

**Stephen Gapps, *Gudyarra: the first war of Wiradyuri Resistance – The Bathurst War, 1822-1824*, NewSouth, Sydney, 2021, xi + 276 pages; ISBN 97817422367111.**

In *Gudyarra*, Stephen Gapps provides a rich, insightful and meticulously researched account of the opening phase of the invasion of Wiradyuri lands by British imperialism and the fierce resistance of Wiradyuri people to this process.

*Gudyarra* continues exploration of two key themes that ran through Gapps' celebrated 2018 book *The Sydney Wars*. First, he demonstrates that British pastoral expansion was a thoroughly militarised process, with strategic concerns about how best to meet and defeat Aboriginal resistance guiding when, where and how new settlements were established. Second, Gapps is concerned to 'shatter the idea' that Aboriginal resistance was sporadic and opportunistic, forensically piecing together evidence about the extraordinary scale and effectiveness of Wiradyuri warfare.

Having carefully walked through Bathurst and surrounds as part of his research methodology, Gapps punctures his account of the advance or retreat of colonists and Aboriginal resistance fighters with descriptions of landscapes, landmarks and architecture that remain today. This compelling device, also used in *The Sydney Wars*, helps to embed the history of warfare into the contemporary world we move through, transforming our understanding of both. A deeper

appreciation of place is also aided by the maps of conflict sites, drawn by Wiradyuri artist Nyree Reynolds, that accompany every chapter.

The opening chapters of *Gudyarra* pick up the story of British invasion where *The Sydney Wars* left off, in the wake of a brutal counter-insurgency campaign against the peoples of the Sydney basin, initiated by Governor Macquarie in 1816. The early pace of colonisation of Wiradyuri lands was slow and controlled. While a Grand Depot was established at Bathurst as a 'military outpost', the minimal presence of colonists and stock from 1815-1821 kept conflict to a minimum. Gapps quotes Wiradyuri historian Mary Coe who has argued, 'As long as the whites didn't interfere with their lives, [Wiradyuri people] would be prepared to share a part of the land with them.'

These dynamics changed abruptly in 1822, after new Governor Brisbane sought to satiate the appetite of wealthy stock owners for pasture in the 'promised lands' over the Blue Mountains. Up to 1821 only 2520 acres of Wiradyuri Country had been allocated to pastoralists. In the next four years this increased more than 36 times, reaching 91,636 acres in 1825.

The flood of armed colonists, sheep and cattle from 1822 constituted a 'colonial apocalypse' for the Wiradyuri, a powerful concept that Gapps borrows from Ambeyang historian Callum Clayton-Dixon's work on the invasion of New England. Faced with the destruction of their livelihoods and

increasing settler violence, Wiradyuri began to wage 'all-out resistance warfare'. After years of relative peace, the British now faced 'the largest and most powerful nation that they had encountered, or would encounter, in Australia', fully mobilised for fighting that far surpassed the intensity of anything described in *The Sydney Wars*.

Gapps masterfully pieces together the full extent of the 1822-1824 Wiradyuri campaign from disparate sources. He paints a convincing picture of coordinated attacks, by multiple war bands with hundreds of people, across the vast expanse of Wiradyuri country. By the time of the most intense fighting in the winter of 1824, Wiradyuri had forced outstations and even major government stations like Swallow Creek to be abandoned; killed around 20 colonists and wounded many more; killed large numbers of sheep and cattle; and stolen goods, clothing, guns and ammunition. Gandangarra people from the mountains to the south and even Aboriginal people from South Coast New South Wales had travelled to join the fighting.

Governor Brisbane declared martial law in August 1824, precipitating a series of massacres, openly discussed in the Sydney press as a 'war of extermination'. While the devastating scale of this mass slaughter has been documented previously, Gapps carefully unpacks the way massacre operated as the premier anti-insurgency strategy used in New South Wales, designed to

decisively crush resistance to pastoral expansion.

Pressure to execute this horrific 'solution' to effective Wiradyuri resistance flowed directly from the expansionist logic of colonial capitalism. In the months prior to the declaration of martial law, the most wealthy and powerful figures in the colony, the 'stockholders of New South Wales', convened in Sydney to demand extermination. In May 1824 the Australian Agricultural Company was formed in London, to mobilise 'large Capital' behind the new opportunities to 'breed fine wooled sheep' on 'fine grazing country'. Securing Bathurst and surrounds from Wiradyuri resistance was key to unlocking the potential of these new lands, and necessitated Wiradyuri genocide: 'The unfettered march of "large Capital" west of the Blue Mountains could not be jeopardised.'

*Gudyarra* is part of an exciting new wave of military history, including work by Wiradyuri historian Angus Murray, that is deepening our understanding of the scale and intensity of Aboriginal resistance. Hopefully we will soon see another instalment of Gapps' work on the warfare that forged the foundations of Australia.

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