

**Mourning, Remembrance and the Politics of Place**  
**A study in the significance of Collarenebri Aboriginal Cemetery**  
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This report is dedicated to the Murri community of Collarenebri.  
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published in Changi to Cabramatta: Places and Personality, *The Public History Review*,  
9, 2001: 72-96.

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The Aboriginal cemetery at Collarenebri is a place of stories. Some are told in words, some are written in the careful decoration of the graves and still others are held in the way the graves are oriented and laid out in relation to each other.

There are stories for outsiders to read. The cemetery has for many years been a point of white interest. In 1917 the Reverend Mr Schenk, an itinerant missionary who recorded his travels on a box Brownie, snapped the cemetery to show how its graves were decorated by family members.<sup>1</sup> In the 1960s the town doctor, Archie Kalokerinos, featured the cemetery in his account of Aboriginal health in the area, using the many small graves to tell a disturbing story of too many infant deaths.<sup>2</sup> Today, a picture of the decorated graves hangs in the local pub, put there by the publican, perhaps as a curiosity of the area to which the occasional tourist can be directed.

For outsiders, the stories the cemetery holds are simple and briefly told. For the Murriss of Collarenebri, the Aboriginal people from the Gamilaraay and Yuwalaraay language groups,<sup>3</sup> the cemetery holds other stories. These are deeper, complex and sometimes conflicting, stories of families and outsiders, people who belonged and those who didn't. How they lie buried tells much about how they lived.

## **DEATH AND PLACE**

Death has been a bitter fact of day-to-day life for Murriss. Collarenebri is on the grasslands of western NSW, where the invasion in the 1830s was swift and violent. Mortality from the conflict were high, but Murriss faced an even longer struggle with the new diseases of the invaders, bacterial infections like smallpox, but then, just as deadly, the viral infections like influenza, measles and whooping cough.

Rapidly recruited to become pastoral workers after the 1850s, Murriss experienced over 80 years of living in camps on their own lands while these were leased to graziers. Illnesses from unfamiliar infections kept death rates high even through this relatively stable pastoral period. Mortality began to rise further as rural employment declined after the 1960s. High infant mortality rates have now been replaced with rising adult mortality from the diseases of poverty. The effects of rural economic decline and continuing racial conflict have generated the circumstances in which high levels of personal violence, substance abuse, car accidents and more recently suicide among young people have ensured that grief and tragic funerals are common events in community life.

Over the long pastoral period, it became harder to carry out the customary rituals which had given comfort and security to bereaved families. The massive impact of the early smallpox epidemics had ruptured the orderly practices which had allowed people to cope with death. Even fifty years later, when Yuwalaraay Murriss described the impact of smallpox at Bangate, near Collarenebri, to Kate Langloh Parker in the 1880s, the focus of their stories was not so much on the symptoms of the disease but on their horror over the inability of the sick and terrified survivors to bury their dead and their continuing fear of retribution for failing their loved ones.<sup>4</sup>

Later circumstances were less catastrophic but just as disruptive. Fences began to obstruct burials in favoured places and eventually made even visits to graves difficult and necessarily surreptitious. The new forms of transport, horses and later trucks, took people further afield for work and they sometimes settled into marriages there. But this meant that if misadventure happened, it was more likely to happen away from home.

Sick or injured people wanted, if the worst came, to be buried 'at home'. So bringing people's bodies home became more necessary as people moved further away, but also became more possible, if expensive, with truck and rail for transport. There is an enormously high importance placed on this expenditure within Aboriginal families, who will go deeply into debt to 'bring the body home'.

Once home, the proper ways in which people could feel they had looked after their kin were subject to pressure and change. There were a number of traditional methods of looking after bodies. Some may have been placed in a hollow tree which might be incised with the elegant, concentric designs of the area.<sup>5</sup> This practice became more difficult under the surveillance of white settlers. Burial was more common, with some buried in murrumbidgees or gravelly ridges but others buried in soft ground, in the sandhills along watercourses. Softer soils were also used as places for quick burials of the victims of violence in the early days of intense fighting and massacres. There is always a deep sense of unease when sandhill burials are exposed, as often happens today because sand is an important resource for local building. Not only do people feel distressed that any old people's remains are being exposed but there is also the suspicion that any burial of numerous skeletons might indicate a massacre site, and so an undercurrent of anger and bitterness flows as well.<sup>6</sup>

Traditionally graves were in small clusters in the northwest, unlike the extensive cemeteries of the Murray and Lower Darling areas.<sup>7</sup> The small group of graves observed and sketched in 1856 at Keera, near Bingara on the slopes to the east of the Collarenebri by a traveller, Mrs McPherson are an example, as are those observed at Bangate by Langloh-Parker in the 1880s.<sup>8</sup> McPherson's description links the material evidence of burial with the non-material but interconnected dimensions of proper funeral traditions.<sup>9</sup> In the Bingara area, McPherson was told that Aboriginal people would not speak the name of the dead person, nor say any other word which sounds similar to that of the mourned name. This custom is still practiced in traditionally-oriented communities, and rather than obliterating the person from memory, ensures that their name remains at the forefront of consciousness for the mourners, who must remember to refrain from using the name and all similar words, substituting conventional mourning words on all occasions. In a custom still practiced in Collarenebri today, belongings of the person whose burial Langloh Parker witnessed were buried with them and in many cases all of their other personal belongings were destroyed.

But the removal of linguistic markers and the destruction of the material possessions of the deceased did not preclude a practice of attention to the graves. McPherson's account stressed that the Aboriginal people at Keera carefully tended their gravesites. Her sketch shows a group of three graves surrounded by carved trees. Each was marked with mounds of pebbles and decorated by recently-cut boughs from the surrounding cypress pines. So frequent visiting and thoughtful decoration of graves was as much a part of proper mourning as were the linguistic and material absences which have also marked out death.

Living a more sedentary life on the pastoral leases over decades meant that Aboriginal graves tended to be made more frequently together and the burial grounds on Dunglear and Goondabluie contain many graves. As the grazing leases were reduced in size in the early years of the twentieth century, Aboriginal camps were disbanded and their residents forced to move into the small townships across the plains. Increasingly, this meant that Aboriginal people were forced to bury their dead in the graveyards of the

white townships. These were and are notoriously subdivided by faith, race and class, with each christian denomination clearly marked off from the others, the 'heathens' section distanced from any of the 'christian' graves, and the 'paupers' separated in disgrace. It is unsurprising that Aboriginal people felt no welcome in township cemeteries. Sometimes families had had no choices, and the death of a child perhaps as the family travelled for work, might result in a township burial and so later an adult of the family would be buried there too.<sup>10</sup> With the loss of the pastoral camps, there were no longer choices for anyone and most townships along the Darling and its tributaries now have Aboriginal graves sometimes concentrated in the 'Paupers' and 'Heathens' areas but in others clustered in the denominational section of the church which had exhibited the greater tolerance in town politics.

At Collarenebri, things developed differently. The Aboriginal camp which grew up on a lagoon was four miles out of town. The camp community began its own burial ground a little way away from the camp but around 1907 one burial, a baby called Hyrum Mundy, was buried much closer to the camp to give his mother some comfort after his death. Other burials were made there, so there were quite a few graves in the 1918 photograph taken by the Reverend Schenk. Soon after this an epidemic, perhaps the 1919 Spanish Flu, struck the camp and a number of Murris died. In customary respect, their relations moved the campsite, along the river and slightly closer to the town. White townspeople deeply resented this movement towards the town precinct and spent much of the next twenty years trying to have the whole Aboriginal community moved to another area altogether. Much of this hostility centred on Murri attempts to enrol their children in the local public school, but the goal of the whites who protested was always complete removal of the community as well as the maintenance of a strict colour bar in the public spaces of the town.<sup>11</sup> Racial segregation was strictly policed in Collarenebri and perhaps as a result there was little official pressure for Aboriginal people to begin burying their dead in the town cemetery. And in this climate, Murris felt their loved ones were far safer in their own cemetery out of town than amidst the hostility palpable even in the white graveyard.

So the Collarenebri Aboriginal cemetery has been nurtured by a community creatively building its traditionally-based culture, but also one under sustained siege, facing segregation and under threat of imminent uprooting. The intense physical segregation in the town ensured that burying remained under a colour bar, but this isolation allowed the community the freedom to mourn and remember their dead in their own way. It is this story, as well as the many stories of the lives and the relationships of the community at Collarenebri, which their cemetery tells.

There are common patterns in the way that Murris have related to the cemetery, but there are also variations between individuals and families in how they have seen the graveyard and in the rhythms of family use over time. This can be glimpsed by tracing some family relationships with the cemetery in detail, keeping in mind that each family group will have had parallel or divergent processes occurring perhaps at different times. One family whose relationship with the cemetery we can



*Isabel Flick at the Collarenebri Aboriginal Cemetery, February 1999. In the background are Rose (Flick) Fernando and Doreen (Weatherall)*

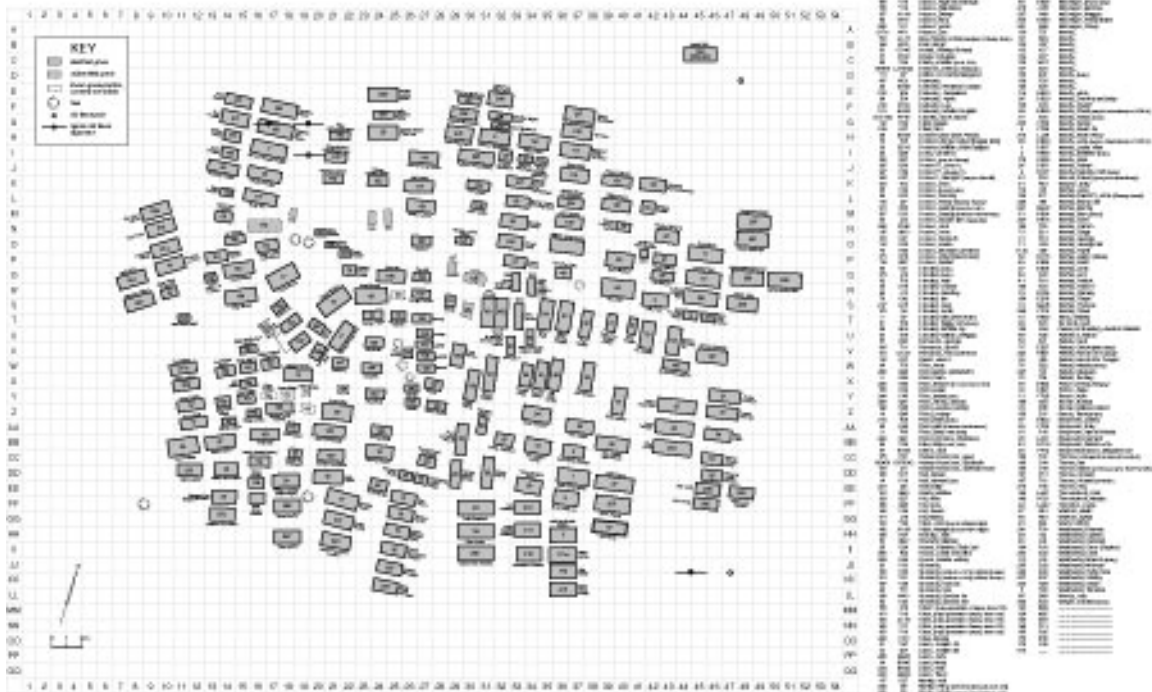
follow is the Flick family, and particularly we can trace the story of Isabel Flick's life and her recorded memories about the cemetery. Isabel was a key activist in many community issues but one of her most sustained commitments was to the protection of the cemetery and in the course of this work she created many records of its meaning to her.

For Isabel, the cemetery told both a family story and a broader, community story. She read from it her own family's story about the way she and her brothers and sisters came to terms with death. At the same time, she saw the cemetery as a collective testament, laying out, in the most concrete way, her community's relationships with each other and with their place, the land on which Collarenebri stands, their country. Although Isabel was involved in many campaigns, the cemetery seemed to mark out the parameters of her activism. The earliest public records of Isabel's long political career were the 1960s announcements that she was starting a funeral fund.<sup>12</sup> This was a crucial financial institution in rural Aboriginal community life: a death was the time when people HAD to have money to cover the costs of bringing the body home and the whole community was uneasy if a burial was not carried out well. And at the end of her life in 2000, projects around the protection of the cemetery had again become the centrepiece of her attention.

This paper arises from one of these, a NSW Heritage Office grant beginning in 1997 to extend the documentation of the cemetery.<sup>13</sup> Isabel had begun this work many years before, with assistance from local community members, then from friends like Peter Thompson, an archaeologist living within the Murri community, and then with the formal assistance of a research team for two weeks from the Institute for Aboriginal Studies, the University of Canberra and National Parks in 1988, including Brian Egloff, Graeme Ward and Luke Godwin. This group conducted a series of interviews with Isabel and other Collarenebri Murris, surveyed the cemetery and recorded identifications for a number of the graves based on their archival research along with assistance from the sympathetic local undertaker, who has maintained a record of the Aboriginal funerals over the years.<sup>14</sup> In 1998 I was asked, as a historian and an old friend of Isabel's, to help her with the new phase of the work.

We had made good progress in a series of visits over 18 months, in which many Collarenebri community members had spent time walking around the graves, discussing the lives and deaths the graves recalled and explaining the significance of the grave decorations.<sup>15</sup> We have created a digital database which will allow community members to store the information in a way which can be continually expanded and which allows the recording of memories about the cemetery and the people buried in it.<sup>16</sup> This work has allowed us to make a major revision of the earlier map, identifying many more of the 250 burials visible there and clarifying at least some confusions. During those meetings at the cemetery, the Collarenebri community had been planning the ways they would like the other projects to take shape. One of these involved a 'history walk', with the erection of plaques around the cemetery which would tell a little about the lives of those buried within it. Another was to be a celebration of those still living, rather than the dead, in which the elderly women of the community were to be honoured with a big picnic and a presentation to each which demonstrated their community's affection. This idea was stimulated by the cemetery work which led to the rueful observation that too many times people waited for a funeral to express their feelings.

## Collarenebri Aboriginal Cemetery September 2001



*Map of Collarenebri Cemetery.*

But then Isabel herself suffered the deep tragedy of losing her eldest son, and at almost the same time, was diagnosed with advanced and inoperable cancer. She died very soon after on February 16, 2000. She left a strong hope that the cemetery projects would continue and they have been taken up by an active community committee. This paper will draw on the whole body of Isabel's and the community's cemetery documentation work to suggest the many levels on which the stories of the cemetery can be told.

### **RITUALS OF MOURNING AND REMEMBRANCE**

Talk about the cemetery among Collarenebri Murrils invariably begins with memories about shared experiences of working on the cemetery over many years. These memories reveal the complex development of a living, traditionally-based culture which is continuously evolving. At the same time, they express the universal need to draw on ritual and community to mourn and come to terms with death.

#### ***Burning glass***

A memory commonly related is of long, enjoyable days spent at the cemetery, tidying up and pulling weeds around the graves, washing each of the grave decorations and placing them back carefully where they came from, and most particularly, undertaking

the elaborate ritual of 'burning bottles' for one of the characteristic grave coverings in the cemetery. Outsiders see a cover of similarly-sized glass pieces spread evenly within a wooden frame and might assume a simple shattering of bottles. But this lengthy and lovingly conducted process involves first selecting glass bottles which are the colour the family favours for their graves. Some families look for blue glass, others for green, while some prefer to trim their graves with borders of red or white painted jars. When there are enough of the right sort of bottles, they are washed and dried. Then a hole is dug and a fire is made to generate a high heat and very hot ashes. The bottles are then carefully placed on top of the ashes, and covered with more coals and ashes.



*Where people burn their bottles they have set up some basic equipment: a hole for the fire, a collection of bottles ready to be burnt, a bed frame to sit on, a drum for water and halved drum for the hot glass, a toilet in the background.*

They are left for an hour or so, then removed with a long handled shovel and then quickly plunged into cold water, so that the glass crazes with tiny internal cracks. Isabel described it as 'crystalising' and this sense of turning ordinary glass into something special, an alchemy which makes it into 'crystal' conveys the beautiful effect and intention. Only then are the bottles carefully placed between hessian bags and struck to break them into regular pieces, large or small depending on each family's preference, and packed densely onto the top of the grave. When regularly maintained and replenished, the glass forms an impenetrable cover, keeping weeds from growing on the grave and protecting it from disturbance by animals or weather. But it is not only for protection. On approaching the graves from any direction, the 'crystallised' glass catches the light, sparkling like water.<sup>17</sup>



*View from the south across towards the western side of the Collarenebri Aboriginal Cemetery, 2001, showing graves from a number of families, including the Mundy, Adams and Thorne families. Granny Annie's grave lies just to the west of the small child's unframed grave at the centre of the photograph. The high recent graves towards the far side show the care with which graves are tended in the period before they subside and can be framed and decorated in the proper way.*

This practice is focussed on a fairly small area in which Collarenebri's cemetery has the most intensive use. 'Crystalled' glass is used to some extent as far to the north east as Euraba and Toomelah, and was used intensively at Goondabluie and Angledool to the north west and Dungaleer to the south. Unbroken bottles are used for decoration on graves a little further to the west in Goodooga and to the south east at Burra Bee Dee, but not the elaborately prepared 'crystalled' fragments, while glass is not a prominent element of old grave decoration at either Walgett or Pilliga. Angledool families, forced to move to Brewarrina in 1936, introduced the use of 'crystalled' glass in their burials in that town.<sup>18</sup>

This is clearly a post-invasion development which uses an introduced material, glass. But this is burnt in ground ovens like those for traditional cooking and then it is used to decorate graves in a continuation of the intention seen at Keera in 1856. It has also been



conducted for long periods across what has been assumed to be a linguistic divide between dialects, being carried out by both Yuwalaraay families at Angledool prior to the 1930s, and by Gamilaraay families at Dunglear in the early years of the twentieth century and at Collarenebri well before 1918, when the Rev Mr Schenk's photo shows a fair sized burial ground with many decorated graves. The common use of glass across this dialect boundary might reflect new cultural exchanges with the changed material and movement patterns of pastoral settlement, but it more likely demonstrates the continuation of traditional cultural exchanges between adjacent groups, despite the fact that they identified their languages as distinct. A traditional dialect 'boundary' could have been far more culturally porous than the English concept would suggest and links between geographically adjacent groups identifying as different language speakers may have been stronger than those between common language speakers who were separated by great distances.

The spread or the development of the use of glass on graves is suggested at Angledool, a government station established in 1912, near a much earlier-established pastoral camp where the burial ground has not yet been investigated. The station graveyard has not been used since 1936, when the community was uprooted at government direction and most families transported south west to Brewarrina, except for those families who escaped to Collarenebri. At the Angledool cemetery, some graves are decorated with whole bottles, but each family group is distinguished by bottles of a particular colour. Other groups of graves are covered with roughly broken glass, others with burnt and 'crystalled' glass, and others again with collections of regularly-sized pebbles of the white stones which cover the hillside where the camp was sited.<sup>19</sup>

At Dunglear, the pastoral camp was broken up during the 1920s. No burials were conducted there after that, and the pastoral lessees have been reluctant to allow Aboriginal people onto the property over the years to visit the graves or to protect them. The graves were unfenced and stock wandered through them, scattering the decorations. When I was taken there in 1981 by Granny Ivy Green, who had been born there, the remaining decoration visible was 'crystalled' glass, but it had been scattered widely by stock. It was extraordinarily beautiful, shimmering in the sunlight as we approached, like a pool of water ruffled by the wind. But Ivy mourned over the dispersal of the grave markers and decorations, pained at the disrespect to her relations. She explained that there were two burial grounds, close by each other, one for adults and one for children. The adult graves had recently but belatedly been fenced. The children's burial ground had been made up of small graves clustered around the grave of one old 'clever fella', a *wirringan* or traditional healer and lawman, who had been buried there to protect the little ones. It remained unfenced, and was threatened not only by stock but also by subsidence as a road had been built close to the soft sandy hill where the burials lay.<sup>20</sup>

### ***A time to mourn***

The memories of relaxed and close family days at the cemetery, burning bottles and telling stories, are not anchored into any particular time. They seem to have always happened. But as we talked over each family's practices during the documentation work, it became clear that this was not something which every family did all the time.<sup>21</sup> For Isabel Flick, her childhood memories were that funerals were solemn and frightening occasions, and even as a young woman, she never went near the cemetery without fear and an overwhelming desire to leave quickly. Her brothers had a different experience,

because as boys they spent so much time hunting during the 1930s and 40s and both the old and new cemeteries were good places to find game. So Joe Flick remembers regularly visiting in the course of his hunting, but although he checked on his auntie's grave there, he did not expect to participate in tending to any of the graves. This was being done at that time by other people, like Granny Fanny Combo who used to carry bottles up in buckets from the riverside camp to burn beside the cemetery.

But all this changed completely for the Flicks when their father Mick died in 1963. Mick had been a towering figure in the family's life, a Gamilaraay shearer and contractor who had given up his early drinking when his children were threatened with removal. He had become the stable rock who had held the family together in difficult times and had been an adviser, mediator and beloved friend for his children and their partners and grandchildren as well as his community.

His sudden death left his children unprepared and they needed to mourn his loss. This for Isabel was the first time she felt she wanted to spend time at the cemetery, to tend the grave and develop a ritual which would allow her to feel she could still express her feelings directly to her father. Decorating his grave was a way to do this and Isabel and her family began to pay more attention to the ways other families attended to their graves. As she reflected in 1988 on the way her feelings had changed with the experience of death, Isabel suggested this might be a common experience for many families:

I think it meant something to be working to make that particular grave look nice—it was a labour of love, shown in a lot of the work.

And some people, of course, like to do it earlier [than a year after burial]. And that means that they have to do a lot more work, and more often [because the grave is still subsiding]. And sometimes that's what people need—that's the kind of thing people need to—I think help us to adjust to that death. I feel that it helped us a lot, working on our father's grave. I think it helped us a lot to accept the fact that he just didn't die and go off and leave us. He left us a lot of valuable things to continue to do.

But the family found that burning bottles was not so simple. Isabel had been shown the cemetery as a young woman, had had the relationships between the burials explained to her by elders like Granny Fanny, (who had reared up her father and his sister Ann when their mother had died), and had been told about the methods of decoration. But when she and her brothers and sisters tried to burn the bottles for their father's grave, they found that a lot could go wrong:

Well...if you've got too much heat, you've got a mass of melted bottles. And if you leave them in too long, this can also happen. Depending on the heat, you sort of get to know the temperature after working with it for a while. And sometimes if you take them out too soon, or your fire's not hot enough, you can get a terrible lot of splinters — a lot more splinters than anything else. More or less splintery glass.

They only found advice when Granny Ada, the blind grandmother of Joe's wife, Isabel Walford from Angledool, became worried that they had spent so much time burning bottles, apparently for little result. She explained the reasons for the failures they were having, and suggested ways to test the temperature of the fire and judge the right time to pull out the bottles. Ada had grown up on Goondablue and at Collarenebri, and

remembered the techniques from the time in her childhood when she could still see. Isabel reflected that her family had really understood the complex process only when they were forced to confront it themselves:

— I think once you lose someone — the need's there. It needs to be done. And I think that's what throws everyone into being able to do this themselves. They know that it's their responsibility.

The need to mourn and the desire to decorate the grave 'properly' in terms of community conventions, combined in leading this family to practice the method till they could perfect it. For them, as no doubt for many other families, the ritual allowed them healing and in the process they learnt a skill which had by then been passed down by word of mouth through the community for at least 60 years. The tradition in this case, and in Isabel's assessment in that of others too, was not passed on automatically, because it was unlikely to be learnt unless there was a compelling personal need to learn. Rather it was effectively passed on only when the time came for each family to mourn.



*The bottles are burnt in a shady place just to the south of the cemetery gate.*

### **Gifts of love**

The 'crystalled' glass is not the only decoration on the Collarenebri graves. The families of the dead and other members of the community with a particular interest in any grave regularly place small items on it or wash and tidy those already there. Sometimes these are silk or plastic flowers which will withstand the sun and dust, as well as the rain. Others are more individual. A cup someone enjoyed drinking from; cards for someone who loved to gamble; a gift of a toy from a grandchild; a letter of love enclosed in plastic; a china dog for the grave of a man who loved dogs.



*Weathered gifts on a child's grave from the 1960s at the Collarenebri Aboriginal Cemetery, 2001.*

Gifts and ornaments are arranged carefully on the surface of the grave, overlaying the glass, shells, pebbles or other material which forms its main covering.<sup>22</sup> At times, families refresh the whole grave by removing all the individual items as well as the covering material, washing all of it, rebuilding the shape of the grave and carefully relaying the glass covering. Such days are opportunities for Isabel Walford Flick, Joe and their children to 'smoke' their family area, in the way Isabel remembers from her childhood at Angledool. While the family members are busy working on the graves, the leaves of the *badha* tree<sup>23</sup> will be thrown on their fire and its smoke allowed to envelop the graves and the workers, a ritual cleansing for the living and the dead. Barbara Flick, Joe and Isabel's daughter, remembers those long days at the cemetery, having been delegated the job of washing an auntie's or a grandparent's grave and sitting laboriously carrying out the task. Seeming tedious to her as a child, she has now recognised that those were the hours when she learnt about the intricacies of kin relationships, heard endless funny and sad community stories and found out why particular types of ornaments were affectionately chosen to fit the likes and eccentricities of the buried family member.<sup>24</sup>



*Beryl Adams tending a family grave in the Collarenebri Aboriginal Cemetery, 2001.*

These gestures are an ongoing way of remembering someone in everyday life. There is a community expectation that a grave will never be 'finished'. Instead, there is always a chance to add another gift, to notice an ornament around the house or on a trip and think 'Pop would like that'. With grave decoration firmly under the control of each family, and with an assumption that continued attention reflects deep remembrance, there are endless opportunities for each family member to continue to remember in the way they want. Everyday life becomes a site for warm remembrance and displays of affection which are within everyone's reach.

### ***Making the graves***

Like the decoration of the gravesites, the actual digging of the graves is within community control, although there has always been minimal supervision from the local police in terms of health regulations. But the community maintains conventions about who digs the grave and how it is done. Direct family members, as mourners, are not expected to dig, although they may be present to see the grave is proceeding well. The community expects that everyone will volunteer to dig when their family is not bereaved, and then, when their turn comes, there will be volunteers in reciprocity from the families whose graves they have helped to dig.<sup>25</sup>

Grave digging continues to be done by hand. As Isabel explained in 1988:

One of the things that happens in Collarenebri with our burials, is each grave is dug by our own people. It's never done by machinery. It's a frightening sort of

thought to think that a machine's digging a grave. It's not — not done properly. So there's always special men in the community that sort of hand down their knowledge of how to dig a grave and, as I say, their work is very important to every burial that takes place here.<sup>26</sup>

The grave is preferably dug in one day, although people lament that nowadays it might be done in two. Rose Weatherall Flick described how her father-in-law Mick, who often assisted with digging, would insist on doing it all in one day, starting at daylight and going 'straight down in one go', then having his sons and sons-in-law 'shave the sides with an axe'.<sup>27</sup> No-one in the community makes casual visits to the cemetery while 'the digging' is going on: the only people permitted to go there are those taking food and water to the diggers.

The graves in the cemetery are laid out in two main directions. Early graves were aligned with the head facing north. Joe Flick calls this 'Gamilaraay', and points out the alternate pattern as 'RSL'. A number of the men buried in the cemetery, like his father Mick, were returned servicemen and their funerals were paid for by the RSL, which influenced the family to bury in what Joe regards as a 'whitefella' style with the head facing west towards the sunset. After a key family figure is buried with one orientation, the next burials in a family tend to repeat this direction, and for some time the westerly orientation has been most common in a number of family groups. Some recent burials, however, have reasserted the northerly orientation as a conscious renewal of Gamilaraay tradition.<sup>28</sup>

Once the burial has taken place, the soil is heaped back high over the grave and repeatedly covered with flowers and other gifts until it eventually subsides to ground level. This may take a year, and then the permanent outlines of the grave will be marked out, perhaps with a wooden frame, and the 'crystalled' glass or other covering will be laid in place.

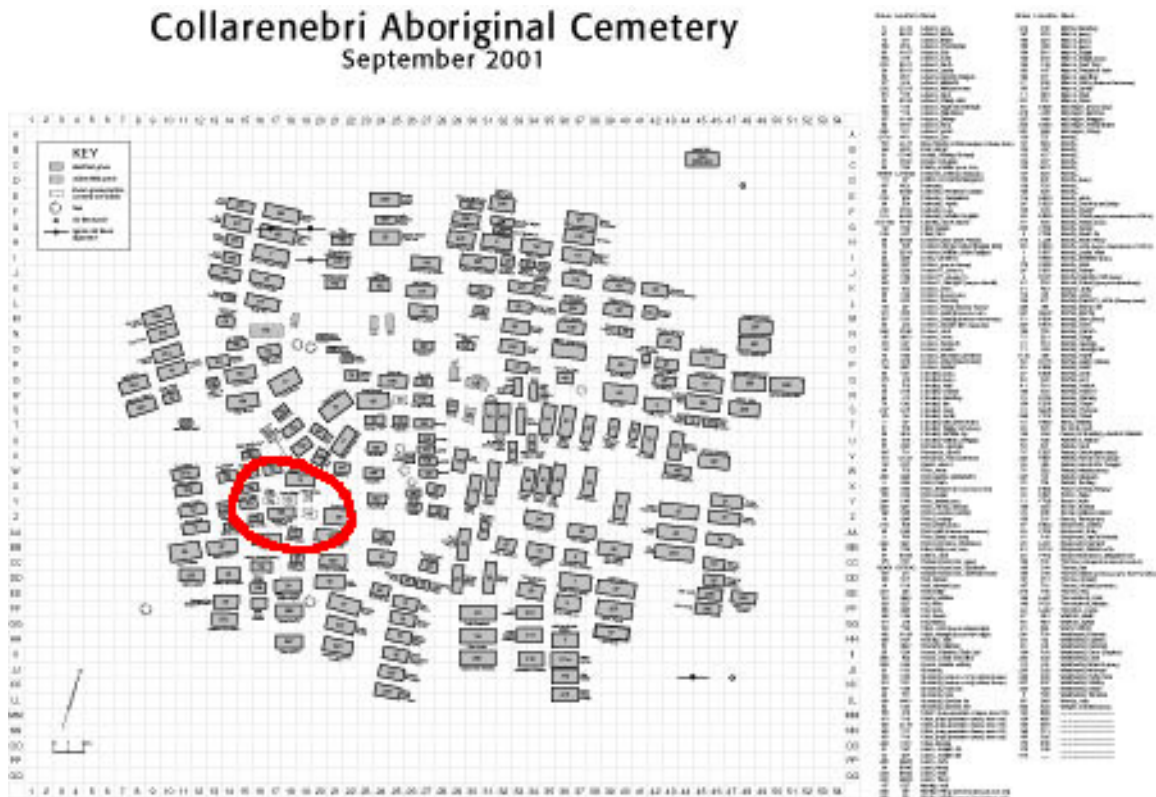
### ***'With their mob': how graves are placed***

The principle guiding decisions about where graves will be placed is expressed simply and powerfully by Joe Flick: 'They'll be with their mob'.<sup>29</sup>

The decorations of the many graves where families remain active in tending to the cemetery often have a common colour scheme or motif underlying the individual gifts laid on top, and this underlying pattern indicates family affiliation. One family tends to use green glass and red painted bottles to mark the borders and corners of graves, while another family characteristically uses green glass and white borders. The cemetery is roughly arranged in segments, with family members buried close to each other. But while this can indicate some general family ties, the detailed relationships are held only in the memories of those who knew the buried people. So the family days spent tidying up the cemetery and burning bottles have an invaluable role in teaching young people what the connections are between adjacent graves, and how it can be seen that people can be found 'with their mob'.

One example is the group of graves round Ann Flick [grave 85]. There was some community confusion about who was buried in each grave, but the exact relationship could be retold in full by Joe Flick, Ann's elder surviving nephew. He explained that Ann was his father's sister. Dora Combo her daughter, was married to a member of the Fernando family, and had died giving birth to the baby girl buried beside her. Ann and her brother Mick were still alive when Dora died, and Ann and Mick's mother, Dora's

grandmother, had been interred in a tree in her traditional country some miles away at Moonlight Point. Ann wanted Dora's body close by, so Dora was buried with her infant daughter near the Combos, for her father's family, but also directly beside her mother's old uncle, Woggi Croaker, Ann and Mick's mother's brother. When Ann eventually died as an old woman, she was buried as she had wished, beside her daughter and grandchild. The relationship between the Flick family, the Combos and the Croakers is recorded in the position of these grave sites, but it needed memory to read that story.<sup>30</sup>



*Cemetery map showing Granny Fanny's grave surrounded by those of some of her grandchildren.*

An example of the meaning of relationships as well as the tragedy of everyday life can be found in the cluster of tiny graves around Granny Annie Murray's grave [grave 155]. Her granddaughters between them lost 5 young babies. A small comfort to their mothers was that they were able to bury them around the grave of their Granny for company and for protection. Many people in the community knew the story, but the outlines of the graves had been disturbed by flooding and had been poorly recorded. The earlier version of the cemetery map, drafted during the 1988 research, had recorded some of these as possibly adult graves, while others had not been recorded at all. With the sustained commitment of a range of elderly people and discussions with the men who had been the gravediggers for some of the funerals, we were able to confirm which were

the graves of the babies and to demonstrate again the pattern found in other parts of the Collarenebri cemetery and at Dungalear, in which babies are buried near grandparents or in which a grandparent or elder who dies will be buried near the graves of related babies to offer protection to the dead and comfort to the living parents. This is the model on which another grave is understood to be present, although never marked on the town undertaker's map. This is the grave of 'King Billy' an elder from the old camp, understood to have died after Hyrum Mundy in 1907 and after the other small burials around that first baby's grave [grave 77]. King Billy, too, was buried among those tiny graves, again to offer protection and comfort.<sup>31</sup>

### ***'I called her sister': the living of kinship***

While the position of the graves can tell the stories of relationships, so too can the stories about how people came to be buried at home at all.<sup>32</sup> In 1980, Isabel Flick had organised the funeral at Collarenebri of a woman called Vera who had died in Sydney. I remembered this event and the extraordinary lengths to which Isabel had gone to ensure that things went well for a proper return and burial. But as Vera was buried a long way from the Flick area of the cemetery, I had never understood her to have been a relation. But Isabel was living another form of kinship to the one I understood. While first recording identifications she began to explain, and then she took up the story again during our recent work. In 1988 she said:

Well, Vera was a daughter of Lexie Murray. And Lexie and my father were supposed to be the right meat and the right two to marry. However, they didn't. They grew up and I don't think they saw each other until they had families of their own. In the old laws I think they said those two was the ones that was right to marry each other and—oh, it was something to do with the right meat.

In 1999, Isabel went further:

'so I called Lexie "Ma". We always took food and other things to Ma Lexie and Vera when I was a kid. And so, Vera, well.... I called her "sister".'

And it was this imperative of a network of mutual kinship responsibilities and obligations which involved Isabel so deeply in the preparations for Vera's funeral. Isabel had been living out an active kinship relationship which to outside eyes was no longer in existence, but which continued to shape her everyday life and became starkly evident in the crucial days around Vera's death.

### ***Those who did not belong***

These have all been stories about people whose grave are in a position which confirms that they belonged to the complex community of Collarenebri Murrumbidgee. But there were those who did not belong, and their position too is indicated in the location of their graves.<sup>33</sup> This did not necessarily mean they did not have a place in the community while they were alive, but it means they were not easily located with kin when they died. These graves tend to be clustered towards the north east corner of the grave yard. There is another group of graves in the central, oldest part of the cemetery most damaged by floods where the identity of individual graves is uncertain, but there is no question over the family group to which these graves belong. The 'strangers' graves in the north east corner are the subject of different sort of uncertainty, a social confusion which leads to dispute over who is buried in which grave. It is here that some graves had been



previously identified but after consultation it is now clear that these individuals are actually buried in other towns. Even after these names are removed, however, there are still too many names for known graves. It is likely that a couple of burials which occurred during heavy rain, when few people could attend the funeral, led to confusion about their actual site. And then flooding might have meant that a grave was inadvertently left unmarked when the flood damage was repaired. But the underlying cause of this confusion is that each of these individuals has no family in the town who have been tending the grave over the years and who can be quite confident about its position. Without advocates, their grave locations are likely to be forever in confusion.

A sad example is that of a woman who had come from Toomelah, many miles back up the river, to marry a Collarenebri man. Her original grave location has been challenged successfully and is now generally accepted [except by a few stubborn women advocates] to be that of a man unrelated to her. In a town where she has no living family, her grave location has been marginalised to an awkward and still uncertain position. This dispute over her grave site perhaps reflects her life and death. Her marriage became violent and through years of abuse the woman, with no male relations close by, had no one who could consistently defend her. Eventually, she was brutally murdered by her husband. A lack of defenders in life has followed through to a lack of effective defenders in death, and her grave location is now a question which hovers uncertainly over a couple of possible sites on the edges of the 'strangers' side'.

## **DEATH AS A SITE OF STRUGGLE**

While the stories to be told within the cemetery are rich and complex, there is another layer of narrative which the cemetery can tell. This is the story of the place of death and mourning as a site of continuing conflict within the racial and cultural politics of this rural town.

### ***Sammy Munna***

The story of Sammy Munna's death and his 'near burial' demonstrates many of the themes of this cultural tension as well the great pleasure Murriss took in winning small victories over white authorities. One of the reasons the grave diggers liked to have the grave dug in one day was to complete the work fully in daylight, because it was a strongly felt belief that all the business of funerals, including the burial itself, should be done between sunrise and sunset. Sammy Munna was an older man who had drifted into the town, as Rose Weatherall Flick tells the story, and who had struck up a joking friendship with Aub Weatherall, Rose's brother and Isabel Flick's partner. Sammy had died in town suddenly, and with no immediate relations, the police were nominally in charge of his burial, although Rose and Aub expected that he would be buried in the Aboriginal cemetery under the supervision of Mick Flick. But late the next evening, the family saw the police truck headed out to the town cemetery. Worried that they were taking Sammy's body for burial, Mick and Aub went to investigate. Indeed the police did have the coffin in the wagon, and they were heading out to give the body a quick burial in the pauper's section of the white graveyard, after dark. Mick was deeply shocked, as Rose relates the story:

They were taking him up the road, it was dark, they had the headlights on. I said: 'They might be taking old Sammy up now'. Mick said: 'They can't be!' I said:

'There's a car driving along slow over there'. And old Mick came out and poked his head out the door. He said: 'Start the old green rig, Aub and we'll go and see!' And true, they had the coffin in the back.

And Old Mick drove round the front of 'em then, and stopped them and came back to the coppers and said: 'No, you never bury Murri people before the sun comes up in the morning or after it goes down at night. Take him back and I'll do it myself tomorrow if you like'. And they were going to bury him as a pauper, see, because he had no relations or nobody knew anything about him. So Mick said: 'This boy's related to him'. And Aub did have a sorry look on his face too. And so because he was related [to one of us] they couldn't bury him as a pauper. Aub came back quite proud, saying: 'I've got a new relation now. Old Sammy Munna!' <sup>34</sup>

### ***Soldiers uncommemorated***

A continuing source of pain was not so easily resolved. For a small community, Collarenebri Murrumbidgee had sent an extraordinary proportion of young men to fight Australia's foreign wars. There are four veterans of World War 1 buried in the Aboriginal cemetery and three from World War 2. Through the 1930s and 40s these men were invited to march in the town parade on Anzac Day, which some of them did to support old comrades. But they were refused access to the segregated Returned Servicemen's Leagues Club for the rest of the year, their names were not inscribed on the Honour Board inside the Club recording those who had fought and this local RSL had refused to recommend that their graves be identified with a special plaque in the manner usually accorded returned service people.

The campaign to have their service acknowledged with plaques and inclusion on the honour board was a long one. The relatives of these soldiers eventually had to approach the State level RSL organisation, which with some distance on the local tensions, finally approved and funded commemorative plaques for the graves during the early 1980s. But the local RSL club proved intransigent over the issue of inclusion of Aboriginal names on the Honour Board. This became one of Isabel's crusades during her later years, but despite her formidable persistence and negotiating skills, those old soldiers have not yet been recognised by inclusion on that Roll of Honour. <sup>35</sup>

### ***Plundering and vandalism***

The cemetery has been the target of acquisitive interest from whites. Over the years, some sightseers have pilfered the ornaments so carefully laid on the burials. To protect the graves from wandering stock but also from dishonest tourists, Roy Croaker erected a post-and-6-wire fence around the cemetery in the early 1940s and Mick Flick and his sons erected later fences with iron and wooden posts and ringlock mesh through the 1950s. The gates were never locked, in case they obstructed Murri visitors, but it was hoped that the fences would assert Aboriginal ownership and deter thieves.

But theft escalated during the late 1970s, when commercial collectors apparently became interested in the old blue castor oil bottles which till then had formed a distinctive part of the grave decorations. Isabel explained in 1988:

..... those bottles were brilliant blue, as you came round the corner on the old road you could just see this flash of blue would be the first thing you'd see. And I was

even offered money for some of the blue bottles. And I just said, you know, 'they're priceless as far as I'm concerned'. And we wouldn't sell anything from there, it doesn't matter what it was. So when some kind of industry started happening with bottles, and that particular blue bottle, they all disappeared in that 1979-1981 time, just over the two years. Most of those bottles are now gone and it was a very sad time for us, because we were very hurt about that.

There have also been periods when vandalism occurred from within the town, like the incident in the 1980s when young white boys were caught riding trail bikes around and over the graves. With little faith in the police to pursue the culprits, although they had been identified, this incident led to open fights on the streets between young Aboriginal and white men. Constant vigilance by members of the Aboriginal community and a new eight feet high fence, eventual support by police against such desecration and just as importantly, Murris believe, better education for younger white townspeople about the heritage values of the cemetery, have led to greater respect for the graves.

But episodes of vandalism still occur, like those around the time of our field trips in both 1999 and 2000. Rather than immature destructiveness, these targeted the graves of activist families and seemed to have been crudely politicised gestures, associated with the intensely hostile white public responses to Aboriginal assertions to Native Title access rights over land. The cemetery is a powerful symbol of the continuation of Aboriginal people's presence and their cultural dynamism. Joe Flick has pointed out that the cemetery's symbolism cannot be ignored by whites:

'They can't just put it under a rug and plant it [hide it]. It's there... out in the open!'<sup>36</sup>

As such, it is vulnerable to acts of resentment by a white rural population which claims it has been abandoned and victimised by urban politicians and ventilates its anger onto Aboriginal people because they are seen as being unfairly favoured by those same urban elites.

### ***Reclaiming the cemetery***

Through the 1970s, Collarenebri Murris became more assertive of their rights over the cemetery. One form of this was their intention to lay an 'all weather' surface on the black soil road from town, which turns to bog when wet making it extremely difficult to reach the cemetery to dig graves or conduct burials when it rains. An 'all weather' road would represent an acknowledgment of both the cemetery and its users as significant in the town. For years the Shire and all other levels of government were disinterested until eventually Mangankali, the Collarenebri Aboriginal Housing company, refused to accept any further funds for its building program until the road program was approved. Their strategy worked and the 'all weather' surface was finally achieved in 1983, when the road was opened in a ceremony which celebrated not just improved access but Aboriginal cultural ownership.

The legal tenure of the cemetery was a deeper problem, reflecting a common situation across all of western NSW in the early 1980s. This site of intense cultural significance was owned by the Crown and leased in perpetuity to a white pastoral lease holder, Mrs Clara Copeman. At around the same time as the confrontation over upgrading the cemetery road, Mangankali began to take pragmatic steps to have this land returned to secure Aboriginal control. Isabel began to talk to Mrs Copeman about working out an agreement to recognise the Aboriginal interest in this land. Mangankali made

representations to the NSW Government's Western Lands Commission to change the tenure over the cemetery, along with the nearby sites of the earlier cemetery and the old camp at the lagoon, still used to draw water to 'crystalise' bottles. The relevant State Aboriginal agency was the Aboriginal Lands Trust, a body set up by the State government to blunt Aboriginal calls for land rights. It consisted of Aboriginal members but had virtually no power to acquire land and often drew strong criticism from Aboriginal communities across the state. Nevertheless, Mangankali pragmatically enlisted the Lands Trust in support of their application and brought them to the negotiations. In 1982, a landmark agreement was reached between the Western Lands Commission, the Aboriginal Lands Trust and Mrs Copeman, to recognise formally the Aboriginal interest in these three small areas of land.<sup>37</sup>

This basic protection did not secure full ownership or guarantee that a later lessee would not obstruct access and management of the cemetery. A Land Rights Act, proclaimed in New South Wales in 1983, allowed Aboriginal communities to form local land councils and to claim any vacant Crown land 'not lawfully used or occupied' and 'not needed or likely to be needed for any essential public purpose'.<sup>38</sup> There was very little land in the whole state which fitted this description, and the cemetery land was not claimable because it remained formally under pastoral lease. The only remaining option was to purchase the land using the fund associated with the Land Rights Act, but the priorities of regional Aboriginal leadership were towards purchase of large pastoral enterprises at this time, rather than small sites of cultural significance.

So in the mid 1980s, the newly formed Collarenebri Local Aboriginal Land Council [LALC] decided to embark on new negotiation with Mrs Copeman. Quietly, patiently, in discussions delegated largely to Isabel, as the LALC secretary, Mrs Copeman was persuaded to relinquish the particular portions of her lease which covered the three related sites, a total of 4.52 hectares. In September 1988, this step was formally achieved with the gazettal of the withdrawal of the land from lease and its restoration to the status of 'vacant Crown land'.<sup>39</sup> With the cooperation of sympathetic officials within the State Department of Land and Water Conservation, this formal relinquishment was followed by a claim on behalf of the Collarenebri Local Land Council over just those pieces of land.<sup>40</sup> The claim was lodged rapidly, but as the Lands Rights Act was subject to constant criticism from rural politicians in both the National and Labor Parties, the State machinery for deciding on land claims has been agonisingly slow. Only in May 1996 was Claim 3698 over the Collarenebri burial grounds finally granted.<sup>41</sup> At last, as a result of patient and tenacious negotiations as well as extraordinarily good will on all sides, the legal ownership of the cemetery land had returned to the collective hands of the Murri community in Collarenebri. This was the only claim ever lodged by the Collarenebri LALC, and it remains one of the few completed with such sustained communication between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parties. It finally brought to Collarenebri Murrumbidgee a degree of security over this precious piece of their country.

The meaning for this small area of land was not limited by its boundary fences. During the development of the database to record the cemetery's history, Isabel kept returning to a particular point about how the introduction was to be written.<sup>42</sup> It was some time before I understood that what she wanted to do was to make it clear that this cemetery did not stand only for itself. In the lives held within its graves and in the relationships demonstrated by them, this cemetery stands for the wider relationship between Gamilaraay and Yuwalarraay people and their country. For Isabel this cemetery is a

symbol, or a metonym, a piece standing for the whole. Its presence in Aboriginal ownership demonstrates not only that her people belong to this piece of ground, but that they are rightful owners of their wider lands.

## **CHANGE AND TRADITION**

The cemetery has not only recorded continuities. It has been a place where Collarenebri Murris have been able to draw on tradition while they grapple with new realities. These three final accounts, while drawn from members of the Flick family, suggest the ways in which the broader Murri community are continually reworking and enriching the meanings of the cemetery.

### ***Renewing culture***

The seclusion and strong sense of Aboriginal community control over the cemetery has allowed grieving families the possibility of conducting funerals which sustain and restore traditional mourning. Karen Flick and James Nurokina lost their baby son, Dhullumei in 1998 and he is buried at the Collarenebri cemetery surrounded by his great grandparents. Karen has explained the deep sense of strength they drew from being able to express their grief within their family's own tradition:

When we buried our baby, we had the smoking and we did everything ourselves. We didn't have a minister or a church service. Our cousin Blue dug the hole, my sister Patsy made the cloth for the coffin, my brother Joey brought our baby home and put him down gently. My father said we should return to old ways and that's why we buried our baby Gamilaraay way, head towards the north, same as his Great Grandfather's sister. .... We had the smoke all around, it was just family and we said what we wanted to say. And even after that, when we went up there, we smoked the place all around when we burnt the bottles, we have the smoke burning all the time.<sup>43</sup>

While it is possible to bury without a christian minister or undertakers in a town cemetery, it requires great concentration and persistence in dealing with bureaucracy, resources which few grieving families anywhere have available to them. Within the security and continuities of the Aboriginal cemetery bereaved families feel comfortable including traditionally-influenced forms of burial. Then the sustained period of continuous attention, with burning bottles for 'crystalled' glass, smoking the graves and people and bringing flowers, gifts and ornaments to the grave, again allows families to develop ways to mourn which offer them the most meaning and comfort.

### ***A personal journey***

For Isabel, the cemetery had been the site of a long personal journey. In her childhood and her youth she had feared it. Then there had been the years when the rituals of mourning had helped her to accept her father's death and then later family grief which was just as painful. In her active years in the tense world of small town local politics, she had reached another understanding of the cemetery, as she explained in 1988:

I knew when I was working in the organisations, I used to feel — I'd think well I can't handle any more. Because the people didn't understand what I was doing, especially when I was involved with Land Councils and the Land Rights Act. One lot tends to think that you're 'black power'. Another lot just can't see any sense in

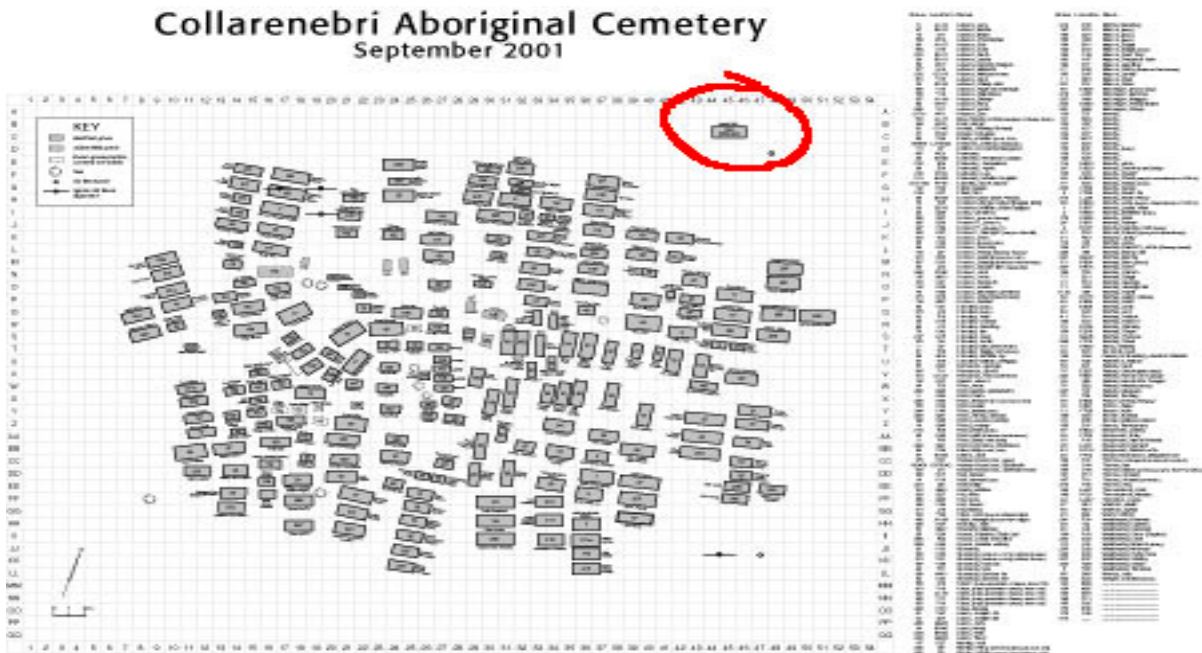
having those kind of things, so you sort of become an isolated person. And you have to condition yourself to continue to work along to try and achieve what you want to do. And I felt a lot of times that when I came up here to the cemetery I was able to relax and — and think about some situations that we faced with Dad. And different other people that mightn't be of my family but other people who had a lot of really coping qualities. You look back and you can think, 'oh dear, I don't know how so-and-so coped with that kind of situation when that happened in their family'. And I used to go away from here feeling so inspired by coming up here and spending time. I'd go back and think, 'well I can handle that', you know.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Drawing in the strangers***

Flowing out of all those years of thinking about what the cemetery meant to herself and to others, Isabel had reflected on her own death, and she saw a possibility for leaving her own meaning inscribed within the place. She explained in 1988 about the site she and her long time partner, Ted Thorne, had selected for their graves when their time came. It was to be up on the northern eastern side, just beyond the 'strangers' place'.

I sort of noticed that nearly all the people buried on this north eastern side are people from other towns and — and I always feel strongly that there shouldn't be any strangers' portion. Not that I feel that people said that's a strangers' portion. But that's how it appears to me. And I feel that this position that myself and Ted Thorne have chosen is a special section in this cemetery yard. And I know that some of the older people living today disagree. They don't feel that I should be buried over there, so far away from my family portion. Because that's how we're buried in family portions ... and it's just that my family know that's where I'll be buried. And so that's—it's a special section for me. I think we all - sort of - have a freedom of choosing these particular sections. And I hope it overcomes — well, it will with me — overcome the feeling that the northern side is a strangers' side.<sup>45</sup>

And this is where she was buried, on 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2000, in a plot set a little apart, under a tree and just beyond the 'strangers' portion'. Isabel was a woman whose life was devoted to achieving justice, and she understood that to mean honouring both the people and the history of her community. But she did not see this community, its history and its culture as either fragile or static. She believed this was a robust culture where individuals like her could honour tradition, not by fearing to change, but by challenging convention and intervening to make a personal contribution to a new sense of justice.



*Cemetery map showing the location of Isabel Flick's grave, after her burial in 2000.*

## **TOWARDS A STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

While this is not the time for any definitive statement of significance, this study suggests some of the parameters of the social significance of the Collarenebri Aboriginal Cemetery. More than anything else, this is a living place, not only reflecting continuities of tradition but the dynamic nature of communities, culture and history. The 'Heritage' embodied here is not fixed or static. It changes over time as new stories are added and told with new burials, as old stories retold and reshaped as graves are embellished, tidied and cared for in affectionate remembrance. Individuals and families use the cemetery in different ways and their patterns of use change throughout the lifecycle of the family and the individuals in it. This place offers many things: the rituals for easing grief and expressing mourning, a place for remembrance, a place for inscribing stories, not just by coincidence of death but by the active task of story telling and teaching, a place of peace and refuge, a place for reflection. But it tells also the stories of Collarenebri Murris and their stormy and complex relationships with the white residents of the town and the district. And finally it tells its stories of the place of individuals within the Collarenebri Murri network, deeply committed to their community and negotiating a way through their life and death to shape its future.

## **Acknowledgements**

This project was initiated and sustained by Isabel Flick. It has benefited immeasurably from the tireless input of Doreen Hynch and the extended Flick family, inside and outside of Collarenebri, and particularly of Joe and Isabel Flick; from the generous assistance of Brian Egloff in making so readily accessible the papers of the 1988 research; and from the continuing support and insight of Denis Byrne, NPWS and from the deep commitment of Peter Thompson, 'Tibuc', Coonabarabran. Valuable research assistance has been provided by Kate Waters. The current Cemetery documentation project was supported by the NSW Heritage Office Heritage Assistance Program with a grant in 1997. Digitisation of the cemetery map was generously contributed during 1999 by the Design Studio at the University of Technology Sydney, organised through the Shopfront. The detailed work of manually adding digitised names to each of the graves has been patiently and meticulously contributed throughout 2001 by Kathleen Chan, of Cracknell and Lonergan, Architects.



**Recorded Interviews**

Isabel Flick: AIATSIS audio recorded interviews with Luke Godwin, 1988

Isabel Flick: audio recorded interviews with Heather Goodall, 1981, 1998, 1999.

Isabel Flick and Rose Flick Fernando, audio recorded interview with Karen Flick, August 1994.

Doreen Hynch, Rose Flick Fernando, Rose Weatherall Flick, audio recorded interviews and field notes, Heather Goodall and Kate Waters, during Cemetery Project Field Trips 1998 and 1999.

Linda Hall, Gloria Adams, Josie Thorne and other members of the Collarenebri community, conversations and field notes during Cemetery Project Field Trip, Heather Goodall and Amy Flick, 2000.

Joe Flick Snr, Isabel Walford Flick, Karen Flick: Notes on interviews with Heather Goodall, July 2000 and August 2001.

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<sup>1</sup> R.W. Schenk and M.R. Morgan: *Father's Photos of Walgett, Terry Hie Hie and other places. A Historical Record: 1918 – 1920*, Mission Publications of Australia, Albany, 1982.

<sup>2</sup> *Every Second Child*, Thomas Nelson and Sons, Melbourne, 1974.

<sup>3</sup> These languages are regarded as very closely related, to the point of being considered dialects rather than separate languages by some linguists.

<sup>4</sup> K. Langloh-Parker: *The Euahlayi Tribe*, Archibald Constable and Co, London, 1905: 39.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid p 92; Surveyor Thomas Mitchell saw decorated graves when he travelled through the Yuwalaray and Gamilaray areas in 1846.

<sup>6</sup> Personal observation over 25 years in field work in area.

<sup>7</sup> Comparisons with funeral practices in other areas have been made after consulting the NSW National Parks and Wildlife compilation of site reports for burial sites; and Witter, D.C.: 'Regional Variation Of The Archaeology In Western New South Wales', *The Rangleland Journal, forthcoming* Vol 23:2, 2001; Pardoe, Colin: 'The cemetery as symbol: the distribution of prehistoric burial grounds in southeastern Australia'. *Archaeology in Oceania* 1988 Vol 23, pp1-16; Nugent, M: *A Search of the Archives of the Aborigines Protection Board and the Aborigines Welfare Board for material relating to burials and cemeteries: a report to the Cultural Heritage Services Division*, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. January, 1998; and NPWS: *In sad but loving memory: Aboriginal Burials and cemeteries of the last 200 years in NSW*, NPWS, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> McPherson: 'A Lady' [Mrs McPherson]: 'My Experiences in Australia 1856-7', London, 1860, p225. Sections reprinted in Isabel McBryde [ed] : *Records of Times Past: ethnohistorical essays on the culture and ecology of the New England tribes*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1978, pp247-260; Langloh Parker 1905:85, 83-94.

<sup>9</sup> McPherson 1860: sketch reproduced in in McBryde, Isabel: *Aboriginal Prehistory in New England: an archaeological survey of northeastern New South Wales*, SU Press, 1974, pp 148-9, plate 29.

<sup>10</sup> Discussions with Collarenebri Aboriginal families during fieldwork about Collarenebri and Goondawindi. Personal observation of cemeteries across the northwest of NSW.

<sup>11</sup> See Goodall, H: *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics 1770 to 1972*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1996 for an account of this long segregation battle.

<sup>12</sup> *Australian Aboriginal Fellowship Newsletter*, Vol 6 (8), August 1966.

<sup>13</sup> C.Knowles, Minister Urban Affairs and Planning, to Isabell Flick and members of the Collarenebri Aboriginal Community, 10<sup>th</sup> December, 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Ward, Graeme, Egloff, Brian and Godwin, Luke: "Archaeology of an Aboriginal historic site: recent research at the Collarenebri Aboriginal Cemetery", in *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 1989/2, pp 62-67

<sup>15</sup> Field Trips with Isabel Flick and Ted Thorne, with the active involvement of many members of the Collarenebri Community and with the research assistance of Heather Goodall and Kate Waters, took place in: December 1998; March 1999 and June 1999. After Isabel's death, she was buried in the Collarenebri Aboriginal Cemetery and there were many discussions then around the gravesides about burials and the stories of the people buried there. Later in the year, her daughter Amy Flick and Heather Goodall travelled to Collarenebri in June 2000. Joe Flick

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Snr and Isabel (Walford) Flick have been consulted about the cemetery map and participated in interviews in Canberra in July 2000 and August 2001. Phone contact has been maintained with Doreen Hynch and other members of the Collarenebri community and a further field and reporting trip is planned in September 2001. Special contributions have been made during conversations and trips to the cemetery and old camp sites, as well as in recorded interviews, by Doreen Hynch, Rose Fernando, Rose (Weatherall) Flick, Clare Mason, Linda Hall, Josie Thorne, Gloria Adams, Mavis Werribone, Joe Flick Jnr, Pat and Bruce Mason, Pat Mundy, Roma Weatherall, Roslyn MacGregor, Aub Weatherall Snr, Auntie Bessie Khan, Louella Martin, Ted Fernando [Local Aboriginal Land Council], John Walford, Ted Murray and Samantha Zada. Great assistance has been received from Brad Sulter [NPWS Coonabarabran] and Denis Byrne [NPWS, Manager Research, Cultural Heritage Unit]; from Brian Egloff, University of Canberra; from John Stanley [UNE]; and from Harry Denyer, undertaker, Collarenebri. The information in this paper, unless otherwise cited, is drawn from the many informal discussions which have occurred in those field trips and conversations, most of which are recorded in field notes and some in formal, audio-recorded interviews.

<sup>16</sup> We have used Filemaker software to do this. The Collarenebri Aboriginal community will decide if the database will be held and be able to be updated on a computer in a local community organisation or in the Aboriginal Research section of the regional library at Moree.

<sup>17</sup> This description of the preparation of 'crystalled' glass is drawn from numerous Field trip discussions, 1998 and 1999; from the AIATSIS Interview 2A, 1988; and from Isabel Flick, Interviews 2/11/1998 and 12/6/99. The use of glass to cover graves is discussed in Ward et al, 1989.

<sup>18</sup> National Parks and Wildlife Service compilation of entries on burial sites in NSW; Witter, *forthcoming* 2001; Pardoe, 1988; Isabel Walford Flick, notes on interview, 31/8/01 for Angledool and Goondabluie practices.

<sup>19</sup> Field trips to Angledool and Bangate for the *Angledool Stories Project*, recorded with notes and photographs during 1996 and 1997, Heather Goodall and Karen Flick.

<sup>20</sup> Goodall, H.: *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in NSW 1770 to 1972*, Allen and Unwin, 1996, for references to my field trips to Dunglear 1981.

<sup>21</sup> This account of Isabel Flick's recollections of her changing attitudes to the cemetery and her family's experiences is drawn from numerous conversations during field trips. Quotes are from her interviews with Heather Goodall: 2/11/1998 & 12/6/1999; AIATSIS interviews, 1988, 1A and 2A. The account was discussed and confirmed with Joe Flick and Isabel Walford Flick, August, 2001.

<sup>22</sup> Ward *et al* describe the graves as having a primary and secondary mode of decoration, with the glass or other surfacing material forming a primary base for the smaller, individualised items which might be varied and supplemented often, while the base material and style tends to remain constant.

<sup>23</sup> Leaves of the *badha* tree – the Yuwalaraay name for *Eremophila mitchellii* -- are used for ritual 'smoking' in the northwest. *Badha* is pronounced with the short vowels 'a' = 'u' in 'cup'. It's common names include 'false sandalwood' or 'buddah bush', a derivation from the Yuwalaraay.

<sup>24</sup> Isabel Walford Flick, Joe Flick, notes on interview, August, 2001; Barbara Flick, personal communication, July 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Doreen Hynch, notes on interview, 4/9/01.

<sup>26</sup> AIATSIS Interview, 1988, 2A.

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<sup>27</sup> Rose Weatherall Flick: interview 18/6/99

<sup>28</sup> Joe Flick Snr, Isabel Walford Flick and Karen Flick, Notes on Interview 31/8/01.

<sup>29</sup> Joe Flick, Snr: notes on interview, July, 2000.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Discussions with Josie Thorne, Linda Hall, Doreen Hynch, Gloria Adams and Mavis Werribone, June 2000.

<sup>32</sup> This section drawn from Isabel's interviews in 1988: AIATSIS 2B and in 1999: Field notes June 1999.

<sup>33</sup> This discussion of the 'stranger's portion' and of the particular question around Toomelah woman's grave is based on numerous conversations during field work in Collarenebri, 1988 – 2000.

<sup>34</sup> Rose Weatherall Flick, Interview 15/6/99

<sup>35</sup> Personal communication, Doreen Hynch, August, 2001.

<sup>36</sup> Joe Flick Snr, notes on interview, 31/8/01

<sup>37</sup> Isabel Flick, interviews 1998 and 1999.

Letter from Mr Colin Clague, Officer in Charge, Aboriginal Land Claims Unit, NSW Department of Lands, to Mrs Isabel Flick, Collarenebri Local Aboriginal Land Council, 19<sup>th</sup> January, 1989, recounting the process of negotiations in the early 1980s.

<sup>38</sup> Section 36(1), Aboriginal Land Rights Act, 1983.

<sup>39</sup> NSW Government Gazette, 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 1988.

<sup>40</sup> Letter from Mr Colin Clague, Officer in Charge, Aboriginal Land Claims Unit, NSW Department of Lands, to Mrs Isabel Flick, Collarenebri Local Aboriginal Land Council, 19<sup>th</sup> January, 1989, alerting the LALC to the withdrawal from lease and outlining the procedures for submitting its land claim.

<sup>41</sup> NSW Department of Land and Water Conservation, Aboriginal Land Claims Unit: Register of Granted Claims

<sup>42</sup> Isabel Flick, Interview 2/11/1998.

<sup>43</sup> Karen Flick, notes on interview, 31/8/01

<sup>44</sup> Isabel Flick, Interview AIATSIS 2B

<sup>45</sup> Isabel Flick, Interview AIATSIS 2A