

# is livelihood of multi-racial town

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FIERY, wiry Aboriginal authoress Kath Walker stood in the hot sand of a side road at Dunwich — sand discolored by the rich mineral content which is the lifeblood of this tiny, historic township on Stradbroke Island in Brisbane's Moreton Bay.

Kath Walker, the outspoken champion of Aboriginal rights and a fighter for conservation long before the movement became fashionable, was on her home ground and the home of her forefathers — the Noonuccal tribe.

She was talking at her characteristic machine-gun pace on her three favorite topics — writing, conservation and integration of Aborigines.

"Dunwich," she said, "is the only place in Australia where I have found complete multi-racial harmony."

And multi-racial is the right word for the 672 adults and 428 children in this sand-mining township, where mixed marriages are the rule rather than the exception.

The people of Dunwich, who think of themselves as islanders and call Brisbane the mainland, are a harmonious mixture of Aboriginal, European, Portugese, Spanish, Pacific Island and Indian or Pakistani.

Dunwich was established as a penal colony and first port for Brisbane in 1828.

Convicts built a stone jetty, which forms part of the foundation of today's jetty, and for about 20 years they toiled towing cedar log rafts to Dunwich by longboat.

The cedar was shipped from Dunwich because the mouth of the Brisbane River was silted up.

In 1842 the convicts were moved to Brisbane and a Catholic mission took over the buildings.

In 1850 Dunwich became the quarantine

station and in 1866 the township was taken over by the Queensland Government which established the Benevolent Asylum for Aged, which cared for about 1000 elderly people until 1946.

During the next few years Dunwich was virtually deserted as local people moved to the mainland for work.

A few stayed on to make a living from fishing and oysters. In 1948, a new and then minor industry moved to Dunwich — sand mining.

Kath Walker says the equal job opportunities created by the sand mining companies and the company housing schemes have created the right atmosphere for integration.

"Here, every opportunity is given to the island people," she said.

## SLASH PINE GROVES FOR RESTORATION

Mrs Walker, who became nationally-known overnight when her *We Are Going* was published in 1964, is in "semi-retirement." Her new book, *"Stradbroke Dreamtime"* will be published shortly, she plans to write the history of Stradbroke, and she hopes to establish a retreat on the island for writers and artists.

"Stradbroke Dreamtime" is a collection of legends and stories I heard when I was little — generally while I was hiding near where the men talked, because I wasn't supposed to hear them," she said.

She is happy with the way the sand miners are rehabilitating — their mined areas but she is critical of their past efforts — especially their plantation of slash pine — and she is determined that the unique freshwater lakes on the island will not be disturbed.

But the slash pine groves are, in a way symbolic.

They were planted in an attempt to provide a future livelihood for the islanders when the mineral sands run out... probably within 20 years.

The sand mining which started in 1940 and has been increasing in tempo since 1967, saved Dunwich from becoming a virtual ghost town. As jobs became available, island families who left to work in Brisbane returned and settled.

When the mineral sands run out, Dunwich probably will dwindle away to a small fishing village.

The sand mining programme has made access to various parts of the island easier for fishermen, bushwalkers and scouts, who use company-built roads, and it has become popular with weekend visitors.

The island people are satisfied with the rehabilitation methods developed by the sand miners.

Kath Walker and other community spokesmen at Dunwich are pleased that native island scrub is being used to revegetate mined areas. Already, many former mined areas have prolific wild life.

Mines manager for Associated Minerals Consolidated Limited, Mr. G. Morris, said: "A few years after we've gone, people will not realise we have been here."

"Our technique of removing and stockpiling the top soil before we mine has proved successful."

"After mining, it is returned with all its natural humus and seeds, fertilised and seeded for quick-cover grass, and where necessary, covered with brush to prevent wind erosion."

"When the grass has a hold, we plant shrubs and trees native to the district, to supplement the natural growth. These seedlings are grown in our company nurseries."

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