Mapping an ancestral past: discovering the Charles Richards’ maps of Aboriginal South-Eastern Australia

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Abstract: Drawn in 1892, the Charles Richards’ maps locate 208 Aboriginal linguistic groups in south-eastern Australia. In 2009 the maps were rediscovered in the departmental archives of Museum Victoria. The maps are an important new nineteenth-century source for understanding the boundaries of language groups at that time. Richards interviewed Aboriginal people and recorded their languages and customs. As an ethnologist, Richards seems not to have been involved in many of the correspondence networks that were central to nineteenth-century ethnology and he was therefore little known in his own time and subsequently. Some of his word-list/dictionaries were published in 1902 in the journal Science of Man, but his maps have never been published before. This paper explores what is known about Richards, his research methodology and his work to compile the maps. The construction of these maps points to the importance of Charles Richards as a nineteenth-century ethnologist. His story is a window into nineteenth-century ethnology and Aboriginal/settler relations, and necessitates further research into this little-known figure.

Introduction
In mid-2009 I was searching through the early departmental archives of Museum Victoria’s ethnographic collection, known colloquially as ‘The Bunker’. Consisting of more than 60 boxes, the archive is the accumulation of 100 years of curatorial notes and correspondence. Within this archive, I came across a file titled ‘C Richards’, which contained two maps, a key (Figures 1, 2 and 3) and a short essay. The documents still showed the marks of a bodkin and appeared to be untouched in the 107 years since the creation of the file. For reasons discussed below, the documents were probably considered an oddity at the time and filed away. The file contents were like a rare eureka moment, the point at which a researcher stumbles on a significant connection to the past. The maps locate Aboriginal groups in south-eastern Australia, covering an area from Brisbane to the western shores of Lake Eyre, and as far south as northern Tasmania. They are remarkable in the amount of data gathered and are also significant because of their date. Drawn by Richards and reproduced as a roneo or stencil print in 1892, they are perhaps the most detailed maps of their age in terms of coverage. They are a new historical source for linguistic groups in south-eastern Australia, and represent the most comprehensive attempt yet discovered to list and locate Aboriginal communities over such a broad geographical area before Norman Tindale’s landmark 1940 map of Aboriginal tribal groups in Australia.

From the little that is known about him, Charles Richards appears to have been a thorough
Mapping an ancestral past: The Charles Richard’s maps

researcher who must have accumulated a rich and detailed knowledge of Aboriginal language and culture in south-eastern Australia. Richards’ knowledge may have matched that of the leading Australian ethnologists/anthropologists of his day, yet his publications are few. In 1902 Alan Carroll, the president of the Royal Anthropological Society of Australasia and editor of its journal, the *Science of Man*, recognised Richards’ maps as ‘valuable’ and ‘important to Australian Scientists’ (Carroll 1902: v) but never published them, nor do copies survive in the Alan Carroll papers. It is a stroke of luck that these maps were donated by Richards to the National Museum of Victoria archive and have survived today.

The maps

The first map (Figure 1) is titled ‘The Aborigines of Victoria, N.S. Wales and South Australia by C. Richards (Bendigo 1892)’ and represents ‘the location of 208 Tribes, with their correct names gathered during three years constant travel among them (over the whole area represented) and from other available data’. It is accompanied by a key (Figure 1 and 2). The second map (Figure 3), entitled ‘Map shewing [sic] aboriginal tribes having one name in common’, was an attempt by Richards to spatially depict the migration of language groups from northern to southern Australia, based on the philology of names. In this paper, I contextualise these maps by outlining the biographical information known about Richards, and his ideas and motives. In researching the story of these maps and their creator, we are re-examining the world of late-nineteenth century ethnology. This was a world of amateur research, in which the aims and purpose of research were very different from twenty-first century anthropology and Aboriginal

Figure 1: ‘The Aborigines of Victoria, N.S. Wales and South Australia by C. Richards (Bendigo 1892)’. Refer to Figure 2 for the rest of the key to this map. Source: Museum Victoria XMS749
Mapping an ancestral past: The Charles Richard’s maps

Knapman

history. Finally, I discuss the maps’ construction, briefly compare them with other known maps from the period, and provide comment on their potential as an historical resource.

Searching for Charles Richards

In his recent biography of RH Mathews, Martin Thomas (2011:ix, 15–58) coined the term ‘ethnomania’ to describe the almost frenetic collecting activities of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century men who became known as ethnologists. This community of enthusiasts was united by private obsessions in collecting and circulating information about Indigenous ‘races’ and customs. Tom Griffiths (1996:9–23) has portrayed this as the antipodean version of the European antiquarian imagination in which enthusiasts for history and science consumed knowledge of the past, exotic cultures and the new scientific discoveries of their age. Although both Thomas and Griffiths present ethnologists in colonial and early federation Australia as a group coalescing around a shared interest in Indigenous Australia, they also comment that many of these men shared isolated existences. Thus Thomas (2011:13) maintains that Mathews had a ‘secretive demeanour’ and that many details of his life did not survive in the archive. Griffiths (1996:28–54) describes an even more elusive figure, Reynell Eveleigh Johns, who collected curios of nature and recorded all the scientific oddities that he had heard and read about in his scrapbooks and diary. While some ethnologists published profusely, the work of others is only known through archive materials. Thus while Mathews’ printed publications totalled 2200 pages, Johns published nothing and it is only through chance that his surviving papers passed at various stages into the archives of Museum Victoria and the State Library. Many other ethnographic enthusiasts existed (such as a ‘Mr Gordon’, who Alfred Kenyon referred to as a ‘famous collector’ (Kenyon and Mann 1916:5)), but few details of these men and the information they recorded survive. Believing Aboriginal people faced extinction, this group was united in

Figure 2: Key to Figure 1 produced by Charles Richards entitled ‘Aborigines of Victoria, N. S. Wales and South Aust.’ The key is continued on Figure 1. Source: Museum Victoria XM5749
a passion for recording Aboriginal customs before it was ‘too late’. But despite their motivation and the quantity of work they undertook, in many cases little of the results of their research survive — or even much evidence of their own existence. Charles Richards is one such figure.

In all the citations to his few brief publications, Richards was only known as ‘C. Richards’. In an attempt to find more information about this individual, in 2000 Museum Victoria made a display within the Bunjilaka exhibition asking members of the public if they had any relevant information, including whether ‘C. Richards’ was a man or woman.

In 1993 Dianne Hosking and Sally McNicol used Richards’ lists of Wiradjuri words for their dictionary of Wiradjuri, but the information they knew about him was scanty: ‘C. Richards published a vocabulary list of approximately 2,000 words in the Science of Man (1902–3) (over eight issues). It is not known how he obtained his material or what his connection was with Wiradjuri people’ (Hosking and McNicol 1993:6).

Figure 3: ‘Map shewing [sic] aboriginal tribes having one name in common by C. Richards Bendigo 1892’. Source: Museum Victoria XM5749

Norman Tindale also used Richards’ word lists in constructing Aboriginal Tribes of Australia, but did not know of Richards’ maps. He wrote of Richards:

C. Richards (1901) published a study of the Nanja horde with details of ages of forty-two persons of whom seven were then dead. This showed an increase of five after 1891–1892. His system of transcription was complex, but he indicated they were of the Dthang’gha or ‘upland’ people who lived west of the Darling River. He placed them in his ‘Marra’warree Nation’. This tends to support the conclusion arrived at independently that they were Dangali, since his paper was discovered only after other facts had led to that assessment (Tindale 1974:130).

With the support of the protector for the Nanja group, ‘Senior-Constable McMillian of Pooncarie’, Richards visited the group first in 1897 and then again in 1901 (Richards 1903b:124). As Tindale outlines, Richards wrote an extensive account of
the history of this group, which was also known as the ‘Scotia Blacks’ after the Scotia grazing run, where they lived (Richards 1903b:123–5). They had lived in isolation for 30 years after Nanja, their founder, killed somebody and ‘disappeared with another man’s wife’ into the desert regions of north-western New South Wales (Richards 1903b:123; Tindale 1974:130). Richards’ account gives details of the 42 descendents of Nanja up until 1901 (Richards 1903b:124). He attributes his account to Dan McGregor, ‘who knew Nganj’ya [Nanja]’ before he left the area in about 1860, and Dan Limbrass ‘an Aborigine of Menindie’ who ‘married “Jenny”, the oldest of ngan’ya’s [Nanja] daughters’ as his sources (Richards 1903b:124).

In the 1890s the term ‘Scotia Blacks’ became a euphemism for people returning to nature (Bushworker 1897). Richards’ account also includes a photograph of the group (Richards 1903b:125), a copy of which was later donated to the Australian Museum by Mrs E Rasmussen in 1951. Frederick McCarthy published a new account of the Nanja group in 1951 but this was devoid of the personal and family details recorded by Richards, suggesting that he did not know of Richards’ work. While Richards himself was an elusive figure, the records he has left of Aboriginal languages and groups are tantalisingly detailed.

By comparing his address on a 1902 letter to the National Museum of Victoria with details on the 1903 electoral roll, his name can be confirmed as Charles, his profession as ‘dentist’ and that he lived with a woman named Agnes Richards (Commonwealth of Australia 1903:v). A notice in the *Queanbeyan Age* (14 June 1902, p.2) refers to a ‘C Richards’ as a visiting dentist who had for the previous six years been engaged as ‘manager of the Melbourne Dental Company’, which operated out of 123 Swanston Street, a few blocks from the National Museum and opposite the Melbourne Town Hall (Sands and McDougall 1899). Although we do not know for certain if Richards worked as a travelling dentist while constructing his maps, we do know from his advertisements in the *Queanbeyan Age* (1902) that he worked in this capacity in rural New South Wales in 1902. His profession ensured that he travelled extensively in rural regions and, presumably, provided the opportunity and means for his work among Aboriginal communities.

In 1902–03, Richards published a number of articles in the *Science of Man*. In an editorial introducing this new correspondent, Alan Carroll (1902) provided some details about Richards’ life and work:

This work has been accomplished by extensive travel and study during several years by the compiler who was sent to Australia to collect native curiosities, and during his explorations and travels he collected the things which he has now sold to the society. He has also promised to give the society for printing in its journal, *Science Of Man*, each month, lists of hundreds of words in the native blacks’ dialects, the words of which he has taken down from the mouths of the blacks in a phonetic manner, with the consonants and vowels so marked as to represent the exact sounds. He has explained and described his methods to our officers, so that each dialect will be a faithful representation or reproduction of the native speeches. These lists will be valuable and specially interesting for philological or phonetic studies. We hope soon to complete arrangements for commencing and continuing the printing of these scientifically collected and arranged dialects of the blacks.

Although he does not provide any information about where Richards came from, Carroll suggests that he may have had patronage to support his ethnographic activities and therefore had some background in ethnology before coming to Australia. In one of his contributions to the *Science of Man*, Richards (1903b:120) maintained that ‘the collector, recorder, or transcriber of languages should…have some training for it [languages] before embarking on his, by no means, easy task’ of transcription. These observations suggest that he did have some training in languages and philology. However, the fact that Richards listed his profession as a dentist in the 1902 census qualifies Carroll’s assertion that Richards came to Australia with patronage support to collect ethnographic objects. In the nineteenth century, ethnology was overwhelmingly a part-time amateur activity, and it was common for collectors to have unrelated careers that subsidised their ethnographic interests.
His few writings give some indication of the extent of his interest and motives. Similar to his contemporaries, Richards acquired collections of objects that he sold to museums, and also engaged in basic archaeological fieldwork that involved copying rock paintings and exhuming Aboriginal graves for bodies and artefacts; yet he also recorded the language and customs of Indigenous Australians (Carroll 1902; Richards 1902a, 1908). An unpublished manuscript that accompanied his maps, and which helps us to understand their theoretical framework, suggests he had a strong interest in religion and that he was probably a follower of Theosophy, a nineteenth-century religious-philosophical belief that combined scientific discoveries with ancient knowledge derived from an analysis of comparative religion and other ideas that challenged Christian orthodoxy (Richards 1892b:1).

Between 1889 and 1892, Richards constantly traversed south-eastern Australia. On his map of Aboriginal tribes (Figure 1) he states that he gathered the information ‘during three years constant travel among them [Aboriginal people] (over the whole area represented)’. In his publications he mentions conducting fieldwork in Bendigo, Cowra, Forbes, Yass, Pooncarie and Cobar (Richards 1902b:82; 1902e:182; 1903b:124). The provenance of the objects in the ethnographic collection that he sold to the National Museum of Victoria also covers large parts of south-eastern Australia (see below and Tables 1 to 5). Unfortunately, as there are no dates associated with the collection, we do not know if the objects were acquired before, after or during the period in which he compiled the language maps.

Richards also maintains he had a ‘close’ relationship with Aboriginal people and outlined his methodology as follows:

To obtain the words given has taken much time, patience, and a great amount of work. Every one is a phonetic transcription direct from the mouth of an aborigine. In some cases over a dozen were present — men and women — and no word was taken down that was not approved by all as correct...Of this tongue [Wiradjuri] I have submitted every word for verification to the following aborigines [sic], viz: ‘Bundaburra Jack’, aged 70, of Forbes (born at Wyalong); ‘Billy Podham’, aged 70, of Eugowra (born at Cowra) [in a later edition Richards states Podham was a gnondam ‘medicine man’]; ‘Mor’ree’ and wife, aged 35, of Cowra (born at Gundagai); ‘Tom Coe’ and ‘Brown’ of Cowra (initiated half-castes, aged 40, born on Murrumbidgee, near Narrandra’ (Richards 1902b:82).

In a later article he also names ‘Lucy Carroll, aged about 70 years, born near Molong, and now residing at Yass’ as providing ‘much of the information given by me in these columns’ (Richards 1902f:182). These individuals provided information that was published by Richards on the Wiradjuri language. However, as he said he was also planning to write articles on ‘South Australian and Victorian languages’ with each containing ‘about 1,000 words’ (Richards 1903b:119), it is likely that he had Aboriginal contacts in Victoria and South Australia and pursued a similar research methodology in these places.

It also appears that at least some Aboriginal people were prepared to trust him with secret cultural information. Similar to his contemporaries Alfred Howitt, RH Mathews and Baldwin Spencer, Richards focused on religion, and he recorded that Aboriginal people showed trepidation in giving him secret information. In one instance, for example, ‘the man who told me the name of their God, though a half-cast [sic], had been initiated, but had forsaken the ways of his fathers, yet was dreadfully frightened to tell me the name, and other things concerning God, least some evil should overtake him’ (Richards 1902c:99). Like other ethnologists at that time, Richards published sensitive cultural information presumably without consent. Mulvaney (1970:209–10), for example, has described how Howitt used a bull-roarer that he had made himself to deceive an informant that he (Howitt) had been initiated, and on that basis gained secret information, which he then published.

In addition to his interest in religion, Richards maintained that his practice of recording Aboriginal language was motivated by recognition of the utility of Aboriginal knowledge, commenting, ‘There is a word which was responsible...for my studying the aboriginal [sic] languages, and which may be the means of directing others into searching for more like it’; he recounted that ‘I
was in the company of an aborigine [sic], when we came upon a “bower” bird’s camp or play-house. In reply to my question he said that the bird’s name was “Ngoo’rang—bool’la” which means “two camps, or nests” — the importance for Richards was that ‘naturalists had at that time not long found out that the bird had two camps’ and therefore proposed the recording of Aboriginal languages for the scientific information they contained (Richards 1902c:99).

Beyond these meagre details, I have found few other traces of his life. Therefore, like many of the late nineteenth-century enthusiasts who practised ethnology in their spare time, Charles Richards appears to have left little trace of what must have been a momentous research agenda.

Richards’ relationship with the National Museum of Victoria and the Royal Anthropological Society of Australasia

In 1902 Richards sold and donated information and collections of objects to both the National Museum of Victoria (now named Museum Victoria) and the Royal Anthropological Society of Australasia. These transactions provide a few additional pieces of information about Richards’ work.

The first transaction was made on 26 March 1902, when the National Museum bought an ethnographic collection from Richards. In addition to selling these items, he also presented the museum with a short essay entitled ‘What’s in a name’ (a theoretical piece outlining his world view and which demonstrates the religious underpinning of the maps (see below); Richards 1892b), as well as the maps and key considered in this paper. At the time, the maps do not appear to have been of prime interest to museum staff, and they were filed away. Instead, interest focused on the collection, which contained a variety of objects, almost all from across south-eastern Australia, including pelican and rabbit-skin aprons and other items of clothing, as well as spears, clubs, shields, sacred objects baskets, and a large quantity of stone tools, the provenance of which is detailed in Tables 1 to 5.

### Table 1: Number of objects in the Richards’ collection at the National Museum of Victoria that are provenanced to New South Wales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Specific locality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Central East Riverine</td>
<td>Bogan River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Central East Riverine</td>
<td>Lachlan River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Central West</td>
<td>Barrier Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Murray River</td>
<td>Lake Benanee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Murray River</td>
<td>Lake Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Murray River</td>
<td>Murray River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>South Central</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>South Central</td>
<td>Lower Murrumbidgee River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>South Central</td>
<td>Lower Darling River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>Darling River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>Upper Darling River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Total of ethnographic objects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>NSW unprovenanced stone tools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Indigenous Cultures Department’s EMu (Electronic Museum management system) electronic database in Museum Victoria

### Table 2: Number of objects in the Richards’ collection at the National Museum of Victoria that are provenanced to South Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Specific locality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Desert Central</td>
<td>Musgrave Ranges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Desert Southeast</td>
<td>The Alberga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Eyre</td>
<td>Coopers Creek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Eyre</td>
<td>Diamantina River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Eyre</td>
<td>Lake Callabonna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Eyre</td>
<td>Lake Eyre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Eyre</td>
<td>Lake Howitt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lower Murray</td>
<td>Coorong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Lower Murray</td>
<td>Lower Murray River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Spencer</td>
<td>Crystal Brook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Spencer</td>
<td>Eyre Peninsula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Spencer</td>
<td>Flinders Ranges</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the evidence of the maps and Richards’ writings on Aboriginal languages, it is likely that he collected many of these objects directly from Aboriginal people, particularly as it is known that he worked closely with them to construct word lists. Nevertheless, some of his objects were also presumably acquired from non-Aboriginal people, and in the case of stone tools possibly from his own ‘primitive’ archaeological fossicking. In addition to those provenanced to New South Wales and South Australia, his collection includes some objects obtained in Palmerston, Darwin and the Alligator River area in the far north of the Northern Territory, and two objects from Kalgoorlie and Esperance Bay in Western Australia. Although he could have collected them himself, it is highly likely that he obtained these objects by other means. Although they may provide some indication of the geographical spread of his collecting activity, the maps cannot be definitively used in this way because the date of collection was not recorded for any of the objects. In addition, while the maps were drawn in 1892, according
to correspondence Richards was still collecting objects ten years later (Richards 1902a).

As well as Aboriginal objects, Richards also took human remains. In a letter to Richard Henry Walcott, the curator of mineralogy and ethnology at the National Museum of Victoria (29 October 1902), Richards offered for sale a ‘very old’ and partially ‘mummified’ human skeleton found in ‘cave’ on ‘Mount Tinderry’ (south of Canberra) and other ‘ethnographical specimens’. He stated that perhaps in addition to ‘the purchase of the 10 skulls I sold you when in Melbourne [you] might like to have this also’ (Richards 1902a). The museum rejected his second offer3 and there is no record in the museum register of the ten skulls previously acquired from Richards. However, the museum most likely did buy these skulls, as the lack of registration information was a common facet of the National Museum’s early twentieth-century acquisition of human remains.4

In June of the same year, Richards sold his collection of photographs, etchings and additional objects to Alan Carroll (Carroll 1902; National Museum of Victoria 1899). As a condition of this sale, Richards agreed to provide the Society’s journal with a monthly column of ‘lists of hundreds of words in the native dialects’ (Carroll 1902:69). Richards planned on producing word lists/dictionaries of four communities (the Kammel larrai (Gamilaraay), the Warra’jerre’ (Wiradjuri), the Marraa’warre’ (Mararwa) and the Narrin’yerree’ (Ngarrindjeri)) of between 1000 and 2000 words each (Richards 1902b:81; 1903b:119). However, he produced for the journal only a word list for Wiradjuri and the first and second parts of a Marawara word list/dictionary.5 It is unclear why Richards did not fulfil his obligation to Carroll. His last publication (the second part of the Mararwa word list/dictionary) is dated 31 December 1903 and concluded: ‘to be continued’ (Richards 1903d). It is possible that he had a falling out with Carroll; in his letter to Walcott offering human remains, Richards complained, ‘here in Sydney they do not take much interest in anthropology’ (Richards 1902a).

Richards’ archive was purportedly extensive. Carroll (1902:69) maintained that it included a photograph collection consisting of ‘the different tribes of each locality of Australia’, an ‘original map’, and ‘rubbings and carefully drawn copies of marked trees, weapons, shields or the various tribes’. In addition, we can assume that he possessed fieldwork journals and notes. However, beyond the maps, the associated manuscript, his collection of objects and a few tantalising publications (of which a complete list is included in the references), the rest of Richards’ archive has not been located.6

With such a breadth of material, it is interesting to consider why, in an age when ethnology was largely conducted through surveys, Richards escaped the attention of ethnologists such as Alfred Howitt, Edward H Curr and RH Mathews, none of whom refer to, or cite, Richards in their published works. Although Richards was clearly selling objects to museums domestically and possibly internationally, his details do not appear to have been passed on to the leading ethnologists and his research went largely unnoticed. Richards’ isolation was probably by choice. Many of the ethnologists and antiquarians of the late nineteenth century corresponded because they lacked, or had only limited access to, a wide range of Aboriginal people, with Smyth (1878) being a good example of this tradition. In comparison, Richards had established relationships with a number of people across a range of Aboriginal communities and did not therefore need to correspond with other ethnologists to obtain information. Interestingly, although Richards sold his collection to the National Museum of Victoria, he did not meet Baldwin Spencer, then director of the museum and a leading anthropologist at the time. Spencer returned from his 1901–02 expedition across Australia on 17 March 1902 and Richards sold his collection to the museum nine days later. Richard Walcott dealt with the purchase (National Museum of Victoria 1899) and while it was Walcott’s role as curator to handle day-to-day business, given the size of the collection and its inclusion of objects from the southern Arrernte region, it is nonetheless strange that he did not introduce Richards to Spencer. It is possible, of course, that Spencer was busy with the many official engagements that followed his and Gillen’s celebrated return to Melbourne, and with the preparation of lectures for the coming teaching year (Argus 1902:6; Mulvaney and Calaby 1985:213). It is also possible that Richards’ use of philology and references to Theosophy may not
have endeared him to Spencer, who was very critical of such approaches to anthropology. Thus, for example, Spencer complained to his friend Henry Balfour at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford that he encountered ‘some rare old philological cranks’ at the anthropology meetings within the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, and that ‘amidst some good work I never before heard such idiotic bosh as some of them propounded’ (Spencer 1898:5).

Although competent, Walcott’s primary interest was not ethnology and he may not have realised the significance of the maps. It appears that Richards did not have the chance to speak with anyone at the museum who appreciated the importance of his work, and the maps were filed away without further consideration. It is also worth noting that Spencer forwarded many objects that Richards collected from South Australia to overseas institutions and claimed that he had collected them himself while on his 1901–02 expedition (Knapman 2010). After reading Richards’ word lists in Science of Man, Alfred Howitt wrote to the Royal Anthropological Society of Australasia on 10 December 1907 requesting Richards’ address. A second document exists with Howitt’s draft letter to Richards with a recipient address of P.O. Cobar (Howitt c.1907). However, by this time Richards had disappeared from the historical record and there is no recorded reply, or even evidence that Howitt’s letter was sent.

Analysis of the maps
Richards’ maps are the most comprehensive attempt at that time to map the language groups of south-eastern Australia. However, although he aimed to identify all groups in this region, the paucity of detailed geographical landmarks limits their effectiveness in accurately discerning his interpretation of group boundaries. The fact that Richards was not part of an extended correspondence network of ethnologists, as well as his own explanation that information to compile the map was ‘gathered during three years constant travel among them (over the whole area represented) and from other available data’ (Richards 1892a), suggests that a significant portion (and perhaps the majority) of the maps was derived from his own observations. On this basis they would be unique for the nineteenth century as contemporaneous maps were drawn in the majority from second-hand accounts collected from others (Clark 1990:6–8). As Dianne Barwick (1984:101) observed, the 1940 and later 1974 Tindale map of language groups in Victoria were both based on the writings of ‘Howitt, Curr, Smyth, R.H. Mathews and the few accessible Protectorate records’. Out of this list, Richards would probably have had access to the published works of Curr (1886) Fison and Howitt (1880), Howitt (1891) and Smyth (1878) and, with the valuable Protectorate records being most likely inaccessible in government department archives. Considering the likely scenario that Richards did not have access to the Protectorate records, and the fact he emphasised his use of fieldwork, it is reasonable to conclude that Richards constructed his maps after interviewing Aboriginal people about their sense of place. This is possibly a very important point. There is a general historical assumption that by the early 1890s colonialism had disrupted Aboriginal communities to such an extent that traditional boundaries had little meaning. The existence of Richards’ maps indicates that a sense of place existed strongly in peoples’ memories.

Richards drew the maps with a particular theory in mind, stating:

I give a map of the aboriginal Tribes of Victoria, N.S.Wales and South Australia with their correct names, and another map in which those tribes having names in common are grouped together. These show that the tribes came from the north and penetrated to Tasmania, when no doubt it was connected to the mainland (Richards 1892b: 4).

Richards’ theoretical framework accords with diffusionism, a school of thought in nineteenth-century anthropology that sought to explain the spread of cultures. Prominent in this school was James Cowells Prichard, whose work in the 1820s and 1830s preceded Darwin’s The Origin of Species (1859) and was inherently concerned with supporting the biblical notion of the unity of the human species. Prichard was actively writing against polygenists such as the anatomist Robert Knox, who argued that the different human races were separate creations (e.g. Knox 1850; Prichard and Norris 1855:5–7; Stocking 1987:47–53).
Using philology, Prichard looked for evidence that showed a common origin of all humans (monogenism), proclaiming that ‘the comparison of languages...if properly applied, will furnish great and indispensable assistance in many particular inquiries relating to the history and affinity of nations’ (Prichard 1857:5). Both Prichard’s appeal to the unity of the human race and his philological approach influenced many nineteenth- and very early twentieth-century ethnologists in Australia (McNiven and Russell 2005:133–80).

Richards’ work is clearly within the diffusionist tradition. Using an argument of comparative social structures, in his unpublished essay (Richards’ 1892b: 2) he reasoned that:

the separation of the Australian from the parent stock must have taken place before the chieftain stage had developed, as it is not found among them. It, however, exists among the Polynesians and marks the stage of separation between them and the patriarchal people, who in their westward march settled on the shores of the northern Indian Ocean.

His classical (albeit simplistic) philological approach attempted to track the diffusion of humans throughout Australia and the world by a comparative study of different variants of the word ‘man’, maintaining that ‘primarily the name of a people must have been derived from the name of a man, with an additional word indicating descent from or belonging to’ (Richards 1892b:1). Richards (1892b:1) classified Australian languages with this imperative in mind:

The word ‘man’ is at the present day used among many European nations to denote the human species, masculine, and was similarly used by the people who spoke the Sanscrit [sic] tongue 3000 years ago. One of the principal tribes of N.S. Wales — the ‘Wirrajerry’ uses the word ‘mein’ or ‘main’ for the same purpose; while there are several tribes in Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland using the words ‘mon’, ‘ming’ and ‘mon-ya’ for ‘man’ and in Northern Territory are the ‘Wartha-man’ and ‘Hain-man’ tribes, the ‘man’ meaning people.

His classification of Aboriginal people on his second map (Figure 3) into groups which he believed had names in common is part of this endeavour. Richards sensed that there were regional trends in the naming of tribal groups and the classification he used is based on the conception that ‘the tribal names are compounded of several distinct names each name meaning man, men or women, in other words people’ (Richards 1892a:3). By connecting communities through ‘names meaning man, men or women’, he wanted to show ‘a closer affinity between the aborigines of Australia and the British-Australian’ (Richards 1892b:4). The physical and linguistic differences, he argued, were ‘due to the lapse of some thousands of years under different conditions’ (Richards 1892b:4). Richards’ conclusions are different from that of Elie Reclus, the French linguist, geographer and anarchist, who was writing on this topic at around the same time and who realised that some of the names were based on the various words for ‘no’ and meant ‘no-no’, and ‘no having’ (Reclus 1895).7

Richards’ approach was eclectic and although he saw ‘science’ as his focus, his writings indicate that he was more concerned with investigating how Aboriginal religion could inform theology. The Aborigines, he argued, ‘have had no writing to dislocate their language...For this reason he is more likely to bring us into touch with ancient times, both in his customs and thoughts or speech, provided he has sprung from a common stock with the ancient Hebrews’ (Richards 1902c:98). Richards framed his diffusionist argument around biblical chronology. He believed that the ‘early Hebrew chronicles’ (by which he meant the Torah or Old Testament) ‘contain germs of historical truth’ (Richards 1902c:98).

By demonstrating the unity of humankind, Richards wanted to connect Aboriginal Australia back to the biblical world and in doing so re-interpret Western European religious traditions. However, Richards’ arguments were crudely presented and were probably similar to the ‘idiotic bosh’ that Baldwin Spencer complained emanated from the mouths of the ‘philological cranks’ who attended the meetings of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science. Nonetheless, these arguments were common at the time and the pages of Science of Man are full of accounts of religious traditions from antiquity and around the then contemporary world. For example, the abovementioned Victorian-based ethnologist RE Johns was obsessed with Hindu and Confucian texts, and many other ethnologists were attract-
ed to spiritualism and occult traditions. Richards appears to have been promiscuous in his religious beliefs, and his ethnology was directly tied into supporting his various flirtations. Although Richards and Johns were probably on the fringe of mainstream ethnology, their focus was not too dissimilar to the doyens of nascent anthropology such as EB Taylor, Andrew Lang and Sir James Frazer, who all relied heavily on comparative religion. Taylor, Frazer and, to a lesser extent, Spencer and Gillen all used (or at least acknowledged) comparative religion in the search for the origins of religion. Ivan Strenski (2008:113–37) terms this tradition as the search for natural relation. With all his eccentricities, Richards was clearly following this same endeavour.

Colonial ethnographic maps

The production of ethnographic and linguistic maps was a common aspect of late nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial history. The first major attempt was published by Robert Brough Smyth in *Victorian Aborigines* (1878) (Figure 4), soon followed by Lorimer Fison and Alfred Howitt in *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* (1880) and a little later by Edward Curr in *The Australian Race* (1886-7) (Figure 5). In 1891 Howitt published a map of the Lake Eyre region (Figure 6) based on the unpublished Otto Siebert map, which Seibert gave Howitt. However, it was not until the 1900s that the next wave of major monographs were produced and there was then a rapid increase in the publication of ethnographic maps.

JB Harley (1991:16) describes cartography as ‘the product of a wider discourse, a form of power-knowledge caught up with the major transformations of world history, created and received by human agents, exploited by elites, to materialize as a world seen through a veil of ideology’. Drawing on this logic, Norman Etherington (2007a:1) maintains that maps (whether topographical or intended to illustrate Indigenous languages and

Figure 4: A section of R Brough Smyth’s map ‘Aboriginal Tribes of Victoria’ showing coastal western Victoria (Smyth 1878)
Mapping an ancestral past: the Charles Richard’s maps

Knapman

territory) produced by ‘colonisers erase, wrote over and displaced indigenous conceptions of space and power’; therefore, although ethnographic maps attempted to depict Indigenous conceptions of space, the maps ultimately represented the ‘coloniser’s view’ of Indigenous society. We can interpret Richards’ maps as having the same result: although his work recorded aspects of Aboriginal culture, a key concern of Richards was to reinterpret Christianity through analysis, and depiction, of Aboriginal society. His maps therefore are part of the wider agenda described by Etherington (2007a).

Smyth’s map and that of Fison and Howitt identify tribal territories, with each showing attempts to make clear boundaries between different groups. In comparison, Curr’s map was both an attempt to conjecture the populating of Australia by Aboriginal peoples (from north to south), while also identifying the location of Aboriginal communities mentioned in his text. Richards’ maps unite both of these approaches — that which shows ‘the location of 208 tribes’ (Figure 1) follows Smyth and Fison and Howitt in identifying the territories of Aboriginal communities, while that which portrays ‘Aboriginal tribes [as] hav[ing] one name in common’ (Figure 3) follows Curr’s approach (Figure 6) of using maps to project population movements and historic connections between communities. All are, of course, fraught with difficulties as they reflect European conceptions of space and territory. Although they are an attempt to reflect tribal locations, in using traditions of Western cartography they do not necessarily reflect Aboriginal views of space, territory and the correct nature of the boundaries between them.

It is beyond the focus of this paper to explore how Charles Richards’ maps change or support our current understandings of the boundaries of language groups. However, drawing on Clark and Ryan’s (2009) recent re-analysis of the Ladjiladji language area, we can start to see how Richards’ maps were constructed and how his maps may inform broader research. Luise Hercus’ (1989:46) linguistic analyses demonstrate that Mathimathi, Wadiwadi and Ladjiladji formed an interrelated language grouping, and Richards groups them in a similar fashion (Figure 3). Clark and Ryan (2009:77) note that Tindale realised that Smyth failed to understand how interlinked these three communities were. As noted by Clark and Ryan (2009), Smyth’s (1878) map ordered communities in this area going upstream as Darty-darty (Dadi Dadi), Yairy-yairy (Jarijari), Litchy-litchy (Ladjiladji) and Waiky-waiky. However, drawing from multiple sources (although, of course, not Richards), Clark and Ryan (2009:87) concluded that the upstream order is Yairy-yary, Litchylitchy and Darty-Darty. Richards organises them upstream as Thor-Tai Thor-Thi (Dadi Dadi), Yeiri Yeiri (Jarijari), Mo-Tha Mo-Tha (Mathi Mathi?), Lei Chi Lei Chi (Ladjiladji) and Wa-Thi Wa-Thi (Wadi Wadi). In his ordering, Richards uses Smyth’s basic structure but recasts the spelling and introduces the ‘Mo-Tha Mo-Tha’, which is presumably the ‘Mathi Mathi’ as described by Hercus. He also changes borders on the river and places the Ladjiladji further upstream around Swan Hill. If Richards’ ethnographic collection can be used as an indication of the geographical spread of his fieldwork, the inclusion of objects from the Murray River indicates that he may have conducted research in this area and future research should address what other sources Richards drew upon to make his conclusions.

Figure 5: A section from EM Curr’s map ‘continental Australia showing the routes by which the Aboriginal race spread itself throughout the continent’ (Curr 1886-7)
Conclusion

Richards’ diffusionist theories deployed ethnology, philology, science and theosophy all in support of a revised conception of human history and racial relations which was — even for his own time — antiquated. Nonetheless, as a purveyor of evidence, Richards’ research is important today for the details he records. His work is a window into the development of anthropology, but his main contributions are the word lists and the maps that he created. His existence also points to the lost work of forgotten ethnologists.
who recorded details of Aboriginal life that have not survived in the archive. The Charles Richards’ maps are a new source for research into language groups and historical social geography in south-eastern Australia. A close analysis of his maps and their accompanying key may reveal new language groups and certainly provide opportunity for the reassessment of information known about others. They may also contribute to present understanding of historical boundaries. Unfortunately, only a small portion of Richards’ research has survived, but what does exist suggests that in the 1890s Richards’ knowledge of Aboriginal languages and groups in south-eastern Australia was comparable to that of his contemporaries Robert Brough Smyth, Robert Mathews, James Dawson and Alfred Howitt.

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NOTES

1. For Charles Richards’ publications see Richard 1902a–f; 1903a–d; 1908. For a list of citations of ‘C. Richards’, see Hosking and McNicol 1993; Tindale 1974:130.
2. Charles Richards, 46 Wilson Street, Newton, dentist, NSW Electoral Rolls 1903: Division South Sydney, MacDonald town polling place (Commonwealth of Australia 1903). This address is provided on a letter from Richards to the National Museum of Victoria dated 29 October 1902 (Richards 1902a).
3. On the reverse of Richards’ letter there is a note stating, ‘Declined 5/11/02 RHW’. The initials refer to Richard Henry Walcott, the curator of ethnology.
4. This does not mean that these human remains were not acquired by the museum. From my experience of the human remains records in Museum Victoria, it was common practice for the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century curators not to record information surrounding the collecting history of human remains. In some institutions this was because unregistered objects were exchanged with other museums, but this is not likely to be the case for the ten skulls bought from Richards. The Director of the museum at the time was Baldwin Spencer, and contrary to accounts of his directorship by Mulvaney (Mulvaney 2008; Mulvaney and Calaby 1985) and Petch (forthcoming), Spencer was reluctant to exchange objects with other museums (Knapman 2010). The museum only began collecting human remains in 1899 and therefore was keen to acquire as many as possible. From a survey I conducted of the museum’s correspondence books between 1899 and 1924, the museum’s main concern was price of acquisition and many offers of human remains for sale were rejected. This is probably why Walcott rejected Richards’ second offer of human remains.
5. For Richards’ published word lists/dictionaries, see Richards 1902b–f, 1903a, b, d. For Richards’ contribution to the Wiradjuri language, see Hosking and McNicol 1993.
6. Museum Victoria holds Richards’ object collection and the maps that are the subject of this paper. The Mitchell Library holds the Alan Carroll papers and the surviving archive of the Royal Anthropological Society of Australasia. Unfortunately, only Richards’ handwritten manuscripts that were published in the Science of Man survive in this archive.
7. I am indebted to Luise Hercus for this comparison between Richards and Reclus.

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Mapping an ancestral past: The Charles Richard’s maps

Knapman


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