‘Killing with kindness’: Daisy Bates and New Norcia

Bob Reece

Daisy Bates, née Margaret Dywer, was baptised a Catholic on 21 October 1859 together with her twin brother Francis at Roscrea, County Tipperary, Ireland, and, after losing both parents by the age of five, was educated by sisters of the Sacred Heart of Mary until the age of about 20. Shortly after her arrival in Townsville, Queensland, in January 1883 as an assisted immigrant, she proclaimed herself an Anglican and became in time a rabid critic of the Catholic Church, particularly its political role in Ireland and Australia. After contracting three marriages in 15 months between 1884 and 1886 and giving birth to her only child, Arnold Hamilton Bates, she spent the five years from 1894 working as a journalist and librarian in England before arriving in Western Australia in September 1899. There she was reunited with her second husband, the drover Jack Bates from Nowra, New South Wales, and 12-year-old Arnold, with the purpose of taking out pastoral leaseholds in the Murchison district. When these plans went awry and her relationship with Jack failed, she had little choice but to return to Perth and journalism, working as a freelance contributor to *The Western Mail* and other journals while Arnold attended Christian Brothers College, St George’s Terrace.

On board the *Stuttgart* to Fremantle, one of Bates’ companions had been the ageing Fr Angelo Martelli who told her about the Aborigines of the north of Western Australia and the work of the Trappist fathers at the Beagle Bay mission in the Kimberley that Bishop Matthew Gibney of Perth had established in 1890. It was no doubt through Martelli that she was introduced to Gibney, whom she then accompanied in August 1900 on a four-month visit to Beagle Bay, where the Trappists were on the verge of failing after most of their number had returned to France. Gibney always accepted her word that she was an Anglican but on a number of occasions confessed to her that if he had not known better, he would have sworn that she was a Catholic.

Beagle Bay was no lady journalist’s outing. On arrival, she was given a hoe and put to work weeding the mission’s banana and sugar cane plots and cleaning out the wells. Her main responsibility, however, was to humour the ageing bishop in his toils and act as chainman for him in the survey of 10,000 acres of coastal land set aside for the mission by the Western Australian government. It was also at Beagle Bay that she first became acquainted with the Aborigines and was imbued with a desire to understand their complicated pattern of social relationships. Observing with keen interest the

linguistic and other investigations conducted by Abbot Nicholas, she described herself as 'bitten by the virus of research'.¹

Back in Perth, she began work on a number of articles for a British magazine describing the Beagle Bay mission.² When the mission was attacked by a former New Norcia employee, B Fitzalan Howard, in the *Morning Herald* in March 1901,³ she stoutly defended it, thereby earning Gibney's gratitude.⁴ Rejecting Howard's claim that the Beagle Bay Aborigines' religious training was 'as fully comprehended by them as a parrot understands the phrases taught it', she wrote:

So far from such being the case, I found on inquiry amongst the women ... that their knowledge, 'sufficient unto their salvation', was clear, though childlike. They believed in the Father, in Christ who died for them, and Who only wanted them to be good, and they acted up to that belief, in so far as the morality of their lives was concerned, in their truthfulness, their honesty, and their simple piety. Can the most learned theologian do more?⁵

Privately, however, she was highly sceptical of missionary endeavour, believing that the Aborigines would never abandon their traditional beliefs and that their repetition of prayers and hymns was no more than a 'patter' designed to fool the missionaries and guarantee a regular supply of food. In April 1907 she told John Mathew, a Melbourne Presbyterian minister and prominent ethnologist with whom she had a professional correspondence for some years:

... there are abstract 'soulful' terms elaborately translated, which the natives could never understand, however civilized they might be.

Let me give you a prayer of a native who was in the Beagle Bay mission for 12 years. It is 'Our Father' and part of 'Hail Mary':

Our faader wart in ivvin al'-o-wyd bid'yd
nim, thyk min kum, dy will be done arness
isstiss neven ... ernest tomson fra deliverer
prime eebil e-men.

Hail Mary
Elmeree ful a gress lo dcree fleesh tara
Past bridden Jesus.

'Well', she continued, 'I suppose the missionaries are pleased to hear that patter but it is as meaningless to the natives as it looks to me'.⁶ Meeting the Anglican Bishop Arthur Thomas in Adelaide in 1914, she shocked him with her frank views about the prospects of converting Aborigines. What she told him went something like this:

Now I am Anglican, and keep the same faith that was instilled into me as a child, by which I mean I neither reason nor question. I just believe and trust – yet to me

1. Bates cited in Reece 2007: 36.

2. Bates 1902-03; see also *The Woman*, 27 November 1909 and 28 January 1910.

3. *Morning Herald*, 30 March 1901.

4. Gibney to Bates, 6 April 1901, Papers of Daisy Bates, MS 365/97/150, National Library of Australia (NLA).

5. *Morning Herald*, 5 April 1901.

6. Bates to Mathew, 17 April 1907, Papers of Rev John Mathew, MS 9290, LaTrobe Library.

that travesty of religion, whether Lutheran or R.C. which is contented with outer mouthings, meaningless to the native, is a mockery of God. The native has his own code of right and wrong, morality and immorality and there can be no deceit, hypocrisy, or false seeming in any native community.⁷

Three more things at Beagle Bay had also left a deep impression on her: the first was the incidence of cannibalistic infanticide; the second was the impossibility of keeping the mission girls away from the Asian pearling crews during the lay-up season; and the third was Gibney's willingness to marry a young Aboriginal girl of about nine to a grey-haired old man to whom she had been promised under traditional custom.⁸

It cannot have been long after returning from the north that Daisy became interested in visiting New Norcia in order to write something about it for the newspapers, including Gibney's own *Western Australian Catholic Record*, no doubt asking him to facilitate matters. Gibney duly wrote to Abbot Fulgencio Torres in August 1901 to seek his permission for an invitation to be offered:

A lady named Mrs. Bates who lives at the Club Hotel – West Perth, and who has taken a very deep interest in the treatment of natives of the North West is desirous to know how they are treated at the New Norcia Mission. She has already written most interesting articles on the matter to English Journals, and is at present engaged in contributing more. Though she wishes to see New Norcia, she is not disposed to go unless at your invitation – the which [sic] if given shall be gladly accepted. If you would kindly appoint the day on which you could conveniently meet her by sending a personal invitation to 'The Club Hotel', West Perth. I am sure her visit would have most beneficial results.

M. Gibney

P.S. Observe that Mrs. Bates is not a Catholic.⁹

Torres, whose English was still rudimentary, sent Gibney's letter back to the Bishop's Vicar-General, Fr Anselm Bourke, at St Brigid's, West Perth, for advice but Bourke, whose relationship with Gibney was becoming strained, was uncooperative, purporting to be protective of the newly installed Abbot. From the letter that he wrote to Torres, Bourke appears to have formed the impression that Mrs Bates was not someone who would wait patiently until invited. Indeed, he seems to have believed that her trip to the Kimberley with Gibney reflected her determination rather than the Bishop's convenience:

I do not think I need write [to] Mrs Bates on your part. She is a very active person and if she wishes to go to New Norcia she will get there by invitation or otherwise. She was with the Bishop all through his journeyings at Beagle Bay and it must have been inconvenient for him at times in the bush. However, Mrs Bates is interested in the natives and wishing to go to that place – she went. The good lady is now living in a hotel near to St Brigid's. Were I to give her your invitation it

7. Bates to Thomas Giffen, 5 December 1916, SC AA 23/1 [plastic envelope], South Australian Museum Archives.

8. Bates 1985: 127.

9. Gibney to Torres, 19 August 1901, folio no 00770, Papers of the Benedictine Monastery, New Norcia (New Norcia Archives).

would perhaps give [her an] excuse for too many calls and thus occasion loss of time to those who are busy and have very little time to spare.¹⁰

The monastery chronicler recorded that on 18 October 1901, 'A lady came to visit the Mission; seems to be a photographer'.¹¹ And an anonymous 'Lady Visitor' then spent 24 and 25 December 1901 there, publishing an account of her observations in *The Western Mail* a few weeks later. Whether the 'Lady Visitor' was Daisy Bates is impossible to say, although *The Western Mail* was to be the most important outlet for her writing and she is thus a strong candidate. Altogether, the article seems to have been a fair account, the venerable English-speaking Spanish monk (probably Fr Bertran) who received her at the monastery gates saying that she was the first woman writer to make a visit. Emphasising that '[w]e are here to help the natives, not white people', he told her that she should not write in too 'high-flown' a style.¹²

The 'Lady Visitor' remarked that the health of the Aboriginal population was good but that alcohol caused the men to fight fiercely among themselves with wooden 'sticks', something which she observed herself during the festivities on Christmas Day.¹³ She mentioned that Moora magistrate Charles Davidson sometimes had to be summoned from his property six miles away to hear cases and order punishments consisting of substantial fines or banishment. As the Aborigines described it, some men were 'put on the road'. Altogether, she believed that 'the white man's intoxicants afford the greatest difficulty the monks have to contend against'.¹⁴ What she did not mention was the monastery's reasonable policy of giving out a ration of a pint of wine a day to men involved in physical labour, such as harvesting.

The 'Lady Visitor' was greatly taken by Abbot Torres' striking appearance ('his style of face may be seen in the works of the masters') and obvious intellectual powers. However, she also remarked on the notable difference in attitude displayed by the Aborigines towards him by contrast with Bishop Salvado:

Father Torres cannot speak English, but can read it and no doubt very soon will be able to converse with the natives. He governs them now with his eye, and they seem to stand a good deal in fear of him. They do not love him as they loved Bishop Salvado. The band instruments are locked up because the natives say 'noo play since the Bishop goo away'.¹⁵

In addition to writing articles for the Perth newspapers and journals, Bates sold post-card photographs of Aborigines she had taken up north and at the government reserve near Cannington. Established by Premier John Forrest in 1899, this had become a sanctuary for some of the remaining full-descent Bibbulmun people of the south-west. There she met Guillermo Monap or William Monnup (Mon'nop), a Victoria Plains man of the Ballaruk intermarrying class who became an important informant and the subject of biographical portraits she was to publish in *The Western Mail* in 1908 and 1909.¹⁶

10. Bourke to Torres, 21 September 1901, folio no 00770, New Norcia Archives.

11. Chamberlain 2001: 88.

12. 'A Lady Visitor' 1902.

13. This was confirmed by the monastery's chronicler, Fr Faisto Curiel, in his entry for 25 December 1901 (Chamberlain 2001: 88).

14. Chamberlain 2001: 88.

15. Chamberlain 2001: 88.

Wearing his distinctive dingo totem headdress, Mon'nop also appeared on a number of photographic postcards produced by Perth's Rome Studio, no doubt at her instigation, in connection with a corroboree that was conducted by him at Cannington in March 1907, the last of its kind in the Perth area.¹⁷ Bates obtained extensive linguistic and other information from Mon'nop and two other Victoria Plains men, also encouraging Mon'nop to 'execute' a unique series of coloured drawings of traditional weapons, tools, clothing and food plants.¹⁸

There is an entry for Mon'nop in Neville Green and Lois Tilbrook's *Aborigines of New Norcia*¹⁹ and he has been the subject of a useful study by the art historian Mary Eagle,²⁰ so there is little point in repeating his fascinating story here. However, his marriage in November 1866 to New Norcia-born Scholastica Manguglian was celebrated with great ceremony and it is clear that they were seen by Salvado as a model couple who would set an example to their people.²¹ They were accordingly allocated one of the 21 two-room stone cottages that he had recently built for the resident Aborigines around the church. Mon'nop for some years played an important part in the mission's farming activities. Bates' account of his subsequent unsuccessful attempt to marry a woman called 'Nyungara' throws some interesting light on Salvado's determination that the traditional marriage laws of the Bibbulmun should be respected:

The Bishop ... called Monnop up to him. Monnop, then a fine upstanding black-bearded weea'ban'dee (young bachelor) stood out from amongst his fellows. The Bishop perused the supplementary register and proceeded to read out Monnop's father's and mother's name and class, and that of their children. Then he looked up Nyungara's pedigree and read it aloud to Monnop, but made no comment upon it, other than to request Monnop to accompany him to the girl's house,

16. Bates 1908 and 1909.

17. Bates 1907. It is clear that as well as being a corroboree master, Mon'nop was a *bulya* (*boylyya*) man, possessing considerable magical powers.

18. The 21 coloured drawings by Mon'nop, together with Bates' detailed annotations, are part of the National Library's Papers of Daisy Bates (NLA MS 365/30/96). Four of the drawings were reproduced in Croft with Gooding 2003: 38–39. However, they located him as coming from the Swan River area (pp 32–33) while at the same time reproducing a photograph (*The Western Mail*, 27 February 1909) which clearly identifies him as from the Victoria Plains and citing Bates' own account placing him there (p 23). Croft also wrote (p 33) that the same image was reproduced 'as a truncated, faded photograph on the cover of a publication of Daisy Bates' writing on Indigenous people of the South West'. In fact in 1938 Bates used a fine print of the photograph prominently in her *The Passing of the Aborigines* (opp p 30). Croft went on to claim that the Aboriginal artist Christopher Pease's 1999 painting based on the same cropped photograph 'has released Monnop from his unwelcome role as an accessory to Mrs Bates' writings on Indigenous people of the South West' (p 33). Extensive linguistic and other cultural information obtained by Bates from Mon'nop and two other Victoria Plains informants can be found at NLA MS 365/42/178–186, 187–217, 218–257 and at NLA MS 365/73/34–37, 249–258, providing most of the data now extant for the traditional culture of the people of the Victoria Plains and no doubt much of the evidence for a Native Title claim lodged in August 1997 which has since been registered (Federal Court, file no. WAD6192/98; see also National Native Title Tribunal 2002). Bates was the vital 'accessory' to the recording of this information and drew upon it for her manuscript 'The Native Tribes of Western Australia' which remained unpublished until 1985 when the National Library of Australia produced a version under the same name, ably edited by the late Dr Isobel White. Mon'nop is referred to on pp 52 and 290.

where Nyungara waited with the assembled girls. Nyungara was commanded to stand out of the ranks, Monnop, who was beginning to feel a little uncomfortable, keeping beside the Bishop.

Monnop was asked: 'Do you like this girl?'

'Yes, my lord, I do,' said Monnop.

'Well,' said the Bishop, 'here in my book Tondarup and Tondarup are cousins, and Ballaruk and Ballaruk are cousins. Tondarup marry Ballaruk all right, but Ballaruk marry Ballaruk [is] wrong. You can't marry each other; you had best part; I can't allow it.'²²

If Bates' story is true,²³ the event described should have taken place after the death of Scholastica Manguglian in December 1889. However, he is recorded as having left the mission in 1886. Furthermore, born in 1847, Mon'nop would not then have been the 'young bachelor' that Bates described. And, by this time it is highly unlikely that Salvado would have been trying to keep up the old marriage rules because of the influx of Aboriginal people from other parts of the colony in response to government encouragement. According to the Rev. James Flood, Mon'nop had never been interested in marrying again. He was so disgusted and hurt when Scholastica Manguglian ran away with another man that he left the mission for 20 years, only returning when she was long since dead:

'It is a wonder', said someone, 'you did not get married, Monop [sic], during these years'. 'Although', the black replied, 'I knew my wife was buried in the cemetery up there, yet I had had enough of women and I was afraid to venture a second time'.²⁴

William (Guillermo) Mon'nop, his first wife Scholastica Manguglian (Nangulan) and her sister Cayaranon, at the time of their wedding in 1866. New Norcia Archives 73459P.

19. Green and Tilbrook 1989: 88.

20. Eagle mentions the drawings as having been made in 1907 by Mon'nop at Bates' instigation but does not indicate their location (Eagle 2002: 53).

21. Their marriage on 25 November 1866 was described at some length in *The Inquirer*, 3 December 1866.

22. Bates 1909. Surprisingly, Bates, who would certainly have approved of Salvado's decision, made no mention in this article of Fr 'Miro' (Cobane) the matchmaker who, George Russo tells us, 'looked after the courtship and marriage arrangements for the girls from 1865 until his death in 1908' and was bound to have been present as well (Russo 1980: 166).

23. Dom Bernard Rooney (personal communication, 3 July 2008) has suggested to me that the name 'Nyungara' was made up by Bates simply to sound authentic. Its literal meaning is 'Nyoongah men', which makes its use as a personal name nonsense.

Bates suggested that after Salvado's arrival, not only was the enforcement of the old marriage laws completely abandoned at New Norcia, but no proper records were kept to forestall bigamy (to which, as we have seen, she herself was no stranger). In her biographical sketch of Fanny Balbuk, the last full-descent woman of Kar'gatta (Karra-katta), the Bibbulmun name for the Mount Eliza area of Perth, Bates reflected on the naïveté of the New Norcia priests who had obligingly officiated at some of the seven weddings of Balbuk to her various suitors during her exile in the Victoria Plains. The 'unwitting priests ... did not remember they had seen her before', she wrote in 1936, and the fame of Fanny Balbuk's furious temper (she had once killed a sister-in-law) was so well known that 'none of the New Norcia natives dared to tell'.²⁵ In fact, according to Green, no records have been found of Fanny marrying anyone at New Norcia, so it appears to be one of Bates' 'tall stories'.²⁶

There is no evidence of what transpired during Bates' visit to New Norcia in 1903. The monastery's chronicler for that year left no record and she may have been mistaken in her recollection. However, it is clear from the two long articles on the mission's history that appeared 25 years later in the Melbourne weekly, *The Australasian*, under the title 'New Norcia Benedictine Monastery: a record of heroism' that she had met Abbot Torres and the monks and taken detailed notes of their conversations.²⁷ By 1903, Torres had read most of the records of the previous 50 years and was well versed in what had happened during Salvado's and Serra's time. In addition, Fr Martinez and others who had been with Salvado could have told Torres stories about him. Through her reading of the 1854 French version of Salvado's memoirs as part of her initial research for the Western Australian government, Bates was well acquainted with his missionary philosophy and the information he had recorded about the Aborigines of the Victoria Plains.

Bates' first documented visit to New Norcia in late February 1904 was brief and she stayed with the Davidson family at nearby 'Glentromie' station.²⁸ Writing to Fr Planas on Saturday, 21 February, she told him that the mission girls were giving her a tame kangaroo which she was going to present to Governor Sir Frederick Bedford's daughter. Accordingly, she requested accommodation overnight before going on to Gingin the following Monday. Abbot Torres obligingly sent a mission buggy to pick her up.

Bates claimed to have witnessed one of the last matches of the New Norcia cricket team against the Perth team at the Perth ground on 7 March 1905, casting herself as a key source of encouragement after a poor first innings. However, there is no independent evidence that Daisy Bates attended the match. She made the claim in a 1924 article about the New Norcia cricket team and it may well be that some 20 years after the 1905 match she was exercising journalistic licence or simply conflating a number of matches between New Norcia and Perth.²⁹

24. Anon (Flood) 1908: 86. Mon'nop took up with Sarah Upona at least five years before his first wife's death in December 1889 and they had two sons. There is no record of a marriage. Clearly, there needs to be a more careful examination of Mon'nop's chronology in order to resolve these glaring inconsistencies.

25. Bates 1938: 70–71.

26. Dr Neville Green, personal communication, 15 May 2008.

27. Bates 1928.

28. For an account of the Davidsons, see Georgeson 2006: 41–42.

New Norcia Cricket Team, c1905, pictured with the Victoria Plains team. Mon'nop, standing second from the left, played in the original New Norcia team of 1879. Reprinted from *New Norcia ... Tribute of an Irish Secular Priest* by Rev Joseph Flood.

When Bates made what was certainly her longest and most important visit in late November 1908, she had been employed for four years by the Western Australian government to collect information about the Aborigines and had developed a reputation through her extensive writing and public speaking as an authority on the subject. Consequently her visit was recorded by chronicler Fr Henry Altimira as a notable event:

Sat 28: Mrs Bates, an official of the government [appointed] to collect data relating to the Australian Aborigines, or rather those of Western Australia, telegraphed from Moora that she is going to come to this Mission, arriving very late. She asks that the sulky be sent to receive her in Mogumber. Her wishes will be carried out.

29. In her 1924 article Bates told the story of the cricket team's first matches in Perth and Fremantle in 1879 when Mon'nop won the day at Fremantle with a magnificent running catch (Bates 1924). Bates took this story from an account by Anon (Flood) 1908: 10. Strangely, Mon'nop does not appear in the photograph of the first New Norcia team, but in the second (see Green and Tilbrook 1989: 162–163). Bates' account of the 1905 match includes the following description of her own encouragement to the team after a poor first innings:

'Are you going to let the white man beat us?', I asked. I always pretend it was the 'us' that did the trick. When play resumed, runs came fast. All the old frenzy of the corroboree was put into the game. Every approach to the big score of the white players was greeted with shouts from the spectators, and as the numbers went up and up and finally passed the white men's score the excitement of the crowd was overwhelming (Bates 1924).

According to the *Morning Herald's* report, however, the Perth team won the match despite the New Norcia team's plucky second innings recovery (*Morning Herald*, 8 March 1905). It is also recorded that the Aboriginal cricketers won the two other matches in the Perth series and the return match at New Norcia (Anon (Flood) 1908: 111–112).

Girls of St Joseph's orphanage, New Norcia, with their pets, c1905. Reprinted from *New Norcia ... Tribute of an Irish Secular Priest* by Rev Joseph Flood.

Sun 29: The Rt Rev Father Abbot received Mrs Bates in St Gertrude's College and not in the monastery parlour, as she wished. This famous woman appointed by the Government of W.A. to investigate and write about what is true and supposed about the language, customs etc of the Natives of this State, showed herself better informed about the behaviour of our Natives than we might have guessed. She said that the Natives who have left the Mission voluntarily or forcibly did so because the Rt Rev Father Abbot did not *allow them to live in the way they liked*. She says that they, instead, give as their whole reason that they did so because *the Father Abbot does not love them*. Mrs Bates adds that the Bishop [Salvado] was more accommodating with the customs of the Natives – perhaps too much so. She showed herself perfectly aware that the girls in the old times had a *holiday* each week, which they spent in the bush, where they used to meet the boys away from the vigilance of those who had charge of one group and the other. In short, she made it known that she was observing the difference there was in the way the Natives of this Mission were being treated from how they lived before, and she praised it with total frankness.³⁰

From Bates' own report on her visit in early December 1908 to the Chief Protector of Aborigines, Charles Gale, we know that she had spent the previous few months in the north-east and Murchison districts interviewing Aboriginal informants and then returned to Perth.³¹ The aim of this tour, together with earlier visits to the goldfields and the south-west, was to collect information on what she called 'pedigrees' (genealogies), language, social classification and other aspects of Aboriginal society for

³⁰. Trans for the author by Fr David, OSB, New Norcia (emphasis in the original).

³¹. Bates' report dated 9 December 1908, acc 1023, State Records Office of Western Australia.

incorporation in a burgeoning manuscript entitled 'The Native Tribes of Western Australia'.³²

For three days she had waited at Moora for a reply from nearby 'Walebing' station, where she understood some Aborigines were working, to a request for a buggy to pick her up. When the owner, Henry Lefroy the younger, finally sent a telegram to say that he was 'too busy to attend', she remarked that it was the only 'discourtesy' she had experienced during her entire tour.³³ Arriving by train at Mogumber station at 6 pm on 28 November, she was driven in a mission sulky the 15 miles to New Norcia, where she arrived at 8.30 pm.

That she expected to be received by the Abbot in the monastery's parlour speaks of her sense of her own importance at this point. As Fr Altimira attested, her public lectures and newspaper articles had by then made her something of an authority on the Aborigines. Far from being a 'government official', however, she was in fact employed on a lowly junior clerk's wage of just eight shillings a day with a travelling allowance of seven shillings a day. Her government 'office' was a tiny cubby-hole in the Registrar-General's Department. She had always been prone to exaggerate her own status and importance, but Fr Altimira (and presumably Torres himself) was clearly impressed by the extent of her knowledge and gratified by her endorsement of the new regime's policy towards the Aborigines.

Torres had only recently returned from a four-month visit to the Kimberley district to establish what became known as the Drysdale River mission at Napier on Broome Bay. Confronted by the dramatic decline of the Aboriginal population of New Norcia, Torres had decided to make Drysdale River the new focus of Benedictine missionary activity, to make New Norcia monastery the mother-house for further Benedictine communities in Australia and to maximise the commercial potential of its estates for the necessary financial support.³⁴ To this end, he disposed of about 90 per cent of New Norcia's land, held mostly in pastoral leaseholds, had paddocks fenced for holding sheep and purchased mechanical harvesters and other equipment to increase

Rt Rev Fulgentius Torres DDOSB, c. 1905.
Reprinted from *New Norcia ... Tribute of an Irish Secular Priest* by Rev Joseph Flood.

³² Bates 1985.

³³ Bates' report dated 9 December 1908, acc 1023, State Records Office of Western Australia.

³⁴ Erickson 1971: 67.

productivity and reduce labour costs.³⁵ He employed a Chinese gardener who, he said, was able to do the work of four Aborigines. Torres encouraged the small resident adult Aboriginal population to find work on neighbouring farms, while maintaining the two orphanage schools for Aboriginal girls and boys, St Joseph's and St Mary's. At the same time, he embarked on an ambitious plan to build residential schools for the sons and daughters of Catholic rural families. By the time of Bates' visit in November 1908, the girls boarding school, St Gertrude's, was operating, while the construction of the boys school, St Ildephonsus, was well under way. In other words, New Norcia was no longer intended primarily 'to help the natives', but as a monastic and educational institution to which the Aborigines were only an appendage.

Sensing this, and perhaps frustrated by the diminished work opportunities, some of the adult Aboriginal men began to develop feelings of hostility towards New Norcia. At midnight on 31 December 1906 after what been an extremely hot day, more than 30 Aboriginal people descended on the settlement, banging tins, calling out, smashing four windows of the boys' orphanage and allegedly destroying earthenware pipes and a water tank. The police were sent for and three men – Emmanuel Jackamara, George Shaw and Lucas Moody – were charged and brought before magistrate Davidson on 11 January 1907. Despite their earlier plea to the Colonial Secretary to be tried in Perth where they claimed they had a better chance of obtaining justice, Davidson found them guilty and sentenced them to three months' imprisonment.³⁶

The source of the crowd's anger may have been the *Industrial Schools Act* (1874) which gave the monastery the power of legal guardian over any Aboriginal child (up to the age of 21) voluntarily 'surrendered' by their parents, a measure for which Salvado had strongly pressed.³⁷ Some of the parents may thus have been unhappy about Torres' restricting their access to their children, wanting to leave them and take them away as it suited them.³⁸ At the same time, there was difficulty about the issue of rations and blankets to Aborigines no longer employed by the mission but who could not find work elsewhere and were not entitled to the government subsidy.

Whether Bates was aware of this incident when she arrived two years later in 1908 is not clear, but it seems unlikely that Torres and the monks would have hidden it from her. In her own brief report of her six-day visit, she wrote:

Nov. 29. Worked in native cottages. Derby, Carnarvon, Northam and Esperance halfcastes now living in cottages. Some old New Norcia district halfcastes gave me information respecting other pedigrees of natives who were known to them. Went to the native school [St Joseph's] where I found several girls who had not forgotten their old Native Class Divisions.³⁹

35. According to Anna Haebich, New Norcia's land was reduced from almost 967,000 acres to just over 100,000 acres by 1909, Haebich 1988: 16–17.

36. For details of the case, including witnesses' depositions and the men's letters to the Colonial Secretary, see State Records Office of Western Australia, 3005 Files – Chief Protector of Aborigines, 1907/0108 and 1909/0505. Anna Haebich (1988: 17–19) provides a general account of the trouble and its origins but identifies the wrong year. The subject merits closer investigation.

37. Russo 1980: 188–192.

38. According to Green and Tilbrook (1989: xix), the Aborigines 'stormed the orphanage to free their children', but there is no clear evidence to support this claim.

In a subsequent letter to the Colonial Secretary asking for the reimbursement of costs incurred in her travels, she also revealed that she had given a shilling each to seven 'old natives' for them to buy stores.⁴⁰ Far from being charity, however, this was payment for information they had provided. When she had begun her fieldwork, she had not thought 'that I should have to pay so much, and to every individual native whose advice I sought, but I found by experience that I could gain nothing from them without paying for it'.⁴¹

What transpired in the conversations between Bates, Torres and others was not recorded (the Abbot did not keep a diary for this period), but we do know that Torres spoke to her about his recent travels in the north, something she would have understood better than most people because of her time there. We also know that he presented her with a copy of a recently-published book on New Norcia by Rev James Flood, an Irish priest who reputedly had been sent over from Melbourne in 1904 (as some other priests were) to cure a drinking problem.⁴² From the chronicle entry, it appears that Bates expressed her approval of Torres' new regime and was critical of some of Salvado's more permissive policies, notably the weekly semi-supervised 'holiday' in the bush for the boys and girls from the orphanages. At the same time, she evidently believed that the exodus of many of the remaining adult Aborigines was due to the fact that Torres made them feel unwelcome.

Most importantly, it was on this 1908 visit that Bates probably recorded in her notebooks a good deal of the surviving genealogical, linguistic and other information relating to the fast-disappearing traditional culture of the New Norcia people (whom she called 'Nyeerggu') which was duly integrated into 'The Native Tribes of Western Australia'. However, it was from Mon'nop (dingo walking in single file) and his sister Bin'narian (dingo digging) at Cannington Reserve some time earlier that she recorded the 'Dreaming' legend of Nyeerrgu-water and the origins of the dingo totem. In an article in *The Australasian* in January 1925 (which was repeated with a little more detail in the same newspaper six year later), Bates prefaced her account of the legend by suggesting that the Aborigines had found dingoes already in residence when they reached the Victoria Plains and that they became an important part of their diet, necessitating restraint on its consumption by means of a totemic tabu.⁴³

The essence of the legend is that in the *Nyitting*, or 'ice-cold times', two large dingoes travelling northward from Balbarup (Bridgetown/Manjimup area) discover two men throwing boomerangs in the bush and promptly eat them. Subsequently, feeling thirsty, they search for water, the female dingo being successful after digging a long tunnel in the earth. Two Aboriginal *mulgar guttuck*, or sorcerers, Beenjerri and Jirgabi,

39. Bates' report dated 9 December 1908, acc 1023, State Records Office of Western Australia.

40. Bates' report dated 9 December 1908, acc 1023, State Records Office of Western Australia.

41. Bates to Under Secretary, 20 April 1909, acc 1023, State Records Office of Western Australia.

42. Anon (Flood) 1908. Flood died in 1931 and an obituary appeared in *The Record*, 8 August 1931.

43. It is now well established that the introduction of the dingo by the Aborigines was fairly recent, dating back to not much more than 5,000 years ago (Breckwoldt 1988). Consequently it cannot have been present at the time of the first Aboriginal settlement of the Victoria Plains which was at least 30,000 or 40,000 years ago.

subsequently visit the site and learn the story from the spirits of the two dingoes who have in the meantime turned into stone at the mouth of the tunnel:

And Beenjerri and Jirgabi said to the spirit dogs: 'We will keep the laws you made, and we will tell all our *moorurt* (relations) to keep them when they come to sit beside Nyeerrgu water, and the dingoes will be our *bo'rungur* (elder brothers, totems), but as it was the mother dog who found the water, we must all follow the mother dog and not the father dog. He 'comes behind'. [In other words, the mother's line of descent was to be followed, not the father's.]

All Benjerri's and Jirgabi's people from that time were dingo totems, and because the water was sweet and good that the woman dog had brought, they never ate the mother dog. Only male dogs were eaten.⁴⁴

The legend goes on to relate what happens to a hungry young man out hunting who defies the tabu and kills and eats two female dingo pups. Chased by thousands of dingoes across the plain, he finally climbs a huge tree only for them to dig it out at the roots. Left behind to this day are the great holes they dug and little red pebbles which are the drops of blood that splashed everywhere when he crashed to earth, still clinging to the tree.

The moral of the legend is that female dingoes and pups should never be killed and that people who wish to drink from the spring should enter the cave absolutely naked and never touch its sides for fear of diabolical punishment. Before drinking, men were required to strike the water with their *marra gobbul* (palm of their hand) and women with their *goor'deen* or *yor'la* (wooden or bark scoop) to make the water follow them to the *taa'*, or entrance of the tunnel. According to Bates, Salvado himself attested to the power of the legend not long after his arrival at New Norcia. Travelling home from a hunting expedition with a group of Aborigines, they reached Nyeerrgu-water, a tunnel cave with a permanent spring. Unwilling to take off his clothes but assured by his companions that as a *jangga* (returned spirit), he would not be harmed, Salvado entered the cave and brought back water for his companions who had been following him in single file.⁴⁵

In his own account of the religious beliefs of the people of the Victoria Plains, Salvado recorded what was clearly the same incident:

A large number of natives came to see me one evening asking for water. The first ones took all I had and drank it, and the others, about fifteen of them, asked me to go to the pool nearby to get some for them. I showed them the bucket, and told them to go themselves. They all fell silent, and no-one dared to take the bucket, or tell me what they were afraid of, until, about an hour later, one of the said respectfully: 'N-alla cape uoto cherchet cuaragn: nunda uoto quaragn iuad.' ('If we go and take the water we will be killed, but if you go, you will be alright.') I quickly saw that they had some superstition on the subject, and said that I would go with them, with the idea of banishing their false fears. As I went off to the pool or stream, they made me go ahead, and all followed me in single file, in deep silence. While they were quenching their thirst, I started to move away, but immediately they shouted, 'Nanap, nanap' ('Stop, Stop!'), fearing that I was going to leave

⁴⁴. Bates 1925.

⁴⁵. Bates 1925.

them on their own. As we began to go back to the hut, they ran ahead and preceded me, again in single file, so that I came last. When I reproached them for their superstitious ideas they replied condescendingly: 'Nunda tonga but' ('You don't know anything about it!').⁴⁶

Dom Bernard Rooney has suggested that Bates' legend is no more than a fanciful re-working of Salvado's published anecdote,⁴⁷ but the names and other details she provides suggest authenticity. What she called 'Nyeergu-water', the tunnel spring that is the focus of the legend, has long been known as 'Nergo well', probably taking its name from the Nyungah word for mosquito.⁴⁸ She also related in her re-worked account that the totemic tradition had come to an end in 1913 with the death of Mon'nop and Bin'narian.⁴⁹ With their passing, the stones that held the *jangga*, or spirits, of the ancestral dingoes split and broke, allowing them to follow Mon'nop and Bin'narian to *Kurannup-Nyeerganup*, the Bibbulmun after-world, 'where all the dingo totemists had gone before them'.⁵⁰ For all its poetic appeal, this postscript sounds more like the work of her imagination.

What transpired on Bates' last visit to New Norcia in the first half of 1912 is not known as there is no record. At that time she had just parted company with the two other members of the Cambridge University anthropological expedition, AR Radcliffe-Brown and Grant Watson, and was no longer employed by the Western Australian government. Subsequently, unable to secure the position of Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory, she moved in stages from Perth to Eucla, then to Fowler's Bay in South Australia for four years and finally in September 1919 to Ooldea Siding on the newly-completed Transcontinental Railway.

Bates had no further communication with New Norcia until August 1935 when she was about to leave Ooldea and begin writing up her ethnographic material in

46. Stormon 1977: 129. Salvado made no reference in his memoirs and notes to the dingo totem in the New Norcia area. In all probability, it was the familial totem of one of the six local 'skin' or intermarrying groups. He called the Victoria Plains people *Murara*, also referred to as *Mourin* and *Maura*, probably taken from their name for a pool in what became known as the Moore River and where the mission was finally located (Russo 1980: 150) and also the likely origin of the name of nearby Moora township. The surveyor Philip Chauncy who made a visit there referred to the New Norcia area as *Mourin* ('Tales of the Australian Natives', *Melbourne Church News*, 28 March 1868). Salvado at no time used the name *Nyeergu*, which was employed by Bates for both the district and its people. Bates' general term for the people of the Victoria Plains was *Yangur/Yabbaru Bibbulmun* (Bates 1985: 54). The linguistic sub-group of the south-west Nyungah language to which the Victoria Plains people belonged, *Tjapanmay*, was identified by Wilf Douglas (1968: 1-3). In more recent times, the name *Yuet* (*Juet*, *Yued*, *Yowat*, *Yuat*) has been used for the Victoria Plains people, perhaps reflecting the designation originally given by Norman Tindale in his 'tribal' map of Australia of 1940, which identified the Victoria Plains area as *Juet/Juat* (Tindale 1974). There is no previous historical record of the use of this apparently unlikely but not untypical name, which is derived from the Nyungah exclamation *yuwat*, or *yuward*, meaning 'no!'. RM Berndt wrote that 'The Aborigines [Salvado] came among in 1846 were the Yuet (Juet) who occupied the area around New Norcia and Moora' (Berndt 1977: 270). Since Tindale and Berndt, the name has become common currency and, as we have seen above (footnote 18), has been accepted by the Aborigines of the area who have used it in a Native Title claim. It may be a case of life imitating anthropology.

47. Dom Bernard Rooney, personal communication, 22 April 2008.

Adelaide for *The Advertiser* with the assistance of the journalist, Ernestine Hill. Writing to Abbot Catalan, she sought information about the progress of the mission since her last visit: 'a kindly statement from you, as to the progress New Norcia has made during the years between, as to the seminaries for boys, and girls etc. [and] ... the poor dying native "children"'.⁵¹ Referring to Bishop Gibney as well, she continued: 'You have both followed Christ's own pitying law, which I myself have humbly tried to follow during my thirty five years service amongst them'.⁵²

Describing the Moore River Native Settlement established by Chief Protector AO Neville at nearby Mogumber in 1918 as 'a mistake', she was pleased that the Abbot had been in touch with its management. Indeed, she observed that 'If you were to justifyingly take over the castes [sic] at that settlement there might be less pain and trouble to its poor inmates, but I realise that they would be a great responsibility for you. Their condition makes me very sad'.⁵³

She sought information about the group 'waters' (homelands) of the adult Aborigines then remaining at New Norcia, including the relatives of 'the last of the Nyeer'gu (New Norcia) dingo totem men', Mon'nop and Bin'narian. In fact, she told Catalan, she would have liked to obtain the totem and group 'waters' of all 125 Aborigines she understood to be at New Norcia but realised that this would have meant a personal visit which was now beyond her.

Finally, she offered a paean of praise for the work that had been done by the Benedictines:

With all and every care your own Mission, the Drysdale and other missions give them, they are a dying race and I love to think of your Drysdale Mission working and making their passing easier for those poor cannibals of that far northern area. If anyone could have made a purely aboriginal 'province' your Mission would have accomplished it in the years of steady progress but Bishop Salvado and father Garrido and all those fine men of the Mission's early years realised that they could not stem the tide and their natives passed on and your forbears made them happy in their passing which is what I have tried to do through my years of service to them.⁵⁴

48. Dom Bernard Rooney, personal communication, 23 May 2008. Located about 20 kilometres to the east of New Norcia and not far from the town of Yerecoin (whose name is also most likely a derivative of Nyeergu), the well was visited by the author in the company of local Yerecoin farmer, Clive Duggan, and postgraduate student Derek Jowle on 18 May 2008. Nergo Well is a circular pool of about 10 metres diameter, now entirely covered with a thicket of tall rushes and with no sign of a tunnel or of the stone footings sometimes built by the monks at other wells. There are, however, the remains close nearby of jam wood slabs which may have been used to line the top of the well or for a windlass. While there is nothing resembling the holes dug by the dingoes in the legend, there are pebbles or lumps of red haematite to be found nearby.

49. Bates recorded that Mon'nop died at Guildford in early 1914, Bates 1985: 52. In fact, he died aged 65 on 27 September 1913 at Perth Hospital and is buried in a communal grave at Perth's Karrakatta Cemetery. So far, the details of the death and burial of his sister, Bin'naran (Beenaran), have not been found.

50. Bates 1931.

51. Bates to Catalan, 21 August 1935, folio 01407, New Norcia Archives.

52. Bates to Catalan, 21 August 1935, folio 01407, New Norcia Archives.

53. Bates to Catalan, 21 August 1935, folio 01407, New Norcia Archives.

While she professed to remember Bishop Salvado with great affection, she had probably never met him. She had arrived in Fremantle from England on 7 September 1899 and he was to depart for the last time for Rome on 30 November 1899. Always inclined to mythologise her past, Bates was now beginning to believe her own wishful thinking.

When Abbot Catalan duly sent her some up-to-date information, together with a copy of Rev Flood's book and a pamphlet on the Drysdale River Mission, she was delighted.⁵⁵ On 5 October 1935 she wrote to him:

I cannot express the pleasure I felt in renewing contact with New Norcia friends. I had spent so many happy days there given the absolute freedom of the place and hearing from the late Dr Torres and Farther Martinez so much of Benedictine history. When I read your kindly letter yesterday, the impulse came up on me to fly over to New Norcia and greet old, and make new, friends. Your mission and the dear and now dead Trappist Mission have been close to my heart always, as in your dealings with our diocese under the jurisdiction of New Norcia was extended to Southern Cross.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, she required further information and photographs in order to bring her account of New Norcia up to date.

After the publication of her book, *The Passing of the Aborigines: A Lifetime Spent Among the Natives of Australia*,⁵⁷ in late 1938 she sent a copy to the Abbot, telling him how much she wanted to visit New Norcia again and renew her friendship with 'dear little Brother Vermundo [Veremundo]' (if he was still alive), Frs Miro and Ramiro, Fr Planas, the five musicians 'and many others'.⁵⁸

While she admired the work of Salvado and Torres, Daisy Bates never faltered in her belief that Christian missionary endeavour with traditional Aborigines was ultimately futile. Moreover, in *The Passing of the Aborigines* (itself her epitaph for the whole race and culture) her fatalistic remarks about the Aborigines of New Norcia suggested that even the best-intended kindness was fatal:

Children of the woodland, dwelling in squalor that could not be avoided in their stone-walled houses, closed in from the air that that was their breath of life, in the heart of summer and the dank cold of winter, they lost all touch with their native earth. They slept on beds – but they could not learn cleanliness. They wore clothing – and developed chest complaints and fevers. They died and the dead were carried out of the little houses, and others went to live in them – a superstitious people with a horror of the dead, there they too died. Alas for the poor 'little brothers of the dingo' – civilization was a cloak that they donned readily enough, but they could not wear it and live.⁵⁹

54. Bates to Catalan, 21 August 1935, folio 01407, New Norcia Archives.

55. Catalan to Bates, 24 September 1935, Daisy Bates Papers, MS 365/07/429–430, National Library of Australia.

56. Bates to Catalan, 5 October 1935, folio 01407, New Norcia Archives.

57. Bates 1938.

58. Bates to Catalan, 26 March 1939, folio 01411, New Norcia Archives.

59. Bates 1938: 67.

In her last letter to Abbot Catalan of 5 December 1941, written from Wynbring Siding in South Australia where she was vainly attempting to resume the work she had given up six years earlier at Ooldea, she enclosed yet another copy of her book, telling him: 'I have such charming memories of the old Monastery of thirty or forty years ago that I am a very frequent "Dream Visitor" in the quiet Evening of my Life'.⁶⁰ She also remembered her old informant Mon'nop as 'a quiet and useful old fellow in his day'.⁶¹ During the last ten years of her life her memories of New Norcia were no doubt a mixture of sadness at the passing of the Victoria Plains people and happiness that she had found at the monastery a microcosm of the old European Catholic civilisation to which she had been introduced as a child by the sisters of the Sacred Heart of Mary at Roscrea, County Tipperary.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the following people for their kind assistance in the preparation of this paper: Peter Hocking, Dom Bernard Rooney, Fr David, Clive Duggan, George Russo, Neville Green, Sebastian Clark, Joan Carney and Rita Farrell.

References

Primary sources

- Anon [Rev James Flood], 1908, *New Norcia ... Tribute of an Irish Secular Priest*, Burns & Oates, London.
- 'A Lady Visitor', 1902, 'The New Norcia Mission. Spanish Monks and West Australian Natives', *The Western Mail*, 18 January.
- Bates, Daisy M 1902-03, 'Among the Trappists at Beagle Bay, nor'-west', *The Social Kodak*, 4, 11, 18 and December 1902, 8, 15, 22 and 29 January 1903.
- 1907, 'A Southern Corroboree', *The Western Mail*, 25 December 1907.
- 1908, 'Some Southern Aborigines. Their Natural Characteristics', *The Western Mail*, 7 March.
- 1909, 'Monnop's Love Story', *The Western Mail*, 27 February.
- 1924, 'An Aboriginal Cricket Team', *The Australasian*, 12 January.
- 1925, 'Dingo Totemists', *The Australasian*, 17 January.
- 1928, 'New Norcia Benedictine Mission: A Record of Heroism', *The Australasian*, 15 and 22 December.
- 1931, 'How the Water came to Nyeergu', *The Australasian*, 3 January.
- 1938, *The Passing of the Aborigines: A Lifetime Spent Among the Natives of Australia*, John Murray & Co, London.
- 1985, *The Native Tribes of Western Australia*, Isobel White (ed), National Library of Australia, Canberra.
- Papers of Daisy Bates, MS 365, National Library of Australia, Canberra.
- Papers of Rev John Mathew, MS 9290, LaTrobe Library, Melbourne.
- Archives of the Benedictine Monastery, New Norcia, Western Australia.

⁶⁰. Bates to Catalan, 5 December 1941, folio 01374, New Norcia Archives.

⁶¹. Bates to Catalan, 5 December 1941, folio 01374, New Norcia Archives.

South Australian Museum Archives.

State Record Office of Western Australia.

The Australasian [Melbourne].

Morning Herald [Perth].

The Western Mail [Perth].

Secondary sources

Berndt, RM 1977, 'Salvado: A man of and before his time', in EJ Stormon (ed and trans), *The Salvado Memoirs*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands: 267–274.

Breckwoldt, R 1988, *A Very Elegant Animal: The Dingo*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, New South Wales.

Chamberlain, Mary (trans) 2001, 'Chronicles of Benedictine Abbey of New Norcia from April 10 to December 31 1901', *New Norcia Studies*, No 9.

Croft, Brenda L (with Janda Gooding) 2003, *South West Central: Indigenous Art from South Western Australia 1833–2002*, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth.

Douglas, Wilf 1968, *The Aboriginal Languages of the South-west of Australia*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra.

Eagle, Mary 2002, 'Monop of New Norcia and the Victoria Plains', *New Norcia Studies*, No 10: 49–56.

Erickson, Rica 1971, *The Victoria Plains*, Lamb Paterson, Perth.

Georgeson, Lyle 2006, 'Glentromie: a history', *New Norcia Studies*, No 14: 41–42.

Green, Neville and Lois Tilbrook (comps) 1989, *Aborigines of New Norcia 1845–1914. The Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians, vol VII*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands.

Haebich, Anna 1988, *For Their Own Good: Aborigines and Government in the Southwest of Western Australia, 1900–1940*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands.

National Native Title Tribunal 2002, *Research Report Bibliography: Yued 2nd edn*, NNTT, Perth.

Reece, Bob 2007, *Daisy Bates: Grand Dame of the Desert*, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Russo, George 1980, *Lord Abbot of the Wilderness: The Life and Times of Bishop Salvado*, Polding Press, Melbourne.

Stormon, EJ (trans and ed) 1977, *The Salvado Memoirs*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands.

Tindale, Norman B 1940, 'Results of the Harvard–Adelaide Universities Anthropological Expedition, 1938–1939, Distribution of Australian Aboriginal Tribes: A field survey', *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia* 64(1): 140–231.

— 1974, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*, ANU Press, Canberra.