



# BOAB BULLETIN

No. 135

August 2016

## NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETINGS

commencing 7.15 for 7.30 p.m.

**Dalkeith Hall, 97 Waratah Avenue, Dalkeith**

**Wednesday, 3 August 2016**

**“Kimberley 1972- 74 and Kimberley Horse Disease”**

**Rick Fenny (Red Dog Vet part 3)**

**Wednesday, 7 September 2016**

**“Warmun Aboriginal health and wellbeing program”**

**David Rose (Gija Total Health)**

Please note that, with many of our speakers involved in work-related travel, this program may change at short notice. Should a speaker not be available, the topic may differ on the evening.

Members and visitors are invited to stay for supper after the meetings.

The Society asks a \$2.00 hospitality fee from non-members.

### THE NATURAL WORLD OF THE KIMBERLEY – A ONE DAY SEMINAR

The full program for our seminar of 15 October 2016 was published in the June issue of the *Boab Bulletin* and in a printed flyer that is available at our monthly meetings and on our website. To find it on the website, click on the tab titled “About the society”, then on “General Meetings”, and scroll down to find both the [program](#) and the [registration form](#).

One small change to the program saw the title of the presentation by Adjunct Professor Kevin Kenneally AM expanded to read ‘The Jungle Jigsaw – Kimberley Rainforests A Focus of Diversity’.

The seminar starts at 8.45 a.m. at The University Club, The University of Western Australia. The four sessions will be geology and plants, animals and sky, sea and coast, and protecting the environment. Early bird registration (\$120) has been extended to August 31st and it costs the same as a member’s registration. Full registration for non-members is \$140. Concessional registration for students is \$90. Enquiries to Hamish McGlashan (tel. 08 9381 1698 or [hemcglash@iinet.net.au](mailto:hmcglash@iinet.net.au)).

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Fascination with the Kimberley as a wilderness or cultural experience remains high with travellers across the country and beyond, and there seems to be an ever-increasing number of cruise ships operating along the coast at this time of year. On a recent trip to the Prince Regent National Park with a group of Society members, we had to juggle our planned itinerary around the availability of helicopters from Mitchell Plateau as they were heavily booked by various cruise operators for scenic flights. Ground-based tourism is also booming with facilities springing up to cater for the demand from one end of the Kimberley to the other.

Just this week there was an expansive series of articles in the *West Australian* travel section about the Gibb River Road, its [accommodation options](#), and some of the 'characters' met *en route*. The 700 km road is described as 'one of the world's great drives' by Stephen Scourfield. He also gives [Derby](#) a big tick as a town with a warm heart (but we knew that already).

Also in the press this week some impressive panoramic photographs of the King George and Mitchell Falls by well known snapper Ken Duncan, who visited the Kimberley recently to help train Wunambal Gaambera rangers in photographic skills. The article, in the *Weekend Australian*, recalled photos taken in the Kimberley in the 1940s by Duncan's father, missionary Jim Duncan. Maybe this recent trip will result in another spectacular book of Kimberley panoramas by Ken.

Our own trips to the Kimberley this year reinforced the beauty of this spectacular and awesome landscape. Where else in the world can you fly for several hours along an incredible coast (Broome to Mitchell Plateau) seeing only minimal signs of human activity on the ground below? And to be dropped into a serene wilderness (Prince Regent National Park) by helicopter, where it seems that no one has ever been before – until you find the incredible rock paintings high above the creeks in fabulous rock shelters.

Let's hope we can continue to enjoy this priceless treasure that is the Kimberley for many years to come.

*Mike Donaldson*

## FUTURE KIMBERLEY SOCIETY MEETINGS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Speaker</u>	<u>Topic</u>
Oct 5	Emma Dalziell	Rare water lily and related plants in the Kimberley
Nov 2	Brennan Rose	Early history of Quanbun Station
Dec 7	Kim McCreanor	Animal Management in Rural & Remote Indigenous Communities (the speaker being the CEO, AMRRIC)

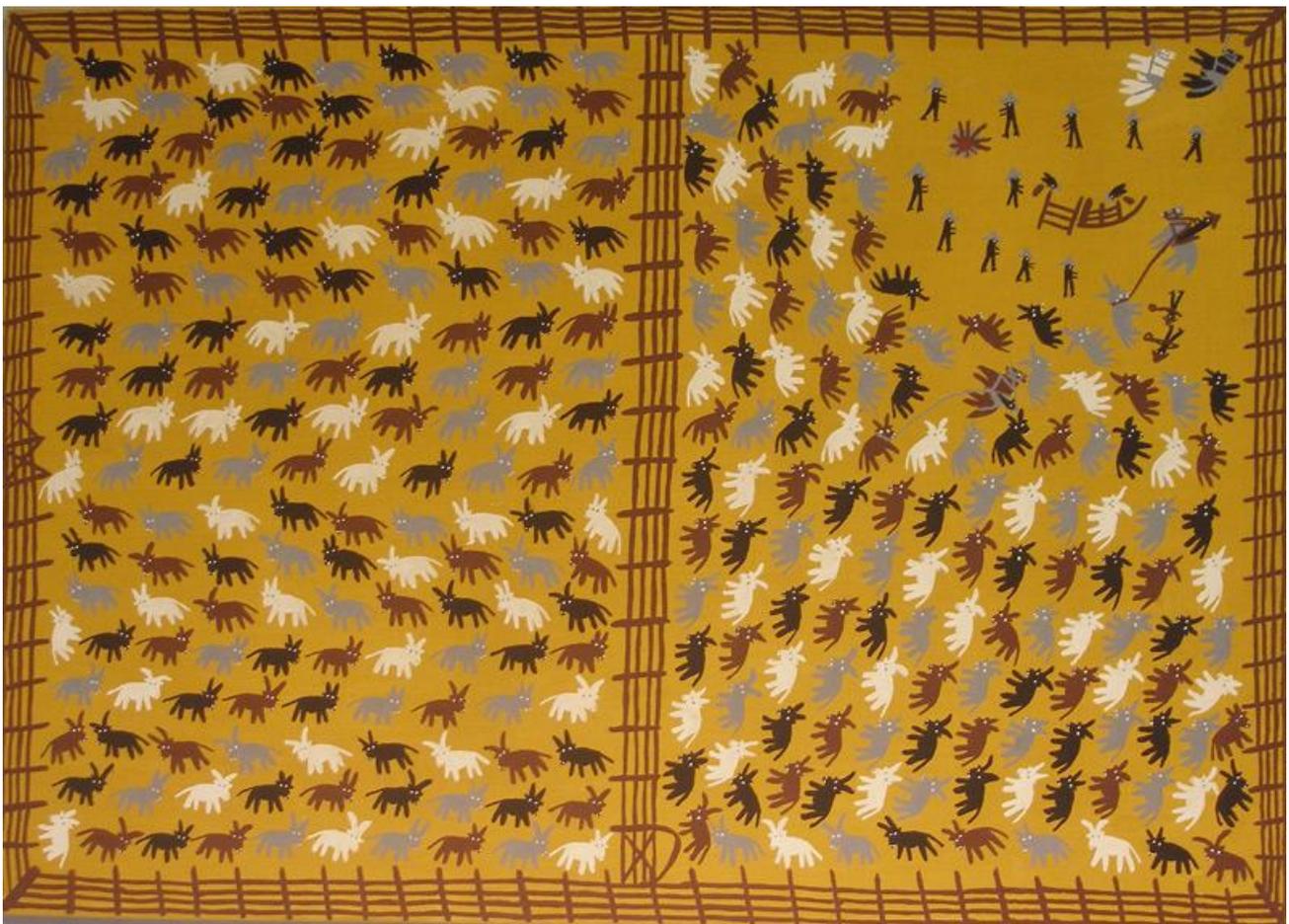
## SUMMARIES OF PAST TALKS

Our success rate in obtaining summaries of past talks is improving but is still less than we would like to see. Efforts to fill some of the gaps will continue. The minutes of the 2016 AGM have yet to be published but will appear in a future newsletter.

## THE ART OF STATION TIME

On 6 April 2016, **Darren Jorgensen**, Senior Lecturer in art history at the University of Western Australia, presented an illustrated talk to the Kimberley Society on the topic of art made by Aboriginal people about 'Station Time' in the Kimberley and across Australia. His summary of the talk follows.

In the Kimberley and elsewhere in Australia, indigenous people and others use the expression 'Station Time' to describe the era when Aboriginal people lived and worked on sheep and cattle stations. It comes after the 'Killing Time', a lawless period when some police and pastoralists employed the gun to 'clear' land of its occupants. There is also the 'Settling Down Time' that describes the transition between these two periods. Today, those who worked on cattle stations often speak fondly of Station Time, because the people who worked with livestock were able to put into practice their bush skills and knowledge of the land, particularly while they were on horseback.



Alan Griffiths, Ithjaroong - Rose's Yard 100 x 140 ochre on canvas. (Courtesy of Waringarri Arts)

While historians of Station Time argue over whether Aboriginal people were indentured labourers, serfs or slaves on stations, artists like [Alan Griffiths](#) memorialise the period with pictures of work. Griffiths grew up partly on Victoria River Downs Station in the Northern Territory, and was partly raised in the bush as his white complexion meant he was vulnerable to being taken away for adoption. A State Living Treasure, he paints in the studio of the [Waringarri Aboriginal Arts](#) in Kununurra, who then sell his works and manage his career.

This painting shows an intimacy with working on stations that is very different to the kind of paintings made by non-indigenous or “whitefella” artists. In non-indigenous Australian art, stations are generally depicted in the European tradition of the pastoral painting, often with sheep or cattle looking peaceful in landscapes dominated by gum trees. So it is that Griffiths and artists like him are part of an alternative history of art about the pastoral industry in Australia, one that is about labour rather than nice scenery.



Mervyn Street, Droving, acrylic on canvas, 60 by 120cm. (Courtesy of Mangkaja Arts)

A second Kimberley artist who depicts station life is [Mervyn Street](#). In Street’s work it is possible to see this tendency for Aboriginal artists to make ‘action scenes’ that are very different to paintings of the outback that typify the history of Australian art. Street, who paints in the studio of [Mangkaja Arts](#) in Fitzroy Crossing, and is also Chair of its board, says of Kimberley stockmen that ‘They liked their work—worked for no money . . . I know it was hard work, but it was good fun, it was a good life.’

In both labour and art it is possible to say that Griffiths and Street point the way to a ‘middle ground’ that revisionist historians opened up in Australian history. For while Australian history was once generally told as a kind of conquest of both the country and Aboriginal people who live in it, this is not the only story that it is possible to tell. Work and more recently art open up spaces within which it has been possible for Aboriginal people to claim a kind of equality with non-indigenous people. As stockmen and artists, Aboriginal people have claimed moments of equality in Australian history which is largely the story of an unequal relationship between Aboriginal and non-indigenous people.

This history of artworks about Station Time can be traced back to drawings, carved woodwork, rock art and other artworks made by artists living in Station Time itself, on missions, stations and in the bush. [George Coolbul](#) was one such artist. While much of the public’s interest in Aboriginal art is an interest in representations of ceremonies and other ‘authentic’ pre-invasion subjects, artists themselves have always been making pictures of their experience on cattle and sheep stations.

## BOOK NOTE

***Harry Hunter and Sydney Hadley: Wild Times on a Tropical Coast. Also 'Dougal's Story* by Ian Thomas Whyte. [Online](#), 2015, 218 pages, maps.**

Written by a former Kimberley Society member, this book offers a mass of historical data about people and events on the Dampier Land Peninsula (north of Broome). The author lives in Scotland but in 1972, working in the Kimberley, he recorded stories told by 'Dougal' (a Bardi man) and his contemporary, Jack Hunter, the son of a Bardi woman and Harry Hunter, who was a pearler and boat builder. 'Dougal' was born at Cygnet Bay and named Djoulgar by his parents. Later on, the local Catholic priests gave him the name Joseph Dougal.

Jack Hunter and 'Dougal' told of events that occurred during their lifetime (from about 1894 to the 1970s) and earlier times (told to them by their families and other people). In the book, Ian Whyte integrates their stories with information drawn from archives, newspapers and published works. I was keen to see how he would use that material because, at intervals over several years, I did archival research for him. The book turned out to be a well presented, informative and interesting narrative.

The easy flow is there from the start, with oral history, primary sources and colourful pieces from published works used to describe Harry Hunter's 1877 arrival on the WA coast. Most of the 29 chapters open with a quote from either Jack Hunter or 'Dougal'. The author says he found it necessary to "lightly edit" the former's contributions and to "translate" the latter's reminiscences "while carefully preserving his meaning".

The narrative proceeds more or less chronologically, with the first five chapters devoted to Harry Hunter. Evidence drawn from letters, newspapers and archives complements the oral history to reveal a hard man living an unconventional life. All of that material is delivered non-judgementally but, in line with the current contested curriculum in which some students learn that the British "invaded" rather than "settled" Australia, the book uses the "invasion" model when discussing the arrival of colonists. The coverage takes in blackbirding (the forced recruitment of indigenous labour), missionaries and missions, pearling, grazing, and activities that include the dynamiting of fish. Many of Hunter's contemporaries are mentioned. They include William Bryan, Charles Clifford, 'Frenchy' D'Antoine, Charles and Isaac Doust, Sydney Hadley, Henry Hilliard, Alfred Mayall, and C W Paterson. The places discussed include Broome, Cape Leveque, Cossack, Derby and adjacent localities.

In chapter six, the focus shifts to Sydney Hadley and his surprising conversion from hard drinking brawler to missionary. Subsequent chapters discuss Sunday Island Mission and interactions between Hadley and Hunter, who, by 1900, was at Boolgin near Cape Leveque. There, Hunter "continued to rule by intimidation", ignoring his children's indigenous heritage but providing the boys with trades and employment. He also protected "his" people, from molestation by pearling crews and other men.

While admiring the author's skilful crafting of this account of Hunter and Hadley, I question his portrayal, on pages 35 and 36, of Hunter having a family that comprised his "wife" Eliza Jane Hunter and her daughter Maud Annie Ross in 1892–1895. That scenario is at odds with Hunter's 1911 description of himself as "a white man, born in England, but a native through, having lived here with the natives for 30 years".

In discussing the Derby family, Ian Whyte notes that Sidney Hedley, who bandaged Harry Hunter's injured arm in February 1894, "was a married man with children who was the auctioneer at Derby in the first half of the 1890s". That clearly differentiates Sidney Hedley from Hunter's business partner Sydney Hadley. But was there more than one Harry Hunter?

In the late 1880s and early 1890s, at least two men named Henry Hunter moved about the Kimberley. The archival evidence used in the book shows that the one who was injured while quarrelling with Eliza Jane and Maud in Derby was sometimes called Harry. He was a heavy drinker, a factor that is mentioned on page 35:

While retaining his base near Pender Bay, Harry Hunter had a house at the Point, Derby between early '92 and late '95, but often worked as a teamster for Lennard River and other sheep and cattle stations in the vast Kimberley region to the east, with the exception of early 1893 when he was shelling west of Cossack in *Governor Weld* using 22 Aboriginal divers, almost certainly Bardi people.

When in Derby, he was arrested on several occasions. In court, he generally admitted his drunkenness or disorderly conduct and paid fines rather than accept the alternative periods of custodial hard labour. A wife is also mentioned in police records ...

That period followed the sale of Hunter and Hadley's pearling schooners and Lombadina Station (pages 32 and 34). Very little documentation is available to show what Hunter did in the first few years after the sale. It is therefore tempting, in the absence of contradictory information, to conclude that he was the man in Derby. To prove that he was or wasn't, if either is possible, would require much more research. In such circumstances, an author who lives a long way from WA archives has a hard choice to make: incur additional cost or take a punt on the data already obtained.

Police records show that another Henry Hunter lived in and near Wyndham with his wife in 1888–1889, probably having gone there from or via Halls Creek. That couple might have lived in Derby in 1892–1895 but, if so, it could be difficult to prove the connection. [Elsewhere](#) I have commented on differentiation issues that occurred when Yvonne Coate, author of *Mother O'Neill : Widow of the Kimberley Goldfield*, had to deal with the use of several nicknames. In that instance, after concluding that she had missed evidence indicative of three nicknames applying to one person, I wrote: "Could three women – Mrs O'Neill, "Mother Dead Horse" and "Mother Dead Finish" – all have been knocking about the countryside operating shanties at a time when European women were a rarity beyond Kimberley towns?"

With no nicknames complicating research into the Harry Hunters of the Kimberley, the Hunter marriage exhibits parallels with another Derby marriage mentioned in *Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance*. In that book, Pedersen and Woorunmurra borrowed details from the life of William Robert Richardson (a stockman) to flesh out the character of the murdered Constable William C Richardson. The resulting composite distorted the story and has since found its way into at least one [thesis](#). The policeman never married but, in *Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance*, much is made of his supposed marriage to "Mary O'Connell, Derby's only single white woman" in July 1892. The marriage that occurred, in June 1892, was between William Robert Richardson and another single Derby woman, Grace Callaghan. Interestingly, some of the women from these stories were of the type sometimes labelled "fallen". Grace Callaghan was living in Wyndham and classed as a prostitute when Henry and Mrs Hunter were living there. Eliza Jane Hunter, as Ian Whyte notes, was classed as a prostitute when she left Derby in 1895. She died soon afterwards, bereft over the government having taken Maud from her.

While half of this book note has been devoted to discussion of issues that arise in trying to write accurate history about transient people in remote localities, that should not be taken as a reflection on *Harry Hunter and Sydney Hadley: Wild Times on a Tropical Coast*. The book makes a significant contribution to our knowledge of the Dampier Land Peninsula and will be a valued resource for people interested in that locality.

*Cathie Clement*

## 75 YEARS OF ORD IRRIGATION

On 24 to 26 June 2016, the forum presented by the [Kununurra Historical Society](#) to commemorate 75 years of Ord irrigation attracted a core group of more than 40 people from various parts of Australia and Asia. Some of the additional events on offer had much higher attendance figures.

Sponsored by the Department of Agriculture and Food WA and the Kimberley Society, the forum delivered loads of information in a relaxed manner. The laid-back atmosphere at the [Kununurra Picture Gardens](#) on the first evening set the pace and, like subsequent events, owed much to planning and preparation. Old film and photos highlighting the pastoral industry and Rosewood Station were shown either side of a refreshment interval. Andrew Barker, president of the Kununurra Historical Society, had created loops of slides to augment the films and some of the forum talks.

Next day, with Jamie Elliott doing a great job of chairing proceedings, the core group heard Matthew Durack speak at Lake Kununurra Golf Club (in the vicinity of the first [Agricultural Research Station](#)). He told of the life and achievements of [Kimberley Michael Durack](#) who, in discussing climate, rainfall, soils, vegetation, water and cattle in a March 1941 paper titled 'Developing the North',

proposed that a Research Station be established at Ivanhoe, East Kimberley, to cope with the problems confronting the pastoral industry as it exists today, and to investigate the possibilities of future, more intensive land utilisation.\*

The next two forum talks, delivered in the Kimberley Research Station Mess, provided context for Kim Durack's work. A PowerPoint presentation from Cathie Clement covered 'Tropical agriculture proposals & endeavours – 1836 to 1941'. Flowing on from that was a talk by John Durack, with the title 'Establishment and early years – 1941 to 1946'. John and Matthew are sons of Kim's brother [William Durack](#) who worked with him at Carlton Reach to establish the first research station. In the talks it became clear that, unlike many earlier false starts (see the summary of Cathie's talk in this newsletter), the implementation of Kim Durack's proposal paved the way for [successful large scale tropical agriculture](#) in the East Kimberley.

Before tackling a scrumptious lunch, the more energetic participants went on walking tours through the Research Station community with Noel Wilson, Mark Warmington and Kay Bailey. After lunch, Noel spoke on 'Agriculture in the Ord River Irrigation Area (ORIA) – 1946 to Present Day'. Mark then offered his 'Thoughts on the Future of Ord Valley Agriculture'.

The five presentations and Jamie's contributions about his East Kimberley origins all prompted questions and animated discussion. In the late afternoon, some of the core group went on a bus tour of the old Kimberley Research Station, now headquarters of Agriculture WA – Kununurra. In the evening, the numbers swelled at a very pleasant barbecue beside Lake Kununurra.

On the Sunday, there was plenty of interest in a 4WD Tagalong tour on which Wendy Carter led the way to relevant memorials and to some of the [graves](#) associated with [Ivanhoe Station](#). Open Day at the [Kununurra Museum](#) followed, with lots of visitors. On the Monday, while not actually part of the forum, Wendy took a small group on an excursion to see interesting remnants of the past on land that had accommodated a sequence of cattle stations on the Dunham River.

Great credit is due to all the people and sponsors mentioned above. Their efforts, aided by those of other members of the Kununurra Historical Society, produced a forum that was both informative and enjoyable. It was a fitting commemoration of 75 years of Ord irrigation and will long be remembered by those who were able to attend all or some of the events.

\* A transcription of 'Developing the North' is available on the [Kununurra Historical Society's website](#).

## TROPICAL AGRICULTURE PROPOSALS & ENDEAVOURS – 1836 TO 1941

This summary is a précis of the talk I presented on 25 June 2016 at the *75 years of Ord Irrigation* forum hosted by the [Kununurra Historical Society](#) (see the previous page for details).

[Kim Durack](#) would have known about some of the things mentioned below. His father, Michael Patrick Durack, had been in the district since 1886 and would have seen some of the early gardens. Other family members would also have shared their knowledge of agricultural ventures and experiments with young Kim.

[Macassan fishermen](#) were probably the first to introduce exotic plants to our northern coast. They brought tamarinds with them, and the seeds produced trees. Betel nut palms also grew at the Macassan camps.

European mariners on exploration voyages often received instructions to sow seeds that might produce useful plants. They, and botanists who accompanied them, also noted vegetation and soil types. Explorers such as [George Grey](#), who examined country around the Glenelg River in 1838, made observations that would have lasting influence. In the 1860s, misuse of Grey's observations duped settlers into going to [Camden Harbour](#).

A chronology of early events shows the start of a pattern that would continue for decades. Grand plans and reckless advocacy often preceded failed ventures. There was some government culpability, and, inevitably, some bad luck and poor timing.

### Some early events related to tropical agriculture in the Kimberley

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| 1836 | A letter sent to the British Government suggested that experiments in cotton and sugar growing should be undertaken in the northern parts of the colony.                       |
| 1838 | George Grey grew plants, as well as going out exploring, before proposing cultivation of cotton, indigo, sugar and rice on lands between the Glenelg and Prince Regent rivers. |
| 1862 | William Harvey (a resident of Victoria) began advocating that colonists grow cotton on Western Australia's north coast and graze stock in the inland.                          |
| 1864 | Settlement was initiated at Camden Harbour and Lagrange Bay, only to be abandoned due to hardship and Aboriginal hostility.  |

Skipping forward to [Alexander Forrest](#), and his 1879 expedition, we see that he too advocated north coast agriculture. Fortunately, no one took up his suggestion of using [Secure Bay](#). In the wake of his expedition, the government was keen to see the north used for grazing and agriculture. The '[Land Regulations for the Kimberley District](#)' offered a bonus (500 acres of rural land) if £500 worth of tea, sugar, coffee, rice, cotton, tobacco or other tropical produce was exported and sold. Opinions and proposals were put forward. A few people urged caution, but no good came of it.

The editor of the Fremantle *Herald* was one who expressed concern. A few weeks before the new regulations came out, he pointed to the risk of releasing the northern land without closing loopholes that left it open to speculation. His concern was well founded. Some speculators tried to find buyers or investors as dozens of others discarded options for [pastoral leases](#) and thus avoided any paying rent.

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|------|---|
| 1881 | On 1 February, a ballot dealt with the first 448 applications for Kimberley pastoral leases, allocating 102 options for leases of varying sizes. In September, Captain Andrew Lindsay Edgar (a resident of Victoria) sought a grant of 30,000 acres on the Glenelg River to grow sugar. He proposed to start 'with a capital of £10,000, erect a sugar mill and buildings ... and to proceed with all despatch in clearing and planting 200 acres'. |
| 1882 | A squatting and sugar company was touted, ostensibly to develop two million acres on the Glenelg River.   |

In 1882, [Captain Andrew Lindsay Edgar](#) continued his correspondence with the WA Government and sought permission to import labourers from the Malabar region of India. In May 1883, as master of the schooner *Albert*, he planted experimental rice, cotton, and other seeds at Beagle Bay and he sailed as far north as Camden Sound.

The following year, [Joseph Anderson Panton](#) visited a sheep station at Lagrange Bay. He pronounced the ground suitable for sugar cane, cotton and tropical fruits. Panton and W H Osmand, anticipating delivery of cattle being overlanded for Ord River Station, were cruising the Kimberley coast on Osmand's yacht. After leaving Lagrange, Osmand called at [Cambridge Gulf](#) and did some experimental planting.

While those plantings were reminiscent of George Grey, the next man on the scene was a Queensland sugar planter, [George Smith](#). In August 1885, he convinced the government to provide a free land grant of 100,000 acres. The attached conditions included expenditure of £100,000 and settlement of 1,000 white people. Possibly motivated by publicity about gold finds at Halls Creek, Smith arranged to import labour and sailed to Cambridge Gulf in search of the right land. Nothing came of it.

By this time, Kimberley people had demonstrated that small scale agriculture was feasible. Lee Sing had crops on 10 acres of freehold land outside Derby. Others had grown produce north of Roebuck Bay. At Wyndham, the police had a small garden near the Three Mile Well and, further out, [William O'Donnell](#) was enjoying success in his experiments with sugar cane and other tropical plants at the Twenty Mile.

More ambitious ideas would be aired but success was limited and fleeting. One idea, articulated in 1887 by "[Explorer](#)", suggested settling 20,000 families on 175-acre farms in the Fitzroy Valley. They were to grow sago palms, dates, and other tropical produce irrigated from a canal running to Derby from the Fitzroy River headwaters.

While ideas came and went, people relied on the local gardens and imports. By July 1887, a [government garden](#) at the One Mile was supplying Wyndham officials with cabbages and melons. Bananas and pineapples were also coming on nicely. Station gardens were up to two acres in size, and each town had nearby market gardens. By 1889, a Chinese gardener named Ah Ling was operating from the King River (near Wyndham) and a 'coloured' gardener named Peter Pise was at Halls Creek.

The lengths to which people went to establish gardens was impressive. In about 1890, Barney Lamond took a bag of banana shoots and pineapple roots by boat from Darwin to Wyndham and put them on Tim Moriarty's horse wagon for Halls Creek. Doused with a bucket of water each day on the road, the shoots and roots survived. Lamond planted them at a big cabbage palm spring on the Black Elvira River, where they flourished, and he mentioned a fine fruit garden being established there afterwards. The place he described might have been Palm Springs.

By 1892, Halls Creek had two market gardens, both run by Chinese men. Japanese, Chinese, or so-called 'coloured' people initiated much of the early Kimberley agriculture. Their produce was popular but they were expected to know their place. One of the best known was Ah Kim who had a garden at Muggs Lagoon (near Wyndham) and, with his Aboriginal wife Lily, raised a family there.

#### **More events related to tropical agriculture in the Kimberley**

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| 1894 | Adrian Despeissis, a viticulturist and agriculturist, helped to establish the Bureau of Agriculture in Perth.   |
| 1897 | Joseph Bradshaw failed to secure government support for his proposal to settle 500 Europeans on the Prince Regent River.  |
| 1899 | Saltbush was grown from imported seed on Argyle Station, with intentions of adding it to the indigenous grasses. Disaster Bay Mission, a branch of Beagle Bay Mission, had bananas, plantains, sugar, rice, dates, coconuts and vegetables flourishing on 30 acres of land irrigated from a spring. |

Space doesn't permit coverage of the full spread or progress of agriculture, but each year brought new developments.

**More events related to tropical agriculture in the Kimberley**

- 1900 Plants, cuttings and seeds donated by Beagle Bay Mission enabled Sunday Island Mission to grow bananas, paw paws, figs, sweet potatoes and beans.
- 1901 Frederick Slade Brockman, with a party that included Charles Crossland and Dr F M House, surveyed the north Kimberley.
- 1903 Connor, Doherty and Durack began employing 'a considerable staff' of men to make hay, using it as fodder on Ascot Station and on ships taking cattle from Wyndham to Fremantle.
- 1905 The naturalist on Charles Crossland's survey expedition, W V Fitzgerald, identified arable lands on the Barker and Lennard Rivers. He recommended forming experimental stations.
- 1906 W V Fitzgerald surveyed the valleys of the Fitzroy, Ord and King rivers, identifying arable lands. Boring for artesian water in the Kimberley commenced.
- 1907 Land for tropical agriculture experiments was excised at Udialla Springs, on the Fitzroy River, but the people who went there faced numerous obstacles. Adrian Despeissis, now Under-Secretary for Agriculture, held the view that, although cotton growing experiments in the South West Division had not met with great success, better results would be obtained in the Nor'-West and Kimberley.

While most of the gardeners relied on windmills, a [Japanese gardener](#) near Broome went a step further. By 1907, he was using an oil engine to raise water. Poured onto rows of vegetables from kerosene tins suspended on yokes, that water helped to produce cabbages weighing about five kilos.

It was also in 1907 that [Arthur Haly](#), the East Kimberley Stock Inspector, offered his view. He felt that the 'extensive and never-failing waterholes in the rivers' would be sufficient for irrigated agriculture, negating any need for East Kimberley dams.

The following year, Broome people expressed a desire to see [plantations](#) established. Over in Derby, someone suggested allowing artesian water to form a lake where local prisoners could clear, fence and cultivate an experimental [plantation](#) to feed themselves and the rest of the town.

Knowledge of Kimberley soils and plants had been increasing each year, partly through botanists accompanying surveyors on expeditions. Adrian Despeissis, as [Commissioner for Tropical Agriculture](#), was also expanding and sharing his expertise. By 1910 the prospects looked the best they had ever been. Yet, as usual and despite the 1911 publication by Despeissis of the 105-page bulletin *The Nor'-West and tropical North*, success was elusive. Some setbacks were due to insufficient water; some to insufficient labour.

In 1912, talk turned to [water conservation](#) and possibilities for capturing some of the wet season rains. But, again, nothing constructive happened. Instead, after a change of government, the position of Commissioner for Tropical Agriculture was abolished.

The demands of the First World War diverted attention from plans for northern agriculture but the mission gardens continued to flourish. Their success owed much to the labour provided by the resident population. That model was also adopted when Aboriginal people were encouraged, or forced, to live on reserves at Violet Valley, Moola Bulla, and other places.

In 1920, after a ministerial tour that included M P Durack, Harry Richard's work at [Palm Springs](#) was held up as an example of what could be done. That oasis always impressed visitors, as did Esau Mahomet's garden at the Brockman.

The following year, the surveyor [W R Easton](#), a returned soldier, led an expedition to examine land on the north coast, assessing it for tropical agriculture and a port. At the time, a government program on Moola Bulla offered returned soldiers training in Kimberley land management. In the years that followed, soldier settlers were among

those who tried their hands on experimental plots of cotton, tobacco and peanuts. One of them, Richard Prior, told how he and his mate had no luck. Their tobacco didn't grow and they ended up eating half the peanuts. Other soldier settlers who had more success included the men who established Nulla Nulla Station out of Wyndham. Their cotton grew, but one of the men, Billy Hay, was killed in conflict with Aboriginal people in 1926. Violent reprisals followed, and the Reverend Gribble's allegations of a massacre led to a Royal Commission into the killings.

#### **More events related to tropical agriculture in the Kimberley**

- 1923 Frank Wise, who was later the Premier of Western Australia, was appointed as Tropical Adviser. The WA Government arranged for Colonel Geoffrey Evans of the Empire Cotton Growing Corporation to evaluate the cotton growing experiments and prospects in the Derby area. He concluded that the pindan soils were not suited to cotton. The Kimberley Progress Association wrote a letter in which it appealed to the Imperial Conference (sitting in London) for an Empire settlement scheme.
- 1924 In Melbourne, Stanley Young advocated a new state centred on Broome, with Federal Government assistance and the use of 'coloured' labour for tropical agriculture. Alice Sawdon, who was living at Udialla with her husband Josiah, wrote to the Western Australian Government proposing the implementation of a group settlement scheme. She wanted to continue the cotton growing they had begun before their helpers walked out. No scheme eventuated but Udialla, like Palm Springs out of Halls Creek, was one place that provided a living for people for decades.

Experimental cotton crops were grown near Broome, Derby and Wyndham, and on pastoral leases, mission land, and reserves that included Violet Valley. None of that was irrigated. Grown under natural conditions, it was known as rain cotton. In 1923, three tons of that cotton, packed into 25 bales, was shown in Fremantle on its way to the British Empire Exhibition. Just over half of it came from Nulla Nulla Station. There was no consensus on the feasibility or desirability of cropping. Some pastoralists were opposed to cotton, and some would have feared losing prime land to excisions. New ideas for settlement schemes emerged. Fresh government appointments were made. Further consideration was given to how tropical crops might be irrigated. After Colonel Evans condemned Derby soils, people debated whether [irrigation](#) and a more suitable type of labour would overcome the perceived deficiencies.

The pattern of growing tropical products on small scattered holdings continued through the 1930s. Fred Merry grew peanuts commercially on Sale River station, sending his produce to Broome by boat. [Bob Thompson](#) had a tropical agriculture lease nearby, at Marie Springs. He paid one pound a year in rent on a thousand acres, and said he only had to keep five acres under cultivation.

The 1930s also saw the emergence of fresh ideas. With Prime Minister Lyons and the Federal Government wanting to develop Australia's north, [Sir James Connolly](#), who was based in London, devised a comprehensive plan for a new colony in the Kimberley. Announced in 1933, it envisaged railways from Wyndham to Meekatharra and Camden Harbour. Young agricultural labourers from England were to be trained in dairy farming and tropical agriculture, and pastoralists were expected to agree to compensation for giving up their leases for the small farms. In the interval between Connolly's proposal and the next one, Kim Durack finished his studies at Muresk Agricultural College in Northam and returned to the north. There was plenty of scope for him to implement his learning and, with exposure to the next settlement scheme, his ideas would expand.

When a second world war looked likely, [Dr Isaac Steinberg](#) and others formed the Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Settlement. Operating out of London, it sought a new homeland for European Jews who were fleeing the Nazis. The portfolio of

properties owned by Connor, Doherty and Durack was on the market, with [George Miles](#), who had been with M P Durack on the 1920 ministerial tour, looking for a buyer. He approached Steinberg in 1938 and 'proposed that the Freeland League create a chartered or limited company with a capital of £200,000 and purchase the land rights, the cattle and the buildings of Connor, Doherty and Durack Ltd'. When interest was shown, Miles worked with Steinberg to create a package in which the League would buy the properties, settle many thousands of refugees there, and begin the conversion to orchards and farms. That work was to be facilitated by damming the Ord River and generating hydro-electricity.

Many events overlapped in this period. A 1939 push for a Royal Commission into the financial and economic position of WA's pastoral industry led to a [recommendation](#) for classification of 100 miles of Ord River country to ascertain the extent suitable for irrigation and pasture development. Various people advocated the implementation of irrigated agriculture on the Fitzroy River, either by the Freeland League or British migrants. The Emanuels had offered to sell their West Kimberley properties to the Freeland League but, when [Steinberg](#) and a young UWA agricultural research graduate named George Melville flew north, it was to be shown over the Connor, Doherty and Durack properties by M P and Kim Durack. On returning to Perth in June 1939, Steinberg and Melville prepared a report on the region's potential, envisaging a research farm as the nucleus of the Jewish settlement. Lobbying continued but the outbreak of war delayed the Federal Government's decision.

In March 1941, Kim Durack produced his science-based study on the potential of the area examined by Steinberg. Titled 'Developing the North', it led to him receiving approval to use Ord River land for agricultural experiments. He and his brother Bill worked at that while the possibility of securing approval for the Jewish Settlement Scheme remained on the table. It was only in 1944 that the Australian Government ruled that [a group settlement](#) of such an exclusive type was not appropriate. That decision cleared the way for Kim Durack to pursue his dreams.

*Cathie Clement*

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