The early ethnographic writings of EW Pearson Chinnery: Government Anthropologist of New Guinea

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Summary
EW Pearson Chinnery (1887–1972) occupied a number of senior positions in the Australian colonial administrations of the territories of Papua and New Guinea in the 1920s and 1930s.

His career may therefore be conveniently examined in two parts: his appointment as a District Officer in Papua from 1910 to 1917, and, following service with the Australian Flying Corps during World War I and studies in anthropology at Cambridge University, his work in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea from 1924 to 1937. He was an important administrative official at a time when Australia took the following significant steps to improve the quality of the field staff in the territories:

- the appointment of government anthropologists reporting to the colonial administration;
- the development of a cadet patrol officer scheme; and
- the establishment of the Chair in Anthropology at the University of Sydney.

However, Chinnery is not regarded as an important figure in the history of Australian anthropology. This paper offers some explanation as to why he is largely ignored, but seeks first to examine how and why Chinnery developed an interest in ethnology during his initial service in Papua and later when a student at Cambridge in 1919 and 1920.

Introduction
In contrast to Chinnery, much as been written on the Government Anthropologist Francis Edgar Williams, who published widely on native cultures and customs in Papua between 1923 until his death in a plane crash in
the Owen Stanley Range in 1943 (Williams and Schwimmer [ed], 1976; Griffith, 1977; Young and Clark, 2001).

Williams wrote a series of classic studies on indigenous cultures in the Western Province (1936), Gulf Province (1940 and 1941) and the Northern (Oro) Province of Papua (1928 and 1930). He also left an outstanding collection of photographs, which is now held in the National Archives of Australia (see items in NAA record series A6510, A6003 and A6004; Young and Clark, 2001). Copies of Williams’ personal papers may be examined at the Mitchell Library in Sydney (FM4/4348–62); the originals of these papers are housed in the National Archives of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby. Despite the paternalistic tone of colonial superiority, Williams’ writing retains its colour and vibrancy and his real sense of delight at being a fieldworker. Chinnery’s career as an anthropologist and administrator and his numerous papers and reports are seldom referred to by researchers. For this reason his reputation as an anthropologist is overshadowed by his more famous contemporary.

However, to deny Chinnery a place in the history of anthropology in Papua New Guinea would be misguided. He was an important figure in the development of fieldwork practices in New Guinea; although he did not undertake long-term fieldwork himself, he facilitated the work of prominent anthropologists such as Gregory Bateson, Reo Fortune, Ian Hogbin, William Charles Groves and John Alexander Todd, and encouraged the fieldwork of some of the first female anthropologists, such as Margaret Mead, Hortense Powdermaker and Beatrice Blackwood.

Chinnery was Government Anthropologist in New Guinea from 1924 to 1932 before his appointment as Director of District Services and Native Affairs. In that position, he promoted ethnological training for patrol officers and other officials in the territory while remaining active in international anthropological forums. He remained a close colleague of Alfred Cort Haddon, one of the most important figures in the development of British anthropology, and the leader of the influential Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits in 1898 (Haddon, 1901–35). This was the first multi-disciplinary fieldwork expedition in the history of British ethnology. Chinnery was strongly influenced by Haddon and if we accept the statement that ‘Haddon perhaps represented the muscular colonial anthropologist at his simplest’ (Kuper, 1973, p. 124) as correct, if somewhat cryptic, then the description may also be applied to Chinnery.

Chinnery is best remembered as an administrator rather than as an anthropologist. While Government Anthropologist, Chinnery published little in the way of solid ethnography. His six anthropological reports (Chinnery, 1927a, 1927b, 1928a, 1928b, 1930 and 1931) follow the quick survey technique favoured by the busy patrol officer and highlight the tensions apparent in his desire to be both an anthropologist and an administrator. In 1937, following a volcanic eruption that destroyed his home in Rabaul (see Chinnery, S, and Fortune [ed], 1998), Chinnery was seconded to the Commonwealth Public Service as Commonwealth Advisor on Native Affairs (1937–47), becoming the
Director, Native Affairs Branch in 1938, a position he held until 1946. He was based in Darwin during World War II and in later years he was to represent Australia at the United Nations. He had a long and distinguished career as a public servant (Gray, 2003 and nd).

Chinnery’s goal was that anthropological training should support the aims of colonial administration and serve to show the world that Australia was a modern colonial power that understood and operated in the light of the ideals then expressed by the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations. Chinnery saw anthropology as one of the tools that the colonial administration could use to bring about the peaceful penetration of white settlers and officials into regions such as New Guinea; assist in the suppression of cultural practices such as tribal warfare, headhunting and cannibalism; and help bring ‘primitive’ peoples up to a higher level of ‘civilization’.

His views and attitudes were conservative, and remained so, for he believed that tribal people were hindered by their position on the evolutionary scale and that they would not be able to govern themselves for generations. In this he was not alone: many Australian colonialists held these beliefs. Indeed, many Australians still do. Geoffrey Gray (2003 and nd) has written two comprehensive papers on Chinnery’s career in New Guinea and the Northern Territory; however, now that Chinnery’s personal archives are held by the National Library of Australia, it is possible to reassess his contribution to anthropology and to Australian colonial administration in a broader light (NLA: MS 766).

Chinnery has left us a rich archival record. Apart from official papers relating to his service, and the decisions and debates within both the colonial service and the Commonwealth departments responsible for the colonies, there are also 1823 photographs (NLA: PIC P783, Albums 869A–G) and 142 maps (NLA: MAP EWP Chinnery Map Collection). This material complements records held at the National Archives of Australia (see especially NAA: B2455, Chinnery EWP, and NAA: A452, 1959/6066 and NAA: A452, 1959/6067). Chinnery was highly organised, paid attention to detail and held a strong commitment to duty during nearly 30 years in the Papua and New Guinea colonial services.

However, in this paper I want to examine Chinnery’s work as a district officer in Papua before he served in World War I. Chinnery developed his interest in anthropology while working as a patrol officer in Papua (1910–17) and then as a student under Haddon at Cambridge (1919–20). During this time Haddon and his associates were continuing in their task of writing the six volumes of the Reports of the Cambridge Expedition to the Torres Straits. Haddon’s professional interest in Papua was strong and during the long period of gestation of the reports he corresponded regularly with many missionaries, traders and colonial officials, including Chinnery and the Lieutenant-Governor of Papua, John Hubert Plunkett Murray.

Chinnery’s writings from that period tell us much about the character of the man and his associations with colleagues, with the formidable Murray, and with the wider academic world. They also tell us much about the operation of
the colonial state and the way in which local people were represented to the
outside world. Colonialism required a body of knowledge that supported the
power and superiority of the white man, but the modern colonial state was also
interested in the moral wellbeing and health of its subjects. This is why it
needed anthropology (Lattas, 1996, pp. 196–97):

The modern civilized colonial state was dedicated not to repressing
the fictions of others but of editing, managing and exploiting those
fictions so as to optimize their use in the development [and control]
of subjects.¹

The state was concerned with the rational use and benefits of ‘thinking black’, a
calculated, strategic and utilitarian use of local knowledge that could be
applied in the resolution of critical issues, two of the most critical of which
were land policy and native labour.

Lieutenant-Governor Murray saw that an understanding of the social customs
of the people would also be useful to answer questions about the pressing
problem of depopulation. At a time when census data was unavailable, it was
generally assumed that the sight of half-empty villages indicated the native
population was declining due to the loss of racial vitality, moral decline, low
birth rate and hopelessness brought about by contact with the superiority of
the whites. Therefore, it could only be increased – and provide more men and
women for useful labour – by moral integrity, racial vitality and by instilling
hope for the future (Lattas, 1996, p. 148). The question of depopulation within
the context of modern liberalism that advocated an increase in the power and
the role of the state was the subject of much debate by ‘enlightened’ colonial
authorities (Murray, 1923; Williams, 1932–33; Chinnery, 1932–33; Murray,
1932–33).

Kumusi Division

Chinnery, who was born in the small Victorian town of Waterloo near Ballarat
in 1887, joined the Papuan Administration in 1909 as a clerk attached to the
Government Secretary’s Department in Port Moresby. He was paid £150 a
year, which increased to £200 after six months’ probation. The salary of a clerk
in administrative service was equivalent to the wages paid to a plumber and
ironworker, sail-maker, shipwright and boatbuilder. ‘Seeking the prestige of
639), and presumably better pay – an Acting/Assistant Resident Magistrate
received £250 a year plus allowances of £25 a year – Chinnery joined the
District Service in 1910. District service was undoubtedly more exciting than
office work in hot, dusty Port Moresby and, with skill and ambition,
appointment as an Assistant Resident Magistrate could eventually pay £400 a
year.

At that time the white settler population in Papua amounted to only about 1500 people, based largely at Port Moresby and Samarai (Chinnery, 1920, p. 440). Following the passing of the *Papua Act 1905*, the colony of British New Guinea was handed over to Australian control. John Murray, who had been the Chief Judicial Officer since 1904 and was Acting Administrator in 1907 following the retirement of Francis Barton, was subsequently appointed Lieutenant-Governor and Chief Judicial Officer in 1908. Murray, by way of contrast with Chinnery, was paid £1250 plus allowances as Lieutenant-Governor, with a further £1000 a year for his duties as Chief Judicial Officer. He was to become the most influential Australian colonial official and to remain in office until his death in Port Moresby in 1940. He was also to have considerable influence on the future career of Chinnery.

In 1909 the Northern Division was split into two administrative regions: the northern Mambare Division and the southern Kumusi Division. On his acceptance into the district service, Chinnery was posted to Buna in Kumusi Division. A substation was also located at Kokoda about 65 to 70 miles (approximately 104 to 112 km) from Buna and linked to the coast by the Yodda Road, which had been constructed in 1904 following a track used by miners.

The main administrative reason for this substation was the control of labour for the alluvial goldfields in the region and for the expanding plantation developments along the coast. Goldminers had begun to move into the uncontrolled areas around the Yodda Goldfield in Kumusi in 1895 and around the Gira Goldfield in Mambare to the north in 1897, and this push outside settled areas was the cause of many administrative problems. The Gira Goldfield was supervised from Ioma Station, which was located about 40 miles (approximately 64 km) from the mouth of the Mambare River.

The peoples of the Mambare and Kumusi districts were divided into coastal, riverland and hinterland groups, and were part of a single language chain. Among the largest groups in these districts are the Binandere, who live along the Mambare River, and the Hunjara (Koko) from the Yodda Valley, where the headwaters of the Kumusi River rise. Together the peoples of the northern divisions became known as the ‘Orokaiva’, a name first popularised by Chinnery and Beaver (1915, pp. 96–97) and later used by Williams (1928 and 1930). The general term ‘Orokaiva’, which is perhaps a combination of the words *oro* (house) and *kaiva* (taro), and the name ‘Oro Province’ remain in use today.

The activities, and lives, of miners and planters were closely supervised by district officials, but the development of the coastal plantations and the influx of white diggers and hundreds of labourers were to have major impacts on the lives of the local people in this region. Following the appointment of local tribesmen as village constables, the Hunjara of the Yodda Valley were able to use their influence with whites to expand out of the valley onto the nearby plains. They then manipulated bridewealth payments for land and used this to cement peace. This also gave the Hunjara access to the cash economy.
The Orokaiva became important wage labourers for the colonial administration and by the 1920s many had entered police service, which yielded them positions of some local power and influence (Bashkow, 1999). This local manipulation of power relations has important implications in the examination of Chinnery’s early writings on the initiation ceremonies of the Koko.

At first, the Yodda Goldfield had a population of 12 whites and about 50 local workers, but by 1900 this peaked at 120 whites and about 600 locals. By the time the alluvial gold had been worked out in 1907, the population in the diggings had fallen to 60 whites and 300 locals. In addition to the impact of white miners, many local labourers on both goldfields died, mostly due to dysentery. Chinnery was also appointed as Acting Mining Warden, in which position he had regular contact with both the developments in the mining area and with local villagers. He also developed a reputation as a conscientious field officer: in January 1911 on a patrol through the Kukurundi, Fufuda, Kumusi, Wasida and Isivita districts, he captured 21 runaway workers from the Mombiri Rubber Plantation.

He also searched for the killers of some Yodda labourers from the goldfields. Maintaining the stability of the region, which in turn allowed for the recruitment of indentured labour, was an important part of the local district officer’s duties. Another task was to search, return or imprison men who had broken their indenture contracts. A letter from A E Oelrichs, the Resident Magistrate of Kumusi Division, commended Chinnery highly for this patrol:

Mr Chinnery is the only one [of the patrol officers] who realized for what purpose he is sent into the country; that is to say, to get into touch with the natives, to get to know them, and they him, to see that the Native Regulations are carried o[ut] and to make them understand for what purpose the Government is here.²

However, there was little stability in the economic development of Papua. By 1912 both the Gira and the Yodda goldfields were practically deserted in favour of the Nepa Goldfield on the Lakekamu (Kunimaipa) River near Mount Chapman, which could be accessed from the Gulf of Papua. The resulting moves in the cash economy, however, meant that more young men, who would previously have been drawn to mining camps or plantations, now applied to join the armed constabulary, and it was common for patrols to bring in men for enlistment in the police service.

The Kunimaipa Valley would also be an area where Chinnery would develop the skills that made him a highly experienced patrol officer. While serving in Kumusi, Chinnery began to collect details of material culture, customs and village livelihood strategies. In this he was supported by official policy. Murray realised early in his time as administrator that understanding the customs, languages and cultural practices of the local people was important; this realisation underlies the ideal behind his promotion of the ethics of

² NLA: MS 766/3/2, report dated 13 February 1911.
humanitarian trusteeship (Lattas, 1996). Australia became a colonial power at a time when perceptions of colonialism were changing. The view that colonialisation could only be a process of rampant resource exploitation and assimilation or replacement of the indigenous people was slowly giving way to the ideal that colonial rule was a service of trust exercised on behalf of the local people. While the officials in charge of Australian colonial policies may have considered themselves enlightened and rational beings, their values and attitudes remained paternalistic and conservative or, as Lewis (1996, p. 7) has stated, ‘the unrealistic paternalism and legalism of “hyprocritical” governments’.

Rigo District

Not all contact between the colonial authority and village people was peaceful. In 1912, Chinnery was transferred to the Central Division, which was divided into two districts: Rigo to the south and Kairuku to the north. Rigo was also the first patrol station established outside Port Moresby and from here Chinnery patrolled in the Kokila District at the foothills of the Owen Stanley Range. In June 1913 Chinnery was sent to search for hill tribesmen from Mount Obree who had raided and murdered men and women of a nearby valley. It was:

...[d]uring the patrol four natives were arrested and unfortunately it was necessary, in self-defence, to shoot six.

He also wrote somewhat colourfully of the action:

They [the Ailiwara hill tribesmen] followed their song with hideous howls and threats and filthy and insulting language, and with loud shouts rushing down the hill to meet us, knocking their shields on their knees as they came and making buzzing noises through their lips or shaking their spears in a similar manner to the Okeina ‘orokaivas’ [people of the northern coast].

While this action was regarded as unavoidable, any contact that resulted in death of either white patrol officers or local people was reported to higher levels of government and viewed unfavourably. The colourful language was also officially supported, for many patrol reports were later published in the annual reports of the time. Chinnery’s patrol succeeded in opening up much of the beautiful Mount Brown and Mount Obree region behind the Rigo District.

Mambare Division

Late in 1913 Chinnery was transferred back to the northern coast, to the Mambare Division bordering German New Guinea. His colleague at Ioma was Wilfred Beaver, who was an unusual man for this sort of work. He too had transferred from the clerical service, but he was highly educated, having been at Scotch College, the University of Melbourne and the University of Brussels. He was also a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and, at a time of

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3 NLA: MS 766/3/6, report dated 7 July 1913.
religious conservatism in public service employment, he was also unusual for he was Jewish. The association between Chinnery and Beaver was to be a productive one, both professionally as field officers and intellectually as ethnographers.

The first paper published by Chinnery and Beaver (1915) was a study of the initiation ceremonies of the Hunjara (Koko), the people of the Yodda Valley at the head of the Kumusi River, close to Mount Lamington. Parts of the initiation ceremonies had been observed by Chinnery in 1911, for it was reported that ‘Mr Chinnery has seen the proceedings and was to a certain degree initiated himself into the Hunjara’ (Chinnery and Beaver, 1915, p. 70). Some observations in the paper have been verified by recent research (Iteanu, 1990; Barker, McKellin and Iteanu, 1991) but the article also contains much speculation and is poorly organised.

Despite being asked not to reveal the details of the secret male ceremonies, Chinnery and Beaver published the findings in a widely distributed anthropological journal (Chinnery and Beaver, 1915). What we learn from the paper is that initiation was undergoing a process of profound change following contact and pacification. The government had forbidden certain ritual practices and so local people were either performing them in secret or were substituting and adapting ritual to meet the rule of imposed law.

For the Hunjara, the initiation practices were being shortened; although both boys and girls were initiated, only boys underwent a second stage, trial by fear. The first stage, seclusion, and the third phase, the triumph of relations and feasting, were still being practiced openly (Iteanu, 1990). In a later paper that summarised his Papuan career, Chinnery acknowledged that he had only seen the final feasting ceremonies when the slaughter of pigs had been substituted for ritual homicide (Chinnery, 1919e, p. 39). It was also politically astute of the Hunjara to allow an important government official, the resident patrol officer, to witness some of the acceptable parts of the ritual. This then allied him, politically, to their culture and way of life (see also Waiko, 1989).

Chinnery and Beaver also made detailed observations of the movements of the Binandere tribes who lived in the Mambare and Kumusi divisions, and these notes became their second published paper on ethnology (Chinnery and Beaver, 1917, pp. 158–64; and NLA: MS 766/3/8). Apart from the extensive notes on ethnology, they also produced a substantial table of comparative languages collected from the Kokoda and Buna regions that belonged to the Binandere, Yema-Yarawe, Mawai, Tahari, Aiga, Yega, Tain Daware and Jegasa Sarau peoples. These groups make up the Orokaiva peoples. This paper not only contains details about tribal movements and the occupation and forfeit of lands along the northern coast and hinterland of Papua, but it also contains considerable details of tribal ancestor stories.

These details form the basis for local group history and claims to land and resources. Much of this information was later used by F E Williams in his books, Orokaiva Magic (1928), and Orokaiva Society (1930), the latter of which is perhaps Williams’ best book. Beaver and Chinnery were apparently able to
concentrate on ethnology and linguistic investigations, and on mapping the regions because nearly all areas in these divisions had been visited. This made the region ‘settled’ or ‘controlled’. Chinnery’s personal papers contain his original field notes and diaries from this period (NLA: MS 766/3/9–13).

In these notes he first reported on the activities of the Baigona men and the impact of this cult on the people of the Mambare region. Baigona was a snake cult that originated in the Tufi (Cape Nelson) area south of Buna. Maine, the Baigona cult leader, was supposedly killed and his body taken to the top of Mount Victory, near Cape Nelson, where it was believed that his heart was cut out of his body, dried and then smoked. Maine, who remained alive, was then initiated by the spirits into cult lore. Upon returning to his community, Maine displayed his smoked heart and, using his powers, proceeded to instruct other Baigona men in the use of beneficial plants and how to maintain control over rain; he also taught that all snakes were sacred. Although the colonial administration tried to suppress this cult, it spread quickly along the northern coast via mediums who claimed to have been visited by the spirit. The spirit communicated instructions in gardening, hunting magic and the preparation of food; it was reported that some young people, when taught the cult lore, went into trances.

Chinnery, by now a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute and a member of the Royal Geographical Society, was obviously interested in cult activities in his regions. He collaborated with Haddon on a new paper reviewing knowledge on five ‘religious’ cults in Papua, the Torres Strait and Dutch New Guinea (Chinnery and Haddon, 1917). In this article, perhaps the first documented study of a ‘cargo’ cult in Melanesia, the reports of the Kava-keva and Kekesi cults were written by Chinnery, while Haddon wrote on the history of a cult found in Dutch New Guinea (using translated information), a report on Baigona and one on German Wislin, a ‘cargo’ cult from Saibai Island in Torres Strait.

Kava-keva was a second food spirit cult that developed among the Binandere in 1914, when a local man, Boninia, told people that they had to follow the taro spirit or all the food gardens would fail. People were ordered not to take weapons into the gardens, to attend to the gardens better, not to waste food and to handle food with care. Boninia then moved south to Kumusi Division and gradually the cult practices died away. The Kekesi rites were introduced to people along the Gira River in Mambare Division by Manau, who was called by Chinnery ‘a most plausible rogue’ (Chinnery and Haddon, 1917, p. 452). Kekesi followers were also told to maintain moral standards, cultivate food gardens properly, offer songs of praise to the Kekesi spirit and to march in single file to the gardens. When Manau claimed that Kekesi was a friend of Jesus Christ, the rites were forbidden by the government. By then the practices had spread as far as south as Buna Bay. Variations on the taro cult continued for some time in the Mambare and Kumusi divisions.

Haddon’s notes were written a year before he received Chinnery’s papers. In his section of the journal article, Haddon reported on a cult found in Geelvink
Bay in Dutch New Guinea, and his comment that ‘An awakening of religious activity is a frequent characteristic of periods of social unrest’ (Chinnery and Haddon, 1917, p. 455) is, for the time in which the paper was written, a perceptive analysis of the reasons behind cult activity in Melanesia. Cult activities were generally viewed as signs that native peoples were irrational, lacked emotional stability and were easily dominated by sorcery and witchcraft.

Haddon then documented the Baigona cult that grew up around the Tufi (Cape Nelson) area of the Kumusi Division, presumably using notes and correspondence supplied by Chinnery. Government attention to the Baigona cult focused on the reports that followers had to pay the Baigona leaders for instruction on the rites, that the followers then stated they had power of life and death over other people, and that Baigona men were not required to work and could spend their time decorating themselves. At this time government regulations were imposed that required all men to pay a village tax, which meant that young men were forced onto the cash economy – either to work on the plantations, in the mining camps or to go into domestic service. Cult activity that excluded some men from work was therefore seen as resistance to government regulations. In some areas, men were jailed for participation.

Haddon’s second example of religious activity centred around a ‘prophet’, Tokerau, from Milne Bay in the south-east corner of Papua, who threatened violent storms and tidal waves unless people abandoned the ‘white’ men and returned to custom ways when the spirits of the dead would return. Over 300 pigs were killed and eaten but after Tokerua was imprisoned and no cataclysm eventuated, the cult faded.

Information for the third cult, German Wislin, was presumably obtained from letters with officials in the Torres Strait as Haddon maintained a wide circle of correspondents during the editing of his Cambridge Expedition volumes and he did not return to Papua until 1914. The cult occurred on Saibai Island, officially not part of Papua but located just off the Papuan coast in the Torres Strait. It operated between 1913 and 1914 when three men formed the organisation, German Wislin, and promoted themselves as generals and captains.

All men on Saibai were told to go to the graveyard and anyone remaining an unbeliever was threatened with punishment if they did not comply with the orders of the movement. While waiting for the arrival of the Markai (spirits of the dead), all people were to refrain from working. The spirits were to come, sail to Saibai with bounty, defeat the whites and return all the goods taken to the village people. In the end, no spirits came and the cult activities died away. German Wislin was the only real ‘cargo’ cult mentioned in this paper, but cargoism continued to grow in colonial Papua and New Guinea (Lattas, 1992; Lindstrom, 2000).

Cult activities retain their strong intangible presence in Melanesia. In her discussion of cult activities on Malaita in the Solomon Islands, Judith Bennett wrote:
Although the … cult was a religious phenomenon, its message was essentially political, as the government’s attempts at containment showed. In expression, each movement found a different metaphor to illustrate the same fundamental theme – a metaphor that was an abstraction of decades of different experiences with Europeans and their economy, which had been determined ultimately by the number and character of human and nonhuman natural resources of the islands.4

Cult activities developed in areas of early contact, where the cash economy took root quickly and powerfully, and where the physical, psychological and social presence of whites was most keenly felt.

In October 1916 Murray spelt out his ideas on the value of anthropology to colonial administration in a letter to the Minister for External Affairs (NAA: A452, 1959/4708). In this letter he sought to explain how the services of a trained anthropologist, or ethnologist, could reconcile native opinion with the general advancement and development of Papua and how ‘best to assist the native take part in the general movement of civilization and progress’. Murray did not want an expert who would frame native policy but rather someone who could advise a sympathetic government on understanding the native mind, one of the basic concepts behind his policy of indirect rule (Murray, 192–; Lattas, 1996; Campbell, 1998, p. 74). In reality, there was no official policy of indirect rule, for Murray’s rule could better be described as ‘autocratic benevolent paternalism’.

**Kunimaipa Valley**

Meanwhile, early in 1917 Chinnery had led a patrol to the country north of Mount Yule, in the region behind the Lakekamu Goldfield. This patrol was an impressive achievement and later recorded by Murray in two of his books (Murray, 1925 and 192–). In his report to the Australian Parliament, Murray called it one of the ‘most important patrols of the year’.5

The patrol explored the Kunimaipa Valley and then moved up the Owen Stanley Range to Lake Wawaru in the former German New Guinea. At 10,800 feet the lake was the headwaters of the Waria River that flowed to the northern Mambare coast. The aim of the patrol was to examine all the unexplored and imperfectly known country in the region. Chinnery wrote of the tribal groups that occupied the Mount Yule, Mount Chapman and Mount St Mary regions; named Mount Strong; made notes on the various languages spoken in the area; and provided geological notes for the administration.

Chinnery’s description of the relationships between the patrol members and the villagers illustrate the inequalities in the power of representation between the literate, educated white patrol officer and the illiterate ‘primitive’. In the

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Omeri region near the Akaifu watershed, the people of this large fertile alluvial river valley:

… manifested their pleasure at our visit, particularly the children, who literally crawled all over the police and squatted in all unoccupied corners of the camp, gazing with rapt attention at their every movement. At the request of the natives I demonstrated the superiority of the rifle, and their expressions of wonder at the magical power which drives bullets right through tree trunks were most amusing.  

Despite the condescension, Chinnery found time to record important ethnological details:

In one of the houses [of the Lamina people who lived below the southern spurs of Mount Chapman] I found the frame of a headdress, beautifully balanced spears pointed at both ends, well-rounded bows of black palm, ornamented with plaited grass and rings of hide from wallaby tails, heavy-headed sticks or waddies of black palm, and the long black plumes of the long-tailed bird of paradise …

This patrol was one of the most significant achievements of Chinnery’s career as a district officer and he deserves credit for its success in opening up the high mountainous region on the edge of the central highlands. It was also clear that Chinnery was developing a strong interest in the ethnology of the Papuan peoples. Chinnery’s work is not acknowledged: McArthur in her report on the peoples of the Kunamaipa Valley makes no reference to his pioneering patrol (McArthur, 1971, pp. 155–89), although C H Karius would have had access to Chinnery’s records before making his well-known expedition to Kunimaipa in 1923 and 1924 (see NLA: PIC P535, Album 815, below).

### War service

World War II (1914–18) led to great changes in the administration of the Australian colonies. Young men in the district service, as well as tradesmen and clerks, enlisted for war service and more than a third of all field officers in Papua volunteered (West, 1968, p. 162). This severely depleted the number of administrative officers left in Papua. In former German New Guinea, occupied by Australian forces in 1914, the military were to remain in control of administration until the early 1920s.

In November 1917 Chinnery was finally given permission to enlist in the Australian Flying Corps and was posted to England. He arrived in early 1918; following the Armistice, he took advantage of demobilisation in England to study for a Diploma of Anthropology at Cambridge, then one of the leading centres of ethnological study in England. The diploma course offered studies in

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historical anthropology, ethnology (including sociology and comparative religion), physical anthropology and psychological anthropology. It also required candidates for the diploma to present a dissertation to the university (Haddon, 1908).

World War I, with its mass slaughter, wounding, gassing and death by disease, was also undertaken in the name of civilization and patriotism. It may have surprised the ‘primitive natives’ of Papua to find themselves being led out of the darkness into light by the same nations that could so easily butcher their young men. One victim of the war was Wilfred Beaver (NAA: B2455, Beaver, WN). He too had enlisted; he was posted to France as an officer in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) in 1916, and by September 1917 he was dead. This was indeed a loss for ethnology, for Beaver was an accurate and competent observer of social life and custom. His monograph on the coastal people of Western Province, written when he was based at Daru, was published posthumously in 1920 with a foreword by the Finnish anthropologist Gunnar Landtman, who had also worked in that area between 1910 and 1912, also under the mentorship of Haddon (Beaver, 1920).

Research at Cambridge

At Cambridge, Haddon became Chinnery’s long-term mentor and close colleague. Chinnery was obviously a dedicated and capable student and, during his stay in Christ’s College, wrote three unpublished and four published papers (Chinnery, 1919a to 1919f, and 1920). In December 1919, Haddon wrote to the lieutenant-colonel in charge of education and employment in the Department of Rehabilitation and Demobilisation of the AIF to say:

His [Chinnery’s] training [at Cambridge] has been extensive and intensive … He is an enthusiastic and hard working student and by his wide and deep knowledge of the Ethnology of Papua has been enabled rapidly to assimilate the instruction given …

Haddon also commented that Chinnery’s successful thesis on stoneworking and goldmining in New Guinea was to be published by the Royal Anthropological Institute and that Chinnery had plans to put together a monograph on the mountain tribes of Papua from Mount Obree, in the southern Rigo District, to Mount Chapman in the north, and that this would include ethnological details about the tribes north of Mount Lamington as well as the people of the hinterlands of the eastern Gulf Division.

This, Haddon wrote, had the approval and support of the Cambridge University Press. Chinnery had also proposed to submit the topic ‘The Peoples of the Mambare and Kumusi Districts, Papua’ as a PhD thesis at Cambridge (NLA: MS 766/3/14). In Haddon’s short statement, we may see both the cause of the dislocation between Chinnery and Murray, and the reason for

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8 NAA: B2455, Chinnery, EWP
Chinnery’s long-held self-criticism over his lack of success as a professional anthropologist. Chinnery’s successful dissertation at Cambridge on stoneworking and goldmining in New Guinea was indeed published by the Royal Anthropological Institute (Chinnery, 1919d).

However, it contains highly speculative and inaccurate findings that show the influence of contact with the heliocentric school of ethnology of William J Perry and Grafton Elliot Smith of University College, London (Perry, 1923). Perry reproduced Chinnery’s Papuan map in his popular book, *Children of the Sun* (Perry: 1923, p. 291). This diffusionist theory, which placed Egypt at 2000 BC as the cradle of most of the ‘artifices of civilization’ (Kuper, 1973, p. 15), was a powerful force in academic circles in the 1920s.

Chinnery’s paper on stonework and gold fields expressed the view that:

… the New Guinea objects [mortars, pestles, stone circles and incised stone work] appear to be similar in many respects to objects associated with megalithic cultures in other parts of the world,9 

and that he was of the opinion that ‘we are forced to conclude that they [the objects] were part of a culture which has failed to survive’ (Chinnery, 1920, p. 280). Perry (1923) had linked megalithic cultures, pearling and goldmining with a belief in fertility rites and soul-substance. Chinnery also produced a paper at this time on the belief in soul and soul-substance (Chinnery, 1919f). The ‘children of the sun’ debate continue for many years, and drew Haddon (1925), Murray (1926, 1928) and Chinnery (1927a) into the fray, but by the early 1930s had been largely discredited.

Later studies on the ecology of the highland fringe area and the changing patterns of land use have shown that mortars and pestles were used by horticulturalists for crushing forest fruits and nuts prior to the widespread introduction of the sweet potato in the highlands about 300 years ago. Agriculture with sweet potato transformed the patterns of human settlement and led to widespread pig-raising and changes in ceremonial practices. These developments occurred during the early periods of colonial peace in both territories (Brown, 1978; Ballard and others, 2005). Much of this information was unavailable to colonial officers in the early 1920s, although Chinnery continued to express many of these conservative ideas in radio broadcasts made between 1957 and 1959 (NAA: A452, 1957/2232). In fact, a Radio Australia general publicity release emphasised the stonework and goldfields theory as one of the main points to be examined in Chinnery’s presentations.

However, during Chinnery’s period at Cambridge he also wrote useful and coherent papers that formulated his position on the value of anthropology in colonial administration (Chinnery, 1919e); he also wrote a paper on his record as a district officer (Chinnery, 1920), which, while he tends to emphasise his own skills, competence and achievements, is nevertheless a factual account of his colourful experiences in Papua. Chinnery presented his paper on the

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9 Chinnery, 1920, p. 279.
opening of new territories in Papua to a select meeting of the Royal Geographical Society in London in early 1920. He was congratulated on his presentation by the president of the society, Francis Barton, who had been Administrator in British New Guinea. Other members of the society who similarly congratulated Chinnery included Haddon, Sir George Le Hunte and W Mersh Strong, all men of considerable experience in colonial administration. The only recorded critic was Alexander Wollaston, a renowned explorer who had led the British Ornithological Union’s expedition to Dutch New Guinea in 1912 and 1913, who commented:

Mr Chinnery objects to inter-tribal warfare. Well, we have spent years in killing each other, at great expense, to make the world free for democracy … I do not think really it is fair of us to inflict what we are pleased to call our Western civilization on these people. You [Chinnery] call them savages. … I hope they [colonial governments] go very slowly about this modifying of institutions. They have an extraordinary interesting culture of which we know very little, and we have much to learn from them.10

Wollaston’s comments were duly noted for the record, and then politely ignored in the general call for a vote of thanks. The 1920s was a time for a re-evaluation of theoretical concepts in British anthropology. Prior to this, empiricism was the rule, stressing the accumulation of data rather than grand theoretical formulation.

Chinnery’s research methodology continued to emphasise this empirical approach, although empiricism was overtaken by the rise of functionalism and the ascendancy of careerists like Malinowski, Fortune and Mead. While empiricism still had its place in ‘scientific’ anthropology, the disorderly, a-theoretical accumulation of ethnographic data was rapidly superseded.

Unfortunately, none of the hard work and the presentation of these Cambridge papers would have endeared Chinnery to Murray. They did little to advance his status and chances of re-employment in Papua. Attempts to link Papuan people to any romantic notions of ancient ‘civilisations’ would have been anathema to the colonial regime. Despite Murray’s claim to liberalism and indirect rule, colonial administration was deeply committed to the expansion of the cash economy, to the support of missions and mission-based education and the establishment of law and good governance. Educational levels were maintained at an elementary standard; young men and women were keenly sought as indentured labourers and domestics rather than as educated, thinking members of society, and villagers were compelled by regulation to be law-abiding, compliant and respectful.

Haddon had noted that in his report to the Demobilisation Board that Chinnery had been working towards a book on tribes in three areas of Papua – Mount Obree to Mount Chapman, the region north of Mount Lamington, and

10 Barton and others, 1920, p. 457.
the coast and hinterland of the Gulf of Papua. These were the areas Chinnery had patrolled with such success early in his district service career.

Chinnery had also impressed others at the university for, according to Haddon in his report to the Demobilisation Board, the Cambridge University Press had taken the most unusual step of asking Chinnery to submit the manuscript of this book on mountain tribes for its consideration and to write another [unnamed] book for publication.\(^{11}\) It is a great pity Chinnery never concentrated on this exercise as the history of contact in parts of these areas still needs to be written.

Following Chinnery’s time in England, and his marriage to the remarkable Sarah Neill (Chinnery, S, and Fortune (ed.), 1998; Sarah Chinnery papers, NLA: MS 8974), he returned to Australia. Murray was notified of his pending return to Papua in 1920 but, to Chinnery’s disappointment and, no doubt, surprise (for skilled, experienced district officers were in short supply following the war), Chinnery was not offered a position back with the District Service.

In one of his many, and often revealing, letters to his brother, Murray wrote in late 1919:

> I am writing to Marett [at Oxford] this mail to ask him if he can find me an anthropologist. – I hope he can, I would give him £400 a year with a first class fare to Port Moresby and £50 for outfit. If they add German New Guinea to Papua (which seems unlikely) he may get more.\(^{12}\)

In the meantime Murray had also made it clear that he would not consider reappointing Chinnery to any post in Papua. He had earlier written to his brother:

> We have a man called Chinnery who is in England now – Haddon has a great opinion of him and wants him appointed. But he will not do at all – he is quite unreliable as to observation, collection of evidence etc – he will say any mortal thing in order to excite interest and attract attention. Not that he is a liar – but he must attract notice. \(^{13}\)

For his part, it appears that Chinnery disliked Murray in return:

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\(^{11}\) NAA: B2455, Chinnery, EWP  
\(^{12}\) Murray and West, 1970; and Murray to Gilbert Murray, 2 December 1919, held in the Murray Family papers (NLA: MS 565). Murray much later had his wish and appointed his Oxford man, F E Williams.  
\(^{13}\) Murray and West, 1970, pp. 106–07; see also Murray Family papers (NLA: MS 565) and Campbell, 1998, p. 73.
He [Chinnery] was not on good terms either with local Europeans or with Lieut-Governor (Sir) Hubert Murray … whom he disliked as something of a humbug.\textsuperscript{14}

Undoubtedly Murray was a difficult man. Francis West, Murray’s biographer, wrote:

There was a subjective and capricious element in Murray’s judgement and choice of men, and he seems to have preferred sheer physical endurance and courage to the more introspective qualities of some of his officers.\textsuperscript{15}

Chinnery was complimented on his stamina and courage while patrolling but as he became more intellectually interested in local people – more ‘introspective’ – he fell out of favour.

**Government Anthropologist of Papua**

In 1921 Murray appointed Wallace E Armstrong as Assistant Government Anthropologist of Papua, pending the appointment of a more permanent officer.

Armstrong had conducted research in the Suau-Tawala region of the South-Eastern Division of Papua in 1919 and on Rossel Island, at the end of the Louisiades, in 1921. Armstrong declined the appointment as the Government Anthropologist and returned to Cambridge to follow an academic career (Armstrong, 1921, 1922 and 1928; Urry, 1985).

Following Armstrong, W Mersh Strong, the Chief Medical Officer, filled the position of Government Anthropologist until 1928. Strong had conducted medical and exploratory patrols in Papua (Strong, 1908 and 1916) but he was not an anthropologist, although he had written on the Raro and Mekeo languages (Strong, 1914). His only significant publications as Government Anthropologist were notes on the correct diets for indentured labourers (Strong 1926a and b). However, in 1923 Murray succeeded in appointing F E Williams as Assistant Government Anthropologist to serve under Strong. Williams was then in a position to be appointed to the position of Government Anthropologist when Strong retired. Williams was to become the longest serving, and last, Government Anthropologist of Papua.

In the meantime, Chinnery had completed his temporary duties as a labour adviser with New Guinea Copper and in 1924 moved on to higher duties in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea. He left his Papua experiences behind in assorted papers and reports that were never compiled into the significant publication that he wanted to produce. Many years later Chinnery was to write to his mentor Haddon:

\textsuperscript{14} *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, volume 7, 1891–1939, A–Q, p. 639.

\textsuperscript{15} West, 1968, p. 162.
I made a great mistake in not remaining at Cambridge to take a
degree [Doctor of Philosophy]. It would probably have given my
advisory work the weight necessary to compel my seniors to take it
more seriously. In far too many cases they have found themselves in
the ditch I tried to keep them out of. However, I shall keep
plodding ahead; patience will win in the end …I have read
Williams’s book [Orokaiva Society] and enjoyed it. He is an infinitely
better writer than I will ever be, but his book doesn’t make the
‘orokaiva’ live as I saw him live. There was a time when I spoke
and thought in ‘orokaiva’ and practically ‘felt’ in ‘orokaiva’ but I
despair of ever being able to present that in print.16

Chinnery underestimated himself. He left an archival legacy that Williams did
not provide: one that opens a whole spectrum on the colonial experience. He
deserves greater recognition.

Conclusion

Prior to his departure for the war in France, Chinnery also patrolled the Kikori
District in the Delta Division (now the Gulf Province). He wrote of his
experiences again while at Cambridge (Chinnery, 1920).

The patrol was part of a major expedition to capture the murderers of the
Assistant Resident Magistrate, R D Kirby. Government control of the swampy,
tidal delta region of the Kikori, Purari, Aird and Omati rivers was never very
successful. Like the Western Division, it remained isolated, inhospitable and
threatening. The Delta Division was never ‘controlled’ or ‘settled’.

Francis West wrote of Chinnery:

He belonged to the generation before Malinowski and Radcliffe-
Brown who so deeply influence anthropology. He supplied useful
contemporary raw material on native society, but his type of work
was overtaken by the new professional standards of the 1920s and
1930s.17

This may seem harsh criticism of a man who had many talents, considerable
charm (it is said) and was a long-servicing and dedicated administrator.

This paper, however, is a comment on his anthropology. Chinnery would have
been a better anthropologist with more training as a writer and the
development of better analytical skills. He appears to have believed that he
was not influential, but he held the power of representation that the local
people themselves did not have. Despite his self-criticisms, he remained true to
his two aims: ‘the general training in anthropological subjects for all District
Officers’, and ‘the publication and circulation of all existing and subsequent
records of New Guinea ethnology for the guidance of such officers’ (Chinnery,
1919e, p. 41).

He was able to reach these goals not by his own anthropological research but by following his teacher, Haddon, and mentoring others. He supported and encouraged the attendance of field officers at the University of Sydney and, by facilitating the work of other professional researchers, he assisted in the wider development of Melanesian anthropology.

**Postscript**

This paper is the first of two studies of the ethnographic writings of EW Pearson Chinnery. The second paper will focus on his work in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea between 1924 and 1937, when he corresponded with many of the famous names in anthropology and acted as a facilitator for many researchers in New Guinea.

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