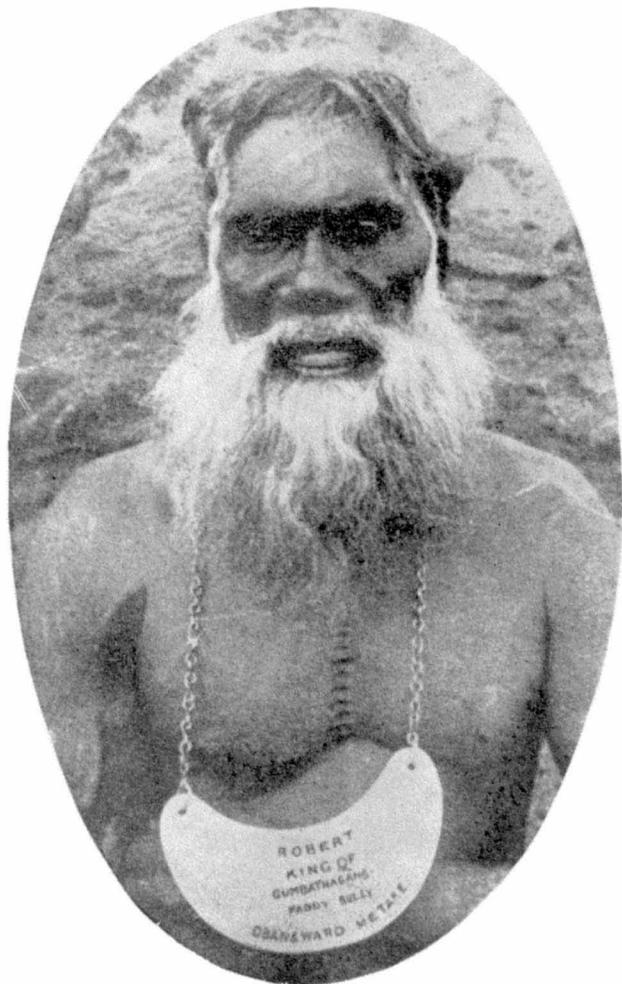


“King Sized” Aboriginal Chief saw coming of the white man

When the white man first came to the New England district the site which was to become the University town of Armidale did not have a true permanent community of Aborigines.

But at the turn of the century three distinct camps of natives were to be found on the outskirts of the town.

King Robert, leader of the Oban tribe, the Gumbathagangs, in a 60-year-old picture. The maker of the Government plate spelled Paddy Gully and Ward's Mistake wrongly



Travellers from the Oban tribe were camped on the north hill, aborigines from Walcha congregated on the south side while wanderers from the Coastal tribes and Kempsey sat down on the East side.

The Oban tribe in those days owed allegiance to a majestic old leader, King Robert—6 ft. 3 in. tall and weighing about 15 stone.

The tribe was known as the Gumbathagangs, who have since scattered widely over the State until none now remain at Oban.

Robert, who was born about 1808, was a tribal leader when the first white men settled the district. He was held in great esteem by the settlers who saw to it that he obtained recognition from the Colonial office as “King” in that district.

It is claimed that Robert lived to be about 102 and when he was more than 80 years was still working and prospecting for minerals in the district.

There is a record of King Robert cutting and laying the bark walls of the then brand new Richardson Emporium—Retailers and Storekeepers—in Armidale. Emblazoned on the awning of the present store today is a sign stating—Established 1845—but the sign doesn't mention one of its original builders . . . the King.

Robert saw his mineral-rich tribal grounds at Oban develop brief glory early this century as a boom town but once the mines were exhausted it fell into decay and today is just a tiny dot on the map.

One man who has vivid boyhood memories of King Robert is Frank Archibald of Armidale—a grandson of the King.

Frank, who was born in 1885, recalls that on many occasions as a boy he stayed with his grandfather at Oban, which then boasted a Government reserve of three tin huts and no facilities.

The old King told his grandson many stories of the old tribal days, of hunting for wildfowl and game on a lake where the New England District Hospital stands today, of the presentation of his Royal shield by the Government.

Frank's memory of his boyhood in the Armidale district some 60 years ago is a mixed one. Armidale was essentially a farming centre and a supply point for