

Curator: Trish Barnard - Senior Curator of Indigenous Studies (Cultures and Histories Program)

Topic: 1897 Aboriginal basket

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visitors are advised that this section contains names of deceased individuals.

My name is Trish Barnard. I'm the Senior Curator for Indigenous Studies with the Queensland Museum. My favourite object out of the collection is this little basket here that was made by a woman in 1897. Her name was Kalmakuta and she was from the Joondoburri people of Bribie Island - Pumicestone Passage area.

It was also interesting that it was made in 1897, which is the same year that the Queensland Act came into place. The Act is formally known as the Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act and that governed Aboriginal people's lives right up until about 1970.

The interesting thing about this basket is also that European people started settling and exploring in the Pumicestone area from the 1820s and it wasn't until 1837 that Brisbane was actually settled. So up around that point, it's interesting to note that throughout Museum collections, very little was actually collected from this region. So that makes this basket very unique indeed.

Another really interesting thing about this particular basket is this diagonal stitching on the front. This is a coiled technique used to make this basket but this diagonal stitching is unique to this region in south-east Queensland and it's not seen in any other bags or baskets made throughout Queensland or Australia. So that's why this makes it a very rare example of fibre work from that time. Very little was actually collected by Europeans since the occupation of this region and very little is actually found in other collections so that makes this basket quite special.

Now, the other interesting thing is Kalmakuta actually married a European who was an oyster fisherman near Bribie Island and his name was Fred Turner. So she adopted the English name of Alma and was known as Mrs. Alma Turner but her language name remained Kalmakuta. The Caboolture Historical Society in fact, erected a memorial to Kalmakuta which is a stone can up at Ningi and it can be seen today. Kalmakuta and her husband Fred Turner lived at Ningi where they established a little hut in the 1870s and they remained there until she passed away in 1897.

May 2009