Looking Through Windows

A touring exhibition about the removal, dispossession and ‘protection’ of Aboriginal people by the NSW Aborigine’s Protection/Welfare Boards 1883-1969
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Lorina L. Barker
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Back image: Brewarrina 2017, Beth Macraild O’Loughlin
Above: Mary White and Jenny Stillingsworth, Brewarrina 2017
Beth Macraild O’Loughlin

CAUTION: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this catalogue contains names, images and stories of deceased persons. It also contains terms that reflect the period in which they were written or recorded and may not be considered appropriate today. Not all views expressed in this catalogue are necessarily the views of the author. Some information may not reflect current understandings, and is provided in an historical context.

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Thank you to the matriarch of my family, my Grandmother Amy Elwood (nee Johnson) an inspirational storyteller, knowledge holder and a much-loved and admired Elder of the Wangkumara and Adnyamathanha peoples.


Thank you, to Uncle Steve Widders for the Welcome to Country and for opening the exhibition at New England Regional Art Museum in Armidale November 2017; thanks to Aunty Mary Waites and Aunty Eva Boney for the Welcome to Country and opening the exhibition at the Brewarrina Visitor Information and Exhibition Centre in April 2018. Thank you to Uncle Chicka Madden for the Welcome to Country and Hon Linda Burney MP for opening the exhibition at 107 Gallery, Redfern in November 2018.

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Image: Brian Smith, Tharriyaa Ngura (detail) 2018, acrylic on canvas, 30 x 30 cm
Introduction
The inspiration for this body of work started with a yarn with my Grandmother Amy, about her life and experiences. Our conversation transformed into the poem, An Ode to My Grandmother which I recited at the 2006 Yaama Cultural festival in Bourke. This poem is embedded in the narrative of my short film, My Grandmother’s Country. Twenty still images from the 2014 film shoot were selected for the community exhibition, Film Through 1000 Images. These artworks along with new works were curated into the 2017 and 2018 multimedia exhibition, Looking Through Windows. Like the artworks the exhibition catalogue also incorporated elements of the original catalogue and transformed into its current form.

Yarning has been practised by Aboriginal cultures for millennia and it is an important way of transferring cultural knowledge: ‘Yarning is a lived experience of a story and the key elements of it are respect and reciprocity, whereby the listener is tasked with the responsibility of transferring the knowledge onto the next generation’.

The process
During Elders Gatherings, multimedia workshop and the curatorship of the exhibitions, the Looking Through Windows team tracked the universal story of Aboriginal peoples’ removal from Country by the Aborigines Protection/Welfare Boards, 1883-1969. Our Elders and community members’ memories, stories and experiences of being ‘truck-off, ‘locked-up’ and ‘fenced-in’ were captured in an array of multimedia including: film, oral history recordings, photography, art, songs, poetry with music, short stories, sculptures and an immersive theatre performance. I also collated documentary evidence including, letters, policy documents, archival photographs and oral histories taken in the 1960s and 1970s and provided accounts of the dispossession and forced removal of the Aboriginal people in NSW. Naturally, I corroborated the oral histories with the written documented sources.

My vision to transform the research into a multimedia exhibition was a collaborative process between myself (Lorina Barker), the oral historian/curator and a team of commissioned artists. Together, we curated the story through an exchange of ideas and creative licence. Each artist was given a brief that included background information on the Aboriginal removal policy and were invited to hang out and yarn with our Elders at the Gatherings and multimedia workshops to listen and be inspired by our Elders stories about their life and experiences. They were also given direction on themes, concepts, ideas and materials to be used for each artwork.

Free verse poetry is a gradual, transformative process that I apply to both my creative art-based and academic research projects. I gather data through oral history interviews in person or over the phone and then transcribed. In the final phase of transcription, my questions and voice are edited out. Excerpts of these recordings are included in this catalogue. Oral histories recorded by other researchers are also transformed into free verse poetry to create an assemblage of people’s memories, stories and experiences. Through free verse poetry, the voice of a family member can be captured in written form and allows people to read and hear the way their family members speak.

The Aboriginal Protection (Amendment) Act 1936 increased the Aborigines Protection Board’s powers, allowing them to ‘confine Aboriginal people against their will.’ It was known to Aboriginal people as the ‘the Dog Act’ because Aboriginal people could be rounded-up, tracked-off to any government station, a mission or reserve at any time.
The Removal

In 1938 about 130 Aboriginal people, including the Wangkumara families, were forcibly removed from Tibooburra to the Brewarrina Aboriginal Station – ‘the Old Mission’. This removal was an orchestrated campaign by the Aborigines Protection Board, the NSW Department of Education and the Tibooburra residents. In April, three gubby trucks rolled into the campsite at Thompson’s Creek. The drivers, Jimmie Barker, a Muruwari Elder and Dudley Dennis, a Gamilaraay Elder were residents of the Old Brewarrina Mission and had no choice but to drive the trucks as refusal would result in their weekly family rations being revoked by the Mission manager.

Since the 1880s it had been government policy for all Australian children to be educated. However, increasing complaints from Tibooburra residents about the ‘cleanliness’, ‘attire’ and ‘behaviour’ of Aboriginal students meant they were expelled from Tibooburra Public School under the long existing policy of ‘exclusion on demand’. The children were removed to the nearest Aboriginal School which was 500 kilometres away at the Brewarrina Aboriginal Station – ‘the Old Mission’. In the following excerpt from an archival oral history recording Granny Ruby Johnson (Nee Ebsworth), Amy’s mum, describes the experience of being removed and the journey to the Old Mission:

When they brought old people away
they left all
all the stock that they had
An’ Ngalka had-tah bring some across
for his father
old grandfather
An’ all old women
an’ kids
an’ young ones
was in the one truck
an the men folk was
in the other truck

We camped at Wanaaring Bridge
packed up from there
an’ come here (Bourke) for dinner
they just got sandwiches
an’ that for us
An’ went onto Brewarrina
an’ that’s where we stayed
until we lost our old people.
Since learning of that story in 2014, the Looking Through Windows team have conducted scores of oral history interviews in northwest and New England regions of NSW.

Looking Through Windows is a multimedia project and exhibition about the removal, dispossession and ‘protection’ of Aboriginal people in the and New England and the New South Wales regions of New South Wales and western Sydney. Combining film, oral histories, photography, songs, poetry with music, artworks, language, sculpture and theatre the exhibition captures stories of what it was like to live ‘under the Act’ on missions, reserves and at the fringes of society. This project also documents the stories of the Stolen Generations removal to government institutions like the Cootamundra Boys Home (places of control for Aboriginal children), and draws attention to the untold stories and silent voices of the parents of the Stolen Generations.

As part of the Elders Gatherings and multimedia workshops in Brewarrina, Bourke, Armidale, Campbelltown and Minto, Elders and community members affected by the forced removal from Country, culture and kin were invited to share and document their stories, memories and experiences in a traditional or new medium of their choice. Together these stories were curated into the Looking Through Windows exhibition in Armidale (2017), Brewarrina (2018), with the final show in and Redfern in November 2018.

Lorina described the process of developing and recording the many stories as part of an artistic enterprise as well as a research project. Beyond the exhibition, these important stories are now documented and available in a variety of engaging and accessible formats for current and future generations.

It is critically important to document Aboriginal peoples’ stories, experiences and memories of removal, dispossession and ‘protection’ by the Aborigines Protection/Welfare Boards and other government agencies in NSW. While a number of Elders have made an astounding contribution to the recording and preservation of Aboriginal cultures, languages and knowledge, many have since joined their ancestors. The passing time highlights the urgent need to document the Aboriginal experience and to demonstrate the tenacity and strength of Elders – preserving recent histories that connect people, identities, cultures and Countries.

It is also vitally important to record stories and histories in a way that the current and future generations can access in mediums that they are familiar with, use and understand such as dance and theatre performance.

This project has the potential to reframe the histories of the northwest, New England and Campbelltown regions with the contemporary and living histories of Aboriginal people in Armidale, Bourke, Brewarrina, Campbelltown and Minto.

The locations chosen for the Elders Gatherings, multimedia workshops and exhibitions have been an essential part of the project’s story, reflecting the journey of many Aboriginal people from their communities to government institutions. The exhibition will reach its final destination of Redfern in November 2018. Aboriginal people, especially the Stolen Generations have a strong historical connection to Redfern – when the Stolen Generations came out of the institutions they were drawn to Redfern, this is where many connected with extended family and developed a sense of community. It was also through these familial and community connections, that they found their way back home. The exhibition in Redfern is an important way of saying thank you to the Redfern community for accepting and looking after our family and community members.

The Looking Through Windows in Redfern is a poignant end to a project that has not just been about recording the past, but a way of facilitating an active process of healing for Elders and community members.

Elders have told me it has been amazing to come together again for a yarn, to reminisce, share stories, and express stories in different ways. I wouldn’t have been able to do all this without their support and having them tell us we’ve captured their stories in the right way.

The Looking Through Windows Team have been amazed by the strength, tenacity and courage of our Elders and the way they’ve embraced multimedia to tell their stories and ensure they’re available for the next generation.

If you choose a story it can take you on a massive journey. This has been a journey of healing for us all.

Community participant, Elders Gathering and Multimedia Workshops, ‘Back to Brewarrina’ 2017, Beth Macraul O’Loughlin

Something about the Looking Through Windows project

Looking Through Windows is a two-year project which culminates with the exhibition at 107 Gallery, Redfern in November 2018. Inspired by the enduring spirit of my grandmother Amy and her extended family’s removal from Country, I embarked on a journey to uncover and understand workshops and exhibitions have been an essential part of the project’s story, reflecting the journey of many Aboriginal people from their communities to government institutions. The exhibition will reach its final destination of Redfern in November 2018. Aboriginal people, especially the Stolen Generations have a strong historical connection to Redfern – when the Stolen Generations came out of the institutions they were drawn to Redfern, this is where many connected with extended family and developed a sense of community. It was also through these familial and community connections, that they found their way back home. The exhibition in Redfern is an important way of saying thank you to the Redfern community for accepting and looking after our family and community members.

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About exhibition, Film Through 1000 Images

People’s relationship with Country can be told in many ways and documenting the process of filmmaking through a mixed-media exhibition is one way of telling these stories and connecting people to their Country, history, culture, language and identity.

Film Through 1000 Images is a mixed-media exhibition that digitally presents the making of the film, My Grandmother’s Country and tells the story of engagement with the community in northwest NSW. It consists of audio recordings, stories, poetry and newspaper clippings that contextualise the history and impact of the removal policy on these Aboriginal families.

It was jointly funded by the University of New England and the Muda Aboriginal Corporation of Bourke, this mixed-media exhibition is an interface that encourages community members to participate in, and contribute to, the preservation of Murdi (Aboriginal) languages in northwest NSW for the community project Murdi Languages, Cultures and Country. It also facilitates community members’ input to the development of cultural programs and language resources for the Muda Aboriginal Corporation’s 2CuzFM radio program and Cultural Centre. Positive engagement with the community is important because it has the potential to reframe the history of the Bourke region in northwest NSW with a contemporary and living history of Murdis. The film, My Grandmother’s Country, was an inclusive collaboration with about 200 people making the story possible. It is their story and the exhibition was a rare and special event and a celebration of making the film.

A bit about the film, My Grandmother’s Country

I read my poem An Ode to My Grandmother at a poetry recital during the Yaama Cultural Festival held at Bourke in 2006. The poem became part of the script for the 2014 Breaks Program (for creative storytellers), at Metro Screen in Sydney. The program offered eight filmmaking teams (writer, director, producer) the opportunity to develop their scripts for screen and provided funding, production equipment and intensive development workshops.

Two weeks after I was awarded a place on the program, my Grandmother Amy joined our ancestors. It is with her permission and the love and support of my extended family that, I am able to document a visual story about the removal and dispersal of Wangkumara people from Tibooburra in 1938 and their walk off Bourkeville Aboriginal Station, the Old Mission in November 1940.

Over four months in 2014, I attended several intensive workshops to work on my script. If not for the UNE Indigenous staff grants I would have been unable to fund trips to Sydney to participate in the program. With the script completed, I faced the mammoth task of raising additional funding to take the film crew from both Sydney and Armidale on a seven-day film shoot to Bourke, Bourkeville, Wanaaring and Tibooburra. Thankfully, through the generosity of community organisations in Armidale, Ilbilba and Bourke and funds from UNE, I managed to raise the funds.

My Grandmother’s Country is the untold story of removal and dispossession and a family’s tenacity and strength to reconnect with People Places and Stories Language Culture and Country Retracing and documenting the journey home to Country from Bourkeville to Tibooburra was a key element of the film and allowed Amy Elwood’s descendants to tell the story about their family’s removal from Tibooburra and the long journey back to Country.
Curator – Lorina L. Barker
Lorina is a descendant of the Wangkumara and Muruwari people from northwest NSW, Adnyamathanha (Flinders Rangers SA), the Kooma and Kunja (southwest QLD), and the Kurnu-Baakandji (northwest NSW). She is an oral historian, filmmaker, storyteller and poet who teaches modern Australian history, Oral history and Local and Community history at the University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales. She uses multimedia as part of her community art-based projects to transfer and preserve knowledge, history, stories and culture for the next generations; in mediums that they are familiar with such as film, short stories, poetry and theatre performance. Lorina wrote and directed the short film Tibooburra: My Grandmother’s Country as a tribute and an elegy to her Grandmother Amy Elwood, about her life and experiences.

Filmmaker/Editor, additional photography – Laszlo Szabo
Laszlo is a multi disciplinary arts practitioner specializing in socially engaged practice that spans 40 years - over 25 of those in regional communities, in northern NSW. With a background as a theatre maker and in multi-media, his extensive skills and experience have seen him collaborate with Lorina on a number of projects over a 10 year period. His contribution includes, project planning and design, creative and technical consultancy, mentoring, filmmaking, digital documentation, A/V production and logistical support. In his capacity as a mentor he has been key to bringing other arts disciplines to Lorina’s work in peer-to-peer collaboration to transpose her work as an oral historian and scholar into other media for community and a wider public. He has also mentored young people and emerging filmmakers within Lorina’s projects. He is the sole operator of Social Ventures Media, a grass roots community arts, media and communications enterprise, with the primary objective to put the tools and methods of cultural production into the hands of people in community.

Filmmaker – Brendan Blacklock
Brendan is a Ngarabal and Biripi man and filmmaker. He is founder/director of the company Blacklock Media and works as a freelance camera operator on music videos, corporate videos, short films and documentaries. In addition to Tibooburra: My Grandmother’s Country, he has shot several award winning drama short films such as AngelFish, The Wave, and Gone; several documentaries for NITV including Stand Up - Karen Edwards and Simi’s Choir; worked in the camera department for various film productions Felony with Joel Edgerton and The Darkside with Warwick Thornton, including television productions such as Redfern Now Series 2, Redfern Now Telemovie Promise Me, Cleverman Season 1, Servant or Slave and Deep Water documentaries, as well as Colour Theory. Recently, Brendan was contracted by Sydney Living Museums to film upcoming installations 1st Government House and Myall Creek Massacre which had him capturing the landscapes of the Gwydir Shire.

Photographer and curatorial consultant – Beth Macraild O’Loughlin
Beth is a photographer, designer and curatorial consultant with a background in fine art. Her personal photographic practice explores notions of collective remembrance and does not shy away from deeply sensitive or intimate experiences. Beth runs Verso with her partner in Armidale, which attracts clients nationally. The studio provides expertise in brand development, print and digital publishing, videography, website development and strategic marketing.

Singer songwriter/Ethno-architect - Simon Mellor
Simon is a singer songwriter and professional artist who has a wealth of experience working with Aboriginal communities on engaging cross-artforms projects in regional NSW. For example, the Kids Kids – Moree Preschool education resources and language preservation project. He co-authored with Ann Do the children’s book/CD, What do they do with all the poo from the animals at the zoo? As part of this project and in collaborations with Elders and community members Simon transformed their stories into songs and add background music to poetry for the project’s CD Wii Thirra (campfire songs). Simon with the assistance of Warren Kelly built a replica tin humpy that is modelled on the design techniques of the Murdi ethno-architects of northwest NSW - Wolompringa, Goodnga, Bourke and Brewarrina.
Artist/Community project officer/ Ethno-architect - Warren Kelly
Warren is a Gumbaynggirr and Dunghutti artist and singer/songwriter and as the community project officer he encouraged and supported Elders and community members in the New England region to participate and to share their stories and experiences at the Elders Gatherings and multimedia workshops.

Artist and academic - Michael Brogan
Michael is a professional artist, educator and academic who has lived and worked in Sydney and Armidale for over 25 years. He is a final year PhD student at UNE and his research crosses over several academic disciplines that are consistent with his professional teaching experience in education and industry based practices in Visual and Performing Arts. He attends festivals where the local, national and international focus is on Indigenous artists, writers, musicians, performers and filmmakers to reconnect with a network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals working in creative industries.

Project Administrative Support - Cherene Spendlove
Cherene has a wealth of experience working on a range of community and creative arts projects and has worked closely in partnership with Aboriginal communities. Cherene provides project administrative support for Looking Through Windows, which includes budgeting, grant writing and filing research ‘data’ and helping with project events and performances.

Project Administrative Assistance (in field support) - Kimberley Barker
Kimberley is a Gumbaynggirr and Wangkumara woman and university student who is interested in project administration and recording our Elders stories. She provides project administrative assistance in the field in the collating and filing research ‘data’ and helping with project events and performances.

Elder/Cultural knowledge holder and Community project officer – Gwen Smith
Gwen is a Wangkumara and Kunja woman and respected Elder from Bourke and Lurnea’s mum. She holds steadfast to her history and culture and continues to pass this knowledge onto the younger generations. She is a source of inspiration, love and support for her children and enjoys singing and sitting around a campfire singing and sharing stories about Country, culture, history and kin. As a community project officer Gwen has been a driving force and instrumental in the success of the Looking Through Windows project at the grassroots level in Bourke and Brewarrina encouraging and supporting other Elders and community members to share their memories, stories and experiences.

Artist/Singer songwriter and poet - Jaluka Rose Quinlan
Jaluka is a Dunghutti artist, singer songwriter, poet and storyteller. She grew up at Belbrook near Kempsey. Jaluka’s grandmother, grandfather, their extended families’ stories about life on Belbrook Mission are the source for her songs, poems, stories and artworks. The Dunghutti culture, language and history are beautifully captured and are for Jaluka a way to follow in her grandmother Minnie Kelly’s footsteps to keep Dunghutti culture, knowledge and language alive. Jaluka’s songs, stories and poems form part of the soundscape in the Looking Through Windows exhibition.

The Looking Through Windows project also acknowledge and thank everyone who have been involved in the journey and contributed in some way to the documentation of Aboriginal removal in NSW and transformed our Elders and community members stories, memories and experiences into an array of film, multimedia, theatre and performances. Artists - Matt Pilkington, Kim Scales, Derek Moran and Uncle Brian Irving. Actors and theatre practitioners – Jesse Donaldson-Jarrett, Judy McBain, Garry Slocombe, Torsten Strokirch, Karin von Strokirch, Claire Wall Mary Waites, Eva Boney and Rodney McHughes. Aboriginal community project officers – Jason Ford and Thomas French (Brewarrina), Lee Patterson (Guyra), Shannon Smith, Biruakue Vale and Gallum Clayton-Dixon (Armidale). The Aboriginal catering teams - Natalie Eastwood, Jennifer Bennett, Jeanette Hammond and Rachelle Gordon (Brewarrina) Elba Barker and Leidy Barker (Bourke); Kristal Yee (Armidale), Lacey Barker and Peta Barker.
ON LOCATION WITH THE PROJECT TEAM

On Location with the Project Team captures the team on location in Bourke and Brewarrina. It depicts the atmosphere the film crew created in order to work with the Aboriginal communities in northwest NSW. The assemblage of photographs highlights the benefits of briefing our film crews on the social and cultural history of northwest Aboriginal communities, and how to work with community members in a culturally appropriate and sensitive manner. As important, was preparing the Aboriginal community to work with outsiders, so there are no surprises. A two-way engagement process helped establish a working relationship built on trust and respect, where cultural protocols were adhered to, ethical practices were followed, and rules and responsibilities were clearly outlined resulting in benefits and outcomes for both the Aboriginal communities and the film crew.

On Location with the Crew 2017–2018
Photographs by Beth Macrauld O’Loughlin
OUR COUNTRY

Our Country is a series of photographs that capture the beauty and spirit of Wangkumara Country. They were taken by Brett Barker, Tracy Kira and Lorina Barker while working on Country in Balerna, Southwest Queensland, January 2016.

The artwork: Matt Pilkington used corrugated iron to frame the photographs aged using a rusting technique. Recycled wooden fence paling and barbed wire were used to hang the artwork.

The photographs signify traditional Country and the materials Matt chose highlight the encroaching outsiders influences of white society and man-made resources.

Our Country (detail) 2016
Aged corrugated iron, fence paling and barbed wire with inset colour photographs
70 x 230 cm (including barbed wire)
**FENCED IN**

_Fenced In_ represents five generations of Wangkumara people who were removed from Country in 1938 and locked-up on the government-run Old Mission. The framed black and white image below is a photocopy of an archival photograph, courtesy of the National Parks and Wild Life Service, Tibooburra. This and the Tindale photographs in the artwork ‘Kundjikah and Papaja: Taking Back Tindale’ are the only two photographs my Grandmother Amy had of her Mum, Ruby, my great-grandmother. They are treasured items preserved, among other photographs, in her family albums.

This particular photograph, taken in the late 1920s or early 1930s, (photographer unknown) at Innamincka, SA, reminds us of the broken kinship ties to Country, culture and language – ties of a family that travelled around Country and lived in two different worlds. Amy’s family, in order of appearance from left to right are – back row: Grandfather Albert Ebsworth holding baby Alma, Great-grandfather Scotty Clayton, Great-grandmother Charlotte Hines, Aunty Laura Dixon, Ruby Johnson (Amy’s Mum), Grandmother Rosie Ebsworth holding baby Jean. Left to right front row: Roy Johnson (brother), Aunty Lena Ebsworth, Leonard Johnson (brother), Ronald Johnson (brother) Uncle Cecil ‘Ngakka’ Ebsworth, Edith Edwards (sister) and Uncle Martin Ebsworth.

The artwork: Matt Pilkington juxtaposed natural and made-made materials to represent the removal of Aboriginal people from the freedom and familiarity of their traditional homelands and of being fenced in on the fringe of white society in northwest NSW. Matt donated the artwork that frames the image and covered it with wire mesh as a symbol of what it is like to be fenced in.
IF YOU HAD TWO HOURS TO PACK UP YOUR LIFE, WHAT WOULD YOU TAKE?

This installation of old suitcases, courtesy of Laszlo Szabo and Theatre Studies at UNE, represents the chaos of forced removal. It highlights what it may have been like, for the Tibooburra families who, under extreme duress and with very little time, had to choose which belongings they could and should take to an unknown place miles from Country. A change of clothes, some linen and precious family photos?

What they couldn’t take was left behind including their pet cats and dogs, their livelihoods - horse and donkey teams, a few cows, camels and the odd goat or two. As they packed, they worried about what would become of their animals - would they be stolen, left starving and thirsty, or would they be shot dead? As the people climbed aboard the gubby trucks they cried out to the ancestors, to the spirit beings, sacred sites and to Country:

We’re sorry
we’re leavin’ you

We’re sorry
no one now to look after you

We’re sorry
we will remember you

As the trucks left Thompson’s Creek Reserve the wailing began.

If you had two hours to pack up your life, what would you take? (Installation detail) 2016
Installation by Lorina L. Barker
Suitcases, colour photographs
Variable dimensions
Kundjikah and Papaja: Taking Back Tindale

Kundjikah and Papaja: Taking Back Tindale represents the way in which I have deconstructed and decolonised the haunting and expressionless photographs of those family members who are part of the Norman B. Tindale Collection of Aboriginal peoples’ genealogical records in the SA Museum. This allowed me to reconceptualise the archives and reclaim the photographs and stories of Tindale and other 1930s researchers and administrators. These photographs now form part of my extended family’s photo albums and remind us of what the Wangkumara Elders endured during two traumatic years on the Old Brewarrina Mission. The following poem is an assemblage of the stories about the Mission days that Aunty Eadie Edwards and Aunty Laura Dixon shared with researchers.

They arrived late one night
the women were told to sleep in the schoolhouse
the men on the verandah

The Mission manager
wandered around all night
with his rifle
we were always frightened

Granny joined our ancestors
Great grandfather joined our ancestors
they couldn’t stand life on the Mission

Given rations
some bread
no butter or jam
a few chops to last a week

The artwork: Matt Pilkington used recycled fence palings to frame the photographs and barbed wire to hang. These man-made materials represent the way in which Aboriginal people, including the Wangkumara, were locked up and fenced-in at the Old Brewarrina Mission.
TINDALE’S TIN BOX: I AM TARAGARA THAT’S MY TOTEM

Inside the Tindale’s Tin Box are photographs of my grandmother Amy Elwood’s Kundjikah and Papaja’s that forms part of the Norman B. Tindale collection and from these photographs I selected my grandmother’s immediate family member including her mum Ruby, dad, Donald and brothers Steve, Ronald and Leonard; sisters, Edith and Gladys and cousin Gavan.

Influenced by Aboriginal artist like Vernon Ah Kee, Brook Andrew, Leah King-Smith, Fiona Foley and Gordon Bennett, and as I had done before, I reframed and recontextualised these ethnographic images to rupture the clouded lens of “the colonial gaze” that deemed my grandmother and her family along with other Aboriginal families as mere subjects who needed to be Christianised, ‘civilised’ and researched in the name of western science.7 This Eurocentric lens removed my Grandmother’s family from our landscape and ignored a millennia-long knowledge system that intrinsically interconnects us with Country through kinship, language and culture. ‘I am Taragara that’s my Totem’ demonstrates the way in which valuable family genealogical information and photographs were extracted from the archives, reconceptualised and re-storied and in doing so, reclaimed and reconnected as family.

There is no photo of my grandmother Amy in this collection she is identified in the genealogical records by name only and in relation to her immediate and extended family. My grandmother explained her absence to me a number of years ago “I was most likely looking after brother Roy who was a baby at the time.” The other family members were given numbers to identify and connect them in the genealogical records such as N156, N238 and N252. In the process of reconceptualising the archives and reclaiming my family, I took individual records and deconstructed them by laying out the information in order of kinship ties, language and culture. The images are reframed as family photographs and the kinship details of moieties and totems connect them together as Wangkumara people. When Norman Tindale would have asked:

“What meat are you?”

My Kundijkahs would have replied

Min:a Kauri ini I am Taragara, that’s my totem

My meat is the black cormorant

As an Adnyamathanha man

My Papaja Donald Johnson would have replied

Min:a Kauri Ini I am Kurdarinja, that’s my Wangkumara totem

My meat is the Billi

The Taragara and Kurdarinja were on opposite side moieties Dhinewa and Gulpara respectively and considered right-way marriage lore for the Wangkumara. It is also an example of how the Wangkumara incorporated my great grandfather Donald Johnson an Adnyamathanha man into the Wangkumara kinship system, which allowed my great-grandparents Donald and Ruby to marry according to Wangkumara lores and customs.

The small vials containing the gold glitter represents the gold from Wangkumara and Adnyamathanha Countries and the epic journeys of the ancestral beings the Mudas/Muras, the Pelican and the Bronze Winged Pigeon and after their earthly battles their blood turned to gold and opal. The gold-filled vials also symbolises the one my grandmother and some of her family members wore. This precious metal connected my grandmother to her ancestors and to Country.
The man behind the photographs

Norman B. Tindale was an anthropologist and entomologist at the South Australian Museum. Tindale travelled the country working with anthropologist and geneticist Joseph Birdsell of Harvard University conducting racial classification surveys and documenting genealogies on Aboriginal Government Stations and Reserves, like the Old Brewarrina Mission in 1938-39 and, further work was conducted again in 1952-54. These records inspired ‘Kundjikah and Papaja: Taking Back Tindale’ and ‘Tindale’s Tin Box: I am Taragara that’s my Totem’.

The ‘Numbers on Tin’ represents my grandmother’s extended family members and I have focused here on the catalogued numbers used by Tindale and Birdsell to identify the individuals that match them to the genealogical records. The numbers are also a way of acknowledging how for some Aboriginal people being numbered, named, measured from head to toe, tested and racially classified for scientific analysis ‘was not always a pleasant experience’ and for others, uncomfortable to say the least and those who were cooperative, did so under much duress.

In the Tindale Tin there are also crayon drawings by my Grandfather Bill Barker and his brothers Jack, Roy and Bert. These drawings were supervised by the researchers’ wives, Dorothy Tindale and Iris Birdsell at the Old Brewarrina Mission in 1938 and forms part of an amazing collection of Aboriginal children’s drawings. Like my grandmother Amy there are no photographs of my grandfather Bill and his brothers, and they are identified by a number which connects them to the genealogical records and provides additional materials like the brothers literacy and numeracy tests.

The artwork: Lorina L. Barker used mixed-media to reclaim the valuable family information contained within the genealogical and family records of the Tindale collection. Archival material, acrylic on canvas and wooden numbers on tin.
Looking Through Windows into the Past

Looking Through Windows into the Past represents the number of times my Grandmother Amy was removed and relocated by government policies that controlled every aspect of Aboriginal peoples’ lives. Amy and her family were first removed from Country in 1938 to the Old Mission and then, as part of the Aboriginal Housing Relocation Scheme, Amy, her husband, children and extended family were relocated to Newcastle in 1972-75.

The coloured photographs captured Amy the storyteller sharing stories about the places where she lived, and some of her favourite fishing places on the Darling River at Bourke. I took the photograph during an oral history fieldtrip to Bourke in 2006 for my PhD research. Bourke, on Ngemba Country is Amy’s adopted Country. She lived most of her life in Bourke, where she raised her children and looked after many nieces and nephews.

My grandparents lived on the Bourke Reserve in a little tin hump where they raised seven children. Three bedrooms, a kitchen and a fire outback. Corrugated sheets, multi-coloured layers, rusty and bent. Framed wooden-posts, sturdily wired and nailed together a front door hammered on windows cut out on all four sides.

The black and white photographs are part of the NSW State Government’s propaganda claiming that the policy of assimilation was ‘working’ particularly for those families who ‘choose’ to relocate from ‘outback’ towns like Bourke and Brewarrina to cities such as Sydney and Newcastle for education, employment and better housing. These staged photographs portray happy and healthy Aboriginal families in clean modern houses, with hygienic kitchens complete with white goods.

Fortunately, History and Anthropology conventions have changed, as has the status of Aboriginal people. As a result, references to ‘anonymous’ people can seem degrading and hurtful to the photographic subjects’ descendants. I make this observation in my PhD thesis, 2014.

I came by this photograph by accident while looking through the Picture Australia database now called Trove. As I flicked through the photographs I found an image of a small dark boy with a football. I thought ‘he looks familiar’ (in the front row). I then saw two more photographs of the boy. Looking closely at the image, I realised it was my Mum’s baby brother, Uncle Ross. I flicked through the remaining photographs and in two of these stood a tall, thin, dark woman with children happily posing at the front of a house. The tall lady had a similar ‘baird’ to my Grandmother Amy, and the other two boys looked like my Uncles Ashley and Neil when they were boys. I was convinced that these photographs were of my family. Flicking through the rest of the collection, I realised there were more photographs of members of my extended family and other ‘outback’ families from Bourke and Brewarrina. Excited by my discovery, I phoned my Grandmother and described the images then printed them to show my supervisor and to take to Bourke to confirm with my Grandmother.

The artwork: Matt Pilkington lightly sanded an old fly-screened window to frame the transparency photographs and mounted them on a wooden stand to emphasise the window effect. The work invites people to open and look into the past, and to remember the removal and the impact on the lives of Aboriginal families.

Image caption: Looking Through Windows into the Past 2016
Artwork by Matt Pilkington
Recycled gauze window frame, timber stand, adhesive
Variable dimensions
THE JOURNEY BACK TO COUNTRY

The Journey Back to Country is at the beginning of the film, My Grandmother’s Country and depicts the Wangkumara families’ Walk-off the Old Mission at Brewarrina in November 1940.

In the following archival oral history excerpt, my Grandmother Amy recalled the day of the Walk-off and the Wangkumara families’ determination to get as far as possible from the Old Mission, its management and a life controlled by rules, rations and religion. They yearned to be on Country, to be free people again. She remembers how:

What couldn’t get a ride
  in the buggy
  in the donkey wagon from South Australia (Nepubunna)

We all walked
  all us kids
  we’d jump on
  when we could get a bit of a room

Then walk on again
  hitting rabbits with waddys an’ that

We didn’t mind walkin’
  ’long as we got away from Bre"

The artwork: Matt Pilkington used a recycled window frame to represent the Mission huts that accommodated large Aboriginal families. It contains Wangkumara descendants at the beginning of their journey to reconnect with people, culture and Country. His artwork frames the Walk-off and evokes the memories and stories of the Wangkumara Elders’ determination to Walk-off the Old Mission; to journey to Country, back to our homelands and cultural way of life.
CAMPFIRE NIGHT

Fire is a gift from the ancestral Mura/Muda – the Pelican whose blood turned to gold and opal. Fire followed him on his epic journey and battle with the Three Brothers near Tibooburra. The campfire is a spiritual place where families gather, stories are shared, songs are sung and dances are enjoyed by firelight. The smoke from the fire is cleansing, healing and keeps bad spirits away.

This assemblage of photographs shows a family around a campfire sharing stories about the ‘good old days’, Country, culture and kinship ties. It is on campfire nights that stories of the Mission Days are passed onto the next generation.

The artwork: Matt Pilkington used a recycled window to frame photographs from the ‘Campfire Night’. It encourages the audience to peer through the window and to view Aboriginal families, history and culture in a cultural setting.
The Aborigines Protection Act 1909 (25/1909), gave the Board legal powers to 'provide for the protection and care' of Aboriginal people. The Board's powers were increased under the Aborigines Protection Act 1915, giving the Board complete control of Aboriginal people's lives, in effect, to act in loco parentis (in the place of a parent). It also gave the Board authoritarian powers to decide where Aboriginal people could live, travel, be educated, work and what (little) they could be paid. The Board also had the power to remove any Aboriginal child from the custody of their parents if the Board considered that child to be 'neglected' or 'uncontrollable'.

The Board’s powers were extended with the amendment of the Aborigines Protection Act in 1936. Known as the ‘concentration’ policy, it allowed the Board to remove large groups of Aboriginal people to any government station (the Missions and Reserves). In 1936 the Yawalaraay and Gamilaraay from Angledool were relocated to the Old Brewarrina Mission, where they joined the Ngumba of Brewarrina and Bourke and the Weilwan of Quambone. There were also people from the Kurnu-Baakandji, Kooma, Wongaibon and Yorta Yorta nations. Two years later, the Wangkumara and Muruwari from Dennawan were concentrated at the Old Mission.

With threats of having their children taken, and at gunpoint, the Tibooburra families gathered their belongings and climbed aboard the gubby trucks. They were transported via Wanaaring and Bourke to the Old Mission in April 1938. The artwork: This artwork shows a scene from the film, My Grandmother’s Country, and is my interpretation of my Grandmother Amy’s story describing what it was like when the Tibooburra families arrived at the Old Mission. For me, a re-enactment was a way of passing on the story to Amy’s great-grandchildren, so they can ‘walk in her shoes’ and experience her hardship, then remember it. It is essential they develop knowledge and an understanding of previous government policies, and how these same policies still impact Aboriginal people and their lives.
WHO’S COMIN NOW...

Who’s Comin Now... represents the perspectives of the Aboriginal residents - both long-term and recent arrivals - of the Old Mission who spent time peering out the windows of their huts, watching and wondering, ‘who’s comin now?’; waiting to meet the new arrivals and find out where they have come from and how they will adjust to Mission life. The cut-out windows framing the black and white photographs of children on the back of a one-tonne truck mimic the gubby trucks used to transport and relocate Aboriginal people to the Old Mission while the wire represents the Old Mission fence that locked them in.

As stipulated in the ‘concentration’ policy the Board could also remove Aboriginal people for health and hygiene reasons as outlined in Section 8A (1) of the Aborigines Protection (Amendment) Act, 1936:

Where an aborigine or a person apparently having an admixture of aboriginal blood is, in the opinion of the board, living in insanitary or undesirable conditions, a stipendiary or police magistrate may, on the application of the board, order such aboriginal or person to remove to a reserve or place controlled by the board...22

The Old Mission was established in 1885 following the complaints by Brewarrina residents about the Ngemba living near the Ngunnhu (Aboriginal fish traps), known today as Barwon 4. A group of Missionaries set up a ration station on land resumed from Quantambone Station, 16 kilometres northeast of Brewarrina. This tactic enticed the Ngemba out of town. While some relocated, many remained at their campsite close to the Ngunnhu.23

The artwork: Matt Pilkington pressed rusty baked bean tins and cut windows to frame the black and white photographs of children on the back of a ute reminiscent of the gubby trucks.
NGAKKA: THE EBB AND FLOW OF TIME

Ngakka: The Ebb and Flow of Time represents Aboriginal people’s relationship with water – in the rivers, lakes, creeks, waterholes and billabongs of the ‘corner country’ and northwest NSW.

The photographs highlight the cultural and social significance of water and serve as a reminder for people to stop, listen, wait a while and pay respects to Country and to the ancestral spirit beings that reside in the water places.

The top photograph shows the Paroo River and the location where a large Aboriginal camp was established. The middle photograph highlights the importance of conveying cultural knowledge to the next generation. The bottom photograph shows the continuous and strong connection to Country and culture passed from grandmothers to granddaughters.

The artwork: Matt Pilkington used sections of an old window to frame three photographs and the fourth served as a stand.

Lake Bulloo ‘The Big Lake’

Weedy Water
water lapping
wave come back

Leaping up
striking the bank

Water shaking
come and carry the weeds away

Bulloo Lake
water

Look at it
he came there
(a great Mura/Muda ancestor) ~
South of Tibooburra there is a huge, white quartz rock that is surrounded by many smaller rocks. This sacred site is the place of the White Lady who is called Guba Wallaga our Ngamadja (Mother). Guba Wallaga is one of the Wangkumara’s most sacred Muras/Mudas and has powerful healing abilities.

Aunty Laura Dixon, a Wangkumara Elder, told the following story of Guba Wallaga Ngamadja to Janet Mathews in the 1960s. Guba Wallaga Ngamadja was a very beautiful ancestral woman of the Wangkumara. She had long golden hair. After she completed her epic journey and creative activities, she rested outside of Tibooburra where she turned to stone (White Quartz). She is a great healer and when someone is sick, especially children, a female relative will visit Guba Wallaga and ask:

My mother, this child is sick would you please make him/her better.26

When the Wangkumara learned that white people treasured gold, the Old people decided to remove her head and buried it in a sacred creek. Guba Wallaga’s location has been kept secret and the knowledge passed down through the generations. The Wangkumara visit this place twice a year to ensure that the golden head of Guba Wallaga is never found by outsiders. Guba Wallaga is surrounded by Mt Poole, Mt Stuart and Mt Sturt, all important places to the Wangkumara.

Guba Wallaga is also a reminder for the Wangkumara to always follow Wangkumara marriage laws and customs, opposite side moieties of Dhinewa and Gulpara. It was told, one day, a long time ago, someone sent for Guba Wallaga because a man was sick. When she went to see this man she discovered that he had tricked her. This man was from South Australia and he knew that she could never marry unless he forced her. So he took Guba Wallaga away with him but when they came to the Country of the people from South Australia there was a dust storm. While the man was gathering wood to make a fire, Guba Wallaga ran away. It was two days before the dust cleared and he could follow her.

The Wangkumara of Cooper’s Creek soon heard about the kidnapping of Guba Wallaga but they were too far behind to catch up with her. The man researched Mt Poole and could see Guba Wallaga in the distance at Mt Brown. He could also see the Wangkumara people and he was worried that they would get there before him. The man didn’t want Guba Wallaga to tell her people everything about him and was worried that he would be killed. So he took a boomerang and aimed it at Guba Wallaga, hitting her in the head knocking her out.

The Wangkumara remember Guba Wallaga, Ngamadja, Our Mother by walking the Mura/Muda tracks of the Wangkumara ancestral beings from Tibooburra in New South Wales to Cooper’s Creek in Queensland and into South Australia.

I enhanced the original photographs of Aunty Barb Ebsworth at Guba Wallaga ‘Ngamadja’ and the feet of my mother, Gwen Barker, by printing them onto canvas. The use of canvas refers to the old army tents Aboriginal people used for housing, to screen interior rooms, for make-shift doors because they had to ‘make-do’ with available building material. Tin humpies and other housing was often made from materials such as discarded corrugated iron, chicken and fencing wire, old window frames and canoes. The photographs, taken by Tara and Emily Fawns, 2014 symbolise the important roles and responsibility of women in Wangkumara culture - the photograph of my mother’s feet representing the tradition of walking the Mura/ Muda tracks of Wangkumara ancestral beings.
The Language Lanterns represent the language groups of northwest NSW including the Ngemba, Muruwari, Kurnu-Baakandji, Burrabindja, Gamilaraay, Yuwalaraay, Kunja, and the descendants of the Wangkumara, Kooma and Adnyamathanha peoples who live in Bourke and Brewarrina. They also represent the New England language groups, the Anaiwan, Banbai, Gomeroi, Gumbaynggirr, and Dunghutti, as well as the language groups from around Sydney, including the Dharawal, and the Gadigal of the Eora Nation. The lanterns shine strong and bright and reflect the sun, the spiritual campfire and the strength of Aboriginal culture and connection to Country.

The lanterns also represent the interconnected relationships between northwest, New England and Sydney language groups and how they come together for social, economic and ceremonial purposes, as they have done for millennia. For example, Muruwari, Kurnu-Baakandji, Burrabindja, Gamilaraay, Yuwalaraay and Wiruwan joined the custodians, the Ngemba, in corroborees, ceremonies and meetings at Baiame’s Ngunnhu.

Artwork: Kim Scales used watercolour paper to create ten language lanterns, and stencilled each of them with the name of one language group. The red and orange-brown and tones of the lanterns represent the red dirt and black soil Country of northwest NSW. The lanterns are illuminated by small solar lights and linked together by wire and fairy lights, symbolising the stars and dust clouds of the Milky Way.
BACK TO BREWARRINA MISSION

Back to Brewarrina Mission is an assemblage of family and archival photographs used in My Grandmother’s Country with photographs from family and archival collections. They illustrate the removal and concentration of Aboriginal people onto Missions and Reserves in the first half of the twentieth century.

After two days travelling, the Tibooburra families arrived at the Old Brewarrina Mission in April 1938.

The day to night they arrived on the mission one cool night
Outside of Brewarrina on foreign land my Grandmother stands
Given rations old government blankets a hut to camp
My Grandmother distressed and weary many miles from home
The Wangkumara joined the families of the Ngemba, Muruwari, Wunulaara, Barabinda, Gamilaraay, Kurnu-Baakandji, Weilwan, Wongaibon, Wiradjuri, Kooma and the Yorta Yorta who were removed and concentrated on the Old Mission.

After two years of harsh living conditions and suffering the death of Elders, the Wangkumara families walked off the Old Mission in November 1940, and in doing so ‘they defied the Board and the police’. They travelled by donkey-cart and sulky and the young ones walked; they travelled to Bourke then to Wanaaring. At Wanaaring, the old Paroo was in flood, so the Wangkumara made camp, the men got work, the children went to school and when family members got sick they travelled back to Bourke.

The Old Mission operated for another 25 years until November 1965 when the last group of residents moved to the Barwon 4 camp outside of Brewarrina. The Old Mission ceased to operate and was officially demarcated as an Aboriginal Government Station in 1966.

Archival Photos from Brewarrina Mission
‘Mission Huts’, Old Brewarrina Mission, 1934. Image courtesy of AIATSIS
‘Mission Manager’s Garden’, Old Brewarrina Mission, 1933. Image courtesy of AIATSIS

Photographs by Beth Macrae O’Loughlin taken on the Old Mission, Brewarrina in 2018
Top left: Thomas French
Top right: Kimberley Barker
Middle left: Gwen Barker, Marji Rose, Kimberley Barker and Paige Johnson
Middle right: Karen Scott and Roberta McLaughlin
Bottom: Boney
Back to Bre 2017 and 2018 - two gatherings from two events out west. add blurb about gatherings - need text
THE GATHERINGS

The multimedia workshops and oral history interviews

The Looking Through Windows Elders Gatherings and multimedia workshops were held in Bourke, Brewarrina, Armidale and Campbelltown/Minto. These culturally safe places provided Elders and community members the opportunity to share their stories, memories and experiences and to work collaboratively with the Project Team to transform their story into an array of multimedia like Aunty Verna Barker’s story that was transformed into the song, It’s Time by Simon Mellor and he also add music to poetry, like Lorina Barker’s poem, ‘An Ode to My Grandmother’.

At these gatherings there were representatives from the 15 Aboriginal Nations including the Ngemba, Muruwari, Wangalumara, Kunja, Ngemba, Gamilarray, Alplymattunha, Burrndindja, Yawalaraay, Kurru-Ruckanjidi and Stona in northwest NSW and the Anaiwan, Banbai, Gumbaynggirr, Dunghutti and Gomeri in the New England region.

Our Elders and community members shared stories, reconnected to family, to Country and were able to begin, and for some to complete their journey of healing from the legacy of inter-generational trauma of removal. These gatherings provided a culturally safe place to listen to our Elders and community members’ stories and by doing so, we are Looking Through Windows into the past, only to see our stories reflected back at us. This is an example of some of the artworks in the exhibition that invites people to look at themselves – to rediscover, reclaim and reconnect to their history and culture. These gatherings were also a way for all of us to hang out and pay tribute to our Elders and cultural knowledge holders.

Elders meetings and oral history interviews, Campbelltown and Minto 2017

The Looking Through Windows team met and conducted oral history interviews with Elders from Campbelltown and Minto. These trips were crucial in ensuring our Elders were able to travel for the Back to Brewarrina & Old Mission Elders Gatherings in 2017 and 2018 and as artists to conduct art and oral history workshops.

The Back to Brewarrina and Old Mission Elders Gatherings, Brewarrina 2017 and 2018

The Back to Brewarrina and Old Mission Elders Gathering was a two-day event held in Brewarrina. It was a wonderful and successful event with an estimated 60 Elders in attendance who travelled from Bourke, Dubbo and as far away as Sydney, Canberra and some came from interstate from Brisbane and Melbourne.

This was a great opportunity for our Elders to catch up, hang out, to have yarn, a cuppa and to share stories of the ‘old days’. There were many tears and much laughter and joy when stories were shared, especially in the tearoom where Elders dabbled in art and embroidery workshops, run by Janny Shillingsworth and Aunty Verna Barker. The lounge area was our meeting place each day, where many stories were shared about the old Mission and what it was like growing up under the Act and Aunty Rita Wright encouraged and supported them to record their oral histories.

The Elders were very excited about the family history workshops with Isabel O’Loughlin and Amy O’Dohough from the SA Museum who brought with them the records relating to Old Brewarrina Mission from the Tindale Collection, which included photographs as shown in the artworks, Kundjikah and Papaja: Taking Back Tindale and Tindale’s Tin box: I am Taragara, That’s My Totem.

The rain prevented us from visiting the Old Mission because in black soil Country it only takes a few drops of rain for you to get bogged as Laszlo Szabo and Simon Mellor discovered. The experience left such an impression it inspired the song, ‘Bogged on the Old Mission Road’. The rain also meant we were unable to take the Elders on a tour of Baiame’s Ngunnhu (the Aboriginal fish traps), though when the sun did shine some Elders braved the mud and went to the river for some quiet time, to reflect and to reconnect to Country. Elders enjoyed a boat cruise on the Barwon River courtesy of community member, Allan Lynch and for some of our Elders it was the first time they had been on a boat and others the first time, since they were kids.
A second Back to Brewarrina Mission and Elders Gathering was held again in April 2018, along with the Looking Through Windows exhibition at the Brewarrina Visitor Information and Exhibition Centre. As part of the opening of the exhibition Trucked-off, an immersive theatre piece was performed to a very emotional audience and was the inspiration for the song, No dogs on the Truck. This event coincided with, the Festival of Barambah’s Ngumnya (Fish traps) organized by Lily Shearer’s and Mooghalin Performing Arts, where our Elders and community members were welcomed by an all Nations corroboree and throughout the festival they entertained by the battle of the bands, a film night and an array of cultural activities like basket weaving by the Ngumnya. With a special guest appearance and yarning session with Bunurong Elder, Uncle Bruce Pascoe, about his work like the book, Dark Emu.

Looking Through Windows Art, Music and Media Workshops, Bourke May 2017

The Looking Through Windows project team held a successful art, music and media workshops in Bourke with an estimated 30 Elders and community members attending the two-day workshops. Elders and community members shared their stories, memories and experiences about life on the Bourke Reserve, now known as the Alice Edwards Village and what it was like growing up under the Act. There were also stories about the Aboriginal Housing Relocation Scheme to Newcastle and Sydney for better housing, education and jobs.

Elders and community members shared their poetry, with Simon Mellor who transformed them into songs like Aunty Diane Edwards poem Cunnamulla. Brian Smith a local Kunja artist held art workshops that inspired the artwork, The Gathering I that captures the spirit of the Bourke workshops and the project objectives. Beth Macraild O’Loughlin took photographs and Laszlo Szabo filmed the event, while Lorina L. Barker led the oral history discussions. The Looking Through Windows team were invited to Aunty Elva Barker’s place for a campfire night, where we were entertained by Simon, Uncle John Barker and Ricko McKellar jamming around the campfire. We enjoyed chicken soup and johnny-cakes made by Aunty Elva and my mum Gwen Barker. The campfire night inspired the song, Johnny-Cakes on the fire.

Looking Through Windows Elders Gathering and Art, Music and Media Workshops, Armidale 2017

At the Armidale Elders Gathering in October Elders we were joined by Elders from Inverell, Werris Creek, Caroona, Quirindi and Tamworth. We enjoyed two-days of art and craft activities and our Elders made some beautiful artworks and string games that decorate the inside of the Tin Humpy. They shared lots of stories about growing up and living on the Mission. Local artist, Derek Moran painted the Gathering II that captures our Elders yarning, laughing and sharing a few ghost stories too. Hamish Sewell, from Soundtrails gave a talk on the Uralla project and the Mandy Cutmore and team from NSW Health did hold checks with our Elders. To end the Gathering and say thank you to our Elders we held an Elders Lunch at Booloominbah at UNE courtesy of Greg Davison and staff at Oorala, UNE. A big thank you, to Bridgette Keen and our Elders who travelled from Werris Creek, Gromba, Quirindi and Tamworth.

Thank you

A very big Thankyou too our Elders for their enthusiasm, generosity and trust in us to record their stories. They reminded us of how important it is to provide the opportunity like the Elders Gatherings so they can catch up, hang out, yawn and have a cuppa together. They helped to create cultural spaces to share knowledge and it was an honour to record their stories. We are very proud of the deadly way our Elders continue to maintain and preserve our histories, languages and cultures.
AN ODE TO MY GRANDMOTHER

Wangkumara woman
Strong in spirit, mind and heart
Wise and generous

Culturally strong in her beliefs
Tenaciously holding onto the past
Her stories, Her life

The storyteller
Captivevating and mesmerising
Stories of the past she shares
The Dreaming and kinship
These stories she told us
My Grandmother

Retelling stories of the good old days
What it was like
Growing up the Wangkumara way
Hundreds of miles from Country

She passed these stories on to us
To me the next generation
This story
Her journey
I’ll share with you
My grandmother’s story

The story of her family’s journey
From her country
Tibooburra in the west
Heading east to the mighty Darling River
To the Country of the Ngemba people

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The Wangkumara families
Trucked off to missions
Through the sand hills
Across the great-plains
The dust rose up and around
My grandmother’s country slowly disappeared

Families cry for country left behind
Up ahead in the distance
Fear and uncertainty
The unknown awaits
Life on a mission
To be the Wangkumara’s fate
My grandmother’s freedom taken away

Minutes to hours
The day to night
They arrived on the mission
One cool winter’s night
Outside of Brewarrina
On foreign land
My grandmother stands

Given rations
Old government blankets
A hut to camp
My grandmother distressed and weary
Many miles from home

The Wangkumara people imprisoned
But not defeated
Found the courage to walk off the mission
Back toward Country
Along the Darling River

They got as far as Wanaaring
Floodwaters cut them off
They turned back toward Bourke
Lost in a foreign land,
My grandmother didn’t despair

On the Darling River they made camp
This place became known as the Bourke Reserve
All along the river and right about here
The Wangkumara people made humpies
Just over there
Between those two trees
That’s the place where my Grandmother camped
On the land of the Ngemba people
My Grandmother’s adopted country

My grandmother married grandfather
Seven children they raised
Many nieces and nephews they cared for too
In a little tin humpy
On the Bourke Reserve
Where my Grandmother lived for many years

This great lady
From a large extended clan
The Ebsworth clan of the Wangkumara
An enduring spirit
A treasure to behold
She is an inspiration my Grandmother

I love and admire
I am who I am
because of you my Grandmother.
THE SILENT VOICES OF THE PARENTS OF THE STOLEN GENERATIONS

Jenny Shillingsworth is a Ngemba woman and artist. Jenny and her sister Rita Wright are members of the Stolen Generations. They were taken while playing with their cousins at the Camp at Baroom 4 at Brewarrina. Jenny like her mum never spoke much about her life until she picked up a paintbrush and as she explained, ‘I just started painting my story’. Jenny has always wanted to give voice to her mum Grace Shillingsworth’s story, to visually describe what life was like when her daughters were taken away. As Aunty Jenny pointed out, ‘Mum’s never been asked to tell her story, so I wanted to tell her story, because I think it’s time now and it needs to be told’.

This collection of works draws much needed attention to the untold stories and silent voices of the parents of the Stolen Generations. This is Aunty Grace’s story, her life’s journey to find her daughters, to bring them back home to Brewarrina, to family, and to Country.

Aunty Jenny lives in Minto and when she is not painting she enjoys visiting friends and spending quality time with her children and grandchildren.

Rations
Just living on and working for rations from week to week. Aboriginal people at the Old Brewarrina Mission received a supply of dried rations such as flour, sugar, tea, powdered milk, a bit of tobacco and some meat.

Rations were issued to the Elderly and women with children, the able-bodied had to work for their rations, the men as station hands and the women as domestic servants in the Big House on the Mission or on the surrounding stations.

Separation
Mum didn’t know where we were
I can just imagine
All the mothers’
They would’ve been devastated

Running after their children
Reaching out
Trying to touch them

The small hands are the children
The matching colours connect them
With their parents
One hand for the children
One hand for the parents
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With their parents

One hand for the children
One hand for the parents

**Broken Hearts and Shattered Lives**

*Broken Hearts and Shattered Lives* represents all the children and the parents of the Stolen Generations.

My mum always had a broken heart
It’s something she can never change
Even if she could go back in time
To mend the past...

She had that sadness about her
But she still had that strength
To be able to walk
With her head up high
 Everyday

Even though we are walking on country
We still haven’t got our whole lives together
The ground is so dry and cracked
The land is so dry and broken
Just like a person
As I believe my mum would have been

My mum’s feet
Walking on Country
With culture and knowledge
But her feet are still shattered
From what happened in her life
Her feet connects her to country
She feels the pain of mother earth
She feels her pain
From her feet
Through her body
Deep pain everyday

*No Voice*
MY BIRTH, MY COUNTRY

Verna Barker is a Kunja embroidery artist. She was born in Bourke and has close family and historical connections to Engonia where her mother’s people lived, Lightning Ridge where she went to school and Brewarrina where her extended Barker family live. These places are central features in Aunty Verna’s embroidered art, My Birth, My Country which represents Aunty Verna’s travels throughout her Country, from Bourke where she was born to Brewarrina and Lightning Ridge where she went to school and her memories of growing up, playing and walking in red dirt Country. It also depicts her deep connection to family and place and provides a glimpse into her memories and experience of removal from family, from community and from Country. These places are also captured in the song, Cubby House Tree about her childhood memories of playing cubby houses in the red dirt beneath a coolah, gidgee or river gum trees. This song was a collaboration between Aunty Verna and Simon Mellor. Aunty Verna is the fifth child in a blended family of eleven siblings. She loves spending time with her family, especially her five children, twenty grandchildren and two great-gran children. Aunty Verna shared with me her memories and experiences of removal and her return to family and Country and the deep loss of her mum. I transformed her story into free verse poetry:

When he got on his feet
He came and picked us up
Aunty Verna shared with me her memories and experiences of removal and her return to family and Country and the deep loss of her mum. I transformed her story into free verse poetry:

When he got on his feet
He came and picked us up
Aunty Verna shared with me her memories and experiences of removal and her return to family and Country and the deep loss of her mum. I transformed her story into free verse poetry:

When I turned twenty-five
I wanted to get my birth certificate
My mum passed away having me
My aunty said we were twins
That she had passed away and my twin sister too
I was weeping because she was only twenty-five
When she passed away
I was born in Bourke NSW
I think I was about five
When Dad put me and my sister Mary
In Broken Hill Convent Home
I remember going to Engonia before that
The red dirt and playing
That’s all I can remember
I think I was nine or ten
When I left Broken Hill Convent Home
And Dad took us to Whyalla in SA
Because he married June Ferguson
She had five children
Then we moved to Lightning Ridge
There I did the rest of my primary school and high school
We use-tah catch the bus to Walgett
Five days a week to go to school
It was fun and very interesting them times
There was no bitumen
It was just all dirt roads
When it use-tah rain
They said “come on all you Lightning Ridge people”
We use-tah run on the bus before it got flooded
Yah know coming into a new family
Who I really didn’t know
I was about nine or ten
I think I was the odd one out
When I was about fourteen
That’s when I ran away from Lightning Ridge to Brewarrina
Met all my mob in Brewarrina
Then I went to Bourke met all the mob there
And Weilmoringle and Goodooga
As a result of complaints from the community about a supposedly delinquent girl with no fixed address, Aunty Verna was removed again from her family age 14 by the district welfare officer and sent to Bidura in Glebe, a state run institution, a ‘depot and receiving home – a holding institution – for girls and very young boys while they waited to be taken to the Children’s Court or were moved between foster care and government institutions.’ Aunty Verna was later remanded to the Minda Remand Centre in Lidcombe for girls and boys, where she awaited appearance at the Children’s Court and by the order of the presiding judge she was sent to the Parramatta Girls Home, where she was put out to service and then to the girls hostel in Bexley, where she worked at Old Flemings Store. This is her story of forced removal:

I had just walked out of the Royal Pub in Bre and onto the main road
The welfare came in a car they knew where I was
Put me in the car and took me to Bourke
I was in the cell in Bourke
They put me in the lock-up overnight
The welfare lady came
Picked me up the next day
And took me to Sydney by train

I was in Bidura in Glebe
Then they shifted me to Minda in Lidcombe
I was there for a while
Then they sent me out to Parramatta
With two other girls
Looking after this place with kids and that
Then after that they sent me to Bexley
In a hostel with Aboriginal girls
I was working at Old Flemings Store
All the girls use-tah go into Redfern
I didn’t know nothing about Redfern at that time
One day they said
“Verna come into Redfern for a ride”
I went in and that was that
That’s where I met my husband
The father of my children
Roy from Kempsey
LOOKING THROUGH WINDOWS, A TRAVELLING EXHIBITION

TIN HUMPY

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LOOKING THROUGH WINDOWS, A TRAVELLING EXHIBITION

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Looking through windows, a travelling exhibition

Caption here - names

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76 LOOKING THROUGH WINDOWS, A TRAVELLING EXHIBITION
Trucked-off is a one-act immersive, interactive performance reflecting shared memories of forced removal of Aboriginal people in NSW and retraces the journey of the Tibooburra families from Country to the Old Brewarrina Mission in 1938.

Trucked-off transformed my grandmother Amy Elwood’s story and her extended family members’ archival audio recordings, government reports and archival materials into a performance that provides young people and the broader community with an immersive understanding of the history of removal and the experiences of Aboriginal Elders from northwest NSW. The Trucked-off performance is a culturally innate way of knowledge transmission, providing me and my family, especially my nieces and nephews a way to immerse ourselves in our grandmother’s and grandfather’s story to walk in their footsteps, to speak their words and those of our extended family – our uncles, aunts and cousins. As active participants, they ‘re-enact and retell the stories on Country and in doing so, experience the knowledge and truth of the story.’

Trucked-off is a way to immerse and embody the oral histories through all six senses: to hear the spoken words of racism and intolerance as we are ‘rounded-up’ by the gunjis (the policeman); to smell the air-filled smoke from the gun that shot our camp dogs and forced our Elders to climb aboard the trucks; to hear the crack of the mission manager’s stock whip as we frantically pack up our life, our belongings and all what we could carry in a single suitcase; to experience the chaotic and confusing melee at The Camp at Thomson Creek – the boom, crack, barking orders, crying screams, yelping dogs, blunting goots and grunting camels. Our senses are confusingly alert as the long journey begins and we are ‘trucked-off’ from Thomson Creek: the dust rises up and around, we smell the sweat taste of Country for the last time and we feel the deep pain of leaving our Country, our ancestors behind; we endure the lingering taste of dried spam sandwiches our Elders ate en-route to Brewarrina.

We understand and know of their suffering, as they are ‘fenced-in’ at the Old Brewarrina Mission. To share this story we invoke the spirit and strength of our Elders to speak their truths about the trauma of removal – the poor living conditions, the worry for Country, for our ancestors – this spiritual unsettling that killed some of our grandmothers and grandfathers. We share their story of endurance and survival. We honour and thank our Elders for the strength and determination for keeping our cultural knowledge and history alive, which connects us to our identity, language, culture, Country and kin.

Trucked-off is co-written and directed by Lorina Barker and Julie Collins. As a theatre practitioner, academic and experienced actor Julie formatted and structured the performance and together we selected my families oral histories, government policies and documented reports for each scene. We were inspired and included excerpts from the book, The Two World of Jimmie Barker and the catalogue Film Through 1000 Images. The stories for each scene also emerged from the Looking Through Windows Elders Gatherings and multimedia workshops at Brewarrina, Bourke, Armidale, Campbelltown and Minto. As Elders shared their experiences of being ‘fenced-in’ and ‘locked up’, their oral histories were added to the script.

The yarn with Aunty Marji Rose and Aunty Jeannie French at Brewarrina helped to develop the scene on whiteness, which represents wholesome and clean, the words spoken by the matron:

‘Your homes will be inspected for cleanliness each week. Here is a cake of sunlight soap (offer bar of soap), make sure your sheets are sparkling white. You will be given blankets twice a year.”

As part of the Gatherings and multimedia workshops our Elders reflected, remembered, re-experienced and re-storied a historically important place and time. Over several months and through a series of creative workshops in community, professional and emerging artists collected collect oral histories, photographs and video document the collation.
Looking Through Windows, A Travelling Exhibition

November 2018.

In April 2018, with the final show at the 107 Gallery, Redfern in 2017, and again at the Brewarrina Tourist Information Centre the Aboriginal Cultural Centre and Keeping Place in November place at the New England Regional Art Museum (NERAM) and part of the opening proceedings. The first performance took Looking Through Windows multimedia exhibition and forms was created and performed as a complement to the Trucked-off under, such as theatre performance. can access in mediums that they are familiar with, use and histories in a way that the current and future generations As demonstrated above, it is vitally important to record histories in a way that the current and future generations can access and by immersing themselves in the story through, re-enactment and their retelling of the stories, they experience the knowledge and truth of the story, and in doing so, understand and embody the oral histories of removal. Aunty Jeanie French shared with me her grandson Todd’s response to his performance and re-enacting his Nan’s, Aunty Jeanie’s story. The following is an excerpt of our yarn together:

He went home that afternoon and said to his little sister, “you should’ve come down today to see the play about the Old Mission. Gee Nan lived a hard life, I wouldn’t wanna live in those times. People movin’ yah, tellin’ yah what to do, how-tah Mission. Gee Nan lived a hard life, I wouldn’t wanna live in those times. People movin’ yah, tellin’ yah what to do, how-tah wash yah clothes and clean yah house. One woman said she was suppose to get married but they told her that she couldn’t marry anyone unless they said so. You should’ve come down.”

As demonstrated above, it is vitally important to record histories in a way that the current and future generations can access in mediums that they are familiar with, use and understand, such as theatre performance.

Trucked-off was created and performed as a compliment to the Looking Through Windows multimedia exhibition and forms part of the opening proceedings. The first performance took place at the New England Regional Art Museum (NERAM) and the Aboriginal Cultural Centre and Keeping Place in November 2017, and again at the Brewarrina Tourist Information Centre in April 2018, with the final show at the 107 Gallery, Redfern in November 2018.

Trucked-off is an immersive experience for family members, actors and the audience and is performed in three stages:

Part 1 – The Camp is a location that represents Country and the Aboriginal Camp at Thomson Creek at Tibooburra such as the Aboriginal Cultural Centre and Keeping Place (ACC&KP), and at the National Centre for Indigenous Excellence, Redfern and in some cases like in Brewarrina The Camp was represented by people gathering under a tree.

Part 2 – No dogs on the trucks. The audience take the journey with Lorina and family from Tibooburra to Brewarrina.

Part 3 – Fenced In. The cast and audience arrive at the gallery, which represents the Old Brewarrina Mission. Where they are welcomed by the mission manager and told the rules and the punishment disobedience and insolence. The family members lay their suitcases down in and outside the tin humpy, and the closing scene is of a female Elder singing in language, and represents the Elders on the Mission, like Granny Helen.

Co-written by: Lorina L. Barker and Julie Collins

Directed by: Lorina L. Barker and Julie Collins

Cast Members – Family members: Lorina L. Barker, Warren Kelly, Lacey Barker, Marlin Kim, Kimberley Barker, Peta Barker, Jada Barker, Rick McKellar, Narella McKellar, Brown Barker, Brooke Barker, Green Barker, Rick Thoado, Louise Thoado, Chanel McKellar, Xavier McKellar, Jylan McKellar, Lala McKellar, Rebecca McKellar

Community members: Jaluka Rose Quinlan, Mary Waites, Eva Boney, representatives of female Elders already residents on the Old Mission, Elders like Granny Helen, Aunty Jaluka Rose sung at the NERAM opening and Aunty Mary at the Brewarrina opening. Rodney McLoughlin, a young local performer, who had recently acted in the movie Emu Runner, appeared in the Brewarrina performance.

Local Cast members – Actors

Julie Collins, Gordon Cope, Jessica Donaldson-Jarrett (Armidale), Judy McInerny (Armidale), Garry Slocombe, Torsten Strokirch (Armidale), Karin von Strokirch (Armidale), Claire Wall (Armidale), Svea Strokirch (Armidale).

Trucked-off utilised the central prop of an Old Mission Truck (a 1930s Dodge Truck). The utes/4 wheel drives were courtesy of Sally and Edward Wright, Armidale, Eva and XXX Boney (Armidale) and Svea the Border collie (Armidale).
Looking Through Windows, a Travelling Exhibition

Baiame’s Spirit Dogs

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Image captions here:
TRAVELLING THROUGH COUNTRY

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Remembering, Returning and Healing - interviews with Aunty Jenny, Rita and others on TV
Looking Through Windows Wii Thirra (Campfire Songs) is representative of the songs inspired by the people, places, stories and poetry shared at the Looking Through Windows multimedia workshops and Elders gatherings in Bourke, Brewarrina, Armidale and Campbelltown and Minto. These culturally safe places provided Elders and community members the opportunity to share their stories and poems and to work collaboratively with Simon Mellor to transform their story into songs or add music to their poetry like my poem, An Ode to My Grandmother. I shared with Simon my family’s history and stories about my great grandfather, Jimmie and I loaned him my copy of the book, The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker, from which he wrote the song, Jimmie Barker. Simon sang it for my great Aunty Margaret Brown nee Barker and extended Barker Family at the Back to Brewarrina & Old Mission Elders Gathering in 2017. Aunty Marg and the family shared with Simon more stories and memories of Jimmie, from which he wrote the last two verses. Aunty Marg and the Barker family endorsed the song and gave their permission for it to be included in the Looking Through Windows Wii Thirra CD collection.

At these gatherings there were Elders and community members from the 15 Aboriginal Nations including the Ngemba, Muruwari, Wangkumara, Kunja, Ngemba, Gamilaraay, Adnyamathanha, Burrabindja, Yawalaraay, Kurnu-Baakandji and Kooma in northwest NSW and the Anaiwan, Banbai, Gumbaynggirr, Dunghutti and Gomeroi in the New England region. They shared stories, reconnected to family, to Country and were able to begin/complete their journey of healing from the legacy of inter-generational trauma of removal.

During the Back to Brewarrina and Old Mission Elders Gathering, 21-22 March 2017 the rain prevented us from visiting the Old Mission because in black soil Country it only takes a few drops of rain for you to get bogged as Laszlo Szabo and Simon Mellor discovered. The experience left such an impression it inspired the song, Bogged on the Old Mission Road.

At the gathering at the Brewarrina Aboriginal Integrated Child and Family Centre Simon had a jamming session with Aunty Verna Barker and younger brother Tom Barker and together they collaborated on the song, Cubby House Tree. Aunty Verna’s song was transformed by Simon into the song, Same Ground.

As part of this project a second Back to Brewarrina Mission and Elders Gathering was held again on 12-15 April 2018, along with the Looking Through Windows exhibition at the Brewarrina Visitor Information and Exhibition Centre. As part of the opening of the exhibition Trucked-off, an immersive theatre piece was performed to a very emotional audience and was the inspiration for the song, No dogs on the Truck.

Looking Through Windows Wii Thirra (Campfire Songs)
1. Bogged on the old mission road
2. Cubby House Tree
3. Jimmy Barker
4. Johnny Cakes
5. An Ode to My Grandmother
6. Same Ground
7. No dogs on the track
8. Pretty White Dress
9. Aunty Verna’s song
10. Cunnamulla song (Aunty Diane Edwards poem)

Artwork by Brian Smith, Bourke 2018: The artwork Kurmpu (corroboree ground collection of Wii Thirra campfire songs). These 30 x 30 cm acrylic on canvas represents the songs created around the campfire and the gathering of people at workshops and events.

Image: Brian Smith, Looking Through Windows Wii Thirra (Campfire Songs) front cover (detail) 2018, acrylic on canvas, 30 x 30 cm
Jimmie Barker grew up on the mission
And when he was young, his father went missing
So him and his brother were raised by his mother
In a little tin humpy down by the river
And pretty soon he realised
What they were doing just wasn’t right
They offered nothin’, and they delivered
Carrying water and chopping wood
Just to get by they did what they could
Starvation rations and meaningless bashings
And being told that you’re no good
And they tried to make him understand
That the colour of your skin was the measure of a man
But Jimmie knew all along, they were wrong
When Jimmie Barker’s two worlds collided
That story was pretty one-sided
They wrote it that way
Just because they can
But with an exercise book and a tape machine
He put it all down for the world to see
The story of a proud Muruwari man

The Managers came and the Managers went
Some you’d remember, but most you’d forget
Not enough blankets and not enough jobs
Not enough tucker and treated like dogs
And it’s hard to stare down a man
With a rifle on his shoulder and a whip in his hand
But Jimmie packed up and walked off the mission
Jimmie Barker looked back on his life
He longed for the old days and mourned for his wife
But all the while through good times and bad
He was grateful for the family he had
And the story he left behind
Is a story we all should keep in mind
The story of a proud Muruwari man

Pretty White Dress

The Gunjis came on horse back
And the wellies came in trucks
They pulled right in to the middle of the camp
And started rounding everybody up
The men and women were taken to the mission
And as the trucks rolled out that day
The orders were to shoot anybody
That tried to get away
It’s a story that’s been told too many times before
It’s a story some folks find a little too easy to ignore
A little girl cried for her mother but they said it was for the best
And they took her down to Cootamundra
And gave her a pretty white dress.

They lined them up for the photo
And told them all to stop crying
Seems to me it’s not hard to see
Why none of them were smiling
They said no body wants you
They said no body cared
Maybe a nice white family might take you
And Jesus would always be there
They were taught the white man’s story
They were taught the white man’s ways
Sent to work in the big house
And treated no better than slaves
Just the other morning
I heard a man on the radio
Wondering what all the fuss was about
It all happened a long time ago
Well maybe he’d like to meet that girl
And maybe he’d like to explain
Why she never saw her parents
Or the sunrise over her country again

Brian Smith, Looking Through Windows W/ Thierry (Campfire Songs)
back cover (detail) 2018, acrylic on canvas, 30 x 30 cm
Mission Days - B&W film footage
The Old Brewarrina Mission - film again include stills
Days gone by - show reel, again get stills for this
MY GRANDMOTHER’S COUNTRY

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