3

The zealot from Parramatta

As we have seen, the first 15 years of the New South Wales Aboriginal Protection Board's existence were characterised by modest action and policy drift. Economic disruption had brought many more Aboriginal people within its purview, but the Board took a very minor role in resolving key policy issues of the period. However, a distinct change in Board activity and focus coincided with the appointment to the Board of George Edward Ardill in 1897. Ardill had been the secretary to the powerful Aborigines Protection Association (APA) and his presence on the Board provided an impetus for a shift in policy focus and a general increase in Board activity. Ardill became the *go-to* man. He was tasked with the resolution of some 'difficult' Board situations and provided the motivation for the increased removal of Aboriginal children from their communities. He was a fixer, a driver, an obsessive man spurred on by his evangelism and self-belief.

The evangelical activist

Born into a family of Baptists in 1857, George Ardill (Figure 3.1) completed his elementary education in the 1860s in Parramatta, and as a young man developed 'strict principles, was a teetotaler and a street preacher'. In his 20s, he decided to 'devote himself full-time to organising charities and to evangelism'.¹ In his biographical account of George Ardill, Bruce Thornton suggests that a pivotal event in his early life set Ardill on a path of 'rescue'.

1 Ramsland, 'Ardill, George'; Radi, 'Ardill, George Edward (1857–1945)'.

A woman approached him in 1882 asking for help and he agreed to meet her the next day where she lived, at 'the graveyard in Devonshire Street'. The following day, Ardill found a considerable number of men, women and children living among the tombstones with no shelter or any other facilities at all. It was close to the Benevolent Asylum where there were daily distributions of 'outdoor relief' and where one might pick up cast-off clothing. The 'atmosphere of hopelessness and utter despair' clearly had an impact on the young Ardill.²

Figure 3.1: George Edward Ardill.

Source: *The Rescue* 2, no. 10 (August 1882): 2. Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

He was not alone in his desire to rescue the poor. The concern for neglected and delinquent children was a worldwide phenomenon, which accelerated in the middle to later nineteenth century.³ The New South Wales Government subsidised several charities as a major method of social welfare provision.⁴ The Benevolent Society, founded in 1818, was the key driver in the establishment of asylums, the first of which was located in Pitt Street in Sydney. Ann O'Brien argues that the middle class felt responsible for proselytisation and philanthropy. Those in society who were already 'saved' and morally superior had to uplift those who were less fortunate; but there was also the view that 'financial assistance should be kept to a minimum' to place a strong emphasis on self-help.⁵ George Ardill identified strongly with the sentiment of self-help and embraced the 'rescue' of children, an ideology inspired by British evangelicals in the 1860s and 1870s.⁶ By his early 40s, Ardill was the director of 12 societies; he had created a mini-empire of institutions for the homeless and for neglected children in the Sydney region.⁷

2 Thornton, *Haste to the Rescue*, 16.

3 Parry, 'Such a Longing', 23. For a short and useful overview of charities from the early 1800s to the present, see O'Brien, 'Charity and Philanthropy', 18–28. For a broad overview see Dickey, *No Charity There*, Chapter 3. See also O'Brien's *Poverty's Prison*, Chapters 18, 19 and 20.

4 Horsburgh, 'Subsidy and Control', 64.

5 O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison*, 189–90.

6 Musgrove, *The Scars Remain*, 37.

7 Ramsland, 'Ardill, George'.

Ardill's Homes

In 1882, at the age of 25, Ardill formed the Blue Ribbon Gospel Army, a temperance organisation that provided for the destitute in Sydney. In 1884 he founded the All-night Refuge, which was an austere affair: a sparsely furnished Methodist shelter where he compelled inmates to attend his religious services. He established the Lying-In Hospital, known as the Home of Hope for Friendless and Fallen, which provided support for single pregnant women. He believed the 'fallen' should be encouraged to acquire skills that should fit them for a life of 'usefulness in the future' and residents were expected to do the 'washing, cooking and cleaning – while others took care of the children'.⁸

In 1886 he opened Our Babies Home and in 1887 Our Children's Home at Liverpool was established, followed by Our Boys Farm Home in Camden in 1890. He also founded, in 1890, the Sydney Rescue Work Society, which became the umbrella organisation for all his Homes. Children who were admitted to Ardill's Homes were those found on the streets who were either needy or friendless, or victims of vice, ill-treatment and neglect. Special officers from the Rescue Work Society, on the lookout across Sydney and in other places, picked up the children and took them to Ardill.⁹ In some cases they were taken before magistrates as juvenile offenders and were committed to the care of Homes. Some children were brought to Ardill's Homes by their parents and surrendered as 'uncontrollable'.¹⁰ Ardill also arranged for the adoption of children and there were regular advertisements in the official monthly newsletter of the society, *The Rescue*:

Applicants are assured that no interference on the part of the mother of the child need be feared, indeed, in most cases, the address of the person adopting the child is not given to the mother, as she has full confidence in the judgment in the Director [Ardill] as to securing a good home.¹¹

8 Thornton, *Haste to the Rescue*, 57.

9 The *Industrial Schools Act 1866* (NSW) allowed a child under 16 years to be committed to an industrial school if found 'wandering about' with reputed thieves. The police or 'any other person' could apprehend a child who was homeless or begging. Ardill's officers could do this and remain within the law. See O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison*, 146.

10 Thornton, *Haste to the Rescue*, 77.

11 *The Rescue*, 26 March 1902, 12.

Although these were well-publicised advertisements, there was a cloak of secrecy surrounding all the personal arrangements to preserve anonymity and confidentiality. There appeared to be little scrutiny into how Ardill's Homes were run. The protocols – if there were any – regarding parental consent, the selection of adoptive parents and the alteration of the child's identity all remain unknown. However, it is known that 'solicitors were very often involved' so there must have been some questionable practices.¹² The organisation and administration of all Ardill's establishments were undertaken by his own people within the Sydney Rescue Work Society. Our Boys Farm Home in Camden (Figure 3.2), set up in 1890 on the edge of Dharawal Country, was designed to apprentice out boys to local farms in the Camden district to acquire farming and work skills that would be useful for them in the future. It was still operating decades into the twentieth century, and from the two following accounts it was not a happy place.

Figure 3.2: Our Boys Farm Home, Camden. Two Aboriginal boys can be seen, second from the far right and one in front of the matron.

Source: Camden Historical Society Archives, Photo Files, CHS 0084.

¹² Thornton, *Haste to the Rescue*, 78.

Mrs Wynne Stuckey, interviewed by Sylvia Hanson in February 2005, spoke of the time in the late 1930s when her father was the Methodist minister for Camden. She remembered 'Mr Ardill as dreadful man [and] to have the children for a meal they would have to go to him on bended knees to ask permission'. 'All the town knew the boys were half starved and only had syrup sandwiches for lunch'.¹³ Eric (Slim) Johnson, born in 1927, who after six years in an orphanage in Baulkham Hills was transferred to Camden Boys Home, echoes Mrs Stuckey concerns. The home was run by two women, Matron Coulson and Sister Teasdale, who were very strict. Eric recalled:

We were never allowed to make friends or talk or play games. We had to walk to school ... We were not allowed to wear shoes and I remember, in winter, on the way to school there would be cows lying in the fields. We would chase each [cow] away in turn to stand for a little while where they had warmed up the grass with their bodies ... the only time we were allowed to wear shoes was to church.

One night, I had just got out of the bath when the matron came in carrying her four foot cane. She sent the boys outside and locked the bathroom door. I remember it vividly to this day. She said, So you like to sing Johnson? Well I'll give you something to sing about, and she laid into my bare body with her cane 78 times – I was about 12 years old at the time. (You were not allowed to sing at any time.)¹⁴

These instances were probably not isolated and reflect reports of institutional abuse of orphans that persisted well into the twentieth century.¹⁵

Ardill was a tireless worker who regularly conducted compulsory religious services for his inmates and believed that the 'fallen' could only be rehabilitated through the 'fear of God', and in the principles of obedience, honesty and industry. Ardill held to the view that laundry work for the

13 Mrs Wynne Stuckey, interviewed by Sylvia Hansen, February 2005, File: Camden Boys Home, Camden Historical Society Archives. It is unclear who had to go 'on bended knee' but the context suggests that it was probably the Methodist minister and his wife and not the boys from the Home.

14 Eric (Slim) Johnson to Paula Douglas, letter, 17 February 1914, File: Camden Boys Home, Camden Historical Society Archives.

15 Shurlee Swain has compiled a list of all the inquiries into child institutions, between 1852 and 2013. From 1990 up until 2013, some 234 separate homes and institutions, subject to investigation, resulted in many instances of various cases of child abuse. See Swain, *History of Australian Inquiries Reviewing Institutions Providing Care for Children*.

'fallen' women was the way to 'cleanse the soul'.¹⁶ He was a 'driven-man' who ruled through fear, within strict religious principles demanding the full compliance of his rules and regulations. John Ramsland portrays him as one who was 'absolutely certain of the validity of his notions'.¹⁷

Controversy and Ardill

Ardill's evangelism, fanaticism and perhaps even impropriety got him into trouble. In August 1890 he wrote a letter of complaint to the colonial secretary regarding harassment while conducting his regular religious services in the Sydney Domain. A large group of wharfies who were on strike accused Ardill of providing ex-prisoners from The Discharged Prisoners Mission (another of Ardill's Homes) to help break the strike. A local constable reported that 'several thousand people assembled' and Ardill instructed the police to arrest a man for disturbing his meeting. The crowd then closed around Ardill and the police had to escort him to a cab for safety.¹⁸

In December 1890, Ardill was attacked by the *Australian Workman* newspaper, which accused him of hypocrisy, mismanagement and exploitation concerning the House of Hope for Friendless and Fallen in 1890–91. Ardill was accused of using (11) rooms in the House of Hope to house his own family and 'took advantage of his position to perpetrate iniquity'. The paper had also accused Ardill of having a Maori girl who had become pregnant while in his employ.¹⁹ Ardill sued the paper and publisher for libel and sought damages of £2,000 and defended all charges. He admitted that his family lived there but only occupied five rooms and not 11; that the girl in question was not Maori but a 'half-caste' Aboriginal girl; and that, while she was pregnant, he was not the father and had no inappropriate relations with her. The jury found in Ardill's favour. Despite his vindication Ardill's behaviour must have certainly

16 Parry, 'Such a Longing', 170.

17 Ramsland, 'Ardill, George'.

18 Extract of a report by Senior Constable Clarke of the incident that took place in the (Sydney) Domain, 31 August 1890, Colonial Secretary's In-Letters (hereafter CSIL), 5/5992, Item 90/10337, State Records of New South Wales (hereafter SRNSW).

19 *Evening News*, 3 July 1891, 6. The coverage of the trial appeared in the *Melbourne Age*. It reported that inmates sometimes 'went without'; the women in the Home 'received no wages' for their work in the laundry, complained of their treatment and had 'scaled walls to get out of the house': *The Age*, 7 July 1891, 5.

raised a few eyebrows among the philanthropic community in Sydney; the *Australian Workman* wrote that ‘Ardill has long been suspected of hypocrisy and questionable honesty’.²⁰

Ardill was involved in another scandal that concerned boys interned on the ship *Vernon* (Figure 3.3). The *Industrial Schools Act 1886* (NSW) was introduced to control children who were neglected and wandering the streets ‘begging, abandoned or committing a crime’. The *Vernon*, a former merchant sailing ship, was purchased by the New South Wales Government in 1867, refitted as a public industrial school and moored between the Government Domain and Garden Island. Boys were placed on the ship (some as young as three) to be given ‘moral training, nautical and industrial training and instruction and elementary schooling’.²¹

Figure 3.3: Naval Training Ship *Vernon*.

Source: SLNSW, c1888, bep_04427.1E1673451 Naval Training Ship ‘Vernon’ with cadets’ washing between the masts – Sydney – IE1673452 – FL1673459 – Call no. At Work and Play – 04427.

²⁰ *Australian Workman*, 7 March 1891, 2.

²¹ Dunn, ‘Vernon Nautical Training Ship’. See also O’Brien, *Poverty’s Prison*, 145–50, for a summary of what was expected of the boys on the ship and the underlying assumptions thereof.

In July 1890, the *Bathurst Free Press* stated that a Joe Bragg, and others, had produced a pamphlet that reflected poorly on the management of the *Vernon* and charged the boys with being guilty of ‘abominable practices’. The issue was raised in parliament and Mr Carruthers MLA asserted that Mr Ardill was behind Bragg’s accusations.²² In debate, Mr Inglis MLA, who knew Ardill, was moved to say: ‘I have looked upon that gentleman [Ardill] with a considerable amount of doubt for some time’. He intimated that the problem was a matter of honesty.²³ Bragg’s pamphlet had accused the boys ‘with every conceivable crime under the sun – bestiality, self-abuse, sodomy and everything else that is atrocious’.²⁴ The *Sydney Morning Herald* revealed that Joe Bragg had committed a string of serious criminal offences, knew Ardill well and had been working for him at the time of the publication. Ardill refuted all accusations regarding his role in the publication as well as Carruthers’ claim that he ‘was a philanthropist for the sake of gain’. Ardill’s connection with the publication was never proven. Carruthers alleged, however, that he was an interested party; Ardill’s Boys Homes (at Liverpool and Camden) were in competition with the *Vernon* and in the event of the *Vernon* closing he would receive many of the boys.²⁵

This overall picture of Ardill is problematic. Ardill’s personal scrapbooks suggest that he was obsessed with articles concerning ‘fallen women’, child abuse and pornography.²⁶ Anne O’Brien poses that Ardill not only saw men as ‘despoilers’ who ‘basely deceived’, he also saw women as having an ‘aggressive desire to show their affection’.²⁷ Despite his strange proclivities, Ardill’s character and actions should be viewed in the context of his fervent evangelicalism. He was undoubtedly a committed philanthropist, who wanted to help pregnant girls, ex-criminals and orphaned children. Ardill’s Baptist upbringing, his strict adherence to temperance and his preaching were all embodiments of self-improvement and evangelicalism that emerged as energising forces in nineteenth-century Britain. These forces had their origins, as American historian Trygve Tholfsen has shown, in the turbulent early decades of the century when the working class, striving not to be ignored and marginalised, gave its ‘unqualified allegiance to an ethic of improvement which exalted the intellectual and moral development of the

22 *Bathurst Free Press*, 12 July 1890, 5.

23 NSW, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 10 July 1890, 2025 (Inglis).

24 NSW, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 10 July 1890, 2019 (Copeland).

25 *Sydney Morning Herald* (hereafter *SMH*), 13 August 1890, 2.

26 Gapps, ‘Mr Ardill’s Scrapbook: Alternative Sources for Biography’, 102. Stephen Gapps was a distant relative: Ardill was the brother of Stephen’s grandmother’s grandfather.

27 Quoted in O’Brien, *Poverty’s Prison*, 121.

individual as the highest good'. The middle class adopted the same language and values and on 'every occasion' preached to the workers the gospel of 'improvement, social advancement, respectability and class harmony'.²⁸ These views were shared by many emigrant families and Ardill was immersed in these philosophies and driven by them. In 1901 the Evangelical Council of New South Wales sponsored large-scale interdenominational evangelism at outdoor meetings; one, held during November in Hyde Park, attracted 30,000 each night. John See (the Premier of New South Wales and Protection Board member) defended the right of the 'mission' to erect large tents in public places as it would 'benefit the conditions and improve the morals of the people'.²⁹ Ardill's religious focus on the uplift and salvation of the fallen was a mainstream middle-class activity.

Ardill's preoccupation with the need to regulate women and children helps explain the marked changes in Board activities after his accession in 1897. Under his dogged sway, the Board increased its activity in the removal of children – especially girls – without a legislative mandate.

The antagonist joins the Board

There was no doubt that Ardill was a controversial figure. Ardill's appointment to the Board on 18 October 1897 was result of the APA's 'forced' transfer of power over the Aboriginal stations at Cumeroogunga, Warangesda and Brewarrina in late 1897. Surprisingly, there was no apparent objection, from the Board, to his appointment. The Board was no stranger to Ardill. It had dealt with him for the last decade in his role as secretary to the powerful APA. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Board had had a fractious relationship with the APA and with Ardill over ongoing issues of funding and financial accountability. It seems strange that no protest was raised to Ardill's choice as a Board member. The 1898 Aboriginal Protection Board (APB) report gives some clues:

The Council of the Aborigines Protection Association were given representation on the Board by their appointment of (Messrs Carpenter and Ardill) so that their work in connection with the religious instruction of the Aborigines might be continued.³⁰

28 Tholfsen, 'The Intellectual Origins of Mid-Victorian Stability', 61–66.

29 Broome, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels*, 56–57.

30 *Protection of Aborigines: Report of the Board* (the APB Report: hereafter *APBR*) 1898, 3. Accessed via *Journal of the Legislative Council*, Q328.9106/7, *NSW Parliamentary Papers, Consolidated Index* (hereafter *Journal of LC*), State Library of New South Wales (hereafter SLNSW), Vol. 57, Part 1.

Perhaps the government (who appointed Board members) was genuine in the desire to maintain a 'religious connection'; or perhaps it considered that Ardill was easier to control by having him inside the tent as a Board member. Possibly, Ardill's and Carpenter's appointments were some form of inducement for the APA to relinquish control of its three Aboriginal stations, or perhaps it was a form of compensation for the APA's 'defeat'. Conceivably, Ardill insisted that the price of the APA's concession was a continuing presence for him and his colleague in Aboriginal affairs on the Board and he likely argued that his many Homes, already established, could provide immediate placement of Aboriginal children.³¹ Some have suggested that the Board 'appeared to welcome' Ardill, even though he had been 'antagonistic' towards it in the past'.³² However, considering his reputation, it seems just as likely that it was a cautious welcome indeed.

From the outset, Ardill made his presence felt in two ways: as a general 'fixer' and as a facilitator for the removal of Aboriginal children from their families. Unlike many on the Board, Ardill's name often appeared as the person to have carriage of issues. From October 1897 until the end of 1900, comprising 163 Board meetings, Ardill's name was mentioned in the minutes 13 times in the carriage of certain tasks; only one other Board member was tasked with a duty during that time.³³ Ardill was an active Board member. For instance, he offered to deal with a problem in August 1899 at Lake Illawarra where he had to 'warn' a Mr Vidler from the Aborigines' Mission to stay away from the Aboriginal people there. In August 1898 he was asked to investigate a long-running dispute at the Brungle Aboriginal Station (east of Gundagai) between the teacher-manager J. Ussher and the Aboriginal residents. Ussher was blamed for the problems, Ardill's version of events was accepted and Ussher dismissed.³⁴

31 There is no evidence to suggest this, but his reputation for single-mindedly pursuing his agenda would clearly raise the possibility.

32 Parry, 'Such a Longing', 163.

33 APB Minutes (hereafter *APBM*), October 1897 to December 1900 (163 meetings were held during this period). All *APBM* accessed via: Minute Books (Aborigines Welfare Board), NRS 2, NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Sydney.

34 The Board was unhappy with interference from Missionary Vidler in the Aboriginal camp at Lake Illawarra. Vidler wanted the camp moved to Port Kembla where it was not so isolated (*Evening News*, 21 July 1899, 3), but the Board disapproved and recorded: 'that prior to Vidler's visit the Aborigines were happy and contented now they are unreasonable and discontented' (*APBM*, 24 August 1899, Item 1). There had been several complaints about J. Ussher from the Aboriginal residents and they often refused to work. Ussher was also 'agitating animals for his own gain on the Station'. See Read, *A Hundred Years War*, 40–41. After Ardill's visit, Ussher complained to the local Wagga Wagga police that he felt 'persecuted and ridiculed', Parry, 'Such a Longing', 172.

Ardill also sought to influence appointments to the APB. In November 1899, he wrote to the colonial secretary and urged the selection of a Mr Henry Trenchard to the Board, which was subsequently approved.³⁵ The Board had not had a member who so clearly dominated proceedings before.

'If a suitable girl can be found'

Ardill was ostensibly appointed to the Board to exert religious influence, but this was not where he found his niche. His focus became the placement of Aboriginal children into apprenticeships and sometimes into his own Homes. Prior to his membership of the APB, Ardill had already been involved with the placement of Aboriginal children into domestic situations. The first instance of Ardill, while secretary of the APA, placing an Aboriginal girl in service was in April 1892. He escorted girls to and from the mission at Warangesda, put them into service or into his own Homes in Sydney, and sorted out disputes with employers.³⁶ The Board had also put Aboriginal children into service well before it acquired legislative power to do so in 1909. During the 1890s the Board 'asked police to encourage young adults to "take service", but, because it had no power to apprentice children or youths, had to rely on families to make informal arrangements themselves'.³⁷ Or, as Peter Read writes, the Board resorted to 'threats and promises' if required. For example, after the Warangesda Dormitory was built in 1893 the Board offered the parents free rail trips home if they would leave their girls.³⁸ Members of the public also initiated removals. The Board minutes reveal many instances of public individuals requesting Aboriginal children to become domestic servants and labourers. In June 1898 when a particular resident of Gilgandra requested 'an aboriginal girl as a domestic servant' the Board's response was to 'request in the district ... if a suitable girl can be found in any of the camps, if not ... to see if [there is] one at Brewarrina'. The police at Gulargambone reported a month later that there was a 'suitable girl in the camp at that place' and the APB wrote to the resident at Gilgandra.³⁹

35 Ardill to Colonial Secretary, CSIL, 1900, 5/6512, Item 99/22038 (SRNSW).

36 *Conservation Management Plan – Warangesda Aboriginal Mission & Station*, 21.

37 Parry, 'Such a Longing', 169.

38 Read, *The Stolen Generations*, 7.

39 *APBM*, 9 June 1898, Item 1; *APBM*, 7 July 1898, Item 2.

There was no apparent vetting process of the resident at Gilgandra by the Board nor any indication that the Board accessed official channels for these removals.⁴⁰

After the appointment of Ardill to the Board there was a significant increase in 'removal activity'. Peter Read has been the only historian to venture that an estimated 300 Aboriginal children were removed during the period 1883 until 1909, a period when the Board had no specific legislative powers to do so.⁴¹ Between these years no complete register or record was kept of such removals.⁴² However, analysis of the Board minutes is useful in providing insight to this activity, as well as confirmation of increased removals after Ardill's arrival. The extant Board minutes from 1883 to March 1910 record 23 instances of discussions regarding the removal of children. However, the Board minutes are missing for 14 years and four months of this 27-year period.⁴³ Table 3.1 depicts the number of removals during the periods when the Board minutes are available. Periods 1, 2 and 3 represent times when the minutes are available prior to March 1910. Period 4 represents the first six-month period after legislation was enacted. I have included this period to draw an immediate comparison as a result of the Board's access to legislation.

40 The *Neglected and Juvenile Offenders Act 1905* (NSW) defined the powers of the Children's Court; providing that children (over 5 and under 16) were 'neglected or uncontrollable' they could be dealt with by the court. Up until 1905 there were a number of NSW Acts that dealt with the court's powers: the *Public Instruction Act 1880* allowed it to punish parents for not sending their children to school; the *State Children Relief Act 1881* let it 'board out' children and also created the State Children's Relief Board; the *Children's Protection Act 1892* enabled a magistrate to hand over a child to a home for destitute or neglected children; the *Reformatory and Industrial Schools Act 1901* made provisions for offenders under 16 and for vagrant and destitute children; the *Deserted Wives and Children's Act 1901* provided for legal custody of children; the State Children's Bill 1902 provided for a court to deal with criminal offences, paternity cases, assault and neglect and destitution and proposed to give it the power to commit children to the State Relief Board. Accessed via: childrenscourt.nsw.gov.au/Documents/History.

41 Due to a 'lack of records' for this period, Read only made an estimation: Read, *The Stolen Generations*, 11.

42 Technically, as journalist Keith Windschuttle points out, there are some records of children removed to Board institutions at Bomaderry, Singleton and Cootamundra from 1907 onwards. Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, 75. See Chapter 6 for all details of removals from 1916.

43 Missing Board minutes: June 1883 to 25 September 1890 (7 years and 3 months); 4 July 1901 to 23 May 1905 (3 years and 10 months); 11 December 1906 to 17 March 1910 (3 years and 3 months).

Table 3.1: Numbers of Aboriginal children removed prior to, and following, Ardill's appointment to the Board during four periods (when minutes are available).

Periods of available Board Minutes	Number of removals recorded	Monthly average	Yearly average
September 1890 – October 1897 (85 months); Prior to Ardill's appointment	2	0.024	0.28
October 1897 – May 1901 (31 months); Ardill a Board member	18	0.58	7.0
June 1905 – November 1906 (17 months); Ardill a Board member	3	0.18	2.16
First six months under legislation: 2 June 1910 – 15 December 1910; Ardill a Board member	55	9.17	110

Source: APB minutes for appropriate years.

During the first period of just over seven years, and prior to Ardill's appointment on October 1897, there were only two removals recorded. However, from 1897, during the next 31-month period that Ardill was a Board member, there was a spike of 18 entries; and Ardill is specially mentioned in four of these removals.⁴⁴ In the third period there were only three removals recorded, but, importantly, in October 1906, the minutes suggest significant removal activity. The local board at Warangesda asked the manager to

interview Parents *of all girls* [presumably in the district, my emphasis] to see if they will allow them to go into the Dormitory [at Warangesda] and any that object should be asked the reasons for their objection.⁴⁵

We will never know how many removals took place in the years where Board minutes are missing – that is from May 1901 until June 1905 and from November 1906 until March 1910. However, if the Board's policy, from October 1906, of interviewing all parents was statewide, then the number of removals from 1906 to 1910 (a period of four years) may

⁴⁴ In April 1900, the Board minutes record that 'Ardill agreed to receive "a half-caste" girl into his Children's Home at Liverpool as long as she was brought from Narrabri' (*APBM*, 5 April 1900, Item 1). A month later a minute entry read, that the 'girl brought from Narrabri from Sydney, by an officer of the Sydney Rescue Work Society; also, the Sydney Rescue Work Society brought a young Aboriginal boy from Moree who was admitted to the Benevolent Asylum' (*APBM*, 10 May 1900, Item 4). Ardill reported on a girl at Carisbrooke private hospital at Potts Point (*APBM*, 3 May 1900, Item 13).

⁴⁵ *APBM*, 16 October 1906, Item 6.

have been higher than two per year as per the previous 17 months. There may of course have been removals that were *never* recorded. More telling perhaps was that after 2 June 1910, when the *Aborigines Protection Act 1909* (NSW) became law, there was an unprecedented spike in removals and 55 children were removed in just six months. This equates to 110 per year – an extraordinary increase.

The records are scant and incomplete, but there seems little doubt that the increase in removals coincided with Ardill's arrival on the Board. With Ardill's influence, even without legislative authority, the Board was becoming a powerful body. By the turn of the century it could refuse or withhold rations and equipment to force compliance, decline rail passes to stymie travel, determine land grants, hire and fire station managers, and remove children without a transparent process. However, the power of the Board was challenged. The Aboriginal residents at La Perouse, and its supporters, opposed the Board's intention to remove the community.

La Perouse: 'This camp should be broken up'

The Board's attempt to remove the Aboriginal community at La Perouse towards the end of 1900 was hubris. This was the Board's first attempt at overt coercive policy, and it failed. Unlike the mix of Aboriginal families and individuals who were removed by the police from the government boatshed at Circular Quay in 1881 (see Chapter 1), the La Perouse community had roots in the area reaching back beyond 1788. Like the boatshed residents, the La Perouse community was considered by the Board to be too close to the city and was attracting 'unsavoury elements'. However, the Board failed to recognise two major factors in its bid to remove the residents. First, the Aboriginal residents had developed strong ties with influential Sydney people such as high-profile parliamentarian and Board member Richard Hill and the establishment of the New South Wales Aborigines Mission at La Perouse in the mid-1890s contributed powerful allies who argued strongly for the community to remain.⁴⁶ Second, the Board failed to understand the degree to which Aboriginal

46 See Chapter 1 for reference to Richard Hill and the Sydney Aborigines Committee established in the 1840s with men such as Daniel Egan, Bob Nichols and George Hill. For more on Richard Hill, see also Irish, *Hidden in Plain View*, 71, 81, 116, 118–19, and 128–29.

residents could mobilise these networks against the Board. At another level, the attempt exposed the disparate nature of the Board. Some members acted alone, some opposed the policy position and, paradoxically, a Board member who was the current premier of New South Wales, as final arbiter, thwarted Board policy.

La Perouse is etched in the history of Australia. It stands as a reminder of both the presence of competing imperial players and their interaction with the local Aboriginal populations at the time of Australia's colonisation. As Captain Arthur Phillip sailed out of Botany Bay on 26 January 1788 for Port Jackson, two French ships – the *Bussole* and the *Astrolabe* – sailed in under the command of Jean-Francoise La Perouse. The French, under instructions to 'observe the new British colony', remained for six weeks on the northern headland of Botany Bay while Phillip established the site of Sydney.⁴⁷ La Perouse sailed out of Botany Bay in March 1788 and was never seen again, his ship lost at sea. Aboriginal people encountered both Phillip and La Perouse, as they had done with Cook 18 years previously. Today there are monuments to all three European men at Botany Bay, as well as structures and features of the landscape named after them.⁴⁸ However, there is no such obvious recognition of the original inhabitants. Perhaps markers are not needed, because the La Perouse community remains a vibrant, publicly engaged community to this day.⁴⁹ It is fitting then that the Aboriginal people of La Perouse inflicted the first setback for the APB.

Since 1883, as part of its function, the ABP had supplied Aboriginal families at La Perouse with rations and other essentials. From 1883 up to the beginning of the 1890s the population had never been large, fluctuating between the mid-teens and high 20s. However, from the 1890s the La Perouse Aboriginal community began to increase. The rise in numbers was generated by two factors. First, regular Board visits to Aboriginal locations/camps around the city to obtain statistical data and dispense rations applied a level of unwanted scrutiny. For example, Aboriginal groups had established themselves at the public reserve at Rushcutters Bay and the Board requested the police to move them on, but

47 Nugent, 'Botany Bay', 27.

48 These are the La Perouse Monument (1828), a public reserve on the southern side of Botany Bay at Kurnell (1899) dedicated to Cook's landing and a monument to the landing place of Arthur Phillip at Yarra Bay on the northern shores of the bay (1956). Local names include Captain Cook Drive, Phillip Bay, Frenchman's Beach and La Perouse.

49 Irish, *Hidden in Plain View*, 33 and 109.

they simply moved to other locations at Rose Bay and then returned in the evening. However, this increasing harassment made the 'security and stability' of the La Perouse community 'more attractive' and some moved there.⁵⁰ Second, the rising European population of suburban Sydney generated more calls for local Aboriginal people to be 'moved on'. In 1893 the Aboriginal group at Watsons Bay increased to over 15 and the local police determined they would be a nuisance to the European community. The Board requested that the police move them on and 'furnish requisites for their passages to the places from whence they came'. Two months later the camp was broken up.⁵¹ Some of this group may well have moved to La Perouse, as there was a significant increase in the population in that year (see Figure 3.5).

Mission activity

In the early 1890s the La Perouse community became a focus for missionary endeavours. On 3 July 1893, 'four Christian Endeavourers' met at the vestry of the Petersham Congregational Church and held the first meeting of the 'Aborigines Committee'. A lantern evening was arranged (lantern and sheet for the slides provided by George Ardill) under the convenorship of a Miss J. Watson, with the expressed intention of raising funds to establish a mission at La Perouse.⁵² Two months later the Petersham Congregational Christian Endeavour Society sought formal permission from the APB to erect a Mission House at La Perouse.⁵³ The Board initially rejected the appeal and determined it would be 'extremely undesirable to encourage any aborigine to La Perouse who do not belong to the place ... as they are constantly attracted to the city'.⁵⁴ The Endeavour Society persisted, and in October 1893 a further delegation that included George Ardill (as secretary of the APA, the body advocating the mission), put their case to the APB. This time the Board accepted the delegation's commitment that no 'new' Aboriginal people would be attracted to the community, welcomed an educational focus and agreed

50 Irish, *Hidden in Plain View*, 127.

51 *APBM*, 31 August 1893, Item 1; *APBM*, 5 October 1893, Item 3.

52 Telfer, *Amongst Australian Aborigines*, 12–13.

53 The Petersham Endeavour Society was part of a broad umbrella movement called the Australian Christian Endeavour Union. It produced a monthly journal published out of Melbourne that noted all the Christian 'endeavours' taking place in all the states and in New Zealand.

54 *APBM*, 14 September 1893, Item 8.

to erect a building.⁵⁵ The Christian Endeavour Society began a full-time mission at La Perouse in 1894 with Miss J. Watson as missionary.⁵⁶ Retta Dixon became the first resident missionary in 1897.⁵⁷

Figure 3.4: The Christian Endeavour Mission Church.

Source: Telfer, *Amongst Australian Aborigines*, 19.

The national body, the Australian Christian Endeavour Union, recognised the achievement in the December edition of its newsletter *The Golden Link*: 'It is with much pleasure that we record the fact that the long-talked of "Endeavour House" at La Perouse ... is at last a reality'.⁵⁸ The La Perouse Aborigines Mission Committee was formally established in August 1895. Its members were crucial to the resistance against the removal of the community.

A few months prior to the establishment of Endeavour House, the Board and missionaries received some critical press attention. A lengthy piece in the *Bird O' Freedom* in June 1894 was scathing of the interaction between the Aboriginal residents and the white 'rough toughs and vagabonds' of the city. It heavily criticised the Board for not properly protecting the camp and preventing 'wild uncouth orgies', describing the

55 *APBM*, 14 September 1893, Item 8; *APBM*, 5 October 1893, Item 8.

56 Harris, *One Blood*, 554; Irish, 'Hidden in Plain View', 263–64.

57 Radi, 'Long, Margaret Jane (Retta) (1878–1956)'.

58 *The Golden Link* 3, no. 29, 1 December 1894, 58.

camp as a 'rendezvous for the pushes' and railing against the effects of alcohol on the Aboriginal population. It reminded readers that the soil at La Perouse 'was the undisputed property of their ancestors for ... perhaps thousands of years' and accusingly concluded that the 'gentlemen philanthropists, members of the "missions", of the Aborigines Protection Board, and all others' were responsible for the appalling conditions at the camp.⁵⁹ Almost a year later, on 23 March 1895, a 7-acre reserve dedicated to the Aboriginal people at La Perouse was officially established. It is unclear who pushed for a reserve, but Richard Hill may have been behind the move to provide some security of tenure, or it may have resulted from the residents wishing to protect themselves from the encroachment of commercialism and missionaries.⁶⁰

By the turn of the century, the La Perouse peninsula was attracting many tourists and Sydney weekenders. It had become a 'landscape of leisure' with daytrippers from the city. The tram from downtown Sydney to La Perouse brought tourists and outdoor enthusiasts, and promoted a local Aboriginal arts and crafts economy.⁶¹ As Europeans rushed to La Perouse, the Board acted to stop the Aboriginal reserve from growing. In June 1896 the Board rejected a request by the La Perouse Mission to build additional housing for Aboriginal people as it would be 'injudicious to build more accommodation for Abs at La P. Especially for men not belonging to the place'. In late 1899 the Board reported 'unsatisfactory conditions' at La Perouse and recommended that the local Sergeant Bruce should 'continue oversight' to prevent non-Aboriginal people from entering the mission and 'warn off' Aboriginal people camping outside the reserve.⁶²

Since European settlement the population at La Perouse had never been large and had fluctuated, reflecting Aboriginal movement (Figure 3.5). Its numbers were modest compared to the bigger stations such as Cumeroogunga, the population of which was 239 in December 1900.⁶³

59 *Bird O' Freedom*, 23 June 1894, 4.

60 Irish, *Hidden in Plain View*, 129.

61 Nugent, 'Revisiting La Perouse', 127; Lambert-Pennington, 'What Remains? Reconciling Repatriation, Aboriginal Culture, Representation and the Past', 314.

62 *APBM*, 18 June 1896, Item 8; *APBM*, 21 December 1897, Item 1.

63 *APBR* 1902, 15. Accessed via *Journal of LC*, Vol. 64, Part 1, 6–7, 1101 (SLNSW).

Figure 3.5: Aboriginal population at La Perouse, 1885–1900.

Source: Census as compiled by the APB reports 1885 through to 1900.

Ardill's report on La Perouse

In the face of unwanted press attention and adverse police reports that reflected badly on the Board, Ardill was asked to prepare a report on the La Perouse reserve. Ironically, six years before, Ardill in another capacity had pressed the Board to establish the mission at La Perouse. He would now advocate for the removal of the community. His 16 September 1899 report was more a collection of observations and recommendations heavily laced with innuendo about sexual relations, predatory white strangers and the squalor of the camps than an objective appraisal. Ardill detailed the visits of a Mr De Santy and his contact with two young Aboriginal girls. On learning that De Santy had been seen 'out in bush' with the girls, 'ostensibly for the purpose of gathering flowers', Ardill recommended that De Santy 'be precluded from visiting the camp' and that Miss Dixon, the resident missionary, discourage visits from young men to the evening service.⁶⁴

Ardill reported that those living in huts were comfortably housed, but those in tents 'lived in a wretched condition and provision should be made to erect suitable huts for them'. He declared that if new huts could

⁶⁴ Inspection Report of La Perouse, 22 September 1899, *CSIL*, 5/6574, Item 00/23677, 1–3.

not be provided, then the residents should be 'induced' to remove to an inland or coastal station. He then recommended that the *whole* camp be removed:

Few of the people [Aboriginal residents] are natives of the vicinity and it is my firm conviction that it is advisable that this camp should be broken up, and the people forced to locate at a much greater distance from the City, under proper supervision and with the possibility of some suitable employment ... I would here suggest the desirability of securing a central coast station to which several small groups of aborigines at La Perouse, Port Kembla, and other places could be transferred, and under proper management as at Warangesda, Grafton, Cumeroogunga and Brewarrina.⁶⁵

Ardill had three more suggestions. First, he advised that while the camp remained open, a notice board should be erected at the front gates forbidding non-Aboriginal people to enter. Second, he was convinced of the importance of securing necessary legislation to 'deal effectively with aborigines', and suggested that the draft legislation already prepared by the secretary (of the APB) be dealt with by Board members and submitted to the colonial secretary as soon as possible. Third, he proposed that at least one inspector should be appointed to undertake regular inspections of the various stations and camps.⁶⁶

Apart from his conclusion that the community should be removed, and that other groups should be gathered up and transferred to a central location, Ardill also raised the old white belief that these people did not belong. In the late 1870s, some 20 years before, when public calls grew for the government to *do* something about Aboriginal welfare, Aboriginal people in coastal Sydney were cast 'as migrants who did not belong'.⁶⁷ By characterising Aboriginal residents of Sydney as 'belonging to other places', the practice of removing them was justified.⁶⁸

This representation was incorrect. Aboriginal families occupying La Perouse in the 1870s were the descendants of those who had encountered Cook, Phillip and La Perouse in the late eighteenth century. By the 1840s there were several Aboriginal camps in the Sydney area. Paul

65 Inspection Report of La Perouse, 1899, 3–5.

66 Inspection Report of La Perouse, 1899, 5–6.

67 Irish, 'Hidden in Plain View', 187.

68 Nugent, 'Revisiting La Perouse', 107.

Irish has confirmed settlements/camps in the Domain, at Woolloomooloo, Double Bay, Vaucluse, Camp Cove (North Head of Port Jackson), Rushcutters Bay, Darling Point, Botany Head (near La Perouse) and the Kurnell Headland.⁶⁹ George Thornton noted in his report of 1882 that Aboriginal people were at La Perouse, stating 'I found that some of them had settled at La Perouse, and were anxious to remain there'.⁷⁰ There is 'fragmentary evidence' to establish Aboriginal people of La Perouse well before 1870. A painting of 1864 of the north headland of Botany Bay shows the La Perouse monument and a group of 'Aboriginal people and their dogs in the foreground'.⁷¹ Maria Nugent acknowledges that this is not irrefutable evidence as those depicted may well be figurative, but she draws on another painting that dates to 1819, of an Aboriginal man called Timbere in the area.⁷² Nugent writes that after the unveiling of the monument to Arthur Phillip at Yarra Bay (in Botany Bay) in 1956, a local Aboriginal man named Robert Timberly presented the then governor of New South Wales with a boomerang. These individuals represented two powerful genealogical links: the governor as the 33rd in direct line from Governor Phillip and Mr Timberly as the 'oldest direct descendant at Yarra Bay of the tribe which was there when Captain Phillip arrived'.⁷³

'Where no temptation existed'

The Board's paranoia about 'outside Aborigines' escalated in early 1900 when the Board was informed, via the Botany Police, that the camp at Coolangatta on the Shoalhaven River in southern Dharawal Country, was to be broken up and those Aboriginal people intended to come to La Perouse. The Board sent word to the Shoalhaven police to the effect 'that Shoalhaven Aborigines will not be permitted to reside at Botany'. Two weeks later the police at Berry on the south coast informed the Board that the Aboriginal people at Coolangatta had been warned they must not

69 Irish, *Hidden in Plain View*, 117.

70 Thornton, *Aborigines: Report of the Protector, to 31 December 1882*, 3. Also, newspaper reports demonstrated their presence. For example: a group undertook a fishing trip to Wollongong and then returned to Botany Bay, *SMH*, 20 April 1846; a gang of youths set upon a group of Aboriginal people heading for Woolloomooloo and pelted them, 'in a most mercilessly manner, with stones', *SMH*, 14 December 1842, 2.

71 Nugent, 'Botany Bay', 2003, 28.

72 The spelling of Timbere differs: Timberly and Timberely.

73 Nugent, 'Revisiting La Perouse', 73–74.

remove to La Perouse.⁷⁴ The Board's real concern was not so much about raw numbers but more about an influx of 'outside' Aboriginal people to the La Perouse reserve.

When pressed by the *Evening News*, Board Chair Edmund Fosbery provided four arguments for removal of the La Perouse community. First, there were too many children not being educated and 'learning to be idlers'; second, there was no manager to supervise the residents and a number of 'young girls' would be better 'away from the influences of the city'; third, the camp was a centre for 'undesirable aboriginals' to gain accommodation and visit Sydney; and lastly, the camp had lost privacy due to the many 'excursionists on Sundays'. Fosbery added that his concerns were justified by further details that were best kept from the public.⁷⁵ Fosbery's intervention is interesting, given the more 'hands-off' approach to Aboriginal affairs he favoured before Ardill's arrival. After 17 years as Board chair, Fosbery now seemed open to more restrictive measures.

The arguments variously referred to 'undesirables', the bad influence of the city and the allegations that many La Perouse residents did not 'belong' there. Yet there is no escaping that in the Board's perspective *no* Aboriginal people – regardless of where they came from – belonged in the new expanding city of Sydney. As Penelope Edmunds observes, this was not uncommon for the mid-nineteenth century. She argues the 'settler-colonial city was audaciously expansive' and it reached out over 'all Aboriginal land'. Edmunds remarks that the 'accelerated incorporation of town space' affected the attitudes towards Aboriginal people who were 'increasing viewed as inconvenient impediments to progress'.⁷⁶

Like the Lekwungen First Nation people of Victoria in British Columbia, the Kulin people of Melbourne and the boatshed squatters, the La Perouse community was suddenly 'too close' to Sydney. By November the Board had made the decision. Wallaga Lake, on the far south coast, had been

74 APBM, 1 February 1900, Item 2. The Coolangatta Estate was owned by Alexander Berry and he had employed many Aboriginal people, but at the end of 1890s the estate was broken up and the Aboriginal people had to move. John Hay, the new owner, wanted the Aboriginal families moved from Coolangatta across the Shoalhaven River to what would become Roseby Park Aboriginal Station; APBM, 15 February 1900, Item 5.

75 *Evening News*, 14 November 1900, 2.

76 Edmunds, 'Unpacking Settler Colonialism's Urban Strategies', 7–10.

chosen for relocation. At the end of the year the La Perouse reserve would be cancelled, rations stopped and the residents would be supplied with passes to Wallaga Lake.⁷⁷ The *Evening News* reported that the APB:

had come to the conclusion that it is advisable that the aborigines at La Perouse be removed to a more suitable locality than one in the neighbourhood of a big city ... where many obstacles are interfering with the moral and physical improvement of those people.⁷⁸

The same *Evening News* report noted that at Wallaga Lake 'huts would be erected', clothing and rations provided and that the 'young females, will be better under control ... and the children also will be more carefully attended to' as there was an excellent school there.

A coalition of support

However, the residents would not budge, and they had powerful defenders.

Figure 3.6: John Stuart Hawthorne.

Source: Parliamentary Archives, NSW Parliament Collection (HawthorneJS-136Web).

The plans to remove the settlement caused only a minor stir in parliament. John Stuart Hawthorne (Figure 3.6), who was member for the seat of Leichhardt, was a liberal reformist, temperance advocate and a member of the Church of England Synod. He asked the premier, John See, if it was correct that the La Perouse Aboriginal community was to be moved to 'some out-of-the-way place in the interior' and whether he would oppose any such move for those who have lived all their lives there and their ancestors before them. See replied that he had not agreed to any such transfer

77 APBM, 1 November 1900, Item 12.

78 *Evening News*, 10 November 1900, 3.

but would support such a move as he thought the camp at La Perouse was a danger to the 'poor unfortunate blacks, especially the women, and is a danger also to the morality of the community'.⁷⁹ The *Australian Star* reported on the exchange between See and Hawthorne and stated that the La Perouse community was to go to Brewarrina.⁸⁰ Apart from Hawthorne's question, there was little sympathy for the La Perouse community in the Legislative Assembly. In late 1900 John Rowland Dacey – member for Botany, foundation member of the Australian Labor Party and trustee of Cook's landing place at Kurnell – raised the issue. He claimed, 'it would be an advantage to the blacks themselves if it [the reserve] were removed to a more suitable location'.⁸¹ Dacey may have had an ulterior motive. He had a commercial interest in the development of the La Perouse area and the removal of the Aboriginal residents would accommodate this.⁸² He had also previously asked the Board for the residents to be removed.⁸³ Mr Chanter, member for Deniliquin and Board member, explained to the Assembly that for some 'considerable time the Board had been doing their best to remove the aborigines from La Perouse to the Wollongong district, where no temptation existed'.⁸⁴ These were hardly compelling arguments to remove a community yet no other parliamentary voices opposed its removal.

However, other forces were stirring. First, the Aboriginal community had some very influential Sydney Christian leaders to aid their cause. And second, the Aboriginal residents themselves refused to leave. Thomas Edward Colebrook, a Methodist, alderman of Leichhardt, printer and publisher, was elected to the La Perouse Aborigines Mission Committee on 14 July 1899, and in that December became the secretary and then in 1902 was made president.⁸⁵ At the 1900 annual general meeting of the Petersham Christian Endeavour Society (the umbrella organisation), Colebrook was joined by the society's president: the coalminer, MLA and Minister for Mines John Lionel Fegan. Reverend Dr Thomas Roseby, a leading theologian, intellectual and chair of the Congregational Union of New South Wales, was also present. Four other reverends attended:

79 NSW, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 20 September 1900, 3100 (Stuart).

80 *Australian Star*, 21 September 1900, 5.

81 NSW, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 11 October 1900, 3891 (Dacey).

82 Dacey wanted to build a resort in the area and acquire a wine licence. See Nugent, 'Revisiting La Perouse', 131–32.

83 *APBM*, 16 August 1900, Item 5.

84 NSW, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 11 October 1900, 3891 (Chanter).

85 Telfer, *Amongst Australian Aborigines*, 33.

S. Harrison, J.W. Holden, William Allen and J. Woodhouse. Fegan addressed the meeting proclaiming that Aboriginal people had 'rights and responsibilities which should be more generally acknowledged' and that these people needed 'solid help' and not the 'scanty tenderness and charity of the state'.⁸⁶ These were well-connected influential people who brought their experience and skills to support the La Perouse Aboriginal people. Colebrook argued in a letter to the editor in the *Evening News* that the decision to remove the community was harsh and unreasonable and that he doubted the 'justice of the proposal'.⁸⁷ He criticised the paper for previously saying the camp had been 'discredited' when there had been no reports to that effect and he challenged Ardill to deny that La Perouse was in fact better than many other stations controlled by the Board.

Figure 3.7: Lady Timbery, Queen of La Perouse.

Source: Photograph taken by author in the museum at La Perouse. Emma, Queen of La Perouse (Emma Timbery), Aboriginal shell-worker – portrait, 1895/ unknown photographer – Call no. P2/570. Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

On 12 November 1900, an open-air demonstration was held at La Perouse to support the community. The gathering included various church bodies 'embracing all shades of political opinions'. It was chaired by the president of the Mission Committee, Mr G.E. Bodley and was addressed by Reverends S. Harrison and J.W. Holden. The meeting opposed the removal of the Aboriginal people from La Perouse on the following grounds: the APB had not advanced sufficient reasons for the removal; the camp had been the recognised home for the Aborigines since the 'discovery of the Australian Continent'; the 'unceremonious method' adopted by the APB in removing 'Her Majesty's subjects against their

⁸⁶ *SMH*, 20 July 1900, 8; *Australian Star*, 15 November 1900, 2.

⁸⁷ *Evening News*, 10 November 1900, 3.

will'; and that it was a 'rendezvous' place for other visiting Aborigines. A petition that embodied the motion was made ready to present to the Legislative Assembly.⁸⁸

The *Evening News* sent a reporter to La Perouse to get a first-hand look at the place and to meet the people. A lengthy article detailed the camp, its inhabitants and the strong sentiments of residents wishing to remain at La Perouse. The reporter described the camp as possessing 'a higher grade of respectability than some people might suppose' with about a dozen neatly constructed buildings and evidence of a certain 'amount of neatness, care, and attention'. The houses have 'ordinary boarded floors', 'comfortably lined' rooms and modest furnishings. Many of the men worked in the fishing industry and gained labouring work in the district. Most the children running about were 'clean and well-tended as any workman's children in the poorer neighbourhoods within the city limits' and 'pretty young half-caste girls ... were ... in clean and freshly-starched and ironed white or print dresses'. Mrs Timberly (Figure 3.7) and her family 'are said to be the only living descendants of the tribe of blacks who originally populated the neighbourhood'.

By way of appeasement, due to the increase in support for the La Perouse community, the APB had indicated that the Timberly family *could remain* due to their long connection to La Perouse, but Mrs Timberly would have none of it: 'I don't want to stop here if the others is all goin'.⁸⁹ As spokesperson for the 50 Aboriginal people at La Perouse Mrs Timberly said that they had only heard about the removal in the *Evening News* and that they didn't know why the Board wanted to 'shift us for'. She stressed:

We're livin' quietly enough here, ain't we? Doin' no harm to nobody. 'Ere we've been all our lives, and 'ere we want to die – leastways I do, and a lot more of us too. Here they gave us seven acres of ground and they says here you can live and stop till you die ... now they're goin' to clear us all out altogether. Have they got the power to do it? That's what I want to know. Ain't we free people in this country now? ... I want to know if they can shift us if we don't want to go. Can they? Mister?⁹⁰

88 *Australian Star*, 15 November 1900, 2.

89 *Evening News*, 14 November 1900, 2. It was recorded that Lady Timberly (Queen Emma of La Perouse) was in fact a vice-president of the Endeavour Society. Telfer, *Amongst Australian Aborigines*, 26.

90 *Evening News*, 14 November 1900, 2.

It was reported that Ardill interviewed the residents (after his report) and they ‘absolutely refused to go’, and when it was intimated that ‘rations may be stopped’ and their ‘homes taken from them’ the residents said they would not go and ‘would camp on the beach as they had done in earlier days’.⁹¹

A deputation

In late 1900 a deputation to prevent the removal of the La Perouse community called on the premier and colonial secretary, John See. The group comprised: Thomas Colebrook, MLA John Hawthorne, six other members of the New South Wales Aborigines’ Mission and three Aboriginal people from La Perouse. Hawthorne argued that the Aboriginal people had been living at this location well before white man came and that ‘some of the descendants of those early blacks are here now’. Hawthorne argued that the government should not make exceptions: if it was right for a few to remain ‘why is it not right to allow 50? There is no charge against them’. He also raised the issue of a possible conflict of interest. There had been an application for a licensed public house and See knew the man seeking the licence as the person who regularly hired out his boat for him to go fishing. While not accusing Premier See of wrongdoing, Hawthorne asked that if he knew of the proposed application for a public house, would he ‘put his foot down to prevent it’.⁹² Hawthorne also took a swipe at Ardill:

I will guarantee there is no more misconduct at this station that the public have been informed has been the case at Ardill’s Homes. I am astonished that men like Mr Ardill and Mr Carpenter lend themselves with others to try and get these people removed.⁹³

Thomas Colebrook also took aim at Ardill, arguing that he had misrepresented the state of the settlement:

⁹¹ *Evening News*, 17 November 1900, 3.

⁹² Deputation to Colonial Secretary, 30 November 1900, CSIL, 5/6574, Item 00/23677 (no page numbers provided).

⁹³ Deputation to Colonial Secretary, 30 November 1900, CSIL, 5/6574, Item 00/23677. Hawthorne was referring to Unni Carpenter, member of the APA, who had joined the Board along with Ardill in later 1897.

We were told by Mr Fosbery that the moral and physical well-being of the Aborigines would be better looked after at Wallaga Lake ... I challenge Mr Ardill, who has been the chief factor in the removal of these people, to deny that from every standpoint at La Perouse the condition of the people is better than ever it was before.⁹⁴

Delegation member and president of the La Perouse Mission Committee Mr Dodley explained to See that while the Board chair, Edmund Fosbery, had claimed the Board was unanimous in its decision to close the reserve, Board member Henry Trenchard had in fact opposed the move.⁹⁵ A frustrated Dodley also noted that the APB claimed there were several reasons for removing the La Perouse settlement but would not publish them. Missionary Miss Retta Dixon explained to See that if the community was removed it would be more dependent on the government as there was no work at Wallaga Lake and the children received a good education La Perouse.⁹⁶

John See (Figure 3.8) assured the gathering that there was no conflict of interest and that he opposed any licensed public house being erected at La Perouse. He also mentioned that as a member of the APB himself, he was aware of work done for Aboriginal people and was sympathetic to their cause.⁹⁷ He was concerned about the number of 'half-castes' and whites at the settlement: 'it is the white people who contaminate the Aborigines not the Aborigines who contaminate the white people'. He pointed out to the deputation that initially 'all the Aborigines consented to go' but soon afterwards they changed their minds, though he did not know why. He praised Board Chair Fosbery as a selfless worker for 'the aborigines', but he would go over all the 'papers very carefully' with Fosbery and reply through Mr Hawthorne.⁹⁸ John See would have been aware that the Randwick Municipal Council was also against the removal. At its November meeting in 1900 it resolved: 'That this council is in sympathy

94 Deputation to Colonial Secretary, 30 November 1900, CSIL, 5/6574, Item 00/23677.

95 *APBM*, 6 September 1900, Item 4. It was rare to have any recorded dissensions in the Board minutes but on this occasion, it was noted: 'Mr Trenchard objecting to the movement of the blacks from La Perouse'.

96 Deputation to Colonial Secretary, 30 November 1900, CSIL, 5/6574, Item 00/23677.

97 John See rarely attended Board meetings, for all intents and purposes he was a non-attender. From a possible 197 meetings he attended only 15, an attendance rate of 8.12 per cent. Arguably, he was not engaged in Board activity at any significant level. Analysis of *APBM* for relevant years.

98 Deputation to Colonial Secretary, 30 November 1900, CSIL, 5/6574, Item 00/23677.

with the Aborigines at La Perouse and protests against the action of the police ... in removing them to another place'.⁹⁹

Ten days after the deputation, Ardill – acting alone as usual – endeavoured to influence See's decision. He wrote to See and referred him to the report that he had written 15 months prior, 'flagging' his paragraphs that related to the breaking up of the camp, a new coastal Aboriginal station and possible legislation. Ardill wrote the letter on Sydney Rescue Work Society letterhead and not that of the Board's. He perhaps did not want the Board to know he had written the letter or felt that his Sydney Rescue letterhead would have more weight.¹⁰⁰

Figure 3.8: John See.

Source: Parliamentary Archives, NSW Parliament Collection (SeeJ-4584).

No record of the subsequent discussion between See and Fosbery has been located. Trenchard was the only identified Board member who opposed the removal, while Ardill tried to influence the decision in favour of removal right to the end. There were two new Board members at this time. Frank Norrie, a solicitor from Grafton, joined the Protection Board in November 1899, but made no obvious contribution to the debate. Likewise, the views, if any, of Unni Carpenter – president of the APA who joined the Board at the same time as Ardill – could not be found. In the end, John See did not back the Board's proposal and there were no forced removals. In a strange twist, See, as a virtual non-attender of Board meetings, was perhaps distanced enough to see the injustice of the proposal.

⁹⁹ Randwick Municipal Council Meeting, 20 November 1900 (no item number), *Randwick Municipal Council, Minute Books: May 1900 – Nov 1909*, Yv1532, CY 2933, Bowen Library, Randwick. However, six years later, the Council had changed its position and was in favour of removal. *APBM*, 30 October 1906, Item 2; 6 November 1906, Item 12; 20 November 1906, Item 1.

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Ardill to Colonial Secretary, John See, 10 December 1900, CSIL, 5/6574, Item 00.24246.

The December deadline for revocation of the La Perouse lease passed. Eight adults with their families, 16 in all, willingly relocated to Lake Illawarra.¹⁰¹ At the end of 1900, 27 people remained at La Perouse (Figure 3.5). The APB with all its posturing and deadlines about removals was, without government approval, unable to carry through its policy. It had no legislative mandate to force the issue, the lobby against removal was significant and most of the Aboriginal community did not wish to leave. The Board report for the year ending 1902 explained the La Perouse decision and in doing so acknowledged that it lacked the power to move the community: 'Strong representations were made by Mrs Timberley [sic] ... on behalf of the Aborigines themselves, and by others'. Although still of the opinion that it was not a suitable place considering the tram-link with the city and the approval of a licence for a hotel, the Board 'felt a difficulty in recommending that those who had been there so long should be deported to another place'. The Board acknowledged it had no power to remove the residents and that they 'absolutely' refused to 'leave the locality'. The Board recommended that the reserve not be cancelled, but in doing so 'no rations or other Government expenditure should be authorised in connection with those aborigines whose homes are in other parts of the state'.¹⁰² The attempt by the Board to move the Aboriginal residents from La Perouse had failed. The La Perouse Aboriginal community remains today after repeated attempts, post 1900, to have its residents removed.¹⁰³

101 *APBM*, 17 January 1901, Item 3. Figure 3.5 shows the decrease in population (1900) as a result of those departures for Lake Illawarra.

102 *APBR* 1902.

103 In late 1906 a Randwick Police report sought the removal of residents, but pressure to prevent the move came once more from the NSW Aborigines' Mission and the Board did not pursue the matter (*APBM*, 30 October 1906, Item 2; 6 November 1906, Item 12; 20 November 1906, Item 1). The Randwick Council tried again in 1928 urging the 'desirableness of removing the aborigines ... to a site where they could enjoy more privacy and where their presence would not militate against the progress of the district' (*APBM*, 23 March 1928, Item 2). The Aboriginal residents refused and, in a petition, stated: 'This is our heritage ... we feel justified in refusing to leave' (*SMH*, 4 April 1928, 24).

The die is caste

George Edward Ardill undoubtedly changed the dynamic of the Board. Arguably he was the most proactive member since its inception in 1883. His drive and persistence had an immediate impact in facilitating the removal of Aboriginal children and dealing with the Board's more difficult tasks. He was undeterred in the face of criticism and his influence in Aboriginal affairs was considerable: he helped create a climate that persisted well into the second half of the twentieth century that would promote and embrace harsh legislation towards Aboriginal people. A decade later, as vice-chair of the Board from 1910, he would have greater influence, but his tendencies to persist and demand would draw the attention of government.

Meanwhile, the Board's failed attempt to close the La Perouse reserve exposed its internal inadequacies. Its policy position could never be enforced as it lacked the power to remove, and any cohesive policy was hindered by members such as Ardill who often acted alone and by the non-engagement of others. Ironically, in this instance, it was an infrequent Board attender, the premier, John See, who overturned Board policy. At the same time, the event likely sharpened the Board's sense that it needed more formal powers to act in Aboriginal affairs. This sense would mature into draft legislation when another powerful figure arrived on the Board, which propelled it towards a legislative agenda with profound effects upon Aboriginal communities, particularly their children.

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