JOURNAL OF THE
ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Special Edition
Norman B. Tindale’s Research Legacy and the Cultural Heritage of Indigenous Australians

VOLUME 39 – DECEMBER 2015

EDITORS
Amy Roberts and Kim McCaul
The *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia* is the official publication of the Anthropological Society of South Australia. It is a refereed journal that has been published since 1963. A list of recent peer reviewers can be found on the Society’s website [http://www.anthropologysocietyasa.com](http://www.anthropologysocietyasa.com). The journal primarily provides a forum for researchers of Indigenous Australian anthropology, archaeology, history and linguistics although broader topics related to all of these disciplines may also be included.

Contributions accepted include: articles (5000-8000 words), short reports (1000-3000 words), obituaries (500-2000 words), thesis abstracts (200-500 words) and book reviews (500-2000 words). Notes to contributors are available through the Society’s website.

Should you wish to submit a paper to the journal please direct your enquiries to the secretary of the Anthropological Society of South Australia (current contact details can be found on the Society's website).

The journal is free for current members of the Anthropological Society of South Australia. Subscription application/renewal forms are also available through the Society’s website.

**Anthropological Society of South Australia Committee**

President: Dr Keryn Walshe (South Australian Museum)
Secretary (Webmaster): Dr Amy Roberts (Flinders University)
Treasurer: Mr Tom Gara (Native Title Section – Crown Solicitor’s Office – South Australia)
Councillor: Professor Peter Sutton (University of Adelaide/South Australian Museum)
Councillor: Dr Alice Gorman (Flinders University)
Councillor: Mr Chris Nobbs (Department for Education and Child Development)
Councillor: Dr Janelle White (University of South Australia)

**Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia Editorial Advisory Board**

The Editorial Advisory Board consists of members the Anthropological Society of South Australia committee as well as the following specialists:
Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney (University of South Australia)
Professor Jane Lydon (University of Western Australia)
Dr Paul Monaghan (University of Adelaide)
Dr David Martin (Australian National University)
Dr Natalie Franklin (Flinders University/University of Queensland)
Professor Robert Layton (Durham University)
Professor George Nicholas (Simon Fraser University)
Dr Stephen Loring (Smithsonian Institution)
Dr Jennifer McKinnon (East Carolina University)
Dr Pam McGrath (AIATSIS)

The views expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the Anthropological Society of South Australia or the Editors.

© Anthropological Society of South Australia 2015

ISSN1034-4438
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Editorial**
*Kim McCaul and Amy Roberts*  
ii

**ARTICLES**

The Legacy of Norman B. Tindale at  
Princess Charlotte Bay in 1927: Lamalama  
Engagement with Museum Collections  
*Bruce Rigsby, Lindy Allen and Diane Hafner*  
1

Norman Tindale and Native Title:  
His Late Appearance in the Jango Case  
*Peter Sutton*  
26

Tindale’s Antakirinja and the Search for the  
‘Real Western Desert Natives’  
*Paul Monaghan*  
73

Cartographic Ethnogenesis: Tindale’s Invention of the  
Jadira Tribe in the Pilbara Region of Western Australia  
*Paul Burke*  
102

Language Group Maps and Contemporary Identities:  
Tindale’s Legacy in the Central Murray Riverine Region  
*Michael O’Kane and Katrina Hodgson*  
127

Wing Commander Tindale RAAF 284483  
*Francesca Zilio*  
147
EDITORIAL

Norman Barnett Tindale holds a position of unique influence in Australian Aboriginal studies. His archive, hosted by the South Australian Museum, is vast, complex, controversial but indisputably significant. Indeed, although his formal background was in the natural sciences (entomology) and he did not receive formal training in anthropology, archaeology, history or linguistics, he amassed voluminous data relevant to all these disciplines over the almost 70 years he actively researched Aboriginal Australians. For example, his excavations with Herbert Hale of a rock shelter at Ngaut Ngaut (Devon Downs) on the River Murray (South Australia) in 1929 demonstrated (via deep stratigraphy and later radiocarbon dating) that Aboriginal people had occupied the continent for far longer than the non-Indigenous public otherwise understood or acknowledged (see Hale and Tindale 1930; Mulvaney and Kamminga 1999:12; Roberts and MACAI 2012:12). His vocabulary collections from across the country have frequently provided linguists with a crucial piece of historic language data (e.g., Breen 2009). His assiduous note taking over many decades captured many historically and anthropologically relevant observations about Aboriginal cultures and the colonial experience including accounts of conditions at the various missions visited during his 1938–39 Harvard Adelaide Expedition, the collection of oral history accounts of early encounters between Aboriginal people and colonisers, family history data, social organisation schemas from across the country, accounts of hunting and gathering practices from the varied Australian environments, traditional mythological narratives transcribed in their original language and descriptions of ceremonies.

However, Tindale’s most controversial legacy likely lies in his work with Joseph Birdsell in relation to the collection of physical anthropological data, an undertaking influenced by eugenics (e.g., see Roberts et al. 2014). Nevertheless, the ways in which Aboriginal Australians and researchers engage with Tindale’s vast archive, will undoubtedly change and transform in new directions in the future as technology and improved understandings allow fresh insights into old materials.
But it is Tindale's (1974) *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia: Their Terrain, Environmental Controls, Distribution, Limits, and Proper Names* (and the accompanying ‘Tribal Boundaries Map’) that remains his most widely recognised legacy. Tindale's ambition to map the Aboriginal tribes of Australia was born from the early insight that the dominant paradigm of his time, which suggested that Aboriginal people roamed about without any sense of land ownership, was mistaken. Instead, Tindale realised from a conversation with an Aboriginal man (Maroadunei) during his participation in a 1921–22 expedition to Groote Eylandt in the Gulf of Carpentaria that Aboriginal people had ‘tribal boundaries, limits beyond which it was dangerous to move without adequate recognition’ (Tindale 1974:3). This realisation set Tindale on a life-long course to document Aboriginal ‘territoriality’ (Tindale 1974:3). By placing tribal names on a map of Australia, backed by what appears to be a comprehensive and carefully researched catalogue, Tindale’s work provides a unique resource for anybody interested in the pre-colonial occupation of Australia. Over time his work has filtered down into many a local history, where the brief references to Aboriginal people are often easily identifiable as deriving substantially from Tindale’s catalogue (e.g., Wright 1981) and his tribes continue to be accepted as a reliable starting point by many who have not delved into his work in forensic detail (e.g., Breen 2009). While there is no denying the remarkable achievement of Tindale’s career defining oeuvre a number of contributors to this volume identify significant shortcomings in his analyses and models, particularly arising when his work is viewed critically through native title and land rights inquiries.

Tindale’s first attempt at mapping Aboriginal tribes in 1940 took place long before the concept of Aboriginal land rights had entered the Australian consciousness and even his final 1974 *magnum opus* still predates the *Northern Territory Lands Right Act* by two years and the *Native Title Act* by almost 20 years. As such, we would argue that Tindale could never have anticipated the forensic challenges the validity of his arguments, interpretations and underlying data would be subjected to in the legal arena. Tindale’s material is invariably revisited and re-analysed in every native title or land rights claim, and while it almost always adds useful data, it is also frequently found to be
imperfect and requiring of exegesis by ‘expert’ anthropologists and other researchers who need to explain to the court why their opinions differ from those of Tindale.

One of the appeals of Tindale’s work to non-anthropologists, lawyers in particular in the native title process, is the elegant simplicity of his model of the tribe, and the certainty with which he expressed his views. According to Tindale (1974:31), tribes were composed of between 250 and 750 people, ‘450 persons per tribe may be the ideal figure’. He further defined ‘tribes’ in the following manner:

> The tribal divisions listed in this work are those accepted and named by aborigines themselves, using so far as possible their own criteria. Generally speaking, they have a name, recognize a territorial boundary, linguistic bonds, and a common system of kinship. They share in a familiar round of ceremonies and habitually exchange wives between their clans, which they regard as lesser groupings than the tribe as a whole. They may live together in hordal associations or on occasion separate into larger and smaller family units. The tribe is the largest consistently named and recognized unit known to aborigines. In practice it is composed of a few or many exogamous clans whose members, usually, but not consistently, live apart, for the better utilization of the rather sparse amount of food that is preset in their country. A common bond of language is present although minor differences in dialect may characterize the more distantly separated hordes of a large tribe. There does not have to be a language barrier to mark a tribal boundary. Members of a tribe are aware of the limits of their territory and a sense of trespass or guilt appears when the bounds are reached.
> (Tindale 1974:32)

On the face of it, Tindale’s definition of the ‘tribe’ appears to correlate nicely with the legal definition of the ‘society’ (‘a group of people united by their observance and acknowledgement of a system of laws and customs’) so crucial to native title inquiries. And yet in many claims anthropologists need to revisit the very premise of Tindale’s work, ‘the tribe’, and explain why it is not actually a helpful unit when it comes to to understanding the formation of ‘societies’ and ‘systems of laws and customs’ as required by native title law. This is not a novel debate. Tindale’s concept of the tribe was in fact subject to early challenges (e.g., by Ronald Berndt [1959] in relation to the Western Desert and by various contributors in Peterson [1976]). But in the native title context the debate is forced to take place with particular
attention to detail and in the face of vigorously opposing arguments.

Other difficulties forensic inquiries regularly identify with Tindale’s data area as follows: the tribal names he gives may be meaningful social units but the precise locations onto which they have been mapped do not stand up to detailed inquiry; the units Tindale depicts as ‘tribes’ may turn out to be more appropriately considered as component parts of larger groups; his linguistic analysis in the catalogue entries are at times implausible or non-sensical; and on occasion, the basis for an entire tribal entry is questionable, because analysis reveals that the name is derived from a single source with little to no justification to associate it with the area in question.

In this volume the contributions by Sutton, Monaghan, Burke and O’Kane and Hodgson all tackle different angles of Tindale’s focus on the tribe and his cartographic ambitions. All four contributions are inspired by forensic native title inquiries and as such are representative of the kind of work that takes place across the country, but which is not usually available to academic scrutiny due to legal restrictions placed on reports by the court or the commissioning land councils/representative bodies. These contributions span three diverse ethnographic areas: the Western Desert (Monaghan, Sutton), the Pilbara region of WA (Burke) and the Central River Murray (O’Kane and Hodgson). Collectively they tackle many of the aforementioned issues that may be encountered during analyses of Tindale’s work.

However, we open and conclude this edition with two quite different perspectives on the life and work of Tindale. The opening article by Rigsby, Allen and Hafner (whose geographic focus is far northern Queensland) explores the legacy of Tindale’s photographic and artefact collections for the contemporary Lamalama community. The final contribution by Zilio, explores Tindale’s less well-known activities in the military during World War II. Zilio convincingly argues that it was by utilising his applied ‘linguistic and anthropological methodologies, research skills and field observation techniques’, honed in his study of Indigenous Australians (combined with his Japanese language skills) that Tindale was able ‘to make a unique and highly valuable contribution to intelligence operations in the Pacific Theatre’. 
It is our hope that together these papers will provide a valuable resource to researchers wanting to better understand the vast, complex, controversial, but always significant contribution made by Norman Barnett Tindale.

**Kim McCaul and Amy Roberts**

**References**


