



Kimberley Society

Book Review

***Kimberley History: People, Exploration and Development* edited and compiled by Cathie Clement, Jeffrey Gresham and Hamish McGlashan. Kimberley Society, Perth, 2012. Soft cover, 240 pages, illustrated (full colour), maps. ISBN 978-0-9587130-2-3. RRP \$49.95. Member's price \$35.00.**

This volume is a welcome addition to the literature on the Kimberley. In March 2010, the Kimberley Society convened a seminar at the University of Western Australia on the people, exploration and development of the region. The contributions reflect the broad nature of research on the Kimberley by members of the Society, and add considerably to our knowledge about the forces, events and episodes that have shaped the region since colonisation. The editors are to be congratulated for their efforts to turn the proceedings of that seminar into an edited volume and make them available to a wider audience. The history of the Kimberley has attracted a growing literature over the past fifty years, yet there is still much to be told. Earlier Kimberley works by authors such as Bolton, Lowe, Hawke, Pedersen and Woorunmurra, Jebb, Choo, Sickert, and Clement, have illuminated the rich and diverse history of the region and its significance to the many peoples who now share it. This history played a major role in the listing of the West Kimberley as a National Heritage place in 2011 (see the Australian Heritage Commission's ['West Kimberley Place Report'](#)).

This volume considerably deepens our understanding of Kimberley history, particularly the period of exploration and initial attempts to settle and exploit the region. Chapters by Mark Bin Bakar and Mike Morwood establish the long connection of Aboriginal people to the region, pointing the way to a deep history of human occupation. The archaeology of the region confirms what Aboriginal people have always asserted: that their ancestors have occupied the land continuously from ancient times to modern. Apart from the work of archaeologists such as O'Connor, Dortch, Balme, Veth and Morwood, we know little either about the ancient past, or the occupation during the long period of the Holocene. The area's archaeological potential remains enormous, particularly the capacity to illuminate this ancient history of human occupation.

At the time of colonisation, each part of the land was owned and occupied by Aboriginal people who were prepared to defend their ownership. Much of the early contact, as shown in the chapters by Clement, McGlashan, Quinlan, and Bolton, is set against a background of cross-cultural relationships, the uncertainties and suspicions of first contacts which often culminated in violence, and subsequent moves towards the accommodations of a contact zone. Men such as George Grey, a personal favourite of mine for his vivid account of his Western Australian explorations, and Michael Quinlan, encountered a rough land which they struggled to understand. It was a land clearly defended by its owners, and both men faced the consequences of their unwelcome intrusion, Quinlan meeting his death in an attack by Aboriginal people near Camden Harbour. By contrast, explorers such as Frank Hann, as described by Mike Donaldson and Ian Elliot, were intent on the mining and pastoral potential of the north Kimberley, and kept their distance from the Aboriginal people they encountered. Hann's observations of the rough lands of the Napier and King Leopold Ranges in 1898 were the first step in opening up the land for pastoral exploitation over the following thirty years.

The volume includes articles on little known aspects of early Kimberley history, such as the extractive industries of guano on Browse and other islands as told by Tim Willing and Alison Spencer, and the chapter by Phillip Playford on the gold rushes of 1885 – 6. It is surprising, given the profile of Old Halls Creek as a tourist destination and its rich archival and oral record, that more has not been published about Halls Creek, so Playford's article on the events behind the discovery of gold at Halls Creek and the men who drove its development is welcome. Two articles by Kevin Kenneally present intriguing perspectives of the Kimberley, the first discussing the overland exploits of Joseph Bradshaw and others, and the establishment, with Aeneas Gunn, of a place on Prince Regent River he named 'Marigui'; the second Aboriginal and European

perspectives on the contact zone of Marigui. Michael Cusack also writes about the overland exploits. Christine Choo's article on the missions provides important information on an aspect of Kimberley history which had a deep impact both on the Aboriginal people they were designed to help, and the missionaries who went to places such as Beagle Bay, Forrest River, Lagrange and Lombadina. Finally, Bill Bunbury's article on impacts of settlement and development on the people of the region gives an overview of some of the key processes of Kimberley history, particularly the pastoral industry.

I suspect Bunbury's closing remark about the capacity of the Kimberley to own the people, rather than the other way round, applies to many of the contributors, each of whom has grown to know and love the region over many years. This volume will form a key reference for those interested in the history of the Kimberley, as well as those who have swum in the Fitzroy River and have the place in their blood. It gives sound direction for future historical research on the Kimberley, and outlines the breadth and nature of research projects currently underway. The book is presented in an attractive and user-friendly format, and is a pleasure to hold and read. Beautiful illustrations and informative maps complement the narratives, testament to the care and determination of the editors and the willingness of the Society to take on the responsibility of publishing. And it is nicely printed too, care of a Perth based company, Scott Print.

Malcolm Allbrook

This review is reprinted courtesy of the Professional Historians Association (WA). The reviewer is a member of that Association and has had a close connection with the Kimberley since 1985. His time there included periods of residence in Derby (through employment with the then Wanang Ngari Aboriginal Resource Centre (it has been known as Winun Ngari for many years now) and the Kimberley Land Council (1993 – 1998). Malcolm continues to research and write on the history of the region and in 2009 – 2011 was part of a team of KLC researchers preparing the submission to the Australian Heritage Commission, which resulted in the listing of the West Kimberley. He goes to the Kimberley whenever he can, even though he is now working with the ANU History Department in Canberra. His most recent visit was last September.