



Kimberley Society

Book Note

Encounter, The Past and Future of Remote Kimberley by Brigida Nailon. Brigidine Sisters, Echuca, [2010], hard cover, 116 pages, illustrated, maps, ISBN 978-0-9579361-7-1, RRP \$44.

On 3 September 2008, the author of this book spoke to the Kimberley Society about what was then only a work in progress. An overview of her talk appeared in the *Boab Bulletin* in December of that year and is available on the Society's [website](#).

Sister Brigida's earlier works (as either author or editor) dealt with the encounter between Catholicism and Aboriginal peoples in and beyond the Kimberley. Her new book draws on some of that material, delves into new areas, and ends with a philosophical look at the present.

A 'Background' section introduces the author by way of her involvement with the church, education, and indigenous people. 'Beagle Bay Mission Stories' follow, telling something of life at the mission, leprosy, the taking of children from their parents, the Sisters of Saint John of God, and people's lives away from the mission. Author's comments on the individual stories clarify things mentioned in them, and, in some cases, explain how situations resulted from policies or legislation imposed on indigenous populations.

Chapter 2 discusses missionaries and their endeavours at Beagle Bay, La Grange and Balgo. It also mentions lay missionaries (male and female), Aboriginal workers, and Aboriginal girls who entered religious life. Some of the girls are shown in a photograph of Daughters of Mary Queen of Apostles, 1939–1951. A feature of this chapter is a long petition submitted to the 1934 Moseley Royal Commission into the condition and treatment of Aborigines. It concludes: "Again Sir we the Half-caste population of Broome ask you to give us our Freedom and ... release us from the stigma of a native and make us happy subjects of this our country." It is not the first time the petition has been published but, here, presented in its original handwritten form, it has a far greater impact than a closely typed transcript. It is through such material that Sister Brigida seeks to change not only how readers look at the problems faced by Aboriginal and mixed-descent people but also how they view those people in their own right.

The coverage of missions and missionaries continues in the post-war material in Chapter 3 where expansion into Wyndham, Halls Creek and other parts of the East Kimberley is mentioned. Here, too, there is discussion of parishes, communities and the significant social changes that took place in the 1960s and '70s. The chapter concludes with a brief commentary on the limitations of academic analysis of both Australian missionary endeavour and the interaction and accommodation that occurred between the missionaries and those they sought to help.

Chapter 4 comprises an informative chronological commentary on Aboriginal legislation in Western Australia from 1829 to 1981. Self-determination is mentioned, and the discussion of social change continues in Chapter 5, culminating with a look at current dilemmas, aspirations and achievements, particularly in education. It ends with the following observation: "The Future lies with Education – It is in our hands to make it happen."

Cathie Clement