

Address: In-service at Wyong, Wednesday, August 8, 1984.

Margaret, a Queen of Ancient Tradition.

At the outset, I wish to emphasise that, after considerable mental wrestling, I have consented to present much of the material about Old Margaret, of Swansea, that will be part of one book that is nearing completion.

Therefore, I would be obliged that until publication the material should not be used unless in general terms. While I have completed a long chapter on this great Aboriginal person, my research into her history is continuing, the reasons for which will become obvious.

When dealing with Aboriginal personages, we should put them into two categories: the famous and infamous.

But tonight I will deal only with those who were not only Aborigines of genuine tribal tradition--and, mark you, persons to be properly recognised in Australian history for their greatness--but also to be living monuments--that is, they should never be allowed to die as other past events in Aboriginal history-- to be monuments of achievement that will inspire Aborigines of today to make some real attempt to emulate them. *have done*

We of European descent are much too prone to perpetuate the myths of past leaders and heroes, conveniently overlooking that in the early days of colonial acquisition of Australia that there were among Aboriginal people of wisdom, courage, leadership and nobility....but such traits of great character have generally been ignored by most historians and history books, and even today, sad to say, so much of the literature published about this ancient race and its culture. *see*

Those who have studied Aboriginal history in all probability have read about the Tasmanian Heroine-- Truganini, a princess of her tribe, but whose image has been somewhat damaged by writers in recent years. Thomas Bock (1790-1855) did a portrait of Truganini --he, by the way, called her TRUGGERARNA-- for Lady Franklin. It showed a close-cropped, slim woman, her neck encircled with possum thread ringlets, and a ceremonial burn or cut on the upper part of her left arm.

The coastal region also had an equally famous Aboriginal woman.. Old Margaret, of Lake Macquarie, better known for generations of Europeans as Queen Margaret, as she undoubtedly was.

She is believed to have been the last Awabakal full-blood. Few details are available about her death in Newcastle Hospital about 1904.

It is more than a century ago that she became a central figure in a black-white land rights issue. She not only had justice on her side; she also had widespread community support from the State Premier downwards.

But when this happened ^{time} things were different --and so were the people, both European and Aboriginal. There was a relationship that died with the passing of the last original owners of this region.

There are several facets of Margaret's history that should be studied more closely to get a clearer and more honest picture of Aboriginal--European relationships during the twilight years of Aboriginal presence in Lake Macquarie.

First, she not only spoke fluent English, but she wrote and read this introduced language rather well. As she acquired this strange tongue, she taught white people her mother tongue--the language of the Awabakal people,--- for for many years in this part of Lake Macquarie both languages were freely spoken, particularly by children.

I can remember many years ago, when in collaboration with the late Mr Blakemore, then President of Lake Macquarie Historical Society and Principal of Booragul High School, a history survey was taken in parts of the Lake. The human sources were people aged 75 to 100 years old. *Ref*

I shall never forget one morning when we visited a dear old lady in her nineties. She was bedridden, but still mentally alert. Yes, she remembered the old darkies, as she called them. Who could ever forget Queen Margaret, she ~~whispered~~ said.

"I knew Margaret and her family and the Whites (Aborigines) well," this old lady recalled. "When we were young, we spoke the lingo well, as did many of our parents.

"Margaret taught us the Lord's Prayer, as the missionary had taught her."

The old lady remembered some words, like willai for possum, moe-arnee for Kangaroo, Koe-in the great spirit.

I began to recite in Awabakal the first few lines of the Lord's Prayer in Awabakal. It was not before long she joined me, correcting some pronunciation.

And, of course, the missionary was none other than another famous character in Aboriginal history, Rev Lancelot Edward Threlkeld, who established at Bahtahbah (Belmont) in 1825 Australia's first land-granted missionary to Aborigines.

While never surrendering her tribal traditions, Margaret became a Christian, as did her baptised children. All Church of England--for she was wont to tell her white friends: "Big spirit in sky all same man. Like you Christians: you have different ways saying and doing things, but you all believe in one big spirit fella."

Her name is perpetuated geographically in Margaret's Bay. Likewise, that of her husband, Ned, in Black Ned's Bay.

Swansea's original name --Leican Flat--was derived from the Awabakal name--Kong Korong-ba, the place of Pelicans. Likewise, the channel was known as Bid-doe-dahbah--the river the great spirit ~~was~~ created to swim to form Lake Macquarie.

Margaret was ~~born~~ born at Wai-ong, now called Wyong, a member of the Brisbane Water Clan of the Awabakal. She was brought to Swansea when rather young. She had more than one place of residence, but early Swansea families remember best the four-roomed cottage she kept at Swansea Heads, spotless with coats of whitewash given twice a year. She was highly regarded by all members of the community, especially white children, who loved to hear ~~her~~ relate the folk lore of her people.

She was fond of growing geraniums, as well as corn and tobacco. She also kept poultry and pigs.

Described as an industrial and regal figure, Margaret always kept a bucket of cold water to refresh visitors, no matter who they might be.

In her late years, her two main pets were a tame wallaby and a magpie. The latter could talk in both English and Awabakal. In those days, there were a few "raw" ditties in Awabakal sung by the male element of the community. Margaret made sure the magpie's tender ears were not polluted.

But the magpie suffered a nasty end. As Margaret often told her friends, she was shocked one morning to here shrieks, and then the bird's last disparing words: "Margaret, the cat's got me."

The wallaby was timid and affectionate. When strangers came to the house, it would jump on Margaret's bed and stay there until they had gone.

Margaret had two children, ~~Henry~~ Ellen and William Henry, better known as Buckin'. Both went to the first school in the district--at Galgabba, but ~~which~~ which they pronounced as Ngarlgar-bah. Buckin inherited all the tribal instincts and physical attributes of his forefathers. He died comparatively young after an accident. He was given a shroud of paper bark and smoked before being put into his coffin. Native bush was planted on top of the grave, located at the back of Parbury Road. The grave, neatly outlined in shells, was kept neatly for many years by Aborigines and white people. But when the Aborigines were no longer about, the grave became neglected, and has probably fallen victim to some form of development.

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Buckin was an outstanding sportsman, and all sides wanted him to play with them. He could pick up a stick like a flash and knock off the proverbial shag on the rock without fail.

Ellen apparently married, since one grand-daughter--Jeebel--went to Galgabba School. Once asked what she liked best, Jeebel replied: "Have a hot bath, put on muslin dress and sit in sun."

Margaret had a sister--Ni, who lived in a crude bark shelter at Swansea Heads. She lived mostly by herself and refused to yield to change, and spoke only Awabakal. She did not enter any European building. The only concession she made was to accept a Government blanket, qualifying acceptance "she would prefer a possum cloak made by her man."

Other children of that time were Wool and Mailey, who were expert at getting native bee honey, catching possum and koala bear (then very plentiful) and playing 2 bush hide and seek with white children.

In later years, Wool became well known for a famous retort. He was well dressed European style when two city types passed him by and observed: "Notice a big black cloud in the offing." His quick reply was: "Watch out that the big cloud don't send out forked lightning and strike you both."

In their school days often the pelts of possums and bears were pegged on the slab walls of that first school at Galgabba. On the site of Swansea High School were large grass trees from which the Aborigines obtained gum to trade since it was in demand for varnish manufacture. The Aborigines also heated this gum to provide a coating on their weapons to preserve them.

eviction

The first threat to Margaret and her husband, Ned, was recorded in the "Newcastle Chronicle" on September 2, 1871, under the heading: "A Case for Government Inquiry"

Part of the report said: "Old Ned, the last of his tribe in this district, with whom all fishing and shooting parties are acquainted, is threatened with expulsion from his little holding on the south side of the Lake by a person who has made a free selection on which this Aboriginal has his habitation.

"Ned has long resided upon this spot with his wife and family and blind mother. This is one of the original inhabitants and owners of the land soil, who is now threatened under a Liberal Land Act with banishment from his squattage so that a free settler may reap the benefit of his labours.

"No matter for such a proceedings as this may be sanctioned by law, we venture to hope that the Government, once apprised of these particulars, will regard them in the light of equity only, and that it will prevent one, who has a right to the land far better than the Crown itself, from being driven off,"

The item brought a week later a response from Rev John Shaw, of Scone, who said: "Ned is well known in Newcastle and Brisbane Water, as a clergyman formerly at Gosford, and am acquainted with the family mentioned. The dwelling and situation are better than many of the selections--a tempting bait to anyone without the bowels of conscience. Ned, hardworking and inoffensive, maintains himself by getting beeswax and honey. Margaret, his wife, is an ornament to her sex; irremovable in her morals. She is a fine looking woman. Margaret is an excellent needlewoman. She is a skillful maker of cabbage tree hats, selling them from £2 to £4,

"I think the Governor could interfere, for if I recollect right a portion of his oath of office expresses that he will protect the Aboriginal inhabitants of this country. Here is a case where surely that protection is required."

The Mayor of Newcastle, James Hannell, wrote to the Minister for Lands, who later instructed that Old Ned was not to be disturbed, and that the Government surveyor was to measure 20 to 30 acres to be notified as a reserve, so that Ned and his family will be secure from all intrusion."

The second threat came eight years later, when the "Newcastle Morning Herald" reported that a Mr Robert Talbot had taken up a selection at Catherine Hill Bay that included Margaret's hut and garden. This evoked action from Mr C Hannell, brother of the now late James Hannell, reminding the Minister for Lands (Mr J S Farnell) of his promise to protect Margaret and her family. Mr Hannell told the Minister: "It would be an act of wanton cruelty to dispossess her of her small block of land she now occupies when it is considered that the whole of it was the patrimony of her tribe."

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Mr Robert ~~Harwood~~ Harwood, of Newcastle, recalled that next day, said the report was misleading since ~~when~~ he and Mr Talbot had visited Margaret's location the previous week. Mr Talbot told ~~Mr~~ Margaret he would be the last man to ~~inform~~ instruct anyone to interfere with Margaret's property. He himself had paid a deposit for 80 acres of ~~mis~~selected land but his right was being disputed by holders of a mineral lease.

Mr Talbot then entered the controversy, by publicising stating it was his intention not to interfere with Margaret or her family in any way.

He added: " I have studied Aborigines and their race for the past 15 years, particularly where they have become extinct by the introduction of the white race. The last of my Aboriginal friends being Lalla Rookh when I used to visit Hobart Town ~~when~~ in the HMS Clio eight years ago. Her native name was ~~Trugannini~~ Trugannini, meaning seaweed.....

"Old Ned ,who died about six years, is buried near Margaret's present abode."

Early in 1880, Mr Hungerford, MLA and Sld Peter Fleming, of Wickham, visited Margaret at Pelican Flat.

The report, dated February 6, said: " Old Margaret is the last living native of the original tribe of Aborigines in the district. She has a son 20 and daughter 26. ~~Mr~~ The Premier (Sir Henry Parkes) did not see any objection to Mr Hungerford's proposal that the land on which she resided should be dedicated to her and her children for life. Sir Henry promised immediate action..

Ald and Mrs Fleming, who knew Margaret well, had built for her a boat costing 13 guineas so she could catch fish.

On March 15, W W Stephens, secretary for lands, that a reserve of 40 acres had been approved for Margaret.

But where? And what has happened to it. I have tried for years to check official records for exact details of this decision... but there is nothing at all. This is evidently the fate of many land grants to Aborigines... once they died, the land became vacant.... no other Aboriginal needs were ever considered.

We do not know where Margaret was buried, except oral tradition is that she eternally rests close to her husband.

And what of Ellen and her children? Again, a mystery. Some say they returned to Brisbane Water to meet remnants of Margaret's family; others claim "they just disappeared".

In 1979 I interviewed Mr William Wood, born 1891, who lived in Swamsea from early childhood, and as a youth remembered Queen Margaret well. He ~~was~~ was able to fill some of the gaps, now being researched to get the complete picture. But even at the turn of the century Margaret was a living legend. As he described her: "A queen in every sense."

I hope I have presented sufficient to indicate that our coastal Aborigines of tribal tradition were people ~~who~~ who had both dignity and nobility. Rarely is an Aboriginal person of this stature presented in history or book form. She, like Threlkeld, will be an indelible part of Aboriginal history.

It can be justifiably said of her that she and her husband won the first land rights issue in Australia more than 100 years ago. I think it can be fairly said that her life is an example for any Australian, no matter his or her origin, to follow.

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famous ~~Aboriginal~~ Aboriginal around Lake Macquarie--and many other
colony-- at the time Margaret was young was Beerar-bahn...also
...and Eaglehawk after he became a clan chief.

Margaret and he had one thing in common: both knew Threlkeld, the missionary.
Bahn for most of his life was known by his totemic name--We-pohng. He gained
Eaglehawk name after passing through a very high ceremony in the Watagan
Mountains in the late 1820s to assume leadership of his people around Lake
Macquarie.

Let it be fully understood that the Awabakal, as historians would have us
believe, lived only around the shores of Lake Macquarie and beaches of Newcastle.

As Tommy Sales can verify, our sites team has discovered in recent months increasing
evidence just how large and extensive this tribe was. Their bush sites may even
outnumber those near water.

Beerabahn was born near Belmont, but at an early age moved to Sydney, where
he grew up to a teenager, then employed by an Officer called McGillicuddy. He
shortened his Anglicised name to McGill.

McGill, though a lover of alcohol, was still a great ~~man~~ man and scholar. He
was able to interpret in a number of Aboriginal languages in addition to his own:
Bonarua, Kattang, Gringhai, Darkinoong, Dharook and ~~possibly~~ possibly Kamilaroi.

Threlkeld did not learn Awabakal mother tongue; he was really taught it
by Beerabahn, who was always very careful with pronunciation.

It is because Beerabahn was so thorough--and perhaps trusting--that he passed on to
Threlkeld some of the ritual language to enable an accurate translation of the
Gospels. Most of the language relating to spirituality belonged to this second
tier of mother tongue--the ritual or initiation language. I can vouch for that, as
one who has read two gospels in Awabakal and his vocabulary and lexicon many times.

Somewhere, I hope--yet to be found, like so many of Threlkeld's work-- is
the missionary's complete story about Beerabahn. The missionary was too ~~thorough~~
thorough to regard as complete his brief versions of his mentor.

Although Beerabahn spread far and wide the purpose of Threlkeld's mission, he
himself never surrendered his traditional beliefs.

The end of Beerabahn and his family is a mystery. Patty, his wife, and Beerabahn, the
second--his only son--were living in 1841. Then a blank. Patty had a melodious
name in her own language-- Tee-pah-ma-ah .

His son until 1836 was called Nin-noe-ai. Then it became Beerabahn, probably due
to initiation. Perhaps the strangest aspect of his giving his father's name is
that both had the name of Beerabahn at the same time.

This is indeed a mystery that probably will never be accurately explained.

Another well-known identity of the time was Gorman, chief of the Pambalang Clan,
between Hexham and Shortland, His first name was Boe-winba, and later for his
senior years koo-ah-mun.

On the road to Kurri Kurri there is a small creek called Wuart Pot, who was an active
figure around the Lake and Newcastle in the 1830s. He belonged to the Kurunbung (
Cooranbung) Clan of the Awabakal. He is best known that for a service rendered an arm
officer gave him a silver mug--about the quarter size of a beer tankard. Though he
could have sold it for heaps of grog. Quart Pot held on to it until his death. He is
believed buried in the vicinity of the creek that bears his name.

One of the most important men in tribal days was the Poontee-mai--the sacred
messenger--who was given immunity wherever he travelled, somewhat like the diplomatic
service of other days. Only one has been recorded in the region--Ngloomlee, of the
Mt Sugarloaf of the Awabakal.