

# 4.

## The Golden Age of Missions 1900–1950

*The work at hand is to run an institution of a peculiar kind—  
the building up of a community.*

### The Industrial Missions

If little was achieved in the first half century of ABM's existence, in the period from 1900 to 1950, much was accomplished with always inadequate resources. This suggested that ABM had fulfilled a good deal of the expectation generated at the 1900 Jubilee. Indeed, looking forward from 1900, or back from 2006, ABM's second half century seems one of considerable achievement, especially as two world wars and the Great Depression dominated the history and developments of this period.

The creation of the missionary dioceses of Carpentaria, based on Thursday Island, in 1900 and the North West, now based on Geraldton, in 1909, accorded with High Church Anglicanism's ideal of missionary outreach. A diocese was defined as the geographical area over which a bishop had authority with regard to all matters involving the church which was then fully represented, actually or potentially, by the three orders of bishop, priest, and deacon who then could teach and minister to the laity. As the bishop could ordain or license priests and deacons for his diocese, the church was self-perpetuating — complete for the area and people to which it was relating. Where the Bishop is, there is the church.<sup>1</sup>

The replication of the English diocesan structure in unevangelised or barely evangelised areas initially placed an extra load on the back of such struggling missions. An administrative structure was needed for the diocese, as well as to relate to the church beyond the diocese. A cathedral,

even a temporary one, was required, and an ordained, stipended ministry. The bishop then had to minister to his clergy and laity through regular visitations and was expected to bring those working in his diocese together on regular occasions to confer with him and to become an integral part of the diocesan family. Missionary societies such as the Church Missionary Society require less extensive structures in the area to be evangelised. They can expeditiously decide to withdraw from an area as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel had from Somerset in 1868 after only eighteen months.<sup>2</sup> The creation of a diocese takes a tenacious grip on the future.

In 1900 Yarrabah was the only Anglican mission to the Aboriginal people. Ernest Gribble had established it in 1892 after his father, John Brown Gribble, withdrew through ill health. Gribble had established a mission village community with a school, a dormitory each for the boys and girls, and cottages for the married Christian couples. The centre of Christian life was the church where morning and evening prayer services were held each day. On Sunday there was also a communion service, and on feast (special) days the communion service replaced morning prayer. The Christian Aborigines or those who were undergoing instruction lived within the mission compound. Local Aborigines who wished to maintain a more independent lifestyle lived in a camp near the mission but were rigidly separated from it by Gribble who nevertheless still intervened to prevent activities of which he did not approve. The camp population fluctuated in size. The local Aborigines, the Gunganjdji and their neighbours, the Yidinjdji, used the mission as part of their subsistence economy or visited relatives, including children they had entrusted to the mission. The mission used their labour in return for food. Only those who worked were fed, except for the sick and aged.<sup>3</sup>

A daily timetable was soon established which was very much like that of a boarding school or a community established by a religious order: 6.00 a.m., ring bell; 6.30 a.m., matins (morning prayer service); 7.30 a.m., breakfast; 8.40 a.m., work bell; 12 noon, cease work; 12.30 p.m., dinner for the Aborigines; 1.45 p.m., school bell; 5.00 p.m., evening bell; 5.30 p.m., tea for the Aborigines; 6.35 p.m., evensong (evening prayer service); 9.30 p.m., the bugle for lights out. On Sunday there were church services at 7.00 a.m., 11.00 a.m., and 6.30 p.m., and religious classes at 3.00 p.m. During the week there were singing classes and drill classes on Tuesday at 8.00 p.m.; choir practice on Thursday at 4.00 p.m.; night school for adults on Wednesday at 8.00 p.m.; parade on Friday at 4.00 p.m. Sewing classes were held at 2.00 p.m. daily except Wednesday and Saturday afternoons which were free for the Aborigines to organise their own activities under the guidance of the mission staff. This timetable encompassed both adults

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and children.<sup>4</sup> The Aborigines were segregated according to age or sex, at work, church, school, and on outings such as Saturday picnics. Under Gribble, church attendance was compulsory for Aborigines in the mission compound. Mission life was dominated by bells.<sup>5</sup>

The aim of the Christian missions throughout Australia was to create a theocracy. The members of the Aboriginal community would lead good, useful lives where they would be 'made to live by rule'. Thus, at Yarrabah, the timetable included inspecting the cottages of the married couples each day at 11.00 a.m. — 'the floors having been swept and washed, and the blankets put to air immediately after breakfast' and cleanliness and sanitation insisted upon.<sup>6</sup> On all Aboriginal missions, to accomplish the aim of creating a new society, a pervasive system of education of children and adults was necessary not only to continue the process of religious indoctrination but also to produce the skills necessary for the first and subsequent missionary generations. There were adult education classes, classes for married women, and practical training in child care, homecraft, and simple industrial skills. As Nicholas Hey, foundation missionary of Mapoon Presbyterian Mission, pointed out, the Aborigines were given a way of life.<sup>7</sup> It was also goodbye to much of the old way of life.

By 1900, the Anglican Church and the Queensland Government had proclaimed Yarrabah a triumphant success: Daniel Craig has succinctly described the nature of this 'success':

After only eight years [i.e. by 1900] the institutional structure of the community was well established with Gribble as its undisputed head... In order to live in the mission, Aborigines had to espouse Christianity and forsake their traditional life styles. Gribble and his fellow missionaries controlled every aspect of the settlement's life: they taught school, adjudicated disputes, dispensed medicine, limited travel, and set codes for everyone's conduct. All letters to and from Aborigines passed through the staff's hands 'for perusal'...Before residents could marry, the intending groom had to build a thatch hut for himself and his bride in the area designated for married couples...He had to promise never to remove his wife or family from the mission should he take a job off the reserve. The couple had to marry according to the rites of the Church of England, and Gribble set the date. Moreover, he reserved the right to postpone or cancel a wedding if one of the parties misbehaved or was deemed unfit for marriage...If a married man left the reserve for any reason, Gribble moved his wife back into the dormitory until he returned...The missionaries gave the wives rations to make their own bread and tea, but a central kitchen served everyone's meals.<sup>8</sup>

As early as 1896, ABM was reporting cautiously but confidently to the Anglican Church through its missionary journal, *Missionary Notes*, of the 'spiritual progress' among their charges:

There are not wanting signs of real spiritual and moral improvement in the people, while the efforts made to enable them to clear and cultivate the soil must tend to their material welfare, showing them that Christianity is a religion which has the promise of the life which now is, as well as of that which is to come.<sup>9</sup>

A number of small satellite settlements were created for trusted married couples and their families, lessening the tensions Aborigines experienced in the larger village setting. Gribble also hoped that it would discourage the Queensland Government from cancelling any reserve land to make it available to colonists.

The Queensland Government was impressed with the work of the Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Anglican missionaries in North Queensland and realised that they could be used as a cheap control agency and dispenser of social services. In 1898, the Northern Protector of Aborigines, Dr Walter Roth, had reported most favourably. The missionaries cared for the sick as best they could, provided a sure if meagre supply of food, protected mission Aborigines as much as possible from opium and alcohol, and saved the women from sexual exploitation. The representatives of government seemed most impressed by the way the missionaries were producing village communities moulded on European-Christian values. Roth related with enthusiasm the skills of the Aborigines in carpentry, agriculture, basket-making and homecraft skills. He praised the choir and the playing of the piccolo, cornets, accordion and the organ. He was impressed with the mothers' meetings, prayer meetings, confirmation classes, and the church service. He thought the 'promotion' system by which girls and boys received in-service training in domestic service and farm work excellent. He thoroughly approved of the way the missionary arranged marriages so that a stable mission community was set up. He noted the excellent health of the community (although it was excellent only when compared with the deplorable health of Aborigines living in the fringe camps throughout the state) and that at Yarrabah there had only been six deaths in six years and fewer at Hope Valley. Of Yarrabah he concluded,

To attempt to describe the noble self-denying work of these missionaries in sufficiently eulogistic terms would be futile: the organisation, management and discipline leaves nothing to be desired: the aims and objects of the mission are practically Christian.<sup>10</sup>

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No pun was intended.

The factor that most impressed the authorities was the control that the missionaries could assert over the Aborigines. The Lutherans at Bloomfield River Mission were criticised by Roth because the Aborigines came and went as they pleased: ‘[T]he mission people have no control over them and herein lies the secret of what I would call their non-success’.<sup>11</sup>

Government approval of the missionaries and their desire to use them to implement government policy was very early made apparent. In 1899, Gribble was appointed superintendent of the reserve under the terms of the 1897 Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act.<sup>12</sup> In fact Roth and Home Secretary JF Foxtton, were convinced that in North Queensland the Aborigines could be raised to ‘a higher scale of social order’ only ‘by the influence and precepts of the missionaries’.<sup>13</sup> In 1903, Foxtton stated publicly that he intended to divide Cape York Peninsula into Aboriginal reserves, apportioning to the interested Presbyterian and Anglican denominations geographical spheres of influence expanding as far ‘as the enthusiasm of the Church members would carry it’. He made it clear that any denomination could have an Aboriginal reserve.<sup>14</sup>

Foxtton believed that there were then 25,000 Aborigines in Cape York Peninsula and he was willing to deliver this number into the hands of the missionaries. As the new century opened, it seemed that a new age of a new faith was about to come to Aboriginal Queensland. After the early frustrating years, the efforts of such pioneers as Flierl and Schwarz of Hopevale, Hey of Mapoon, and Gribble showed promise of rewards that none could have imagined.

Although Gribble’s authoritarian rule was at times harsh, he was held in great respect, even loved and revered by those who remained part of the mission community at Yarrabah, and later at Forrest River in Western Australia. The long periods of his life he was willing to dedicate to the creation of his mission community (seventeen years at Yarrabah and fifteen at Forrest River) allowed the Aborigines to adjust to his ways. His commitment to Aboriginal people and his encouragement of Indigenous leaders within the mission were factors that perhaps allowed them to forgive his flaring temper, his arrogance and his sometimes cruel punishments. The regime at Yarrabah was similar to that on other contemporary missions.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Yarrabah became the model for Anglican missions to Aborigines, although the relationship between the Aboriginal ‘inmates’, as they were termed by the church and the government until after the Second World War, and mission staff depended greatly on the personality of each superintendent. For, as John Best, Chaplain-Superintendent at Forrest River Mission from 1942 to 1947, remarked: ‘The Superintendent was

God'.<sup>16</sup> This system of white domination continued largely unchanged until the 1950s.

In 1895, the Queensland Government made its first attempt to develop a comprehensive Aboriginal policy when it appointed Archibald Meston as a special commissioner. His report and that of the police commissioner, WE Parry-Okeden, led to the formulation of the 1897 Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act. In 1897, the government, on Meston's advice, had sent some Aborigines living in southern Queensland to Fraser Island to isolate them from alcohol, opium, and sexual exploitation. Here they were expected to recover their health, dignity, and self-respect if left to their own devices and allowed to hunt and fish. Most had grown up within the developing colonial society and found their forced return to an unfamiliar Aboriginal lifestyle most unwelcome. Many of the women had been brought up from childhood in white settlers' houses. Home Secretary Foxton, concluded that this was not the future for Queensland's Aborigines and appealed to the churches to take charge of Fraser Island Reserve. The government would provide a yearly grant and the salary for a school teacher. The Anglican Church grasped the opportunity and requested Gribble's advice. Within two weeks, Gribble was at Fraser Island and had assumed authority.<sup>17</sup> In 1904, the Fraser Island Reserve was closed and 117 Aborigines were transferred to Yarrabah.<sup>18</sup> The Brisbane Diocese, through its ABM committee, had been providing most of the funds for Fraser Island and could not sustain the financial strain, especially when the Queensland Government reduced its subsidy. Nationally in 1905, ABM was confronted with rapidly increasing expenses from the New Guinea Mission while support for the Chinese missions in Australia and the Melanesian Mission in the South Pacific had dropped considerably. Overriding all of this was the belief that Fraser Island was an unsuitable site for an industrial mission, that is, a mission where a primary industry could be developed to provide employment and training along western lines for the Aboriginal 'inmates'.<sup>19</sup>

By 1903, the Bishop of Carpentaria, Gilbert White, was ready to establish the first of three ABM supported missions in his diocese. He and Bishop Frodsham of North Queensland requested the support of 'the whole Church' through ABM in the establishment of a mission near the mouth of the Mitchell River on the western side of Cape York Peninsula. To prevent competition by the two dioceses for support for their Aboriginal missions, the bishops requested coordination of funding through ABM. As the North Queensland Diocese had a colonist population of only 80,000 and Carpentaria a mere 12,000, neither diocese could support an Aboriginal mission from its own resources. It never occurred to

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anyone that the Aborigines should be given a higher priority than the establishment of white churches in white parishes. Yet, the two bishops justified the creation of such missions, firstly, in surprisingly elevated terms of Aboriginal rights to land as 'the original owners and inhabitants of the country'; secondly, their consequent first claim upon the spiritual commitment of the colonists to atone for dispossession; and, thirdly, the diseased and demoralised state of Aborigines subsequent to colonisation:

*Claims of Aboriginal Work*

It will scarcely be questioned that the Aborigines of the soil have a primary claim on the Missionary service of Australian Churchmen. Not even New Guinea demands our aid so imperatively as the original owners and inhabitants of the country in which we dwell, whose land we have taken and whose means of subsistence we are daily diminishing, while our vices and diseases have swept them away like a pestilence, except when they have been shielded and preserved by Missionary effort. Not only have the Aboriginal Missions a first claim on Churchmen, but they also appeal to many who are deaf to every other Missionary appeal. There is an element of justice, of reparation, of plain and obvious duty about this work which commends itself to the hardened man of the world who cannot enter into the enthusiasm of the Gospel.<sup>20</sup>

For 1903, this was an extraordinary statement. Although there was no suggestion that colonisation was wrong or unchristian, Aborigines were declared central to Australian history and first in their claim upon Christian conscience and commitment. Time would show that the bishops' values were not shared by Australians in general or the Christian churches in particular. Their optimism that the unique place of Aborigines in Australian society would be accepted even by 'the hardened man of the world' was also misplaced. For despite the emphasis given to Aboriginal people, they were still seen as dependent on missionary outreach which was equated with charity, not seen at the time as essential to the individual's expression of Christianity, nor to that of the parish church or diocese.

Gilbert White had visited Yarrabah in 1902 to study Gribble's methods and was impressed. At White's request, Gribble immediately set out overland, attaching himself to a police patrol for protection. He inspected the area White had previously visited. White and the Northern Protector of Aborigines, Walter Roth, had intended to meet Gribble's party at the proposed site of the mission. As Gribble's party was delayed, this did not eventuate but the subsequent reports from Roth, White, and Gribble to Queensland's Home Secretary, Foxton, led to the gazettal of five hundred

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square miles (approximately 130,000 hectares) between the Mitchell and Nassau rivers as an Aboriginal reserve. Gribble made another two inspections before selecting a lagoon the Aborigines called Trubanaman as the site for the mission. Between May and July 1905, White and Gribble laid the foundations for the Mitchell River Mission. A number of Aboriginal Christians from Yarrabah had accompanied Gribble's overland expeditions: James Noble and his wife Angelina, Peter Bendigo, John Grady, Ernest Bungie, and Dinaroo. John Grady and Bendigo, who came from the area, remained at Trubanaman with the white missionaries, Miller and Williams. Miller, the first superintendent, was soon succeeded by the Rev. Selwyn Chase.<sup>21</sup> Mitchell River was then gradually developed as an industrial mission like Yarrabah. Increasingly the cattle industry became its industrial base. Associated with it was the supply of pastoral workers to other northern cattle stations.

The next Aboriginal mission to be developed with ABM support was in 1913 at Forrest River in the far north of Western Australia. The desire to establish a mission in north-west Australia had a long history. JB Gribble's 1885 attempt to establish a mission on the Gascoyne River was aborted the following year by the Anglican Church in Western Australia as a result of the opposition of the colonists. Another decade passed before the next attempt to establish an Aboriginal mission was made.<sup>22</sup> Harold Hale, son of the first bishop of Perth, spent some time at Yarrabah studying Gribble's methods before, in 1896, attempting to re-establish the Gascoyne Mission. As he soon concluded that this area was unsuitable, the Western Australian Government offered an alternative site at Forrest River, north-west of Wyndham. Here two of the five missionaries were attacked by Aborigines so the mission was moved within a few months to be adjacent to Wyndham and then abandoned in 1897.<sup>23</sup> In April 1913, Bishop Trower of the North West attempted to establish a diocesan mission at Forrest River under Robins, the Anglican priest at Derby. Both Trower and Robins had missionary experience. Although there was no support and some outright opposition from the Kimberley pastoralists, the mission was established at Hale's old site. At the outset, Robins was confident and optimistic but left the mission in November 1913, thoroughly cowed by the Forrest River Aborigines.

At this time Ernest Gribble was rector of Christ Church, Gosford. He had been ordered to leave Yarrabah in 1909 in a state of physical and emotional collapse. In September 1913, Bishop Trower telegraphed for his temporary assistance in re-establishing Forrest River Mission. With a promptness that reflected his enthusiasm, Gribble arrived in Wyndham in December 1913. Although just as vulnerable to the hostility of the

numerous Aborigines as the others who had attempted to move into the area, he established a working relationship with the local Yeidji, Wembra, Andjedja and Arnga people without much difficulty. James and Angelina Noble, Aboriginal Christians from Yarrabah, joined him in April 1914. Gribble stayed at Forrest River Mission until 1928, the Nobles until 1933, and together they established Forrest River as an industrial mission modelled on Yarrabah. Gribble and later superintendents struggled against an uncertain rainfall, limited agricultural and pastoral potential, remoteness, and extraordinarily difficult communications with the outside world to make Forrest River Mission economically viable, or at least a major contributor to its own economy. The paternalistic authoritarian domination by white missionaries persisted unquestioned by the Perth committee of ABM, who had immediate responsibility for the mission, or the ABM board and executive council until the 1950s. Any attempts by Aborigines in the mission compound or in the camps adjacent to the mission to challenge missionary authority were effectively quashed, if necessary with the assistance of the Wyndham police.<sup>24</sup> John Best, superintendent from 1942 to 1947, summed up the Forrest River Mission experience: 'The mission has never flourished and its whole history is the story of a never ceasing struggle against environment and circumstances to keep it in existence'.<sup>25</sup> As we shall see, this was the white missionary perspective of the Forrest River experience.

Forrest River Mission was a small part of the vast (1.6 million hectare) Marndoc Aboriginal Reserve, which the Western Australian Government had created in 1911 to provide hunting grounds for the preservation of the local Aboriginal people. They were able to live traditional satisfying lives which most of them considered much more attractive than living under the autocratic Gribble regime and those which followed. This entailed living within the compound and surrendering their children to the dormitories where they lost control of their children's culture and their future. If they wanted to work for whites, they could live in the camp outside the compound and move on. They also had stations like Nulla Nulla where their labour was needed for the pastoral and agricultural pursuits being developed there. The government had excised one-fifth of the Marndoc Reserve after the First World War as part of its War Service Land Settlement Scheme. Leopold Overheu and Frederick Hay occupied Nulla Nulla in 1922 and needed Aboriginal labour to harvest and weed their cotton and peanut crops.

In 1928, there were only 111 'inmates' at Forrest River Mission, more than half from beyond the Marndoc Reserve, most were under seventeen

years of age, many sent there from distant places by the government to become part of the Stolen Generation. Thirty-seven were pensioners.<sup>26</sup>

Another decade was to pass before the next ABM Aboriginal mission was established, at Lockhart River on the east coast of Cape York Peninsula. In the meantime, however, in 1919, ABM's Aboriginal sub-committee made a creative attempt to rethink its Aboriginal missionary policy and practice. Bishop Gilbert White who was then pioneering another new diocese, Willochra, in South Australia chaired the sub-committee and was the author of its report. The language was still paternalistic. The Aborigines on missions were still referred to as 'inmates'. There was still the belief that Aborigines were a doomed race unless they were segregated from contact with 'white civilisation'.

White pointed out the tokenism of the missionary outreach in meeting this limited aim. All the denominations combined had only twelve missions to 'wild Aborigines' in the north of Australia, containing no more than 2400 Aboriginal residents and having contact with approximately twice that number of non-residential Aborigines, a combined total of 7000 Aborigines at most that the Christian churches had any contact with. White believed this to be about one-tenth the estimated Aboriginal population of Australia. The conclusion the sub-committee reached was that the churches were neglecting 90 per cent of the Aborigines in Australia and thus dooming most of them to oblivion while they concentrated on a cosseted minority. The most experienced missionary bishop in Australia commented:

The Mission native is more or less of a hot-house product. Many of the natural factors of life are necessarily eliminated. He is cared for in all things, and the discipline of the struggle for existence is removed.<sup>27</sup>

While the sub-committee went on to stress a loving indulgence allowed to the Aborigines that mission Aborigines might have had difficulty recognising, it clearly depicted the dependence on the white missionary structure that mission practices inculcated. White suggested firstly that the missions should 'endeavour to save and influence the whole people even if Christian endeavour takes a less concentrated form', and secondly, that the missions should prepare Aborigines for assimilation into the wider Australian community. 'What we want', urged White, 'is to develop the Aborigines and half-castes in such a way that they may be fitted to hold their own in the future, and to make them of real service to the State, while increasing and developing their self-respect'.<sup>28</sup> The rejection of the policy of paternalistic segregation in favour of paternalistic assimilation

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did not become commonwealth and Western Australian policy, as we have seen, until 1951 and was not accepted by Queensland until 1957.

It was beyond the resources of the churches to implement a policy that reached out to all Aborigines in northern Australia. White suggested that the commonwealth, Queensland and Western Australian governments establish a further twelve stations for Aborigines and 'half-castes' not more than twenty-five miles (forty kilometres) from the coast, with outstations on the coast, plus another four inland stations. Together with the existing Aboriginal missions, this would have provided a network of stations not more than 240 kilometres apart across northern Australia in the two states and the Northern Territory which was administered by the Commonwealth Government. Health services and the administration of these reserves were to be the responsibility of the relevant governments. Each reserve would have one chaplain provided by the churches, the reserves being apportioned to interested churches in proportion to the numbers of each denomination in the national census, a condition that would have favoured the Anglicans. The school teacher was to be paid for by the government but appointed by the denomination concerned. White suggested that the cattle industry could be developed on each of these northern missions. Despite the fact that White had pointed out the unrealistic expectations the public had that missions should become economically self-sufficient, he believed that the infusion of sufficient capital by the governments and the development of community infrastructures would allow these reserves to become self-supporting, and even to repay the government its initial capital investment. White also suggested that the Aborigines could be used as 'a permanent corps of drilled but unarmed scouts' to patrol the almost empty north in peace and to serve as a coast watch and coast guard in war. It would 'save the State from real dangers and be one-tenth the cost of any system of coast guard'.<sup>29</sup>

Given the grey sameness of policy and practice in Anglican missions throughout this whole period after the foundation of each mission was accomplished, the 1919 proposal of ABM's Aboriginal sub-committee leaps out of the archival records at the unwary historian. More amazingly, the Board endorsed it.<sup>30</sup>

This scheme, which would have accelerated the change in government and mission policies by over thirty years, brought no known constructive response, although many of its suggestions would later eventuate for other reasons. It would have required the three governments and the various churches to take Aborigines seriously and to regard them as potentially equal citizens. It would have entailed a coordinated approach, a hefty investment of developmental capital, and the creation of costly community

infrastructures and services. It would have also meant rejecting the concept that Aborigines were societal failures only in need of Christian charity. Although the proposal was a generation ahead of its time, there were certainly negative aspects. Thousands more Aborigines in the Northern Territory, Queensland, and Western Australia would have been brought under a paternalistic control that most would escape for a generation.

As early as 1921, there were negotiations between Bishop Newton of Carpentaria and the Queensland Government with a view to establishing a mission for Aborigines on the east coast of Cape York Peninsula. The first site suggested was the Pascoe River, about 64 kilometres north-east of the eventual site of the Lockhart River Mission. Although the Queensland Government offered a foundation subsidy of £200 and a further £200 per year thereafter, ABM was unable to provide its estimated share of funding of £300 foundation cost and £300 per year.<sup>31</sup>

In the previous year, Yarrabah had been apportioned an annual grant from ABM of £1900, Mitchell River Mission £1529, and Forrest River Mission £1500. Out of a total budget of £32,729, £6279 (19 per cent) was to be provided for the running costs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander missions. The board believed it needed a further £3000 to maintain the existing Aboriginal missions adequately yet it had to pare its 1920 budget to £31,000. The board estimated that its 1921 budget had to be raised by another 20 per cent. This was not the time for a new mission.<sup>32</sup>

By April 1924, the board was able to respond favourably to the Queensland Government's request for the establishment of a mission in the area. The Lockhart River site was chosen to avoid interference from existing and future mining operations. The Queensland Government had raised its support at the request of the then Bishop of Carpentaria, Stephen Davies, to an establishment grant of £1000 with an additional £500 per year for running costs. ABM agreed to contribute £500 per year.<sup>33</sup> The Queensland Government was clearly indicating the value it continued to place on missions as cheap agencies of control and social welfare.

HR (Harry) Rowan was licensed as a lay missionary and appointed superintendent. As with the other missions, Rowan made optimistic attempts to set up a western industrial base centred on agriculture, trochus shell and bêche-de-mer fishing, and later mining. The Aborigines in the area had experienced contact with pearl-shell and bêche-de-mer fishermen and sandalwood gatherers since the 1870s, and later with miners. A few South Sea Islanders, Torres Strait Islanders, and white settlers had established permanent or semi-permanent bases. Japanese pearl-ers visited the area and they and the other intruders exploited the Aborigines for

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their labour and possibly used opium and certainly other trade goods to sexually exploit the women. The population had been greatly reduced on the north eastern coast of Cape York Peninsula because of this prolonged contact, through introduced diseases such as venereal disease and influenza. A modified form of English was widely used.<sup>34</sup> Chase stressed that, though the Lockhart River Aborigines had experienced extensive prolonged contact and their culture had considerably changed as a result, a cultural continuity predominated that was, even in the 1980s, distinctively Aboriginal.<sup>35</sup> In different ways, this is true of all the Aboriginal communities dealt with in this study.

The people who formed the Lockhart River Mission were composed of a number of Aboriginal groups originally living on a 200-kilometre stretch of land north and south of the mission site. A sandalwood gatherer and fisherman, Hugh Giblet, had exercised control over the Aboriginal community at Lloyd Bay. After Giblet's death, this community became the nucleus for the Lockhart River Mission.<sup>36</sup>

Throughout its existence as a mission, Lockhart River was inadequately staffed; insufficient capital was invested to provide an acceptable level of community facilities for either European staff or Aboriginal residents or to produce a viable industrial base. Even in 1961, a report by the then superintendent, JT Currie, of the health, housing, buildings, and working



*St James' Church at the old site of the Lockhart River Mission, 1950s. Photograph by John Warby, Noel Loos Collection.*

conditions was of an isolated, colonial slum, despite the improvements John Warby had implemented throughout the 1950s. White Australia was willing to tolerate such living conditions for Aborigines and missionaries in such places as Lockhart River and Forrest River, while the pittance given for their support provided a comfortable Christian consolation to the people in the pews and the church hierarchy.<sup>37</sup> The conscience of the church towards Aborigines was easily ignored. Parishes had to become viable and staff educated and paid for, churches and cathedrals had to be built.

The establishment of the Edward River Mission was a long drawn out process. The Queensland Government gazetted the land on the west coast of Cape York Peninsula between the Mitchell River in the south and the Edward River in the north as an Aboriginal reserve on 14 January 1922; however, until November 1938, Edward River was merely an outstation of Mitchell River Mission.<sup>38</sup>

The Thaiore and Munkan Aborigines at Edward River had relatively little contact with white settlers and were considered warlike, fierce, and treacherous by the missionaries. In reality, this meant that whites intruded into the area at their own considerable risk. The legendary superintendent of the Mitchell River Mission, 'Chappie' Chapman, made brief visits between 1923 and 1938, and on at least two occasions unsuccessful attempts were made to establish a mission community. Although there was an abundant natural food supply, some Aborigines were willing to work for tobacco on the farms Chapman began establishing. In 1932, Chapman was surprised to find Aborigines visited Edward River from as far north as the Holroyd (sixty-four kilometres away) and as far east as Coen (190 kilometres away). Those visiting the mission site from the more distant areas suffered more from disease than the local Aborigines; and it may be that those from areas of greater contact were refugees from the settlers. Old Edward River Aborigines today have vivid memories of 'wars' between hostile Aboriginal groups, some of which may have resulted, at least in part from such displacement. Chapman had been powerless to prevent the more determined conflicts.

In 1928, the chairman of ABM, John Needham, expressed his fear that the Queensland Government would eventually give in to pressure from pastoralists, sandalwood-gatherers, pearl shell and bêche-de-mer fishermen, and other colonists to occupy the reserve unless the Anglicans showed 'that we care enough about the natives to make some effort on their behalf'.<sup>39</sup> In 1939, Bishop Davies of Carpentaria pointed out a surprising situation: the Aborigines were now requesting that a mission be established at the Edward River. They had visited Mitchell River Mission

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and had even allowed some of their girls to live in the dormitory. He urged that the reserve should be offered to another religious organisation if ABM would not support it.<sup>40</sup>

In 1938 Chapman was allowed by the Munkan and Thaiore and ABM to reside permanently at Edward River. He remained there, often with very few supporting staff, until 1957. He managed to introduce the people at Edward River to English and to agriculture and to develop a mission village. Because of its late establishment, Edward River was the only ABM mission in which the dormitory system was not introduced. The parents were allowed to be parents.

Chapman had been at Mitchell River since 1914, for many years as superintendent, and was, typical of the age, authoritarian and paternalistic. At Edward River, he had to make himself accepted by the people even while he was developing an alternative lifestyle for them within their midst. His acceptance was demonstrated when he was initiated by the Aboriginal elders. Such acceptance did not imply unqualified approval or a failure to acknowledge the inevitable warts in Chapman's personality.<sup>41</sup> He retired in 1957 to Mitchell River Mission and died there in 1966. His record of forty-two years of Anglican missionary service to the Aborigines is second only to that of Ernest Gribble.

Edward River Mission was the last of the five ABM supported industrial missions to be established. All exist today as Aboriginal communities. The Queensland Department of Community Services administers Yarrabah, Mitchell River Mission (now known as Kowanyama), Lockhart River and Edward River Mission (now known as Pormpuraaw). Under the Deeds of Grant in Trust legislation a great deal of the day-to-day control and decision making has been transferred to the elected community councils.<sup>42</sup> The Anglican Church is still the only religious denomination established in each of these communities although members of other Christian churches make occasional visits.<sup>43</sup> The missions have become parish churches whose active congregational support varies from community to community and from time to time. Forrest River Mission is now the Aboriginal community, Oombulgurri, which rose Phoenix-like out of the ashes of the dead and buried mission.