most of the outbuildings have now gone, and the Church burned down in the 1980s, the Kings have honoured the commitment to preserve the cemetery boundaries, and the site is filled with artefacts of the Mission and Station days.

The shared history of the community of Warangesda has, since the 1980s, resulted in efforts to preserve and recognise the Warangesda Aboriginal Mission and Station site. The family members of former residents have held reunions at the site, and documented its buildings photographically. Reminiscences were also collected, and informed the work of historians like Peter Read and Heather Goodall, who did their PhD studies on the Aboriginal communities of New South Wales. Peter Kabaila has documented the site at various stages since the 1990s. Clean up and restoration works, which have delayed some of the deterioration in the buildings, have been conducted by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Landcare groups. With the Heritage Listing of the site, the tangible history that survives is now linked to the history of that community.