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The Cry for Justice and Equality

Some Exceptional Protestant Missionaries in Western Australia

Neville Green

Introduction

In 1834 Captain F.C. Irwin, the former military commandant of the Swan River Colony, returned to Ireland where he rallied support for a Dublin based Swan River mission society. This society was dedicated to provide a missionary teacher to serve the needs of the Aborigines and the colonists (Irwin 1835:133). The person chosen for this task was Dr Louis Guistiniani who arrived at Fremantle in June 1836.

The mission history of Western Australia begins with Guistiniani's arrival, and during the next 118 years at least thirty eight Christian missions were established by eight religious denominations or mission organizations. Missionaries seem to fall into one of two overlapping categories. The first group saw themselves merely as smoothing the pillow of a dying race and preparing them for a better life in the hereafter. The second group set as their primary goal the creation of a better life on earth for Aborigines. This article will review the work of five protestant missionaries in the second category who took up the cause of justice or equality. Such people stand out because they publicly challenged the prevailing attitudes and practices.

Guistiniani and the Gribbles, father and son, took up the cause of the Aborigines and through the pulpit and the press attacked the injustices that they saw. Their protests alienated sections of the European society and in the cases of Guistiniani and J.B.Gribble, their cries for justice did little to change the conditions of the Aborigines. Others such as Smithies and Pastor Hammer met the same type of injustice, yet contained their anger and directed their energies towards positive goals. Both tried to achieve the objective of equality through education and training and both pursued an assimilationist goal to prepare Aborigines for a place in European Australian society. Hammer also strove to make access into that society possible for Aborigines, but was realistic enough to realise that it was only achieved when aligned with justice and equality.

Dr. Louis Guistiniani

Dr Louis Guistiniani, who was born in Florence and educated in Rome was a convert to the Church of England. (He may have previously been a Jesuit priest.) His letter in the Perth Gazette a month after his arrival, brimmed with optimism and hinted at a government grant of land in the York district where he intended to establish a mission 'on the plan pursued by the Moravian Bretheren' (Perth Gazette, 27 Aug., 1836).

The English colony was only seven years old and was contained within the boundaries of the several Aboriginal linguistic groups which are currently referred to as Nyungars. The resistance by these groups had been persistent and bloody for the previous four years, and included the infamous massacre of Aborigines at the Murray River which had been glorified by Europeans as the Battle of Pinjarra. Settlers moving across the Darling Range to the York district had encountered fierce resistance during 1836 and retaliated with gun-fire. In a statement taken down and marked with a cross, Edward Gallop described how he had ambushed and killed a man by shooting him through the head (C.S.O. 1836:48/51).

Guistiniani demanded that Gallop be brought to Perth and placed on trial but the Governor, Sir James Stirling, ignored him. In the months that followed, Guistiniani assumed a self-appointed role of protector of the Aborigines. He aired his grievances through the columns of the *Swan River Guardian*. He wrote angry letters to the Secretary of State, Lord Goderich accusing the York settlers of flogging Aborigines and cutting off the ears of the Nyungars they shot, to keep as grisly trophies in homestead kitchens. Guistiniani's anger was also directed against the landowning members of the executive council, the Governor, and the lawyers Mackie and Moore, who were the very people who had supported the idea of a mission. He attacked the court for its treatment of Aborigines, and deplored the severity of the sentences. After the April Quarter Sessions he wrote:

> To condemn the Native to seven years imprisonment for having stolen grapes in a fenced in portion of his land, where he, from his childhood, was accustomed to dig roots for his own support, is no infringement of his liberties!!... What next? (*Swan River Guardian*, 4 May 1837)

Finally the missionary offered to defend three Nyungars who were to be brought to trial at the October Quarter Sessions. It was the first time that Aborigines had been defended in a Western Australian Court. There is some evidence that Judge Mackie and crown prosecutor Moore had lured Guistiniani into their court in order to put him in his place.

The first prisoner was Neu-an-ung, charged with stealing wheat and a sack from an Upper Swan farm. Francis Armstrong, the interpreter, explained this to Neu-an-ung who denied the theft but admitted that he ate some of the wheat, and because he was cold had wrapped the bag around his shoulders like a skin cloak. The jury listened, retired briefly, and returned with a verdict of guilty. The prisoner was sentenced to six months with hard labour.

Durgap next took his place in the dock, charged with breaking into a York house and stealing a handful of dough. Having previously pleaded guilty, the passing of sentence was a mere formality — seven years transportation.

Gogoot came to the dock having already pleaded guilty to the theft of five kilograms of fresh butter. Guistiniani questioned the Nyungar's understanding of the European concept of guilt. Through the interpreter, Gogoot admitted pleading guilty only to avoid punishment (*Swan River Guardian*, 5 Oct., 1837). Judge Mackie asked the interpreter to explain to Gogoot the meaning of the terms 'not guilty' and 'trial by jury', but Armstrong replied that it was impossible. At this admission Guistiniani launched into a long and eloquent plea to the jury which concluded with: 'So long as the Natives are unacquainted with the elementary principles of civilised Society, they ought not to be judged by the Laws of that Society' (*Swan River Guardian*, 12 Oct., 1837).

The plea was futile and Gogoot also received seven years transportation. The prisoners accepted their sentences without emotion or apparently understanding and then, roped together, they were led away. Guistiniani had been both defender and defendant in this trial. The convictions and sentences of the three Nyungar reflect the condemnation of the missionary more than any public dislike for the hapless prisoners. All his eloquence had come to naught and there were many who thought that the brash Italian had got his just desserts. The congregation at his church dwindled and finally even the Sunday service was attended only by his wife and his catechist, Abraham Jones. Guistiniani prepared to leave the colony and on 13 February 1838 he sailed aboard the *Abercrombie*.

Soon after Guistiniani's departure, the Western Australian Missionary Council opened a fund for a second priest. The Rev. Mitchell who arrived later in 1838 was the antithesis of Guistiniani. He was a quiet, unassuming Englishman with experience in India, described as a simple, faithful, laborious, self-denying man learned in Eastern languages who lived in a cottage worse than expected of an English labourer (Wollaston n.d.:78).

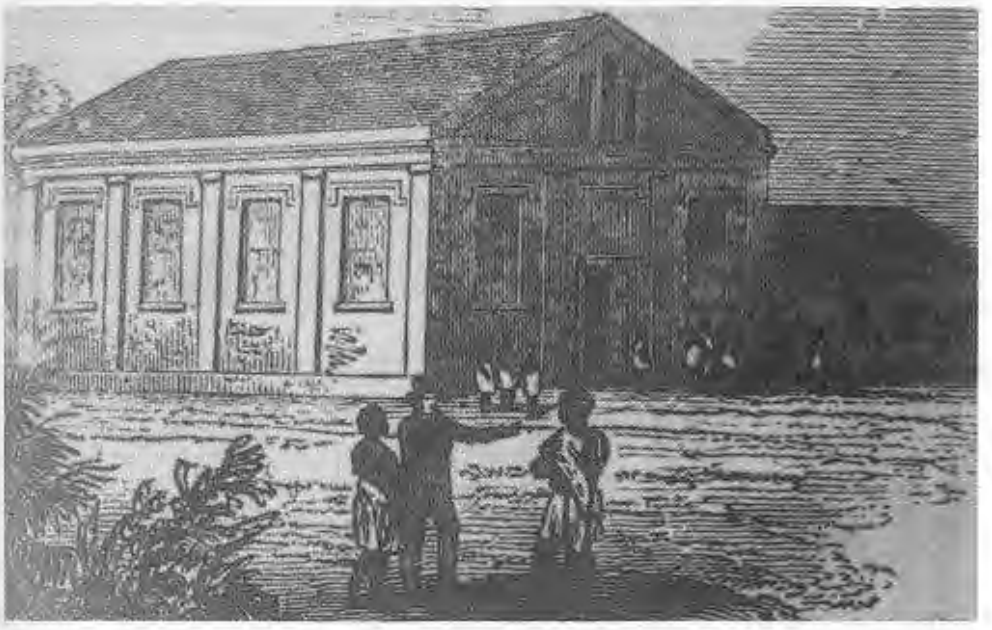
The Rev. John Smithies

By 1840 the most serious problem facing the young colony was a shortage of labour. Those who had arrived as indentured servants had served their contracts and now regarded themselves as free. It was difficult to attract labourers from England and the alternatives were to recruit Asian workers or to train the indigenous population as servants and farm labourers. John Hutt, who succeeded Stirling as Governor in 1839, initiated the latter programme by offering a land bonus for those who trained Nyungars. He later extended this offer to provide plots of land for Christian Aborigines. Hutt's policy was assimilationist in that it endeavoured to prepare Aborigines for a place in colonial society, and by 1848 an estimated 500 Nyungars were employed by the settlers. The Rev John Smithies adopted objectives that were compatible with those of the governor. The eventual collapse of Smithies' missions may be attributed to Nyungar passive resistance rather than European apathy.

The Reverend Smithies arrived in the colony in 1840. The official interpreter for the Aborigines, Francis Armstrong, provided the boat to convey him up-river from Fremantle to Perth, and recruited as rowers two ochred Nyungars each with a kangaroo skin cloak draped over his shoulders. Soon after his arrival in Perth, the leading citizens proposed the establishment of a Wesleyan mission. The document, in referring to the Aborigines, gives as one of its main objects:

> to assist by Schools and every other means in its power in Cultivating the moral and intellectual improvement of their conditions and in leading them out of their present dark and abject state to the blessings and advantages of Christianity and Civilisation. (C.S.O. 1840, 78/139)

In 1840, Smithies opened the Perth Native school in William Street. About thirty boys and girls attended, learning how to spell, count and sing psalms that Armstrong had translated into the local Nyungar language. When not at school, Sundays excepted, the children worked as servants to approved townspeople who provided their meals and clothes.



1. Pupils of the Perth Native School, c. 1842

At the completion of the first year, the board of directors of the Perth Native school examined the pupils in the presence of the Governor and a crowd of interested spectators, which included Francis Lochee, the editor of the *Inquirer*. Lochee doubted that the settlers would ever accept the educated Aborigines as equals or give them access to colonial society. With extraordinary foresight he wrote:

> It is asking too much of human nature to suppose that persons will consent to live nominally in our communion, and yet be excluded from those social advantages which they see enjoyed around them by all beside. Unless constant employment be found for the adult natives, in the towns; unless they are properly wived, and they and their families considered to form part of the general society; in short unless full equivalent be given to them for the adoption of our forms in the relinquishment of their own, we much fear that all that is now being done will have little ultimate good. (*Inquirer*, 16 Nov., 1842)

The church responded by marrying the older students. The first marriage was a simple ceremony preceded by a baptismal service. The Governor endorsed the union and promised the young couple a town allotment. In the wake of this marriage, there arose a storm of righteous indignation from the members of the Church of England, angered that sacraments of the church had been extended to the savage. There was also opposition from the Aboriginal community for there were men who by tribal law had rightful claims to the brides. The church offered flour to the suitors as compensation but this was rejected.

Guistiniani had taken up the cause of justice and lost. Smithies sought to use Christianity to give Aborigines equality in colonial society. This too was doomed to failure. The settlers approved of training Aborigines as useful servants, but they were not prepared to share the benefits of their English society. It was a form of discrimination that only emerged when the Aborigines acquired the education and skills that set them in competition with the settlers.

In 1844, the Perth Native school was making steady progress with fifteen younger children, but the sixteen older pupils, aged between thirteen and sixteen years, were resisting the mission control. That year two of the pupils died of tuberculosis, and other fatalities followed.

To counter these problems, Smithies decided to move the mission some forty kilometres north of Perth and applied to Hutt for a grant of thirty hectares of land beside Lake Goollelal at Wanneroo. Smithies chose the site because it formed a cross-roads between Aborigines moving north and south along the coastal lakes, and those travelling west from the Darling Range.

In August 1845, the pupils were transferred to Wanneroo where they cleared seven hectares of light scrub, part of which was then ploughed and planted. The boys worked at shingle splitting, brick making, sawing and gardening. They could hunt and fish for two days of the week but Sunday was reserved for religious instruction and church services. Some formal education was given, but emphasis was placed upon practical training that would prepare them for employment.

Despite the hostility of the Church of England congregation, Smithies continued with his arranged marriages. Four couples had been married by the time the mission moved to Wanneroo, including the marriage of Eliza Wobart to a young colonist, Joseph Stokes, who became an overseer and instructor at Wanneroo. By 1848, marriages between Aborigines were approved by the Anglicans and in that year four girls from the Fremantle Anglican school and four men from the Wanneroo mission were married by Bishop Short of Adelaide, who was visiting the colony.

In 1847, severe flooding forced the Wanneroo mission to close. Smithies opened a third mission at York, 100 kilometres east of Perth, but this was not successful. With its closure in 1854, the Wesleyan (later Methodist) association with Aboriginal missions in Western Australia lapsed until 1951 when it assumed responsibility for Mogumber mission, the former Government Native Settlement at the Moore River.

The apparent success of the Wesleyans revived an Anglican interest in the Nyungars. Guistiniani's Guildford mission and school was re-established by the former catechist Abraham Jones. This venture was short-lived, for in 1841, twelve of the twenty-three pupils died of influenza and the survivors returned to their families. The Fremantle Anglican mission closed in 1851 because of its proximity to the convict establishment and the children were transferred to Annesfield, a Christian school at Albany. The attempt to offer a modicum of equality via education had failed as did the attempts to establish an indigenous serf class in colonial society.

The Rev. John B. Gribble

The Rev J.B. Gribble's cry for justice must be viewed against the political and economic background of the times. In the 1850s the pastoralists began to push north from Perth rolling back the frontiers with their sheep and cattle. Throughout the Murchison, Gascoyne, Pilbara and the Kimberley they laid claim to pastoral leases often in excess of 50 000 hectares. The Aborigines they encountered were encouraged to become station employees and if they rejected these terms they were driven from their traditional lands. By 1885, the economy of the north was dependent upon Aboriginal labour which was managed at a level of indentured slavery. At this time there was a push for self-government which required Western Australia to convince the British Parliament that it was applying humane policies toward the indigenous population. The services of a renowned missionary such as Gribble, it was thought, might be regarded by England as a step in the right direction and the Gascoyne region seemed to be the appropriate location for a mission.

Gribble arrived at Fremantle from Sydney on 16 August 1885 and was welcomed by Bishop Parry (J.B. Gribble Journal, 16 August 1885). In the days that followed he met the Governor, Sir Napier Broome, who applauded the new Gascoyne mission, and the Colonial Secretary, Malcolm Fraser, who offered to provide tents until the mission was properly established. He was then interviewed by Mr Maitland Brown, the Member of the Legislative Council for the Gascoyne, who made his name in 1865 by leading a punitive expedition against a band of Garadjeri at La Grange Bay (*ibid*, 22 August).

Gribble boarded the *Otway* on 25 August and three days later he was welcomed to Carnarvon by the local magistrate, Mr Foss. During his years on the bench at Carnarvon, Foss sentenced more Aborigines to the notorious penal settlement at Rottnest Island than any other magistrate in Western Australia. As many as thirty prisoners at a time appeared before him for sheep stealing, to be convicted and bundled in chains onto the next ship south. Here too, Gribble encountered Inggada Aborigines, reduced to a dreadful condition and he noted in his journal: 'The poor creatures are in a wretched state, just burrowing into the sand like so many wild animals. Some of them quite naked' (*ibid*, 28 August).

Near the town, Gribble saw a girl of about thirteen years with a teamster who had just arrived with a load of wool. Gribble discussed this with a station manager, who confirmed that it was customary for white men to do as they wished with the black women. Gribble was deeply disturbed and noted in his journal: 'truly then it is a monstrous iniquity to be grappled with and purged out of these parts. God help me do it!' (*ibid*).

The Bishop had directed Gribble to a mission site in the Kennedy Ranges, some 400 kilometres to the east of Carnarvon but as a temporary measure he established a mission at Yankeetown on the fringe of town. On the last Sunday of August 1885, he opened Sunday School for a mixed group of European and Aboriginal children and conducted a service attended by thirty people, including six Aborigines.

In September, Gribble toured the Gascoyne to meet the pastoralists. At Meebo Station, the homestead was a single room. There were no beds so he slept the night on the slab wood table. At Millee-Millee, he was welcomed by Captain Russell, and Divine Service was attended by the Captain, four Aborigines and the Chinese cook.

Continuing, he arrived at Gascoyne Junction Station where he found six men and a woman chained to a tree awaiting the official visit of Police Magistrate Foss.

Gribble sympathised with their plight and told them of the Great Believer who would break the chains of those bound. While here, he berated two teamsters who had girls in their company and he was horrified to learn that others exploited 'their' women as travelling prostitutes (*ibid*, September 1885).

Back in Carnarvon, Gribble vented his anger to all he met, which did little except antagonise the townspeople who held public meetings to have him removed (*West Australian*, 26 Nov., 1885). At Carnarvon police station twenty-eight Aborigines convicted of cattle killing were awaiting shipment south. Gribble's dismay is apparent in his journal entry for 5 January 1886:

> Poor creatures I did pity them as chained to each other around the neck they passed me on their way to the lock-up yard. These men represented a tribe called *Predong* and they are the first of the tribe ever brought down... They had no one to represent the case from their point. Whether they were personally guilty or not had not been made clear. Whether there had been previous interference on the part of the white men was not shown. Something must be done to get the natives properly represented at such cases.

The chained prisoners were forced into the tiny hut that served as the lock-up. The mid-summer heat was intensified by the galvanised iron roof and walls and the perspiring bodies looked as though they had just been drenched with buckets of water.

A small but powerful lobby opposed Gribble, and a petition for his removal was circulated. A public meeting in December carried a motion by Messrs Gayle and Rotten for a deputation of influential settlers to wait upon the Governor to condemn the mission and its work. The deputation was led by Maitland-Brown, the member for the Gascoyne (Gribble Journal, December 1885).

Gribble retaliated by having his journal, including the details of injustice, published by the *Perth Inquirer*. The town responded with a boycott. The few Aborigines that Gribble and his son Ernest had attracted to the Yankeetown mission were coerced into signing contracts with the pearling luggers to the north to remove them from his influence.

Gribble's journal entry for 4 January 1886 was blunt: 'I have never before in all my experience met with such perfect human asses as the people at the Gascoyne are proving themselves to be'.

A second petition to remove Gribble was circulated in Carnarvon. Several who signed later sought him out and apologised. 'One said that after he had done it he could have cut his hand off for the harm he had done' (Gribble Journal, January 1886). On 22 January, Gribble arrived at the small schoolhouse where he held the Sunday service to find a poster on the door:

> OLD PARRY SENT A PARSON HERE
> HIS NAME IS J.B. GRIBBLE
> POOR SILLY WRETCH HE DAMNED HIMSELF
> TO SAVE THE LORD THE TROUBLE.

An angry Gribble returned to Perth and in a letter of 12 May 1886, he warned the Governor that he would tell the world of the ill-treatment he had witnessed at the Gascoyne. On 11 June, he addressed a public meeting at St. Georges Hall, Perth, which the *Inquirer* of 26 May advertised with a bold heading:

> LIGHT ON THE NATIVE QUESTION
> Startling Disclosures
> North West Settlers versus Missionary Efforts
> Slavery exposed
> Native's blood crying for Vengeance
> Men in high places not clean of the stain.
> Rev. J.B. Gribble at St. George's Hall,
> on Saturday evening next.
> ADMISSION: FREE
> Collection in aid of the Gascoyne Mission.

The local press, like the population it served, was divided on the Gribble issue. The *Inquirer*, owned by the Stirlings, ardently supported Gribble, while the co-proprietors of the *West Australian*, John Hackett and Charles Harper, each had an interest in northern stations and were openly in support of the Gascoyne settlers. These same men of influence were also prominent in the affairs of the Church of England and were able to exert considerable pressure on Bishop Parry who needed their contributions to build a new Cathedral.

In June 1886, Gribble travelled to Victoria where he packed the halls with tales of horror so terrible that women and children were turned away at the door (W.A.P.D. 1 Sept., 1886). He had not obtained the permission of the Bishop or the mission's committee before his departure so his license was withdrawn. Gribble was unperturbed. As he had the support of the Archbishop of Sydney and the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Society, he continued his barnstorming tour.

A scathing editorial in the *West Australian* of 24 August 1886, accused Gribble of being a 'lying canting humbug'. Gribble replied with a libel suit against the newspaper proprietors for 10,000 pounds, an unprecedented amount for those times. In his judgement address on 28 June 1887, Chief Justice Onslow expressed his sympathy for Gribble's claims, yet surprisingly the decision went in favour of the *West Australian*. John Gribble was shattered. The north-west passengers of the *Otway* were reported to have given 'three hearty groans' when news of the verdict was received, and a correspondent to the *Inquirer* observed:

> Let the many friends of the Rev. Mr. Gribble rejoice that he has been spared to perform further good work in his Master's vineyard and, poor though he is, he can well afford to laugh at the braying of asses and the bleating of very scabby sheep. (*Inquirer*, d/uk)

Gribble and his family left for Sydney. In 1890, acting on the advice of Baron Von Meuller, he re-established the North Queensland Belendenkerr mission, later to become Yarrabah. From here he wrote to his son, Ernest, for assistance. John Gribble

returned to Sydney and died soon afterwards. His gravestone in Waverley Cemetery bears the simple inscription:

> In loving memory of the Rev. John Brown Gribble, F.R.G.S.
> founder of the Warangesda mission and the blackfellows' friend,
> who fell asleep June 3rd, 1893, aged 45 years.
> "GOD IS LOVE"

In 1905, the Roth Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Conditions of Aborigines in Western Australia vindicated the claims of injustice made by Gribble.

The Rev. Ernest Gribble

The Forrest River mission in the North Kimberleys was founded in 1897 by a Church of England expedition led by Harold Hale (Gribble 1930:168). The Aborigines opposed the missionaries as vigorously as they had resisted the pastoralists ten years before. In 1888 they had driven out the Victorian Pastoral Company and they did the same with the missionaries (*ibid*:169-70).

Government policy related to reserves underwent considerable change in the first decade of this century. Cattle spearing was a major problem and the cost of maintaining Aborigines in prisons was escalating. In 1909,the Aborigines Act was amended to remove the reserve limit of 1000 hectares. Soon afterwards three Kimberley cattle station leases were purchased to form a government experimental station, Moola Bulla (Biskup 1974:99-101). The incidence of cattle spearing diminished and the government was supportive of mission stations being established in the Kimberleys. In 1912, the first Bishop of the north-west, the Rt. Rev. Gerard Frewer, re-established the Kimberley outpost as the Mission of Saint Michael of All Angels, usually referred to as the Forrest River Mission (N.W.Q., July 1913). This was located on the one and a half million hectare Marndoc Aboriginal reserve. Aborigines came to the mission in increasing numbers, at first friendly, but then more resistant to the European presence. By November 1913, the mission house was a fort with walls half a metre thick, surrounded by a barbed wire entanglement (N.W.Q., October 1913). A second collapse was imminent and Bishop Frewer sent an urgent telegram to the Reverend Ernest Gribble asking him to come to the mission.

In 1892, Ernest Gribble had taken over the Queensland Yarrabah Mission from his ailing father, the Rev. John Gribble, and built it into what was then perceived as a mission. Ill health forced his retirement in 1911 and he was placed in the relative comfort of Gosford Parish in New South Wales. Upon receiving Frewer's telegram, his duty was clear; he took leave and booked his passage to Western Australia, arriving at the Forrest River Mission in December 1913. Gribble was convinced that the Aborigines were a doomed race and that he had a God-given role to preserve the remnants. For the next fourteen years he administered the mission with autocratic paternalism. In an era when the policy of protection was diligently applied, this type of administration was often admired and rarely challenged. During these years he endeavoured to transform a traditional Aboriginal population into a self-sufficient community. The children were separated from their parents at an early age, educated in English and indoctrinated with Christian beliefs. Everyone, including the children, worked building houses of mud-brick and straw, ploughing fields,

2. Reverend E.R. Gribble preaching at Forrest River Mission, July 1914. James Noble, a Queensland Aboriginal, is by his side.

3. Confirmation group at Forrest River Mission c. 1930. Bishop Frewer and Reverend James Noble, the first Aboriginal to be ordained a Deacon in the Anglican Church

picking cotton, grading peanuts and attending stock. Gribble was intent on transforming a population of hunters and gatherers into an agricultural Christian community. He was creating an artificial society that he was determined to isolate and protect from the changing world beyond the mission (Green 1986:93).

In July 1922, the tranquillity of the Marndoc reserve was disturbed by rumours of the activities of a police party along the Durack River. Gribble wrote to the Chief Protector, A.O. Neville, to alert him to the reports being brought in by the bush people who claimed that many people had been shot and their bodies thrown into a ravine and 'the country all stink from the dead fellows' (A.F., 655/1922).

Some years later, Gladys Birch, an eye-witness to the massacre was interviewed by the writer:

> They line them up at the cliff. First place then they shoot, they chuck them on the bonfire, then other one, we're watching from further up the Durack River. They shoot another one, chuck him on the bonfire, another one, shoot him, there were about nine of them. All people, old, with long whiskers. They didn't know what was coming to them, but they shot them all. (P.I., 6 July 1977)

In 1922, a southern sector of the Marndoc reserve was excised for a land settlement venture, and taken up by two returned servicemen, Leonard Overheu and Frederick Hay, who employed a white stockman, Dunett. Two years later Dunett was charged with the attempted axe murder of Barnabas, a mission convert. Police Inspector Douglas, in a report to his Commissioner, complained that a juror had told him that the verdict of 'not guilty' had been agreed upon months before (A.F., 294/24).

Gribble was not only a priest, he was also a Protector of Aborigines; the legal guardian of adults and children alike. The murders, the cover-up, the denials, the brutality and the injustice of the acquittal, brought him to a state of despair. Then on 27 May 1926, he made a brief entry in the mission journal: 'News brought to us today that police boys and Tommy killed old Blui-nua with the butt of their rifles and threw the bodies into the water. Some natives chained.'

This was the first indication Gribble had that another police party was on the Marndoc Reserve. Two weeks later, on 9 June, the government boat arrived with stores and news that Frederick Hay had been speared by Lumbia and that a police expedition was hunting for him. Gribble had no sympathy for the deceased and noted in the mission journal: 'No doubt Hay has paid for his harsh sadistic treatment of the natives during the last few years. He certainly took women from the natives and now he has paid.' (M.J., 9 June 1926)

When the police party reached the mission Gribble offered them two of his men, Herbert Mitchell and Aldoa, who tracked and arrested Lumbia. Gribble questioned Lumbia who admitted to the killing but insisted that Hay had raped his wife and when he objected, Hay had assaulted him with a stockwhip. With this admission of guilt, Gribble took the police and prisoner into Wyndham on the mission lugger.

Upon his return he asked the Aboriginal deacon, James Noble to backtrack the police and investigate the reports of massacres. The mission journal of 21 June, provides the report that triggered a Royal Commission:

> Noble returned this evening having found the spot on the Upper Forrest [Gootgootmerrie] where the police shot and burned their

> native prisoners. He brought back a parcel of charred remains. The natives were shot on the stones in the bed of the river. Blood is still all around.

Police Inspector Douglas visited several sites on the reserve and agreed that a number of Aborigines had been shot. Gribble's demands for an inquiry stirred local opposition in the town and the shops refused to buy mission produce. When his life was threatened, two converts, Robert Roberts and Herbert Mitchell, insisted on accompanying Gribble when he took the lugger into Wyndham.

Throughout July, there was no response to his demands for an inquiry and he wrote in anger to the Archbishop of Perth:

> It has been a terrible affair. It has happened on the Aborigines reserve in their own territory and in the name of the law. I sincerely trust that this awful tragedy of innocent men and women done to death in cold blood will lead to steps being taken to render such things impossible in the future. (Gribble to Riley, Aug., 1926)

A Royal Commission, under Commissioner Woods, investigated the allegation during 1927. Unfortunately, the rains of the 1926 wet season destroyed most of the evidence. Despite this, the Commissioner concluded that at least twelve Aborigines died as a result of police action.

Gribble's claims of a police massacre made headlines around Australia and the findings of the Woods Royal Commission confirmed his role as a crusader for justice. The truth was that Gribble was a 19th century missionary; an anachronism in a changing world. Any attempt to replace him, however, would have certainly been misconstrued as the Church yielding to local demands for his removal.

Gribble had been shocked by the shooting of Aborigines on a reserve that he regarded as their sanctuary. The Royal Commission had confirmed the massacre by the police party yet the court refused to commit the police for trial. It seemed that despite his protests nothing had changed. Gribble now presented a problem to both the Church and the Aborigines Department. It was important for the mission to maintain a working relationship with Wyndham but Gribble was no longer capable of achieving that. The Chief Protector, A.O. Neville was critical of Gribble's management of the mission and in particular his inflexible control of the inmates and his obsession with 'the preservation of the remnant'. Gribble's removal was merely a matter of timing. The decision had already been made.

Dr. (later Professor) Elkin, a noted anthropologist and former Anglican priest, reported on Forrest River mission in 1928. His report, given to the Aborigines Department and the A.B.M. in Sydney, resulted in Gribble's removal. In an interview with the writer in 1978 Elkin recalled:

> He thought his job was to turn them into British subjects and salute the flag every morning. There was no depth about it. It was a very sad picture. It was on that ground alone that I asked the A.B.M. to shift him away for his own good.

Gribble's dismissal came in the same batch of mail as a letter informing him of his mother's death. He was distraught on both accounts and wrote in his personal

journal: 'News of mother's death and my trial, condemnation and dismissal without a hearing. This is all hard to bear. Yet my Master knows' (E.R. Gribble Journal, A.B.M. Sydney).

Ernest Gribble's work with Aborigines was not at an end. As though in penance for a sin he could not understand, he volunteered to be chaplain of Palm Island, a government settlement off the north coast of Queensland. He remained there until September 1957. A few months prior to his departure from Palm Island, he was honoured with the Order of the British Empire. Then, at the age of eighty-nine, he retired to Yarrabah where he died on 18 October 1957.

Pastor David Hammer

John Gribble's crusade at the Gascoyne incited a local opposition to missions that persisted long after their causes were forgotten. In 1897, Harold Hale had proposed reopening the Anglican mission but anti-mission sentiment caused the government to re-direct him to the Forrest River, north-west of Wyndham.

The Gascoyne remained free of missionaries until the arrival of Pastor David Hammer in 1945. Hammer, who had worked in the New Hebrides, was nominated by the Churches of Christ Federal Board of Missions. The living conditions of the Aborigines had changed little since Gribble's time. At Yankeetown, the surviving Inggada, Dedei and Nandu population lived in terrible single-roomed humpies which he described to Maston Bell, the board secretary:

> A few sheets of rusty iron wired together for walls, no door or windows... no furniture except a rusty iron double bed for the whole family, a few heaps of blankets, a few heaps of mangy dogs, lying amongst the rusty tins used for cooking. (Hammer to Bell, 24 Oct., 1945)

From the outset Pastor Hammer encountered strong opposition from the local member of the Legislative Assembly, Mr Frank Wise, who was also the State Premier: 'Wise has no conscience in the matter, and if he is forced to do anything he will want the mission as far away as possible... I feel I can't trust him'. (Hammer to Bell, 4 Jan., 1946). Wise was also Minister for Agriculture and Lands and his opposition seems to have produced a state of inertia in the Crown Lands Department, which continued to hedge about a decision for a grant of land to the mission. When land was eventually offered, Hammer noted caustically that it was 'practically an insult to the Lord's work here' (*ibid*).

The second problem arose when, soon after the arrival of the missionary, the police sergeant declared the town a prohibited area. Aborigines were only permitted into the town on Mondays to shop and Saturday evenings to attend the open-air movies. Here was a dilemma — the mission permit restricted its activities to a town forbidden to Aborigines. So Hammer took the gospel to the fringe dwellers knowing he was contravening the conditions of the permit. To Bell he confided, 'If it becomes known to our friend the Premier, it seems quite likely that we would have some instructions to clear out' (4 Jan., 1946).

The townspeople were suspicious of the mission, and their experience with Gribble's mission sixty years before was affecting Hammer's efforts (Hammer,

Prayer letter, 1 Feb., 1946). Like Gribble, the new pastor toured the Gascoyne to elicit support and seek a good location beyond the town. All but one pastoralist received him cordially but the station attitudes towards the Aborigines was disturbing. Most did not even provide accommodation for their regular workers who were forced to throw together crude humpies. The responses to the proposed mission were equally varied. Said one, 'It would be a tragedy to have a mission in this district' (Report to Board, Oct., 1945).

When Gribble returned from his grand tour he went on the attack. Hammer, by contrast, returned to Carnarvon to ponder the situation and concluded that the pastoralists objection was not to the actual mission, but to their own preconceived ideas of a mission as a place that would withdraw Aborigines from the local workforce.

Hammer's letters show that he was just as angered by the local attitudes towards the Aborigines as Gribble had been. But while Gribble launched an ineffectual frontal attack, Hammer worked quietly and determinedly towards his objectives. It is after this tour that Hammer clearly defined the roles of the mission in terms intended to allay the concerns of both the pastoralists and the townsfolk. These aims may be summarised as:

1. To provide education and manual training for the children.
2. To care for the elderly and the indigent.
3. To provide a counter attraction for the Yankeetown fringe dwellers. (N.T., Jan., 1946)

The first aim implied an intention to train Aboriginal children as farm hands and domestics, which would please the pastoralists. The second would overcome a growing social problem and the third might clear out a trouble spot. The last two were attractive to the town.

In December, Hammer was invited to present the case for the mission to a meeting of some forty pastoralists. They asked a number of questions, and to Hammer's surprise a resolution in support of the mission was carried unanimously. The decision by the Gascoyne pastoralists did not go unnoticed by the Premier whose own opposition seemed to alter with the tide of electoral opinion.

Not all station owners were on his side. G. Gordon Gooch wrote to *The Northern Times* of 4 Jan., 1946, publicly stating his opposition to the mission. Hammer's response was immediate and cleverly worded. He praised the pastoralists as open-minded, fair men with an intelligent interest in any plan which touched on the well-being of the Aborigines and added, 'I am loath to believe that Mr Gooch is less open-minded than the average.' Hammer also took advantage of his response to Gooch to publicise the aims of the mission.

Hammer's main opposition now lay within the town, where people had no objection to a mission so long as it was far away. Their motive was to get rid of the Aborigines. Hammer writes, 'they are neither friends to natives, or the Lord, or to us.' (Hammer to Secretary, 4 Jan., 1946).

Hammer's place in Gascoyne mission history is enhanced by two factors. The first was his devotion to the Aboriginal children and his high hopes for their future. The second was his disciplined response to the prejudice and injustice he encountered at Carnarvon.

Soon after his arrival, Pastor Hammer commenced Sunday school in the dry bed of the Gascoyne River. These informal sessions inspired the confidence of the parents who then pleaded with the missionary to open a day school. A few Aboriginal children attended the Catholic school but most were excluded from town schools. It was a Catch 22 situation. Children could attend school if they were clean, but the fringe-dwelling existence to which they were condemned made this impossible. The declaration of the town as a prohibited zone added another dimension of hardship. No home had refrigeration, or even a food safe and in a situation where food could only be purchased on Mondays, the children went hungry for most of the week. Hammer fumed to the Board secretary:

> I have kept fairly quiet, pending developments of mission land... but am not at all convinced that I am doing God's will in keeping quiet about an injustice like that, simply to help us in another matter. (Report to Board, Dec., 1945)

The mission was in a delicate situation and a freehold site was desperately needed. Gribble's former town mission reserve was available but it flooded when the Gascoyne rose. The government would not release land close to the town but countered with an offer at Rocky Pool, nearly 100 kilometres away. Hammer considered a petition to the Premier but feared the consequences:

> I find myself doubtful about a petition, at any rate it means stirring everyone up, making some for, and others against, and one has to start off then in a glare of publicity. (Hammer to Bell, 4 Jan., 1946)

The quest for a mission block close to Carnarvon became a covert operation. A sympathetic station owner suggested a seventy acre block owned by a Mr. Zeddi. It was less than ten kilometres from town with good water prospects. Zeddi was a kangaroo shooter in the Roebourne district and Hammer sought him out and closed the deal before the townspeople could block the sale.

In May 1946, the Hammer family pitched their tents on the block and commenced building a mission house, dormitories and school. The response from Aboriginal parents was overwhelming; they wanted their children to be educated, 'to have a chance'. School commenced with children crowding around the kitchen table with simple lessons as most had no previous schooling.

The mission gained an unexpected ally in the local headmaster. Carnarvon had an overcrowded two-teacher school but he offered to enrol the children. The six most promising pupils were enrolled in this bold venture in February 1947. The town reacted as it had with Gribble. The issue was raised at the monthly meeting of the Returned Servicemen's League which declared an immediate boycott of the school bus because it picked up Aborigines. The boycott was extended to the mission. Hammer recalls those difficult days:

> It was an agonizing situation to find that when we came into town for supplies, people who had been warm and friendly just looked right past us, or crossed over to the other side of the street. (Hammer 1976:152)

As with Gribble, a petition against the mission was circulated. Anti-mission feeling simmered. The editor of the *Northern Times*, a quiet supporter of the mission, reported on the March meeting of the Carnarvon School Parents and Citizens Association with a bold heading across the width of the page.

PROTEST AT NATIVE CHILDREN FROM THE MISSION ATTENDING THE CARNARVON STATE SCHOOL

Pastor Hammer attended the meeting and faced a barrage of hostile questions. With quiet reason he countered the prejudice of the crowd until finally his most outspoken critic came to his feet: 'Mr Hammer has the answer for everything. But we want him to know that we just don't want niggers in our school' (*ibid*:154).

But like it or not, providing the children were clean and free of head lice, they could not be excluded from school. It seemed the mission had triumphed. But, in January 1948, the Education Department advised Hammer that the children could not continue at the town school. In a compromise action it would build and staff a school at the mission. Hammer could fight the town in one corner and the government in another, but with both aligned against him he saw the wisdom of yielding.

In the years that followed, the mission school proved its pupils were the equal of Europeans in both sporting and academic achievement. Eventually in 1955, the white parents approached the mission to enrol the middle primary and older children at the town school. This was not an expression of town guilt at past prejudice. The reasons were pragmatic — the town needed a high school and could only achieve this status if it accepted Aboriginal children. This was an era when the government policy for Aborigines had changed from protection to assimilation. Once again, Aborigines were to be merged with the mainstream population rather than remain separated on missions. At Carnarvon the policy had a measure of success, and in 1959 the mission school closed and up to a hundred children accommodated by the mission were bussed into the town school.

Pastor Hammer left Carnarvon in 1951 and spent five years with the ministry in South Australia. He returned to Carnarvon in 1956 and continued with the mission until 1961. He died in retirement in December 1984.

Both Gribble and Hammer opposed the rampant prejudice and injustice at the Gascoyne. Both were committed to the cause of Aboriginal equality. Gribble's self-righteousness and pride became a self-destructive force. Hammer, by contrast, harnessed his sense of purpose to a rational determination. Gribble had confronted the issues in an irrational manner. He did not distinguish allies from enemies and like a dog in a frenzy bit every leg that approached him. Hammer's opposition was equally formidable but he worked quietly to achieve his Christian goals.

Conclusion

The Nyungar population of metropolitan Perth was rapidly dispossessed of their lands and decimated by introduced diseases such as whooping cough, influenza and measles. By the end of the 19th century the descendants of those with whom Guistiniani and Smithies had been concerned lived in small bands. Some camped beside the lakes on the fringes of Perth and others had retreated to the Maamba reserve about twenty kilometres from the city.

The Forrest River mission was closed by the Anglican church in July 1968, and the Aborigines so jealously protected by Ernest Gribble became refugees living a pauperised existence on the town reserves at Wyndham. In 1972, the elders, including Robert and Louisa Roberts, led the mission families back to the Forrest River to establish the community, now renamed Oombulgurri.

By quiet yet persistent protest, Pastor Hammer had broken the nexus of Gascoyne prejudice and paved the way for better opportunities for Aboriginal people. Forty years after the Churches of Christ mission opened, Carnarvon has three qualified Aboriginal teachers in the town schools and another eight have graduated. Many more Aborigines with mission associations at Carnarvon and elsewhere have become achievers in Australian society.

The cry for justice and equality is still heard but today the voice is frequently Aboriginal. Justice under the law is still an issue; two per cent of the State population contribute thirty per cent of the jail population. Equality remains a distant goal for many. It is an Australian myth that education and equality are the same. It is also a myth that education provides access to Australian society. In a nation where Aborigines are the most under-represented group in business leadership, politics and the professions, Frances Lochee's 1842 prophecy is still valid. Education without access is worthless.

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Abbreviations Used Refer to Battye Library Sources

P.G.	*Perth Gazette.*
S.R.G.	*Swan River Guardian.*
C.S.O.	Colonial Secretary's Office Records.
Inq.	*Inquirer.*
W.A.	*West Australian.*
W.A.P.D.	Western Australian Parliamentary Debates.
A.F.	Aborigines Files.
N.T.	*Northern Times.*
N.W.Q.	*North West Quarterly*
W.A.M.S.	Western Australian Missionary Society.
A.B.M.	Australian Board of Missions