THE Lycett ALBUM

Drawings of Aborigines and Australian scenery

with commentary by Jeanette Hoorn

National Library of Australia
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In 1972, the National Library of Australia purchased from Sotheby and Company in London an album of twenty watercolour drawings dating probably from the 1820s and attributed to the convict artist Joseph Lycett (c. 1775–1828). The drawings, each measuring approximately 17.8 x 28 cm, depict aspects of Aboriginal life in New South Wales. The album, bound in half morocco leather and measuring 34 x 23.5 cm, appears to have been assembled at a later date. The title page carries an inscription which incorrectly identifies the contents as 'Drawings of the Natives & Scenery of Van Diemens Land 1830'. The album was offered for sale by Mrs C.E. Blake, a grand-daughter of Charles Albert La Trobe whose signature appears on the inside of the upper cover, and great-grand-daughter of Charles Joseph La Trobe, Lieutenant-Governor of Victoria 1851–54.

The sale of this album in 1972 attracted considerable interest and publicity since the attribution of the drawings to Lycett identified a previously unrecorded body of his work, possibly intended as a sequel to his famous collection of Views in Australia or New South Wales, & Van Diemen's Land which was issued in London in 13 parts between 1824 and 1825. Lycett’s reputation had been established as a landscape artist but these rediscovered drawings demonstrated his interest in depictions of the human figure. The collection has continued to stimulate scholars and historians in the years since it was acquired, both as an important documentary record of the life of Australia’s indigenous people and as an accumulation of the work of one of the country’s early professional artists.

As part of its commitment to make available rare and unique materials held in the national collection and traditionally available only to scholars and researchers on visits to Canberra, the National Library is delighted to publish these historical drawings for the benefit and enjoyment of a wider community of Australians.

Warren Horton
Director-General
DRAWINGS
OF THE
NATIVES & SCENERY
OF
VAN DIEMENS LAND
1830.

The inscription (appearing inside the front cover)
and the title page in Lycett's album
Introduction

Joseph Lycett (c. 1775–1828) was convicted of forgery and transported to Australia in 1814. During the period he spent in the colony Lycett recorded many aspects of the life and landscape of Australia. The album of watercolour sketches reproduced here contains one of the few series of works which document the life and use of the land by Aboriginal people in the early colonial period. The sketches were executed by the artist in the early 1820s. They were compiled into an album at a later date when, it is assumed, they were incorrectly entitled 'Drawings of the Natives & Scenery of Van Diemens Land 1830'. The album was purchased in New York in 1872 by Charles Albert La Trobe, whose signature appears inside the cover. Although it is not known who inscribed the album with its title, it is possible that it was La Trobe as the pen and ink appear to be very similar. Whoever did provide the title may have concluded that the drawings depicted Tasmanian subjects because of their compositional similarities with some of the engravings in Lycett's Views in Australia, the largest and best known published volume of Australian views of the early colonial period. It is clear, however, that the works in the album relate to the landscape and people of New South Wales. The sandstone cliffs in these drawings are not present in the coastal regions of Tasmania but are characteristic features of the coastal landscape of New South Wales.

The drawings in the album are likely to have been executed between 1820 and 1822; at this time Lycett was working as an artist in Sydney, supported by private patronage and by Governor Lachlan Macquarie and his wife Elizabeth. In a dispatch to Whitehall in February 1820, Governor Macquarie sent three paintings of the settlement at Sydney Cove to the Colonial Secretary, Lord Bathurst. Macquarie's communication to Bathurst reveals that at least one of these works was painted by Lycett:

I have long wished to be able to Send Your Lordship a correct View of the Town of Sydney, but never could get one painted to my satisfaction or sufficiently well executed to justify my sending it to Your Lordship.

1 Charles Albert La Trobe (1845–?) was the son of Charles Joseph La Trobe (1801–75) who held office as Lieutenant-Governor of the colony of Victoria from 1851 to 1854.
But a Convict Artist, named Lysaght [sic], having lately drawn a View of Sydney on a large Scale, which I consider extremely correct and well executed, I take the liberty of forwarding it to Your Lordship by the present conveyance, together with Views of the Government House at Parramatta, and the Government Cottage at Windsor on the Right Bank of the River Hawkesbury; all which I trust will prove acceptable.³

In 1822, reporting on his inquiry into the colony of New South Wales and Macquarie’s administration of it, Thomas Bigge also refers to Joseph Lycett, noting that he earned a living by painting views of Sydney residences.⁴

Lycett had arrived in Sydney on the General Hewitt in February 1814. He had been convicted of forgery at the Shropshire assizes on 10 August 1811 and had been sentenced to fourteen years in New South Wales. In the records of the General Hewitt, Lycett is described as a portrait and miniature painter aged thirty-eight.⁵ He was granted a ticket-of-leave when he arrived in Sydney and was employed as a clerk in the Police Department.⁶ This indicates that he was literate and it is possible that his work involved copying letters and official documents—the usual occupation of the clerk.

Some fifteen months after his arrival in Sydney, Lycett was arrested and charged with passing false banknotes. He had manufactured the notes on a printing press and was once again convicted of forgery. He was sent to the penal settlement at Newcastle, a community of convicts who were either considered too hardened to be employed in Sydney, or who, like himself, had committed additional offences in New South Wales. Lycett left for Newcastle on the Lady Nelson in July 1815. He spent at least two years working for the regional commandant, Captain James Wallis, who had been posted to Newcastle following his arrival in Sydney with the 46th Regiment. In addition Lycett assisted with drawing up plans for the settlement’s church, and also decorated its altarpiece.⁷

On 8 November 1817, Lycett was sent to Sydney on government business for the commandant. The journey included a visit to Port Stephens, where Lycett was wounded in a confrontation with Aborigines. It is unclear whether he ever returned to Newcastle. He does not appear in the annual muster until 1819, when he is listed as being in the colony in government service. He continues to appear in the muster until 1822, the year that he returned to England.

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⁵ Colonial Secretary Indents of Convict Ships, 1811–May 1814, COD 140 4/4004, State Archives of New South Wales, Sydney.
⁶ Register of Pardons and Tickets of Leave, COD 18 4/4427, State Archives of New South Wales, Sydney.
Lycett probably painted the works in the National Library’s album during the years he spent working as an artist in Sydney following his release from detention in Newcastle. Those of his works now in public collections date predominantly from this period.\textsuperscript{8}

One of the features that distinguishes Lycett’s work from that of other colonial artists working in Australia in the first decades of European settlement is his diversity of style—the result of his frequent appropriation of elements from the work of other artists. If we compare Lycett’s work with that of George Evans, the surveyor, John Lewin, the ornithological draughtsman, John Heaviside Clark or Thomas Watling, we see that Lycett used ideas from all of these artists in the construction of his pictures.\textsuperscript{9} For example, his view of the Bathurst Falls, \textit{Bathurst Cataract, on the River Apsley, New South Wales}, an engraving in \textit{Views in Australia}, takes a good deal from an engraving by James Taylor which was based upon a drawing by George Evans and published as \textit{Bathurst’s Falls} in John Oxley’s \textit{Journals of Two Expeditions into the Interior of New South Wales, 1817–18}, London, 1820. \textit{View of Arbuthnot’s Range}, a watercolour by Lycett in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, is extremely close to \textit{Arbuthnot’s Range from the West}, James Taylor’s engraving of the same subject (from a drawing by George Evans), which was also published in Oxley’s \textit{Journals}.\textsuperscript{10} Similarly, the drawing on the title page of \textit{Views in Australia} resembles John Lewin’s sketch \textit{View of the Bathurst Plains}, which he executed while crossing the Blue Mountains in 1815 as a member of Macquarie’s party. Moreover, several flower studies by Lycett in the collection of the National Library are facsimiles of flower studies by Lewin.\textsuperscript{11}

Lycett’s use of elements from other artists’ works may have been a reflection of his lack of originality, but was just as likely the result of his material circumstances which would have prevented him from travelling to areas outside Sydney or Newcastle. He may also have been required to use the work of other artists in the course of his employment. He is likely to have been employed by the Governor to produce copies of existing works—or drawings based on the field sketches of others—for the purpose of expanding existing records of the colonial landscape and its settlement. Visual records were an important source of information for colonial governments, both for use in documenting progress and facilitating the circulation of information within the colony, and for providing evidence of the development of the colony to the Home Office in London.

\textsuperscript{8} For a general discussion of Lycett’s work, see my entry (with Elizabeth Imashev) on Lycett in Joan Kerr’s forthcoming \textit{Dictionary of Australian Artists}.

\textsuperscript{9} For a discussion of Lycett’s use of the work of other artists, see Hoorn, ‘Joseph Lycett: The pastoral landscape’, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{10} See Rex and Thea Rienits, \textit{Early Artists of Australia}, Melbourne, 1963, p. 188.

\textsuperscript{11} A series of thirteen watercolours of various Australian flowering plants painted by Lycett c. 1820. Rex Nan Kivell Collection, National Library of Australia, NK 6335/A–M.
Bathurst Cataract, on the River Apsley, New South Wales, engraving by Joseph Lycett in his Views in Australia, plate 25.

Bathurst's Falls, engraving by James Taylor, after a drawing by George Evans in John Oxley's Journals of Two Expeditions into the Interior of New South Wales, 1817-1818, p. 301.
Lycett's practice of taking up subject matter and compositional elements from the work of other artists should not, therefore, be regarded as the improper use of the ideas of others. Originality may not have been part of his brief.

When Lycett painted the works contained in the album, few artists were producing imagery of this kind. Most of the pictures of the period describe the impact of European settlement within the conventions of topographic view painting. The works of John Lewin, George Evans and John Eyre, three other important artists working in the colony during Macquarie's administration, are often concerned with this subject. Indeed, most of Joseph Lycett's own work focuses on the changes wrought by Europeans, rather than on the life and culture of Aboriginal people; in the majority of his works, Aboriginal people have only marginal status.

While Aboriginal use and control of the land had been a dominant theme for the artists of the First Fleet and for artists working in the first decade of European settlement, most representations of the landscape produced in New South Wales by 1820 show Aboriginal people as mere staffage, as an exotic element located at the edges of compositions. In the work of European artists, Aboriginal people had been transformed from a people in control of their land and culture to powerless and passive observers of European civilisation in Australia. They had come to occupy the role of the 'other'.

In the works contained in Lycett's album, we see a return to an earlier mode of depicting Aborigines in control of the land; they are also seen in conflict with Europeans, a subject that Lewin, Evans and Eyre avoided. Aboriginal people occupy centre stage in Lycett's compositions; restored to their former place, they no longer have the status of 'other'. Yet Lycett's pictures describe a situation which was disappearing. By the second decade of the nineteenth century, the Aborigines of the New South Wales coast were rapidly being alienated from their land by Europeans.
The Watercolours

The watercolour drawings in the National Library album show Aboriginal people involved in various activities associated with their use and control of the land. While it is possible to identify the locations described by some of Lycett's scenes, others are difficult to identify and in these cases the drawings may not accurately describe a particular place.

A location which can be readily identified is that depicted in A Distant View of Sydney and the Harbour, Captain Piper's Naval Villa at Eliza Point on the Left, in the Foreground a Family of Aborigines (plate 4). This drawing shows Aboriginal people walking through an elevated section of the harbour foreshore. The group is led by a man carrying spears and a woomera. He is followed by a woman, who carries an infant on her back and a dilly-bag in her hand. She is trailed by a young boy who, like the man, carries weapons for hunting. A small dingo accompanies the group. Lycett shows his figures wearing cloth, which is draped around the body in accordance with European standards of modest dress. However, Aboriginal people rarely wore attire of this kind and Lycett probably included this type of drapery as a concession to the expectations of his patrons.

The figures are located near the centre of the foreground and dominate the composition. Lycett was not a skilled figure painter and by comparison with his handling of the features of the landscape his figures are crudely drawn. Yet, in the way he describes the male figure, who faces the spectator head-on with his arm drawn across his chest, ready to defend himself and his companions, he shows them as people in control of the land and ready to defend their use of it.

Posed against this assertion of black ownership is evidence of white possession. The scene describes Sydney Cove, looking from directly opposite what is now Point Piper across to Circular Quay, Bennelong Point and the North Shore in the far right of the composition. Garden Island and the prison island of Fort Denison are also depicted. The Governor's stables are just visible in the centre of the image, to the right of the windmill seen above the head of the adult male.

12 The sketches in the album are untitled. Individual titles in this work have been assigned by staff of the Pictorial section at the National Library of Australia. The sketches are discussed here in logical subject groupings; plate numbers indicate their original order in the album.
The most striking architectural feature in the landscape is Henrietta Villa, or the Naval Villa, which is seen at the far left. The villa was the residence of Captain John Piper, a close friend of the Macquaries. Piper arrived in the colony in 1792, and after serving as an administrator in various capacities was appointed magistrate in 1819. In 1825 he became Chairman of the Bank of New South Wales. He completed building his Italianate villa at Point Piper, then known as Eliza Point, in 1822.¹³

Piper’s home became a centre for social life in the colony. The villa supported a large garden, and an enclosure in the shape of a cross is seen behind the residence. This echoes the villa's domed ballroom, built in the shape of a St Andrew’s Cross. Piper is said to have been in the habit of saluting friends as they sailed in and out of the harbour by firing shots from a row of cannon located in the front of his garden.¹⁴ The portraits that he commissioned Augustus Earle to paint c. 1826—of himself and of his wife and children—are amongst the most ambitious portraits of the early colonial period. They are an indication of Piper’s sense of his own influence and of the role he had established for himself in Sydney.¹⁵

Piper’s residence is also seen in other works by Joseph Lycett, amongst them the watercolour Point Piper, N.S. Wales, in the Mitchell Library, Sydney. The villa is also depicted in the Mitchell Library’s miniature pencil drawing Marine Pavilion at Point Piper, the Seat of John Piper, Esq, N.S.W., an unattributed work that may be by Lycett. Lycett’s engraving View of Captain Piper’s Naval Villa, at Eliza Point, near Sydney, New South Wales, in his Views in Australia, shows the villa and its gardens at close quarters.

A Distant View is the only watercolour in the album that focuses upon Sydney Harbour. It is also the drawing least concerned with describing the actions of Aboriginal people in the landscape, and most concerned with showing the impact of Europeans on the land. It shows the same view of the harbour as that seen in the Views in Australia engraving Distant View of Sydney from the Light House at South Head, New South Wales, which it resembles in terms of its composition.

All of the other works in the album, with the exception of An Aboriginal Funeral (plate 20), in which we see Sydney’s South Head in the background, appear to describe the lives of Aboriginal people living around the Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Port Stephens and Myall Lakes areas. Many of the drawings record distinctive features of the coastal, river and lake regions in these areas located immediately north of Sydney. Lycett, as we have seen, lived in the settlement at Newcastle from 1815 until at least 1817, when we know that he journeyed to Sydney. He visited Port Stephens en route to Sydney and it is possible that

¹³ For a discussion of the life of John Piper, see Marjorie Barnard, The Life and Times of Captain John Piper, Sydney, 1939.
¹⁴ Ibid., p. 112.
on that occasion he made preparatory sketches of some of the subjects that appear in the album. He may also have returned at a later date to this region.

It is clear that Lycett sought to accurately record the customs and land use of the Aboriginal people living in the area he chose to paint. If we compare the iconography contained in his pictures with descriptions that appear in the written accounts of the period, we find close correspondence between details in the pictures and material in the narrative sources. The most useful and detailed information on Aboriginal people living on the north coast of New South Wales between 1820 and 1840 may be found in the letters, reports and other published works of the missionary Lancelot Edward Threlkeld.\(^{16}\)

L.E. Threlkeld was a member of the London Missionary Society, a nonconformist Christian association dedicated to bringing the gospel to indigenous people throughout the British Empire. After working for many years on the Polynesian island of Raiatea, he began a career in Australia devoted to educating Aboriginal people, to converting them to Christianity, and to representing their rights before the law. In May 1825 he established a mission at Reid’s Mistake, on the eastern shore of Lake Macquarie, in the area where Swansea is now located.

As Threlkeld was interested in the customs and beliefs of the people with whom he worked, the observations that appear in his reports are invaluable sources of information on the culture of Aboriginal people from the Newcastle area, as well as on the state of race relations in the colony of New South Wales.

Threlkeld was the first European to study an Aboriginal language seriously. He compiled a grammar of Kattang, a language spoken by the people occupying the territory extending from just south of the Macleay River to the Hunter River district.\(^{17}\) The Aboriginal groups or peoples living in the lower and middle parts of the Hunter Valley included the Geawegal, Wanarua, Awabakal and Worimi. The major group living in the area around Newcastle and Lake Macquarie was the Awabakal, literally ‘people of the plain surface’,\(^{18}\) and it appears that Lycett was largely describing the customs and land use of these people in his drawings.

It is clear from Threlkeld’s writings and from other contemporary sources that by the early decades of the nineteenth century, in the wake of European settlement, the numbers of Aborigines living on the coast between Sydney and Newcastle had been considerably reduced. The outbreak of smallpox amongst

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18 Threlkeld, *Australian Reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 3.
these people had a devastating effect.\textsuperscript{19} David Collins was one of those who described the impact of the disease on the coastal populations: ‘In the year 1789 they were visited by a disorder which raged among them with all the appearance and virulence of the small-pox’.\textsuperscript{20} Collins also wrote that the outbreak was not restricted to Sydney: ‘On visiting Broken Bay, we found that it had not confined its effects to Port Jackson, for in many places our path was covered with skeletons, and the same spectacles were to be met with in the hollows of most of the rocks of that harbour’.\textsuperscript{21}

By the early 1820s, when Lycett most probably executed the pictures in his album, disease had reduced the Aboriginal population of the Newcastle, Hunter River and Lake Macquarie areas. Threlkeld notes in one of his earliest letters to the London Missionary Society: ‘The natives are not in this country located in any number although every tribe has its district the boundary of which must not be passed without permission from the tribe to which it belongs’.\textsuperscript{22} This suggests that although there were not large numbers of Aboriginal people in these areas, communal structures had remained intact.

While disease was the principal cause of the reduction in their numbers, conflict with pastoralists became the most serious problem facing Aboriginal people following the first years of contact with Europeans. Threlkeld’s diaries continually refer to racial conflict. Indeed, Threlkeld’s main role appears to have been that of a conciliator of disputes and protector of, and advocate for, Aboriginal people before the law.

\textit{Aborigines Resting by a Camp Fire near the Mouth of the Hunter River, Newcastle, NSW} (plate 12) is an important work in Lycett’s series. His inclusion of Nobby's Island at the head of the Hunter River enables us to positively identify the area depicted. In this romantic scene, the rising moon creates a powerful atmosphere as it sheds light over the ocean, illuminating the activities of the figures in the landscape. The drawing shows two groups of people seated around camp fires, relaxing quietly in the moonlight. All of the figures appear to be male and are wearing white loincloths.

Most of the Aboriginal people in Lycett’s work wear clothing. The men usually wear loincloths, while the women wear cloths that cover the entire torso. Yet it is clear from contemporary accounts that Newcastle and Lake Macquarie Aborigines did not wear clothes. Threlkeld repeatedly refers to this in his letters. In April 1825 he reports: ‘The Natives are perfectly naked both men and women living in the


\textsuperscript{20} Collins, \textit{Account}, 1798, p. 597.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{22} Threlkeld to William Aleres Hankey, London Missionary Society, 20 August 1825, in Threlkeld, \textit{Australian Reminiscences}, vol. 2, p. 186.
woods roving about from place to place'.

Threlkeld also notes that Aborigines did not always wear clothes in the streets of Sydney:

It was the custom at this time for the Aborigines both male and female to parade the streets without a particle of clothing, and it struck me very forcibly, on my first landing in Sydney in 1817, to observe such scenes in the midst of what was called a civilized community, and when walking one day with some colonial Ladies, and meeting a mixed party of undressed natives of both sexes, no slight embarrassment was felt as how dexterously to avoid the unseemly meeting, but this was speedily removed by their claiming old acquaintance privileges, and entering into a friendly conversation with our friends.

Lycett and other artists working in the 1820s, including Augustus Earle, show Aboriginal people outside urban communities—even those in unsettled areas—wearing European clothing. This is almost certainly a result of the British bias against displaying the body and not a reflection of Aboriginal custom or practice.

Lycett's image is very appealing, with its use of romantic and picturesque devices, as well as local subject matter, to create a dramatic effect. The artist uses a coulisse to frame his composition, with a eucalypt on the far left and a casuarina, or she-oak, on the far right. At the same time, he crowds his composition with extraordinary detail, which gives the work a naive and unschooled appearance.

This picture is similar in mood to *Fishing by Torchlight, Other Aborigines beside Camp Fires Cooking Fish* (plate 5), in which several Aborigines are seen roasting fish on a camp fire on the shore while others are fishing from canoes. Once again, the scene is illuminated by the light of a rising moon, which enhances the romantic atmosphere of the work.

Fishing was the most important source of food for the Awabakal and Worimi people. There are numerous descriptions of the Awabakal method of fishing in Threlkeld's journals and letters:

Their mode of fishing is curious, sometimes angling with hook and line thrown by the hand as they are seated in the bark canoe, sometimes diving for shell fish, sometimes standing in their frail bark darting their spears into the fish as they pass, or at other times using hand nets forming a circle in shallow waters and enclosing the fish; but the most curious method is that of planting sprigs of bushes in a zig-zag form across the streams, leaving an interval at the point of every angle where the men stand with their nets to catch what others frighten towards them by splashing in the water.

It is clear that there was considerable subtlety in the methods employed for catching fish. Threlkeld also describes the manufacture and use of the bark canoe:

Their canoes are simply a piece of bark 14 or more feet long and from 3 to 4 feet wide. They are procured by climbing a large tree, not in the usual way of notching the bark with a hatchet, and placing the toes in those steps, but by raising a scaffold against the tree, and chopping round the top at the height they want. Others cut the bottom, and it is then stripped off, tied up at each end to a point; a piece of stick

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24 Threlkeld, *Australian Reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 44.
A Night Scene in the Neighbourhood of Sydney, engraving in Collins, Account, 1802, [frontispiece]

'A Scene by Moonlight', engraving in Collins, Account, 1802, p. x
is put at one-third from each end, and a string secures the sides to the sticks so as it shall not separate; a quantity of clay is placed in the centre as a hearth, on which they roast the fish as they catch them.26

The figures in Fishing by Torchlight are insufficiently detailed for the viewer to be able to determine their gender. It is clear from Threlkeld's accounts, however, that fishing was frequently the task of women: 'Naked and shivering with cold the women, used to be seen, in the winter seasons suffering severely from the effects of the bleak wind until a sufficient supply of fish was obtained, when they returned on shore to supply their Lords with a hearty meal’.27

Threlkeld's description of Aborigines fishing on Lake Macquarie in the evening could almost be a description of Lycett's moonlight scene:

It was a pleasing sight on a calm summer's evening to see a number of the native canoes on the glass-like surface of the Lake, sending up their strait columns of smoke from the centre of the barques, shewing an appearance of a fleet of small steamers at anchor in the stream. The wild vines of the bush formed their cables and a heavy stone was the substitute for an anchor.28

Aborigines grouped around camp fires at the water's edge are also seen in earlier colonial pictures, such as two engravings illustrating the second volume of David Collins's Account.29 The composition, the disposition of the figures and, in particular, the depiction of the night sky in these works are remarkably close to comparable elements in Fishing by Torchlight.

The use of the resources of sea, lake and river is one of the controlling themes of the album, and six other watercolours, in addition to the two night scenes, describe fishing and activities associated with hunting the birds of the wetlands.

Aborigines Spearing Fish, Others Diving for Crayfish; a Party Seated beside a Fire Cooking Fish (plate 14) shows a variety of activities taking place on a beach close to a headland. In the foreground, people are seen fishing with spears from a rocky outcrop. The fishing spear, distinguished by its four-pronged point, is depicted in this watercolour, as well as in Two Aborigines Spearing Eels (plate 7). The spear is described by Threlkeld in the following way:

The fish-spear *Kul-la-ra,* and *Mo-ting,* two names, is made from the stem of the grass-tree [a grass tree is depicted at the far right in Aborigines Feeding from Beached Whales (plate 8)], at the end there are four

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26 Ibid., pp. 190-1.
27 Threlkeld, Australian Reminiscences, vol. 1, p. 54.
28 Ibid.
29 William Alexander, 'A Scene by Moonlight', engraving in David Collins, An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, From its First Settlement, in January 1788, to August 1801: With Remarks on the Dispositions, Customs, Manners, &c. of the Native Inhabitants of that Country, vol. 2, London, 1802, p. x; A Night Scene in the Neighbourhood of Sydney, engraving in Collins, Account, 1802, [frontispiece]. Collins gives William Alexander as the artist and James Powell as the engraver of all the engravings reproduced in his Account, but since Alexander is not known to have come to New South Wales it is likely that he worked up his drawings in England, basing them on pictures by the colonial artist Thomas Watling.
pieces of hard wood, about two feet long, [which] are fastened with a bark-thread covered with the grass-tree gum, heated in the fire until at a melting point, when it is worked round the thread fastening it, as we would use sealing wax for a similar purpose. The three or four shorter spears thus fastened to the long stem of the grass tree, of about six feet length, becomes [sic] thus somewhere nigh eight feet in the total length of the weapon.  

In an adjoining cove three young men are seen cray fishing. Lycett shows the process by depicting it in three stages. We see a diver making his way into the water towards the prey, another is submerged and surrounded by the crayfish, while a third figure is seen emerging from the water with the two creatures he has caught. Threlkeld notes that crayfish were highly sought after by the Awabakal, who were prepared to risk a shark attack to procure them:

The craw-fish is a favourite food, and much hazard was often undergone by the aborigines in endeavouring to obtain them. Their general mode was to go out, choosing a calm day at sea, in one of their frail canoes, and dive along side of the rocks, and pull the fish out of the holes in the rock under water, by their long horns, sometimes a shark would make its appearance, when the utmost agility would be required to escape the monster, who would, as readily seize the legs of the biped animal and devour him as that animal would the tail of the cretacious one.  

Elsewhere in the scene, people are seated around a camp fire, preparing a meal from the day’s catch. A woman with a baby arrives at the camp fire and to the right a young man drinks water from a waterfall. The whole scene is overlooked by another group of people positioned at the top of the headland. By describing the scene in this way, Lycett creates the impression that the land is being actively utilised by the Awabakal, who clearly occupy it and at the same time live in harmony with it.

Lycett’s palette is particularly fine in this watercolour. The green tones of the vegetation, the light greys and pale browns of the sandstone, together with the pale blues of the sea, create a pleasant effect. The colours are accurate to those of the north coast of New South Wales and Lycett shows an interest in conveying the geological character of the area through his depiction of the exposed sandstone outcrops of the headland.

Aborigines Feeding from Beached Whales (plate 8) is similarly located. The landscape depicted in this work is clearly a section of the coast close to Nobby’s Head, at the head of the Hunter River. Lycett shows the surf breaking and we see a ship out at sea on the horizon. The picture describes the preparation and consumption of the flesh of a beached whale, a practice to which Threlkeld refers:

A Whale, cast on shore, is quite a feast, and messengers are despatched to all the neighbouring tribes, who assemble and feast upon the monster of the deep so long as the treat lasts. Porpoises are never refused. We shot one or two, once, in the lake, and the blacks drew the dead fish on shore, but, as Queen

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30 Threlkeld, *Australian Reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 67.
31 Ibid., pp. 55–6.
Elizabeth had such fish on her royal table, we must not think too unfavourably of the aborigines of N.S. Wales, because they love a similar dish to that of the maiden-Queen.32

Collins’s narrative refers to the beaching of a whale in Manly Cove: ‘The cove was full of natives allured by the attractions of a whale feast’.33 The same occasion is referred to by the Port Jackson Painter in two watercolours that describe the spearing of Governor Arthur Phillip on 7 September 1790.34

The precise location of the scene depicted in A Family of Aborigines Taking Shelter during a Storm (plate 10) is not known. Gale-force winds bend the trees and waves break against a nearby headland. Lightning flashes through a gloomy sky. In the left foreground we see a young family taking refuge from the storm in a cave. The menfolk attend to the fire, which will be used to bake the fine bream held by the man standing at the entrance to the cave, while a young woman feeds her infant. They seem unperturbed by the turbulent weather outside.35

Threlkeld’s description of the plight of Aborigines during rough weather suggests that they did not usually fare as well as the family in Lycett’s charming watercolour: ‘How pitiable was the condition of the aborigines when the equinoctial gales, or other stormy weather set in, for days then were they found sleeping around their fires in any bushy spot as a shelter from the storm’.36

Two Aborigines Spearing Eels (plate 7) shows two figures, in the classical pose of warriors, spearing eels from rocks. In Lycett’s Views in Australia, the letterpress accompanying one of his plates refers to the catching of eels by the Aboriginal people of the Hunter River region: ‘Very large Eels are taken here by the Natives, who make Canoes of the bark of the large Eucalyptus, from which, at certain seasons of the year, they spear vast quantities of these Eels, weighing from ten to twenty pounds each’.37 Collins refers to the people of the Hawkesbury River area constructing traps with which to catch eels: ‘They resort at a
certain season of the year (the month of April) to the lagoons, where they subsist on eels which they procure by laying hollow pieces of timber into the water, into which the eels creep, and are easily taken'.

Aborigines Hunting Waterbirds (plate 3) and Aborigines Hunting Waterbirds in the Rushes (plate 18) are two similar compositions depicting the hunting of birds that inhabit the wetlands in the upper reaches of the Hunter River. Both drawings describe the method of hunting birds at close range. In Aborigines Hunting Waterbirds we see several men standing in the water at the edge of a lake, driving spears through some birds and catching others in their hands. In Aborigines Hunting Waterbirds in the Rushes, men beat the reeds with spears to flush out the birds, while a group of people is seen at the lake’s edge, preparing a fire for the meal that will follow the hunt.

Both pictures describe the topography of the river landscape, with the spectator looking into the landscape over a sheet of pale-blue water that stretches into the distance, flat and glass-like. These two views resemble the engraving Lake Patterson, near Patterson’s Plains. —Hunter River. New South Wales, in Lycett’s Views in Australia. Lake Patterson was located in the upper reaches of the Hunter, an area that was subsequently drained and given over to pastoral use. The letterpress accompanying the print describes the lake as being about ‘five miles in length, and from one to two miles and a half wide’. Wild ducks, teal,
widgeons, black swans and 'a peculiar sort of Geese, which are about the size of the common English wild Goose, and of a remarkably fine flavour, as near as possible to the English wild Duck' in 39 inhabited the area.

In *Aborigines Hunting Waterbirds in the Rushes* (plate 18) Lycett again uses the device of the coulisse to frame his composition. Here he places groups of trees in the middle right and middle left, framing his image and, at the same time, breaking up the composition, while providing a means by which the viewer can judge distance. The hunting of birds by Aborigines is not a common subject in visual material produced during the early nineteenth century. John Heaviside Clark's engraving *Throwing the Spear*, from his *Field Sports, &c. &c. of the Native Inhabitants of New South Wales* published in London in 1813, shows Aborigines spearing galahs, and is one of the few early works describing the spearing of birds. The disposition of the figures in *Throwing the Spear* is recalled in *Two Aborigines Spearing Eels*. In both works, figures are placed large in the foreground of the composition, silhouetted against a landscape.

*An Aborigine Climbing a Tree by Cutting Steps in the Trunk* (plate 1) and *Aborigine Climbing a Tree with Two Aborigines Sitting beside a Fire, Others Spearing Birds* (plate 2) are two of the five works in the album that show the hunting of land animals. The method of climbing trees depicted in both works is described in a number of early journals. It is noted by Threlkeld and also by Collins, who comments:

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39 Lycett, *Vires in Australia*, letterpress accompanying plate 22.
It has been remarked, that the natives who have been met with in the woods had longer arms and legs than those who lived about us. This might proceed from their being compelled to climb the trees after honey and the small animals which resort to them, such as the flying squirrel and opossum, which they effect by cutting with their stone hatchets notches in the bark of the tree of a sufficient depth and size to receive the ball of the great toe. The first notch being cut, the toe is placed in it; and while the left arm embraces the tree, a second [notch] is cut at a convenient distance to receive the other foot. By this method they ascend very quickly, always cutting with the right hand and clinging with the left, resting the whole weight of the body on the ball of either foot.

In an excursion to the westward with a party, we passed a tree (of the kind named by us the white gum, the bark of which is soft) that we judged to be about one hundred and thirty feet in height, and which had been notched by the natives at least eighty feet, before they attained the first branch where it was likely they could meet with any reward for so much toil.\(^{10}\)

The notching and climbing of trees in order to hunt game is the subject of the engraving *Climbing Trees* in Clark’s *Field Sports*, and of the Port Jackson Painter’s watercolour *Method of Climbing Trees*.\footnote{Port Jackson Painter, *Method of Climbing Trees* (Watling Collection 75, British Museum, Natural History), illustrated in Smith and Wheeler, *Art of the First Fleet*, p. 55.}

*Aborigines Hunting Kangaroos* (plate 9) and *Aborigines Using Fire to Hunt Kangaroos* (plate 17) describe the method of hunting the kangaroo. The latter work depicts the frequently employed method of burning the country to flush out game. Threlkeld refers to this method in his description of Awabakal initiation ceremonies. Speaking of the Aborigine known as John McGill, he notes:

> A few weeks back Be-rah-bahn returned from a ceremony performed in the mountains, which has initiated him into all the rights of an Aborigine.—It appears that they burn a large part of the country, then hunt for kangaroos, feast upon the shank bones only, after which they pipe clay themselves all over and then everyone must rush at once into the water and bathe themselves clean.\footnote{Threlkeld, London Missionary Society Report, 21 June 1826, in Threlkeld, *Australian Reminiscences*, vol. 2, p. 206. Pipe clay is a fine white clay used for whitening.}

Elsewhere he writes:

> Sometimes I accompanied them in their hunting excursions, but this caused more bodily fatigue than could be well sustained without the advantage contemplated in obtaining phrases in their language. For when the sun is fully up, the whole tribe prepares for the hunt by taking their spears, throwing-sticks, hatchets, and fire-brands, proceeding to the hills, they scatter themselves so as to surround a valley, leaving the entrance guarded by several good marksmen armed with spears. The surrounding party then begin to enclose shouting with all their might, but still in regular time. The Kangaroos and other animals become alarmed and make towards the entrance of the valley, where a shower of spears transfix them in their endeavour to escape.\footnote{Threlkeld, *Australian Reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 46.}

*Two Aborigines Hunting Emus* (plate 15) is the only other watercolour in the album that depicts the hunting of animals. It shows two men occupying a ridge, positioning themselves behind sandstone rocks to hide from the emus that graze on the plain below. Threlkeld describes the spearing of game as follows:

> On the appearance of any game, the men transfixed it with their spears, or ran after it with their cudgels and destroyed it. Some of the Aborigines climbed the trees, others stood like statues on the stumps with spears poised ready for the discharge. They seldom miss their aim.\footnote{Threlkeld, London Missionary Society Report, [December 1825], in Threlkeld, *Australian Reminiscences*, vol. 2, p. 190.}

The use of the spear by Aboriginal people of the Newcastle area is also described in other contemporary sources. As an anonymous writer recorded: ‘The spear is the most deadly of their instruments of war, they throw it by means of an instrument called a wommara which fixes into the end of the spear. They can hit with great exactness an object a good way away’.\footnote{Anonymous manuscript describing the settlement on the Hunter River, and the Aborigines of the district, in the period 1815–29, in the papers of John Dunmore Lang, vol. 1, p. 62.}
Aborigines with Spears Attacking Europeans in a Rowing Boat (plate 16) is the only drawing that depicts Europeans. In this work, a number of sailors, their ship at anchor behind them, are seen fishing from a rowing boat. A net has been cast out in front of the bow of the boat. As they await their catch, the sailors are met with a hostile response from local Aborigines, who shower them with spears. The seriousness of the attack is indicated by the fact that a hat belonging to one of the sailors is seen floating in the water with a spear through it. A considerable number of warriors are shown hurling their spears and it is clear from their attitude that they intend to repulse the boatload of Europeans.

There can be no doubt that there was a great deal of conflict between Europeans and Aboriginal people from the time of the arrival of whites in Australia in 1788. The subject of racial conflict is continually referred to in narrative and visual sources of the colonial period.\footnote{For discussions of the conflict between Europeans and Aboriginal people in Australia, see Butlin, Our Original Aggression; and Henry Reynolds, The Law and the Land, Melbourne, 1987, and Reynolds, The Other Side of the Frontier, Townsville, 1981.}

Threlkeld’s journal carries many accounts of racial conflict in the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie areas. The first reference to violence between Europeans and Aborigines occurs in the journal entry for Monday, 12 December 1825, some seven months after Threlkeld’s arrival at Reid’s Mistake. From this day on, his journal is continually punctuated with descriptions of assault, murder and summary executions of Aboriginal people by Europeans, as well as with accounts of retaliatory actions on the part of Aborigines.

On 8 August 1826 Threlkeld wrote: ‘A Black came to me yesterday saying that a great many blacks were coming from the mountains to burn all the houses of the Whites and that I must tell about it to the Commandant’.\footnote{Threlkeld to Saxe Bannister, Attorney-General, 8 August 1826, in Threlkeld, Australian Reminiscences, vol. 1, p. 92.} On 16 August, Threlkeld continued:

The Horse police consisting of one sergeant and two privates called at our house with two prisoners, Blacks, who were fastened, with rope round their necks and handcuffed together, they were taken up suspected of murder. One Black they shot bringing him down, as he endeavoured to escape, he bit the rope in two, and as he descended the bank of a river the Soldier shot him through the head. This makes the fourth summary execution of the Blacks in as many weeks.\footnote{Threlkeld, Australian Reminiscences, vol. 1, p. 93.}

By September, Threlkeld was describing the situation between Europeans and Aboriginal people in the Newcastle area as one of warfare: ‘You will be grieved to hear that war has commenced and still continues against the Aborigines of this land ... Many lives will be lost on both sides and the Blacks threaten to Burn the Corn &c as it ripens—this would ruin the colony at once’.\footnote{Threlkeld to George Burder and William Alers Hankey, London Missionary Society, 11 September 1826, in Threlkeld, Australian Reminiscences, vol. 2, p. 214.} Troops were sent into the area by Governor Darling later that month. On 11 September, in a letter to Lord Bathurst, Darling wrote: ‘I think it right to apprise you that the natives have lately committed some acts of outrage on Hunter
River, and that I have in consequence ordered detachment of troops to proceed and banish their aggressiveness'.

Lycett’s picture describes conflict between Awabakal people and what are probably members of the crew of a ship visiting the penal settlement at Newcastle. Conflict between Aborigines and European soldiers and sailors is also described in a number of pictures by William Bradley and by the Port Jackson Painter, both artists of the First Fleet. The Port Jackson Painter’s *The Hunted Rushcutter* (also known as ‘An Attack by Natives’) shows a sailor being pursued by Aborigines. William Bradley’s the *Taking of Colbee and Benalon 25 Novr. 1789* describes the kidnapping of Colebee and Bennelong by the British, and the resistance mounted by Sydney Aborigines.

The Port Jackson Painter’s *The Governor Making the Best of His Way to the Boat after Being Wounded with the Spear Sticking in His Shoulder and Mr Waterhouse Endeavouring to Break the Spear after Govr Phillips [sic] Was Wounded by Witle-me-ring where the Whale Was Cast on Shore in Manly Cove* depicts the spearing of Governor Phillip at Manly Cove. Another incident is recorded in the Port Jackson Painter’s *Mr White, Harris & Laing with a Party of Soldiers Visiting Botany Bay, Colebee at the Place when Wounded near Botony [sic] Bay* which describes a punitive expedition organised against the warrior Pemulwuy and led by the surgeon John White.

The remaining five watercolours in the album are concerned with describing ritual. *Group of Aborigines with Shields and Spears* (plate 11) shows ten young men—armed with spears and woomera, shields and boomerangs—preparing for a confrontation. Four other men may be seen at the left of the composition in the distance. The men’s battle spears are differentiated from hunting spears and fishing spears by the saw-like appearance of their points. Threlkeld describes the implements of war of the Awabakal in detail and it is clear from his description that Lycett observed their appearance accurately in this drawing:

The hunting spear, *wa-rai*, is ... made from the stem of the grass-tree, but having only one hardened joint of wood inserted at the end ... The battle-spear is made of the same material, but often with the

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50 Darling to Bathurst, 11 September 1826, Sydney, New South Wales Governor’s Despatches to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, vol. 8, September–December 1826, pp. 207–14, Mitchell Library, Sydney.
51 Port Jackson Painter, *The Hunted Rushcutter* (Banks Ms34:44, British Museum, Natural History). For a discussion and illustration of this work see Smith and Wheeler, *Art of the First Fleet*, p. 67.
53 See footnote 34.
addition of pieces of sharp quartz stuck along the hard wood joint on one side so as to resemble the teeth of a saw … The war-spear, called by the same name as the hunting spear, is alike thrown, as all the spears are, by a throwing stick, made of hard wood and named, wom-mur-rur. This instrument is generally about four feet long, half an inch thick, and tapers to a point at one end.55

The bodies of the young men in Lycett’s picture are marked with scars. This reflects the traditional practice among Aboriginal people of causing raised scars to appear on the body. The practice was generally decorative and not denotative of membership of a particular group or people.56

The shields held by the warriors tally in general terms with contemporary descriptions of the shape and decoration of Awabakal shields:

The shield, Ko-reil, is usually about three feet long by eighteen inches, or so; at most lozenge-shaped, pointed at top and bottom, and pigeon-breasted rather than flat. The thickness in the centre may be an inch, not more, and thins off to about a quarter of an inch to the edge. On the inside of the shield, in the centre, a piece of tough wood is bent and inserted like the handle of a basket, just sufficiently large to hold by, and a soft piece of tea-tree-bark is fixed on which to rest the knuckles and preserve them from abrasion. The shield is made from one of the buttresses of the nettle-tree, or the great fig-tree, which the blacks select of size and thickness as best suits their purpose. It is astonishing to see the agility with which they will cover their whole body with so small a shield from the continued steady assault of their opponents … The shields are always painted white with pipe-clay, and generally are ornamented with a St George's Cross, formed by two bands two or three inches wide, one vertical the other horizontal, colored red, with the pigment with which they paint their bodies for the dance or the fight.57

In describing the decoration of the shields of Kattang-speaking people, W.J. Enright notes: ‘This instrument is covered with pipe-clay and adorned with three red stripes’.58 Lycett’s depiction of the shield in *Group of Aborigines* therefore corresponds quite closely with descriptions in the ethnological material.

A Contest with Spears, Shields and Clubs (plate 6) shows young men involved in various contests of skill, while women and children observe the proceedings from the sidelines with—according to their gestures—some consternation. Threlkeld notes:

From infancy the children practise, in sport, the attack and defence, using a piece of the bark of the gum-tree for a shield, and small grass-tree stems for spears. The defendant holds the upper point of the shield level with his nose, looks over it at his assailant, lowers or raises, shifts to the right or left, the shield, just as occasion requires.59

The pose of two of the men, who balance on one foot with the other resting on the knee (seen at the extreme right and left of the composition), is also referred to by Threlkeld: ‘It is a most picturesque

56 For a discussion of Aboriginal body markings of this kind, see A.W. Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South Eastern Australia*, London, 1904, p. 743.
57 Threlkeld, *Australian Reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 68.
59 Threlkeld, *Australian Reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 68.
sight to see a naked well-formed aborigine standing on the left leg with spear poised, and the other [leg] drawn up resting the sole of the right foot on the inside of the knee joint of the standing limb'.

This pose is seen extensively in visual material of the colonial period; it occurs, for example, in the work of the artists of the voyages of Nicolas Baudin and James Cook, as well as in the work of Thomas Watling.

The decoration of the shields in this picture is more varied than that seen in other works from the album. The artist Richard Browne, who spent some years at the penal settlement at Newcastle, included in his works the weapons of the Aboriginal people of the district. A shield drawn by Browne to illustrate what is now referred to as The Skottowe Manuscript carries the diagonal stripes seen in Lycett’s watercolour.

Corroboree around a Camp Fire (plate 13) depicts the night-time performance of a ritual dance, possibly as part of an initiation ceremony. The pigments seen here on the bodies of the participants are referred to by Threlkeld in his discussion of ritual preparation for song and dance: ‘Red and white pigments were applied as cosmetics to the cheeks, forehead, breast, and other parts of the body, just as it

\[\text{\textsuperscript{60}}\] Ibid., p. 46.

happened to be the fashion at the time'. A.W. Howitt discusses the application of pigment to the body in preparation for initiation ceremonies, and notes in particular a ceremony of the Port Stephens Aborigines which he witnessed: ‘I found that a conical fire was burning in the centre of a cleared space ... Round this fire radiating, radiating from it like the spokes of a wheel and painted like skeletons were a number of blacks’. The painting of the body with white pigment to resemble a skeleton is also seen in the engraving *Warriors of New S. Wales* in Clark’s *Field Sports*.

A description of body marking contained in a letter, now in the Mitchell Library, is particularly close to those depicted in *Corroboree around a Camp Fire*:

I went on Saturday evening, Nov 24 1821, to one of their festivities known as the *Corrobbarara*. Many of the surrounding tribes were encamped in the woods. The Five Islands blacks, when darkness had shrouded nature in her mantle, began to undress; and immediately to paint themselves with a kind of white earth that resembles our pipe clay. The figures displayed neither taste nor ingenuity. Longitudinal lines on the legs and arms, and curved lines from the breast to the arms, and a spheroidal figure on the breast, intersected without the least display of art, constituted their principal pencil display. Some were disfigured with a soft excrescence of iron ore which made them red; and around the eye they struck a circle with the pipe clay.

*An Aborigine Warding off Spears with a Shield* (plate 19) depicts members of one Aboriginal group inflicting punishment upon a member of another group. The subject of social control and punishment in Aboriginal communities is widely referred to in the ethnological literature. In this watercolour, we see a young man fending off spears which are directed towards him by his peers in what is clearly a ritualised form of combat. Threlkeld describes a similar ritual which he witnessed among the Awabakal people:

Punishments, seem to be amongst the aborigines a sort of retribution, arising from the natural feeling of self protection, you protect me and I will protect you, is their principle of action. In a certain sense they are like our ancient tournaments, where the accuser and the accused fight to prove their innocence by victory. But, there is this difference amongst the aborigines, the accused stands punishment, literally, and does not fight in return, except a general engagement ensues. The alleged guilty one stands naked some little distant from the injured party who throws at him a certain number of spears, before agreed upon by the tribes assembled in conclave, the which spears he wards off by a wooden shield held by the left hand, with a waddy in the right, and it is astonishing to see the agility and cleverness manifested in evading or warding off every spear. His own tribe, as well as the tribe belonging to the aggrieved party stand around to see fair play.

Another contemporary observer of Hunter River Aborigines notes:

62 Threlkeld, *Australian Reminiscences*, vol. 1, p. 56.
63 Howitt, *Native Tribes of South Eastern Australia*, p. 572.
64 William Walker to the Reverend R. Watson, 26 November 1821, Parramatta, BTM Box 1040, Mitchell Library, Sydney. Five Islands is close to Wollongong, south of Sydney.
65 Threlkeld, *Australian Reminiscences*, vol. 1, pp. 60-1.
When a Black has committed any offence against his own tribe such as stealing a gin [an Aboriginal woman] from one of the same tribe he is compelled by the other blacks to undergo a punishment—he is placed in the middle of the whole tribe of black fellows who form a circle at some distance round him. Each black then throws a certain number of spears or boomerangs at the culprit proportionate to the offence of which he has been guilty.\(^6^6\)

John Heaviside Clark took the same subject for one of the engravings in his *Field Sports*. His *Trial* shows a young warrior defending himself against a similar onslaught.

*An Aboriginal Funeral* (plate 20) describes the performance of burial rites. Here Lycett shows a group of mourners carrying a body wrapped in bark towards a grave. The scene is located near South Head in Sydney. The Macquarie Lighthouse, built during Governor Macquarie's administration, together with the flags of the naval establishment beside it, is just visible in the upper right of the composition.

The rituals associated with death and with mourning are widely discussed in contemporary sources. Collins, for example, presents a detailed account of the funerary customs of the Sydney people.

\(^6^6\) Anonymous manuscript describing the settlement on the Hunter River, and the Aborigines of the district, in the period 1815-29, in the papers of John Dunmore Lang, vol. 1, p. 64.
in which he notes: ‘Their young people they consign to the grave; those who have passed the middle age are burnt’. This suggests that the deceased person in Lycett’s drawing was young.

Collins also describes the transportation of the body to the grave in a manner that accords with what we see in Lycett’s scene. He describes the lifting of the body and its placement on the heads of two men, and notes: ‘Some of the assistants had tufts of grass in their hands, which they waved backwards and forwards under the canoe, while it was lifting from the ground, as if they were exorcising some evil spirit’. The practice of waving tufts of grass around the corpse is depicted in the watercolour.

Two figures are distinguished from the others by the manner in which their bodies are painted; the bodies of the young man and child in the left middle ground are dotted with white paint. These people are likely to be close relatives of the dead person for, as Collins notes, special paint was applied to the bodies of mourners close to the deceased: ‘Cole-be and Wat-te-wal were painted red and white over the breast and shoulders, and on this occasion were distinguished by the title of Moo-by; and we learned from them that while so distinguished they were to be very sparing in their meals’.

Lycett’s album is an important visual record of the life of Aboriginal people in coastal New South Wales during the early colonial period. The artist’s interest in presenting a detailed account of Aboriginal land use, of the defence of the land against the Europeans, as well as of the ceremonies surrounding everyday life, provides evidence that Europeans regarded indigenous culture seriously. While application of the principle of *Terra Nullius* implied that the land that had been colonised had never been occupied, and that Aborigines were not prepared to defend it, material in Lycett’s pictures and in the pictures of other artists, such as those of the First Fleet, make it clear that this was not the case. The Awabakal people of the north coast of New South Wales are shown fishing, hunting and defending their right to do so in the face of European intrusion.

In comparison with the rest of his oeuvre and with the work of other artists produced in the third decade of the nineteenth century, the imagery in these watercolours is unusual. By 1820 the main concern of most European artists working in Australia was to describe the progress of European settlement. In most of the work of this period, Aborigines take second place to Europeans in pictorial compositions. In the work of John Lewin, George Evans and John Eyre, we see the land inhabited by Europeans and there is little interest in describing Aboriginal life and culture. In most of the work of the period, Aborigines

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68 Ibid., p. 603.
69 Ibid., p. 605.
are located on the edge of compositions as exotic staffage. Indeed, much of Lycett’s work emphasises the impact of European habitation on the land.

Lycett's focus on Aboriginal life and culture may be accounted for by the peculiar circumstances of his life. His period of detention at Newcastle probably provided him with direct contact with the Aboriginal people of the area and this enabled him to provide imagery which is resonant with descriptive material in the narratives of observers such as Threlkeld. His subsequent experience as an artist in the employment of Governor Macquarie following his return to Sydney presented him with the opportunity to observe the work of other artists, possibly in the records of the government and, almost certainly, in published sources. Collins’s *Account* and Clark’s *Field Sports* were published and presumably accessible to the artist. This would account for some of the similarities, which have been noted, between Lycett’s work and that of earlier artists.

The album contains some of the few visual representations of the indigenous people of the Newcastle area produced in the early colonial period by a European artist. The watercolours are extremely valuable, both as works of art and as rare historical documents. The lively interest in Australian material enabled Lycett to publish his *Views in Australia* on his return to England. He may have intended to publish the watercolours contained in the National Library’s album but was unable to find the means to do so. Their reproduction in this volume achieves what an engraved edition of the watercolours would have done in the artist’s lifetime—presents these important works to a wider audience.

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**Acknowledgments**

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of the staffs of the Pictorial collection of the National Library of Australia, the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, the Fort Scratchley Museum, Newcastle, and the North Library, British Library, with research undertaken in the preparation of the material contained in this book. I especially wish to thank Elizabeth Bilney, Charles Ferrall, Theo Hoorn, Joan Kerr, Carol Miller and Dana Rowan for the many helpful suggestions which they made in the course of the research and writing of the manuscript.
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