

A Strange Symbol of Identity

“King’s Plates” are often a sensitive issue amongst Aboriginal people. They can be a symbol of one of the worst periods in Aboriginal history.

Originally the plates (and similiar tokens) marked the demise of traditional Aboriginal society and the white man’s assertion of his authority.

Typically a farmer or stationowner would bestow his recognition of leadership upon which ever tribal elder had proved most compliant with the white settlers.

Sometimes the rightful leader or “King” was ignored. Always the decision as to who would be

accorded the “honour” of receiving a plate or whatever—as if such recognition were necessary—was at the discretion of the new settler rather than the traditional inhabitants of the land.

Despite their sordid history and ugly connotations today these plates are often highly valued possessions among the black descendents of the original owners.

At Walgett, for instance, Mrs Kathleen Dodd has in her possession a plate produced in 1913 by Mr Charles Clark in acknowledgement of “Tinker—King of the ‘Murgadool’ ”.

Jimmy Tinker was a grandfather of Mrs Dodd. She claimed he was born in the 1850’s and died in about 1929.

The King’s Plate in the possession of Mrs Kathleen Dodd of Walgett

