

Open Foundation

Regional History

Thursday 10-12

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Lecturer :- MARGERET HENRY

Topic :- Purfleet

"TRANSCRIPT." of interview with  
Horry Saunders.

My name is Randall Wiggers and I am interviewing Horry Saunders on the History of Purfleet an Aboriginal reserve, south of Taree. This tape is part of the Regional History assignment for the Part Time Open Foundation Course. The date today is the 25th of August, 1989.

RANDALL:- So Horry when were you born?

HORRY:- 3rd of May 1929

RANDALL:- Whereabouts were you born at?

HORRY:- I was born at Waratah

RANDALL:- In Waratah in Newcastle is it?

HORRY:- Yes! I originally came from Karuah. Karuah Mission and I was only 5 year old when I came to Purfleet to live. We lived on the edge of the Mission for many years and then we, the Protection Board soughta took over. And the area where we lived in it became part of the Mission. So we thought we were on the edge of the mission, finished up we were on the mission. But we had our house when I was a child, it was only a bark house, built out of bush timber, and the roof was made of bark. It was a two bedroom house, and big gining room and a kitchen, four bedroom house all told and a verandah in front and a verandah on the back. And a big tin fireplace, and I had two sisters and a brother. We lived in that house. And the house itself had no flooring. It was just a dirt floor.

RANDALL:- It would have been cold.

HORRY:- Very cold in fact, cold and wet in Wintertime. We soughta built the soil up higher so it made a drain around the house, so the soil kept pretty high and dry inside. It was very hard times, them times, because I don't think we were just the only people living in that, in those circumstances, there was a lot of other people, that might have had some slab floors at the time. Cause I'm talking about fifty

five year ago.

RANDALL:- That's a long time isnt it?

HORRY:- Thats a long time, jeh! But Purfleet was only a small settlement then.

RANDALL:- How may people do you think lived there then?

HORRY:- Well it about, oh, two hundred people at the most. That's men women and kids. But it wasn't called Purfleet in them days it was called Sunrise. There was a manager and his wife. Mr. Williams and Mrs. Williams and he had a son and daughter.

RANDALL:- What about your Grandparents, Horry, when were they born?

HORRY:- They were born up here at Melinga and Laurieton area.

RANDALL:- Ahah! And what do you remember about them?

HORRY:- They were Clarkes. My Grandparents were Clarkes. They were a big family Clarkes. Mill workers, I can remember em, my Grandfather was working at the Langley Vale Mill, and he married a girl from Karuah that s how I soughta came into the Karuah area.

RANDALL:- Growing up in Purfleet as a child, what games or sports did you play?

HORRY:- Well we played hockey, but we made our own hockey sticks out of bush timber, it was one of our favourite sports, and football, Hockey and football was the main two sports. We played bare footed them days, no boots. (Laughs) And the hockey sticks was just a stick out of the bush with a bit of a lump on the end of it, and thats our hockey stick with a tennis ball, we didn't have hard balls in them days, just a tennis ball.

RANDALL:- What about, did you have a favourite swimming place?

HORRY:- Yes, we all had our pet little spots, the old people never let us go too far away to swim. And we had our special little swimming holes

that we swam in. And our main swimming hole at Purfleet then was down on, we call it, Willards Creek, it was a junction of the creeks back in behind Old Bar Road there. It was about a mile and a half walk from the Mission.

RANDALL:- Is that still there?

HORRY:- It's still there yeh! Thats the old swimming place.

RANDALL:- And what school did you go to?

HORRY:- Purfleet had their own school. Aboriginal school and the Manager was our school teacher.

RANDALL:- Was he a good teacher?

HORRY:- Well, he was a ex-army man, and ah, he just taught you what he'd feel. We went up to fourth class. There was only four classes in it, one, two, three, four.

RANDALL:- Right! What were the main subjects that were taught?

HORRY:- Little bit of History.

RANDALL:- That'd be European History, Aboriginal History, or?

HORRY:- Nothing about the Aboriginal History hey kept it right out, because they wanted Aboriginal History to fade out. Dead against the culture if you spoke in the language you got the cane.

RANDALL:- For speaking in the language you got caned?

HORRY:- Yes! Yes! You was'nt allowed to speak in the language. We had to learn English and him being an English man he was very strict with his ways, many times an old swallow or something like that'd fly come inside the school, the doors were open, windows, old swallow'd come inside the school. He had his little gun with him all the time. He'd shoot the swallow in front of you up in the ceiling. (Laugh)  
You expected anything.

RANDALL:- So did that double as a church to that school?

HORRY:- That was the church and the school. The old church that is out there now that was the school. That was the old school it's been shifted about three or four times.

RANDALL:- Did you attend church like with your family on Sundays?

HORRY:- Yes, Yes! We were very regular church goers.

RANDALL:- Were you made to go to church?

HORRY:- Yes! We were made to go to church them days, they were very strict the older folk, very strict about Sunday school. Went to Church of a Sunday and Sunday night.

RANDALL:- So what effect did the missionaries have on Purfleet.

HORRY:- Well to tell you the truth they were very helpful, I thought to the people. They were more helpful to the people than what the ~~managers~~ were. Managers more or less, rationed ~~everything~~ out, like to come and give you things, if anybody was sick with the missionaries you would'nt have to wait. Really helped the sick people. The Managers if you were'nt there at a certain time to see them when you were sick, that was it, at the time. And the missionaries they came anytime people were sick, they came and gave them something.

RANDALL:- Do you think they emphasised christian beliefs instead of Aboriginal?

HORRY:- No! It was just a change we came into, a change, it started in my time a change over to come into a different culture. The change, leave our culture behind and to come into white society's culture. I remember I used to know a lot of that language but I've forgotten it. I know a fair bit of it yet.

RANDALL:- After all your years at school you probably would forget it.

HORRY:- Yes you do forget the language! Its pronouncing the language thats

very hard to remember.

RANDALL:- So were the Managers respected by the community?

HORRY:- Yes! They were, some of them were and some were'nt you know did'nt have respect for the Managers. But there was a lot that had had respect for the managers.

RANDALL:- So in the time that you were at Purfleet, how many managers do you think were in that time? They left every two or three years did they?

HORRY:- There'd be half a dozen managers at least. Six at least. They had a lot of relieving managers. But on the whole I'd say there'd be six.

RANDALL: How restrictive were they?

HORRY:- They were very strict with us, the only manager, I think that, ah, the last Mr. Briggs and his wife there was a change in them when they came here. The other managers did'nt like you going out after dark.

RANDALL:- So there was like a curfew on you?

HORRY:- If I had a friend coming to my place he'd have to go to the manager and report before he was allowed to come on the reserve. Even if he was my own colour, he he was dark blood he still had to come and report to the manager before he was allowed to come on the reserve. So the laws them days were through the Managers and very strict. You just could'nt come and go as you pleased. If you went away for a holiday you had to report to him.

RANDALL:- Before you left?

HORRY:- Before you left! And when you come back you had to report to him to let him know you were back home.

RANDALL:- What were the houses and the amenities like when you were a child.

HORRY:- The houses we built ourselves, thats what I told you were just bark houses. We made do, we went to the bush and stripped the bark, cause there was no private properties them days. You were allowed to go and get your bark and get your timber to build your house. No restriction like there is today. There was no Trespasser will be prosecuted. Them days you had your hunting ground, there was a lot of people used to own the land, but they never had no restrictions.

RANDALL:- They didn't mind you going on their property?

HORRY:- And getting our bark for houses and timber to build houses with. We had no trouble doing our hunting for wallaby and anything we got.

RANDALL:- What about if you were ever caught inside the corn fields or whatever

HORRY:- Well that was something different there were restrictions there, but they never really got on our backs. There was a lot of really good people them days.

RANDALL:- So were you taught any traditional skills?

HORRY:- Yeh we were, some of the boys were taught many traditional skills, how to hunt for food. And how to look for our wild vegetables, you know, for our fruit.

RANDALL:- So did you use it to supplement your diet?

HORRY:- When we were in the bush we'd go out in the bush hunting and if we found the special things in the bush we'd gather em and bring them home. We done it for years? Even when I was grown up, even if I go in the bush and I see something I still bring it home.

RANDALL:- So did you go on family outings?

HORRY:- Yes! We used to do a lot of family outings, a lot of people called it the walkabout, these were certain times that were selected for

doing such a different type of thing, we went looking for.

HORRY:- Like the talk about the Witchetty Grub we didnt know anything about a Witchetty Grub, it was called Guppoo. We don't know who came into this Witchetty Grub name. Well that was the name of the grub that we went looking for, Guppoo see. And we went looking for Cobra we called it Yimmerah!

RANDALL:- Cobra is that a snake?

HORRY:- No, it lives in the wood in the saltwater.

RANDALL:- Oh! Thats the long worm.

HORRY:- Yeh! It's like a worm it is, it's beautiful. It's beautiful to eat. If your sick if anything like that, you generally go'n get it it does you real good, it brings your appetite back.

RANDALL:- What other type of bush foods did you find?

HORRY:- Well there was a lot, we went for Wallaby, Kangaroos, porcupines their nice food. Their a delicacy porcupine. It's between a pig and a fowl. Then you had your place where you went and got your turkey.

RANDALL:- What type of weapons did you use?

HORRY:- We never worried about guns or anything like that, we had our own bush stuff, we caught our stuff with snares and different things. We never used much spears cause we wasn't any good with the spears. But we made a stick like a Boondi, we used to call it. And we get around our stuff, surprising how you killed your stuff and you had your dogs. We never had no guns.

RANDALL: So you had some good times out in the country?

HORRY:- Yeh! Yeh! Well we had some good times, well every day you looked forward to doing something after school, you know, we'd do something special after school. Go into your bush back with your old ways. I use to enjoy it, well, I still enjoy it, I like to go into the bush now just to walk round in the bush to get that feeling, feel that free



you know when you go into the bush. I think its the greatest thing out to go in the bush, you know all that fresh air in the bush. Listen to the birds and the freedom you find when you walk around the bush.

RANDALL:- So was there a lot of storytelling by elders?

HORRY:- Yes, everyday thats what I use to like about the past, after we had tea, we'd go to some old persons place and you'd have to tell them what you had done that day. And each one that done something he told his story what happened. And we'd sorta get together there the ways that I use to like. Everybody had their different story where they'd been, what they'd done. But you had more time to communicate with each other and you wasn't looking at the T.V and getting sore eyes, like they do today. Y ou had more fellowship, there was a lot of fellowship with each family them days, there just wasn't one special family.

RANDALL:- More contact amongst the family?

HORRY:- There was a lot of unity amongst the people. That's all gone now.

RANDALL:- So if a manager walked in and you were being told a story by the elders, which he did'nt think was right---

HORRY:- Yes he didn't like it, he'd always want to know what the story was all about and if it was just about the days story, about what happened, they'd leave you. But if they were teaching you something that they wanted you to get away from like the old ways he'd break it up.

RANDALL:- So would he just walk straight into the house?

HORRY:- Oh yes! They didn't have to knock they'd just walk straight into your house.

RANDALL:- I suppose some would be worse than others?

HORRY:-

Oh yes, some would be worse than the others. I remember once there was a new Matron, you had to call her Matron, the Manager's wife you had to approach her as Matron. And there was one there came once, she was relieving the Manager's wife. And she came in, I was married, I had two children then, and the first thing she came in, I had chairs around the place and she came in and sat on the table and I approached her straight away. I said "look" I said, I'm sorry, but I eat off that table and if you don't mind would you please sit on the chair. And she was really offended about that. I was really brought up strict, where you ate was something special. You know, always taught to keep it clean. She was really insulted when I told her about sitting on my table where I ate my food off.

RANDALL:-

I suppose she didn't like being told what to do?

HORRY:-

No, No, she really got her back up then, those soughta things like that you couldn't talk back to them. They were always right, you were wrong.

RANDALL:-

So what other outings did you go on, one of them was Saltwater was it?

HORRY:-

Yes, Saltwater was one of our special camping grounds, something special it was to everyone, when we went down there we knew we were really going to get into the old traditional way of living. We got down there and that's all we done was hunt and fish, you liked the old lifestyle every time you went there.

RANDALL:-

How did you get out there to Saltwater?

HORRY:-

Well, sometimes some of them used to have sulkys, horses and horse and carts, buggys, take it in turns taking the families down that way and a lot of the families used to walk. Cause when they got there they'd just strip the bark and make a bark hut to live under. My old man was really good at building them and he taught me how to

build them How to strip the bark off the tea-tree, they'd never leak, got all the timber out of the bush and he'd take the bark off the tree, it'd never affect the tree, take certain layers off and you wouldn't hurt the tree at all.

RANDALL:- Did you have boats then?

HORRY:- No, we didn't have no boats. We didn't have no boats them days. I never got into fishing until later on in life. I left school to go fishing at fourteen years of age. But I have had my own boat I worked for someone else, till I was a certain age and I got my own business then.

RANDALL:- When you were out at Saltwater what type of fish would you catch, would you go for Crayfish?

HORRY:- The older people used to do the diving for crayfish, dive around the headland.

RANDALL:- Were they plentiful then?

HORRY:- Oh, they were plentiful then. You'd stand in the water or on a rock and the old chaps were really good divers then, they'd get under the caves and everytime they'd come up with a couple of lobsters in each hand. And you'd be standing there holding the bag for them to drop the lobsters in. They'd only catch what they could eat. Never waste anymore than they needed. We used to call them mutton fish. Abalone they call it today. And that was plentiful there too around Saltwater. Oysters were plentiful there, always plenty of honey down there, bee's nest.

RANDALL:- Bush honey?

HORRY:- Bush honey yeh. We got all that out of the bush, And there were certain places where the porcupine lived and you knew where to go to get them. They'd never kill the young porcupine they'd only kill a

certain size procupine.

RANDALL:- There's still what they call middens at Saltwater is there?

HORRY:- There's a lot of them at Saltwater.

RANDALL:- Was there any need to go to Taree?

HORRY:- Well, we all got our rations them days the government used to supply rations through the manager on the mission. They got supplies of food and they had a ration store that used to store all the bulk food in. As a matter of fact when I was going to school I used to work in the ration store and weigh out the stuff. And if you gave somebody a little bit more than you should you'd get a rap over the knuckles. It had to be right on the right weight. During the war coupons were given out. You could'nt go anymore than what the coupon was valued at. So much tea and sugar.

RANDALL:- So what effect did the war have on Purfleet?

HORRY:- Well it more or less helped Purflett because there was plenty of work then for the people that lived in Purfleet. There was nobody else to work, the men and women worked around the place, even the young boys that just left school. Some left school just to go to work. I did myself, I went into fishing. When the war was on I got my licence at fourteen years of age to go fishing.

RANDALL:- When you did go to Taree how did you get there?

HORRY:- We used to go by horse and sulky and we used to come across by punt.

RANDALL:- On the punt was it? There was no bridge then was there?

HORRY:- There was no bridge then. We'd leave our sulky and horse tied up on the other side of the river and come across the punt and go to the pictures that way and do your shopping and head straight out of town as soon as you'd finished.

RANDALL:- Did you have to ask the manager for permission then to go?

HORRY:- If he knew you were going to town it was alright. Your parents were on pink slips with the endowment and he knew when endowment day came that people had to go across to town and draw some of the food from the shops. They never used to get any money for the endowment they used to have a pink slip and they used to order through certain shops until that amount of money was cut out. Rations were given every Thursday about two o'clock in the evening. They supplied us with a pint of milk every morning. My uncle used to get the milk from the farmers, he used to have a milk can and get it every morning.

RANDALL:- So was the diet adequate you got as a child?

HORRY:- Oh well, you could'nt live on it you'd have to still go hunting and get enough food to build it up. After I grew up, even fishing when I left school, fishing got slack. I'd have to work on the rations to get me rations, two days a week I'd have to work. I'd work two days to get your supply. You got  $\frac{1}{2}$  a pound of tea, 2 lbs of sugar, 1 lb of onions, 2lbs of potatoes, sometime you got turnip, sometime half a pumpkin if that was available,  $\frac{1}{2}$ lb salt, 4lbs of flour that was a weeks supply of flour, we used to bake our own bread those days, there was no baker. And the meat twice a week the butcher came around through the rations we were allowed 2lbs of meat the first day and a 1lb the second day. Three lbs of meat a week we'd get through the butcher. And it was just rubbishy meat it was never any good. You never got sausage or anything like that, we had a bit of soup bones or something like that and we never ever got butter. You'd never get butter. We used to call it "suet" from the butchers and you'd melt it down, that was a sort of fat. You call it dripping today. We'd get this suet it was part of the meat fat cut off the bullock. They'd give you about a 1lb of that a week. And in that

ration you got jam, a little jar of jam a week.

RANDALL:- So you were treated different to the lower class of white settlers?

HORRY:- Oh yeh! I've seen people that are just too sick to go and work for their rations and I've seen them get knocked back for their rations. Calling them lazy and no good.

RANDALL:- Were they given medicine as well?

HORRY:- Oh yes! Well we used to get medicine, the main medicine was cough mixture---it'd kill ya or cure ya, thats the only thing I remember any good was the cough mixture.

RANDALL:- So it would not taste too good then?

HORRY:- No! No! It was pretty rough stuff, pretty raw too. You got a bit of Sloan's Linament, they gave you that for rubbing stuff and if ya rubbed it on your skin it'd burn you (laugh).

RANDALL:- So after you left school you mainly went fishing, what other type of employment was available.

HORRY:- There was nothing for me till I was eighteen or nineteen I was, when I got married. The Government took over the fish markets then and all the fishermen went on strike. The protest was against the government taking over the fish market, cause they used to have agents in the market. We thought well when the government takes over we'll just get the one price, there'll be no competition in it, so we said we'll black ban the government idea. Most of us went on the railway for a while. I was only nineteen I put my age up to twenty one because I was well matured, you know, I'd pass as twenty one. I was on the Railway for 2 years, I was at repair and gang then I finished up getting into loco. Taree used to have a loco shed in them days.

RANDALL:- What were the conditions like then?

HORRY:- It was pretty hard in to loco sheds then, there was a fair few blokes used to work in the loco sheds them days around six hundred people used to work in the loco sheds. And it was one of the biggest industries we had the railway. And then timber, it was always pretty big cutting timber, but that sort of went back, the mill works sort of dropped off. Then there was a building boom after the war and it wort of took aff in Taree. Most of themen at Purfleet in those days, I think when I started on the railway, they got on the railway, the railway was the only thing that really accepted them. It was very hard to get work.

RANDALL:- So there was a colour bar ?

HORRY:- You had to look really hard you could'nt get a job on the Council Shire my uncle he got a job on the shire, the shire was the only chance where anybody ever got a job. And the railway was the only one that accepted the Aborigines. There was a fair few I'd say about twelve blokes working on the railway then.

RANDALL:- So if you could have got a better education would it have made any difference?

HORRY:- Oh yes. I had a lot of opportunity, but I did'nt have the education to go through. When I got into loco they gave me a pile of books to study and I just freaked out (Laughs) I passed a couple of exams but there were chaps that helped me through you know. I knew that they would'nt be with me when I was out on the road trying a locomotive. Then going from a locomotive, then to a fireman to a driver, it was just beyond me, so I had to give it away.

RANDALL:- So that's what stopped you?

HORRY:- I went back to the fishing then and as soon as I'd get a slack season, a wet season or something like that, I'd get a job in the building trade. And I did about twelve months or so working on the Housing

Commission. It was sort of booming in Taree in that time. We worked right through Robert Street, Stuart Street and I put the first pier down for the R.S.L. went down nineteen foot six and all we put the pier on was gravel.

RANDALL:- Did you and Faith meet at Purfleet Horry?

HORRY:- Yes, we met there, her father was the pastor at Purfleet.

RANDALL:- What was his name?

HORRY:- Bert Marr, Pastor Bert Marr.

RANDALL:- So he was a story teller?

HORRY:- That's right----Bossy Marr was his brother, he was one of the elders that told us all the stories. What to do and what not to do. And there was an old chap Eddy Loggin and Uncle Fred Loggin, we always called the elders Uncle. Anybody old we was always taught to call them Uncle or Aunry or Gran. And there was one old lady full blood she was Gran Galbin, some used to call her Aunty. And she could only speak in the language and she taught us a real lot. We'd always go and get her sticks. She taught us how to light a fire. She'd tell us all about the old storys , what happened , cause Eddy was one of the old timers, that was her son. And she'd never talk to Eddy only the one way in the language, and he knew the language real well. But he never spoke it much unless there was somebody that spoke it to him . It was very reservative with the language, lingo, they never taught you unless you asked to be taught.

RANDALL:- So you were married at the Purfleet Shurch?

HORRY:- Yes, I was married at Purfleet Church.

RANDALL:- So whereabouts did you live then, once you were married?

HORRY:- Well I went and lived in the old place where we had the wooden floor, and a tin roof but it was still lined with bags.



RANDALL:- So there was no such things as honeymoons?

HORRY:- There were no honeymoons, we did'nt know what honeymoons were about (laughs). No, straight to the married life. I was working pretty hard at the time.

RANDALL:- How did you get established in fishing?

HORRY:- There was a chap I worked for by the name of Ken Ward, he was a white chap and I worked for him for about three years. And he taught me all about the fishing game. How to sew nets and how to look for your fish, signs where the fish fed and all that sort of thing. And he took me to Sydney and introduced me to a net agent and I bought my first fishing net down there, and I got the O.K. from the bank where I was banking at the time. And the bank gave me an open cheque to go down and buy what I wanted and I thought I was a millionaire. So I bought ninety six pounds worth of net. Thats a lot of net them times, twelve lengths of net was plenty of net to made a living because there was plenty of fish, not like it is now. So I bought my own boat from Martin, one of the old sailing boats, they to own the Manning Hotel and I bought that and converted it into a fishing boat. My Uncles were pretty good to us and they gave me a hand. I used to row around the river then, that's how I started, just a pair of paddles and a push bike.

RANDALL:- What events caused you to move to Finonee?

HORRY:- That was when I was living in Purfleet and I objected about the conditions that we were living in, we had to pay rent for these houses. About the conditions the Managers could walk in anytime. Police could walk in anytime without knocking, if the door was locked they'd knock it down. Kick it open, even if your wife was taking a shower, a bath or something like that. There was no such thing as

privacy. And I protested. I objected about that. There were a few of us got together and protested on it. We refused to pay our rent and they used me as a test case. I won the first two cases. The only support I got on it, the Trades Union in Newcastle they supported me. Because I was joined up with the wrong mob they said they were the wrong mob, they evicted me.

RANDALL:- So it must have made you feel a bit bitter about that?

HORRY:- I did, because the things I was standing up for - fences around the houses, decent showers, sinks in the houses.

RANDALL:- Just basic necessities?

HORRY:- Just the main necessities, because I worked on the Housing Commission at the time and I knew when I was working on them what they were putting in the houses in Taree. It must have got my back up because I knew what was being done in Taree with the houses, and what the conditions we were living in out there.

RANDALL:- So when you went to Tinonee how difficult was it living that far away from Purflett. Tinonee is about six miles away?

HORRY:- These old houses were condemned before we moved into them. It had one little tank and it was leaking like a sieve and I had to get there and patch it up. And I found it very hard, a lonely life, I lived there. I was always a man that kept to myself. I was never around Tom, Dick or Harry's house. I kept to myself, done my own thing. Course when you get into the fishing game it's just like being a farmer. If you want to be a good farmer you gotta be full time on your farm, fishings the same thing you gotta be full time on your fishing.

RANDALL:- So how did you get into town then?

HORRY:- Well I bought myself a motor car.

RANDALL:- What type of car?

HORRY:- Old B Model Ford, had that car for years, bought it in Newcastle. It was great it used to have a rack on the back and you could load your stuff on the mudguard, we thought this was really good. You could get a sledge hammer and you would'nt even dent it, really good material.

RANDALL: Strong cars?

HORRY:- Yeh! They were strong, no rust or nothing.

RANDALL:- I suppose tough cars for tough times? So how long did you stay at Tinonee?

HORRY:- I was there for about two years at Tinonee. I liked the place it was a good quiet place, but the conditions I was living in, I had to leave it I had two little kiddies sick all the time while I was there. I sold my fishing business and took off to Sydney. Went down there it took me three weeks to get into Sydney and one week to get out. (Laughs). I didn't like it, I came back here and I went and lived on the verandah of my brothers place at Purfleet. Then I bought the fishing gear back. When I came back the chaps that bought it off me said "you'll be back" They said they still had it for me, they saved it for me, so I gave them the money back and got my business back and never left fishing since.

RANDALL:- So when you stayed at your brothers place, how many children did you have then?

HORRY:- I had five, six, seven, seven I had then.

RANDALL:- Seven children! It would have been pretty cramped conditions.

HORRY:- Well we were living on the verandah or their old building at Purfleet. Seven of us would have given you some idea of the conditions, we were living in. We had one big double bed and two little single beds along side of it.

RANDALL:- Plus your brothers children too!

HORRY:- He had four or five children, so the house was really packed. I worked

hand and then saved 1,000 pounds and I bought this place out here. It was only a little place when I bought it not like it is now. But I bought it for £2,300. I borrowed £1,400. I tried to get it from the bank and the bank knocked me back because there was a drought on. With the bank them days if the farms was broke, everybody was broke. Bruce Cowan's brothers wife lent me the money. He was my Solicitor and his wife lent me the money to buy the place. I had £1000 saved up and they said if you have £1000 saved up you've got good intentions to go ahead and do something with your life. So I went out to show the Board what I could do for myself.

RANDALL:- So you were forced to do that you did not have much choice.

HORRY:- I had no choice, I had to stand on my own two feet, and I think it was the best boot I ever got in my life. I had to go ahead.

RANDALL:- So was it difficult to move to Taree?

HORRY:- It was. More or less I was the first to shift over here and buy his own house. After I was here for so long, another family moved to Taree and not long after that more came. Then they started to put them into Housing Commission homes. I started a trend, I think they used me as a guinea-pig to see the way I lived. They seemed to be happy with me then they started moving them into Housing Commission.

RANDALL:- So the conditions that made you move from Purfleet have they improved?

HORRY:- A little. These houses that their building now, I think there might be a big change in the people themselves. After getting a decent home it will put a bit of pride back in the people.

RANDALL:- That's what they mainly need a bit of pride.

HORRY:- There's nothing like having a decent home for your children and privacy. And these nice homes that they are building there now I think there's going to be a big change. You've gotta really know the conditions

their living in out there at Purfleet to understand their attitude.

I think you'll see the difference the people living in Town in the Housing Commission the people that's living there now and the people that's living at Purfleet, they're a different type of people. Because the people that's here now in Taree have something to be proud of, the people out there, the conditions their living in have got nothing to be proud of.

ANDALL:- They have not even got a shop out there, have they?

ORRY:- There've got to come into Taree all the time. So they had a couple of "outlaws" and the rest of the community had to suffer for it, that's the reason the shop was closed down. They had trouble with a few and the rest of the people had to be penalised for it, so it closed down. They tried to buy the shop but they wouldn't sell it to them.

ANDALL:- So what are the most influential people in your life like -- Ella Simons you knew her did you?

ORRY:- Ella was a cousin of my wife. We were close to Ella, great friends, and Joe her husband I knew real well before he died, he was a good man. As a matter of fact when I was a boy Joe's son and I were very close, cause wherever they took him I'd go with them. Joe was one of the old timers who had to get around in his horse and sulky, he used to take us everywhere in that, I was more or less one of the family.

ANDALL:- Were there many people sent away from Purfleet, sent away to work?

ORRY:- Yes, there were a lot of kiddies taken away to work. I've got a sister I have'n't seen since I was five and she was seven and I have not seen her since then.

ANDALL:- You don't know where she was sent?

ORRY:- The last time I heard that she was in Melbourne.

ANDALL:- Was she sent away to work somewhere?

ORRY:- There was no respect to whoever, they just came along and took them.

RANDALL:- So the girls were sent for domestic work?

HORRY:- Domestic work. But she finished up as a Sister at the hospital. She sent a photo home once to her mum and she was in her uniform then, thats the last time I saw her at Purfleet. So I've had the experience of somebody dear to me taken away, very frightening. I've got that uh! those people now they call them - the Link up - I think. Well they've been searching for her for years now, but they don't know where she is. She's changed now, she was married, her first husband died and she remarried and I don't know her married name, she was a Johnson but I don't know her married name.

RANDALL:- It would be hard to track.

HORRY:- Very hard to track.

RANDALL:- So Horry do you think it was worthwhile after all for you to move to Taree?

HORRY:- Yes, I've got much better conditions. I couldn't get much better conditions at Purfleet. So I came to Taree to live and it was a big improvement where I was living. So I knuckled down and made a life of my own, and for my family. I gave them a good schooling and they've achieved something in life, and I'm really proud of them. I've had no interference with anybody since I've been here. I've got a lot of respect for my neighbours and they've got respect for me.

RANDALL:- Was it hard at first?

HORRY:- It was very hard when I first came here and I only spoke to one or two people. Only the chap next door and the lady next door, the rest I hardly spoke to. There's one I've lived here for all these years and I have'nt spoken to him yet. We just keep to ourselves thats his life style, I just accept it that way, I don't have anything against him that's just the way they live.

ANDALL:- So you really made it yourself?

DERRY: Yeh! I've got a couple of acres of land here. The fishing business is up the back, I've got sheds for my boats. And I feel more contented in life, I think anybody can make it if they reach out. If your given the opportunity, I found that this is the only way to look at it. We all have to work, work's the secret in life.

ANDALL:- So you don't think that there is any reason for Aborigines to be on Social Security.

DERRY:- No! If there's a chance for them to get jobs I don't think they should be on Social Service. It's hard for work - white as well as black - but I think its much harder for dark blood. I think it comes down to conditions their living in at home. Those in good conditions seem to get good jobs.

ANDALL:- So why do you think alcohol is such a problem?

DERRY:- Alcohol will always be a problem in the poorer race, white, black or brindle I don't care what colour they are, in the poor class of people, living in poverty Alcohol will always be a problem. But you have that choice to turn away from it. White families have just the same problem as Aborigines, I don't think it's a problem just for the Aborigines - its a problem for everybody.

Horry Saunders was born in Waratah in Newcastle on the 1st of May 1921. Being of Aboriginal parentage he moved with his family to Karrah Aboriginal reserve until five years of age. Subsequently his family finally settled at Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve, which was under the control of the Aboriginal Protection Board. Horry grew up in a community caught between two cultures, excluded from their traditional life style and unable to be accepted into the dominant European society.

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Horry Saunders lived with his parents, a brother and two sisters on the edge what is known as the 'open' area. Houses consisted of what material that was at hand, mostly wash timber, bark roofs and walls lined with heathen bags.

## Regional History.

Thursday 10-12  
Government which was substituted with traditional food. Managers appointed by the Protector.

## Topic :- Purfleet.

distribution of welfare, rationing and education of the Purfleet Aborigines. The manager who is most vivid in Horry's memory.

## Summary of interview, Horry Saunders

Horry attended an Aboriginal primary school at Purfleet. Education was based on European methods.

## Name :- RANDALL WIGGERS

at Church was compulsory with Horry's parents being devoted Christians. Although European society greatly influenced Horry's childhood. Horry was taught many skills by the Aboriginal elders of Purfleet. Horry played mainly European sports as a child, such as football and hockey, but often hunted in the country surrounding Purfleet.

Camping at Saltwater, a beach near Yaroo, was an annual event for the Purfleet Aborigines, transportation was by foot, horse or bullock. Horry was taught most of the traditional skills at Saltwater away from the influence of



white society. He was taught how to make bark canoes and bark houses and at night always perched on a tree branch to watch the stars and the moon. Harry Saunders was born in Waratah in Newcastle on the 3rd of May 1929. Being of Aboriginal parentage he moved with his family to Karvah Aboriginal reserve until five years of age. Subsequently his family finally settled at Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve, which was under the control of the Aboriginal Protection Board. Harry grew up in a community caught between two cultures, excluded from their traditional lifestyle and unable to be accepted into the dominant European society.

Harry Saunders lived with his parents, a brother and two sisters on the edge what is known as Purfleet reserve today. Houses consisted of what material that was at hand, mostly bush timber, bark roofs and walls lined with eucalyptus bark. Cooking was done on an open fire, with rations supplied by the Government which was substituted with traditional food. Managers appointed by the Protection Board controlled the movement, distribution of Welfare, rations and Education of the Purfleet Aborigines. The manager who is most vivid in Harry's memories was his teacher, an ex-army Englishman who caned pupils for speaking in the native language.

Harry attended an Aboriginal primary school at Purfleet.

Education was based on European ideals with emphasis on assimilation into white society. A missionary was in residence at Purfleet until 1971, hence attendance at Church was compulsory with Harry's parents being devoted Christians. Although European society greatly influenced Harry's childhood. Harry was taught many skills by the Aboriginal elders of Purfleet. Harry played mainly European sports as a child, such as football and hockey, but often hunted in the country surrounding Purfleet.

Camping at Saltwater, a beach near Taree, was an annual event

for the Purfleet Aborigines, transportation was by foot, horse or sulky. Harry was taught most of the traditional skills at Saltwater away from the influence of

white society. He was taught how to make bark huts, fishing and hunting skills and at night elders portrayed past events through storytelling.

The freedom of Saltwater was the antithesis of the lifestyle at Purfleet. Managers and Police were able to enter homes without knocking and often questioned elders if they were storytelling to groups. Permission from the managers was required to enter or leave Purfleet with a curfew placed on after dark activity. Harry also accompanied his parents on shopping trips into Taree or to attend the pictures. Transport to Taree was by way of horse and sulky, which was left at the bank of the Manning River and a punt was taken into Taree. The Theatre was racially segregated with Aborigines only allowed to enter and leave when the lights were out.

Harry upon leaving school at fourteen obtained his fishing licence. Working for a white man in Taree for three years, he learnt most of his fishing skills and was helped in establishing his business. The Government decision to take over the fish markets, caused the local fishermen to go on strike. Harry gained employment at the railway working on the gang until promoted to the locomotive section. Lack of education led to him failing the engine drivers' exam. Subsequently Harry returned to fishing and gained employment in the building industry when it was available.

Harry met Faith and was married at Purfleet church. Faith's father was an Aboriginal Pastor at Purfleet. They moved into Harry's parents house, which at the time had a tin roof, and a bush timber floor. Harry protested about the conditions at Purfleet which resulted in him being evicted and sent to Tinonee, a valley six miles from Purfleet. Harry lived in a condemned house with his seven children for two years. Harry returned to Purfleet where he lived with his seven children on his brothers verandah, his brother also had five children. Harry worked until he had saved 1,000 pounds deposit on a house in Taree.

Harry has through determination established a successful fishing business which employs six people. Together Harry and Faith have raised ten children, all of whom are married, employed, and with their own home.

Open Foundation

Regional History

Thursday 10-12

Topic :- Purpleet.

1,000 word Essay.

The Australian Agricultural Company in 1827 conducted two expeditions to establish the navigability of the Manning.

These reports concluded that, the Manning had "a noble river and its navigable entrance, together with a magnificent rich countryside".<sup>1</sup> This favourable report resulted in the settlement of large tracts of land, by 1833

The Manning River Valley was originally occupied by the Birpai tribe of Aborigines. As with other Aborigines they led a semi-nomadic, hunter gatherer lifestyle, ruled by the Seasons, in Summer they occupied the coastal lowlands of the Manning River and migrated in the Winter to the highlands of Gloucester. European invasion had a devastating result on the Birpai's delicate ecological balance with nature. The Birpai became dependant on the dominating European society, but were unable to be accepted into it.

Hence with the establishment of Purfleet in 1900, they became fringe dwellers on white society, and ruled by restrictive European legislation. European society, the Birpai were forced into black camps on the fringe of white settlement.

Black camps in the Taree district were at Brown's Hill, Saltwater, Larry's Flat, Kimbriki and No. 1 Station Brown's Hill.<sup>4</sup> The Birpai people became dependant on white society and were exploited as casual labour in such things as land clearing, sillet cutting and domestic work. For example an Aboriginal named "Booy", felled about 30 acres of land for the late Mr. Joseph Andrews for 2s6d and notions and a pair of moleskin trousers.<sup>5</sup>

In 1883 the Aboriginal Protection Board was formed to segregate and protect Aborigines from white society. This led to the establishment of Purfleet Mission in 1900, on eighteen acres of land two miles from Taree. A school building which was also used as a Church was built in 1904.<sup>6</sup>

By 1900 most of the Birpai Aborigines had moved into Purfleet

Mission.

The Australian Agricultural Company in 1827 conducted two expeditions to establish the navigability of the Manning.

These reports concluded that, the Manning had "a noble river and it's navigable entrance, together with a magnificent rich countryside".<sup>1</sup> This favourable report resulted in the settlement of large tracts of land, by 1833 the Australian Agricultural Company occupied over 243,120 acres<sup>2</sup> of land in the Gloucester region. This had a devastating effect on the Birpai economy as they were excluded from their Winter migration.

The Manning Valley experienced a rapid growth of European settlers through the discovery of large quantities of cedar. Subsequently the timber industry cleared the way for agriculturists who by 1861 occupied over 380,000 acres.<sup>3</sup> European economic activities destroyed the Birpai's delicate ecological balance with the land, which was the basis for their economy and religious beliefs. Unable to practice their traditional lifestyle and excluded from European society, the Birpai were forced into black camps on the fringe of white settlement.

Black camps in the Taree district were at Brown's Hill, Saltwater, Larry's Flat, Kimbriki and No. 1 Station Brown's Hill.<sup>4</sup> The Birpai people became dependant on white society and were exploited as casual labour in such things as land clearing, millet cutting and domestic work. For example an Aboriginal named "Bony", felled about 30 acres of land for the late Mr. Joseph Andrews for 2s6d and rations and a pair of moleskin trousers.<sup>5</sup>

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greater power. A resident missionary appointed by the interdenominational  
Aboriginal mission was responsible for the health, education and 'spiritual  
salvation' of the Birpai people.<sup>7</sup>

Although the missionaries were helpful towards the health of the Birpai, they  
imposed non Aboriginal spiritual and material values. Ella Simons, tells of  
visits made to full tribal elders, "we used to sing hymns to them. The missionary  
would go ahead and dress them"<sup>8</sup>.

Aboriginal children was restricted from attending European  
Schools until 1951, by a law which stated, "if one parent objected to a child  
attending a particular school that Aboriginal child had to be removed."<sup>9</sup>

In 1904 a school was built at Purfleet, with funds raised through  
the missionary, with a teacher appointed by the department of Public Instruction.<sup>10</sup>  
A succession of teachers taught at Purfleet travelling from Taree by horse and  
sulky. Aboriginal children were forced to travel long distances often past  
European schools, to be taught at Purfleet.

By 1909, the Aboriginal Protection Board had been given full  
power over all Aborigines.<sup>11</sup> They were responsible for the custody, maintenance  
and education of Aboriginal children, and could place adults in employment, where  
or when they liked. The Apprenticeship System resulted in many Purfleet children  
being taken from their parents and trained at homes to become servants. A few  
concerned parents from Purfleet approached an inspector, but were told "it  
did not matter if the mothers cried buckets of tears, the children would still be  
taken. It was for their own good."<sup>12</sup>

The depression years of W.W.1 resulted in an extreme lack of  
employment. Government supplied rations were inadequate and had to be subsidised  
with traditional food. Possum, Kangaroo and Koala skins were sold at Tinonee  
Store, or exchanged for food. In order to give the Aboriginal Protection Board

greater power over the Birpai people a resident Manager was appointed in 1932.<sup>13</sup>

The role of Managers was to "concentrate on reserves, all people of Aboriginal blood, with legal powers over them, ----- they were not at liberty to leave without permission."<sup>14</sup> Managers upheld the legislation of the Aboriginal Protection Board, and were responsible for the distribution of rations and education of Aboriginal children. The Birpai spirit decayed further as Managers replaced the authority traditionally held by the elders of the Birpai clan. This authority helped to undermine the respect that Aboriginal children held for their elders, through such things as forbidding story telling and the speaking of the Aboriginal language. Managers enforced the attendance at schools, where emphasis was on European ideals.

The Aboriginal Protection Board abandoned their policy in 1940, and was replaced by the Welfare Board.<sup>15</sup> The new policy of assimilation resulted in significant changes at Purfleet. Education of Aboriginal children was taken over by the Education Department with the phasing out of separate schools.<sup>16</sup> By 1943, exemption Certificates were granted to Aborigines who had "moved away from their tribal habits and customs of the uncivilised Aborigines."<sup>17</sup> These certificates were needed to leave the reserve and allowed access to places that Aborigines were banned.

As a result of the Second World War an employment boom was experienced at Purfleet. During 1944, 96.2 percent of Purfleet Aborigines were employed.<sup>18</sup> The main areas of employment were the railway or building trade, due to lack of education. Subsequently with the return of enlisted men families in receipt of rations increased by 90 percent.<sup>19</sup> In 1959 Aborigines were entitled to control their own old age, invalid or unemployment benefits, "except those living a nomadic or primitive way of life."<sup>20</sup>

Housing conditions at Purfleet were alleviated in 1909, with



the Aboriginal Protection Board funding the construction of twenty houses.<sup>21</sup> Houses originally consisted of bush timber, bark and walls lined with hessian sacks. The Welfare board in 1948, funded the construction of thirty houses and recreational facilities.<sup>22</sup> However, the houses lacked fencing, baths and sinks and were fitted with inadequate pump showers. In contrast Welfare houses in Taree were fitted with baths, sinks, fences and electricity.<sup>23</sup> Further improvements were made in 1960 to Purfleet houses with the installation of electricity and stoves. By 1960 the C.W.A established the Purfleet Gift shop and funded a pre-school for Aboriginal children<sup>24</sup>.

Aborigines were acknowledged as Australian Citizens as a result of the 1967 referendum. By 1969 the Aboriginal Welfare Board had been replaced by the Aboriginal Advisory Council. Subsequently the Majority of the restrictive legislation was abolished, such as exemption cards. Managers ceased to be appointed in 1968. After a period of thirty two years the United Aboriginal Mission left Purfleet with the establishment on the Purfleet Aboriginal Advancement League.<sup>25</sup> Nine members of the community were elected, and responsible for Purfleet Community Affairs. *The struggle p.190*

10. The history of the Birpai after European invasion, has been one of subservience and degradation. Acknowledged as having no rights to their traditional land, they have been forced onto a settlement and restricted by European legislation. The result of being unaccepted into the dominant European Society, has resulted in an unemployment rate in contemporary Purfleet of 87%. Subsequently Purfleet has become a victim of European superfluities with alcohol being the largest problem. Facilities in contemporary Purfleet are inadequate with the only shop being closed in 1988. Although houses are presently being built at Purfleet, there is still overcrowding which causes health problems.

19. Ibid p.44

20. Ibid p.30

21. Ibid At present there are three Aboriginal Police Liason Officers who assist in quelling the vandalism and theft which is caused through the high unemployment rate. Greater Taree City Council has recently provided funds for further development of the Wonnai Aboriginal Community Centre which emphasises the development of Aboriginal culture.

FOOTNOTES:-

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