

KIMBERLEY CAMEOS: BROOME, BIRDS AND ABORIGINAL ART

At the Society's meeting on 7 February 1996, the audience heard cameo presentations on three individual topics. The first speaker was an old Broome identity, Thomas Dampier Chapple, whose parents arrived in the pearling port in 1901. Tom was born there and recalled some of his childhood in a talk entitled "Snippets from the Early Days of Broome". A story about growing up on goat's milk, which was so rich that he ended up being 14 stone when he went away to school, at the age of 14, drew some laughs, as did a few of his other stories.

Tom's tales gave us insight into an unusual childhood spent with a multi-racial background of Aborigines, Malays, Koepangers, Chinese and Japanese, the latter being the leading pearl shell divers, and the odd English remittance man. This racial mixture caused much tension, and fighting was common, but there was also entertainment through such venues as the Sun Picture Gardens. Ted Hunter opened this silent movie venue in 1916, and we heard how the tram delivered patrons to the front door under the watchful eye of the owner. The Sun Picture Gardens still function today, and the place is recognised as an important heritage site.

It was clear that Tom has many more yarns to tell—perhaps none as comical as the one we heard about the Asian cook and the one-legged "chooks"—and that he is very much a living part of the history of the town of Broome. We look forward to more reminiscences in the future.

Our second speaker was the well-known photographer of natural history and author of many books, Michael Morcombe, who spoke about "Wildlife Photography in the Kimberley". We heard about his first Kimberley trip, which was done in 1967, driving a Holden panel van with a faulty radiator in late October. Michael was with Malcolm Lewis (a fellow Kimberley Society member) concentrating on the south west part of the area, and they got no further north than the King Leopold Ranges.

His next trip was to Drysdale River and Mitchell Plateau, which they had all to themselves. Here he told a story about having an olive python in one hand and a giant spider on a stick in the other, trying to keep them apart! A flight to Koolan Island and photographs of the black kites hovering over the world's most picturesque rubbish tip were also part of this trip.

Birds are Michael's favourite subject and he delighted us with slides of the Kimberley's best, too beautiful and numerous to mention. But the lengths the photographers go for a good shot of birds in nests was astounding. The height of the scaffolding necessary to construct a flimsy hide beside a giant gum tree was amazing and they really deserve every good picture they get.

Pat Vinnicombe was our final speaker. An anthropologist and archaeologist currently working with the Aboriginal Affairs Department, she spoke on "Contemporary Aboriginal Paintings from Turkey Creek". The community at Turkey Creek, which is located between Halls Creek and Kununurra, is known as Warmun, and artists from the area include Queenie McKenzie and the internationally known Rover Thomas.

We were privileged to see not only Pat's excellent slides of the artists and their work but also some of the actual artefacts which have been used in dances and were loaned by Subiaco art dealer Mary Macha, who was a guest at the talk. Pat spoke of the role of the eagle hawk and kangaroos in the mythology of the area, and she also explained the ways in which some paintings represent the country of the artist. Of great interest was her description of how the dot painting techniques of the Warmun people differ from those of many other Aboriginal people and, in this regard, we heard how the people have adapted their art forms to reflect the introduction of new mediums into their society. Put very simply, the light coloured dots in the Warmun paintings have evolved from the earlier practice of using small tufts of fibres from the coats of animals to decorate ceremonial boards that were carried during dances. Pat also mentioned that the colours used by the artists are still made from the traditional materials and illustrated this point with slides of women out collecting these materials.

As with the other two speakers, we felt that we had had no more than a glimpse into an area about which there was so much more to learn. We look forward to an opportunity to see and hear more at future meetings.

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