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Author: Liz Flaherty
 Consultant: Lyn Beasley
 Commissioning Editor: Sabine Bolick
 Project Editor: Rachel Davis
 Editor: Beth Zeme
 Designers: Anne Donald and Jennifer Johnston
 Copyright & Pictures Editor: Katy Murenu
 Cover Designer: Glen McClay
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Introduction

This series of books is about the first peoples who lived in Australia. It explores their arrival and their contact with Europeans.

First Peoples

Australia is an **ancient continent**. It has been inhabited continuously for many thousands of years. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples lived in Australia long before the arrival of Europeans.

Aboriginal peoples live across the whole continent of Australia. Traditionally, Torres Strait Islander peoples lived on the islands in the Torres Strait, which is between the Cape York Peninsula on mainland Australia and New Guinea.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not one group of people. There are many different groups or nations. Each group has its own culture, customs and language. It has been estimated that over 250 different languages were spoken by Aboriginal groups across Australia before European arrival.

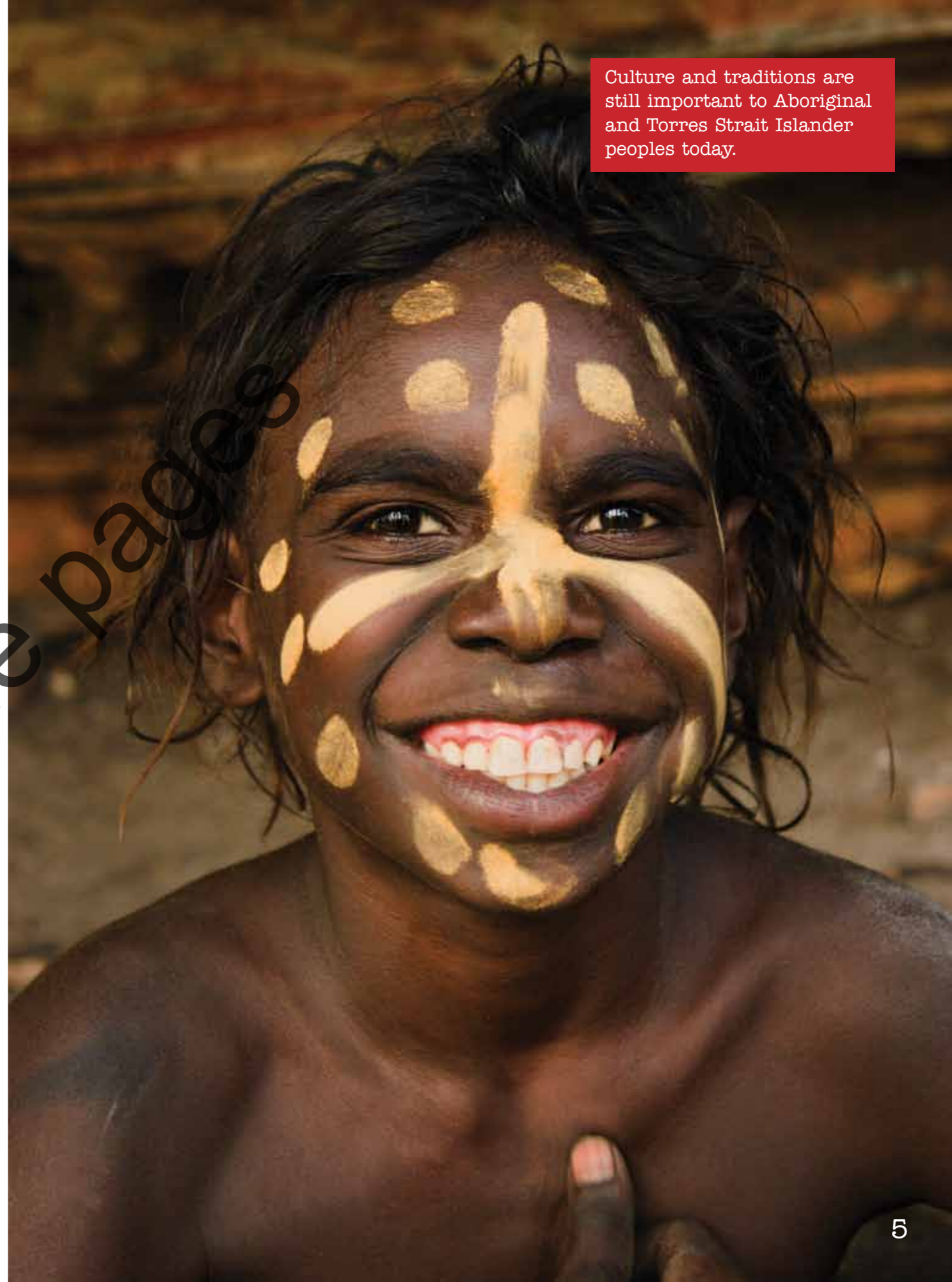
About this Book

This book explores what happened to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples after the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788.

Life for Australia's Indigenous peoples changed forever when Europeans arrived to occupy Australia. Relations between European settlers and Indigenous peoples were strained from the outset, but worsened over the 19th and 20th centuries.

However, the situation has improved in the 21st century. Australia is learning to embrace its Indigenous peoples and respect their traditions and culture. Unfortunately, problems continue with the health, **life expectancy**, education and welfare of Indigenous peoples compared to other Australians.

Culture and traditions are still important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.



European Arrival

Before the First Fleet arrived in 1788, it is estimated that between 500 000 and 1 million Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples lived in Australia. They respected the land, plants and animals that provided them with food, clothing and shelter.

The 19th Century

Within a few years of European arrival, Aboriginal peoples, particularly in New South Wales, were forced from their own lands and were treated with disrespect, fear and often hatred. By the start of the 19th century, just 12 years after contact with the new arrivals, the Aboriginal population was **decimated**. Many people died from diseases that they had never been exposed to before, and a large number of people were killed by European settlers.

The landscape also changed greatly. Large areas of land were cleared and animals that were once **abundant** became scarce. Europeans also introduced plants and animals that were not native to Australia.

Some of the plants, such as blackberries, and animals, such as rabbits, cats and foxes, have caused terrible damage.

Alfred Canning

Some Aboriginal people living in the Great Sandy Desert in Western Australia only met Europeans in 1906, when Alfred Canning began searching there for a stock route and sources of water. This route became known as the Canning Stock Route. Canning has been very much criticised for his treatment of Aboriginal people.

Languages

Of the estimated 250 different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages spoken in 1788, many have now disappeared. While approximately 145 languages are spoken today, only about 18 languages are still spoken fluently and taught to children.



This map shows the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nation groups, or language groups.



Great Sandy Desert, Western Australia

Tasmania

Some of the harshest mistreatment of Aboriginal people occurred when Europeans spread to Tasmania. Only 30 years after the arrival of Europeans, the Tasmanian Aboriginal population was almost wiped out through disease and **massacres**.

Martial Law

Before European contact, between 5000 and 10000 Aboriginal people lived in Tasmania. In 1828, only an estimated few hundred remained. Still, the government declared Martial Law against the remaining Aboriginal people, meaning the settlers could shoot them on sight.

In 1830, a five-pound **bounty** was put on Aboriginal adults brought in to the government alive and a two-pound bounty on Aboriginal children. Aboriginal people were **outlawed** in their own Country because European people wanted their land.

The Black Line

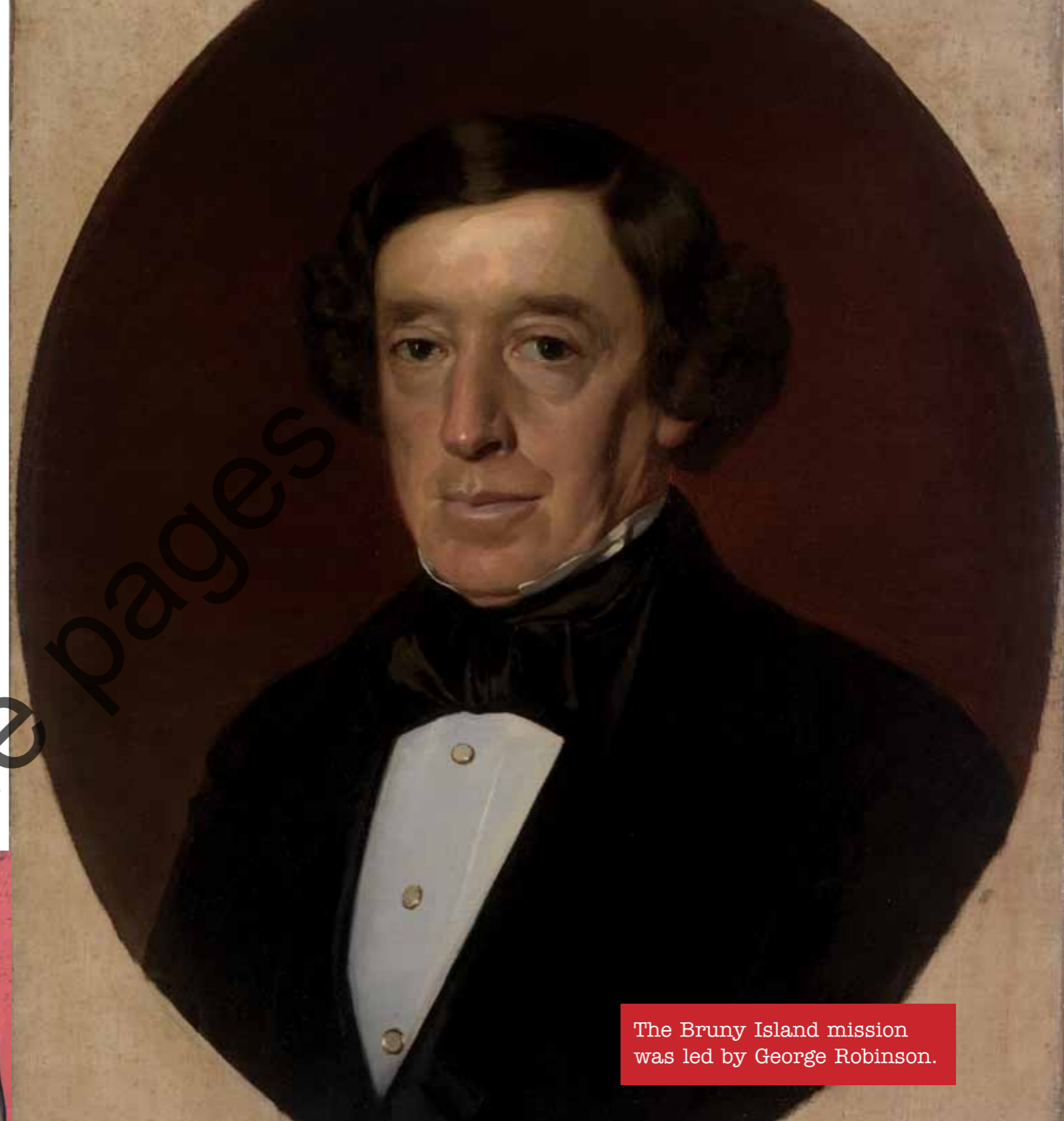
The **campaign** to get rid of the Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples from 1803 to 1832 was called the Black War.

In 1830, the government called upon every European person in Tasmania to form a line across the country. The aim was to catch and kill the remaining Aboriginal people during a three-week period.

This became known as the Black Line. Only one man and boy were captured. However, the line did force people out of their homelands.



This painting by Lawry Love called "Colonisation" shows some of the harsh ways Aboriginal peoples were treated.



The Bruny Island mission was led by George Robinson.

Mission

A **mission** was set up to house Tasmania's Aboriginal people on Bruny Island, off the Tasmanian coast. Here, the Aboriginal people were banned from speaking their own languages and practising ceremonies that were very important to them. They were taught Christianity rather than their own spiritual beliefs.

Truganini

Truganini was born on Bruny Island in 1812. By the time she was 17, her mother, uncle and the man she was to marry had been murdered, and her sister had been kidnapped by seal hunters.

Spokesperson

Truganini tried to help her people by being a **spokesperson** for them. The **mission** on Bruny Island was to shut down because of the number of deaths from European diseases, against which the Aboriginal people had no resistance. Truganini negotiated with George Robinson to get the best outcome for her people.

Three hundred Aboriginal people moved to a new mission on Flinders Island, where the government promised they would be safe and that they would be allowed to return to their homeland later.

Back to the Mainland

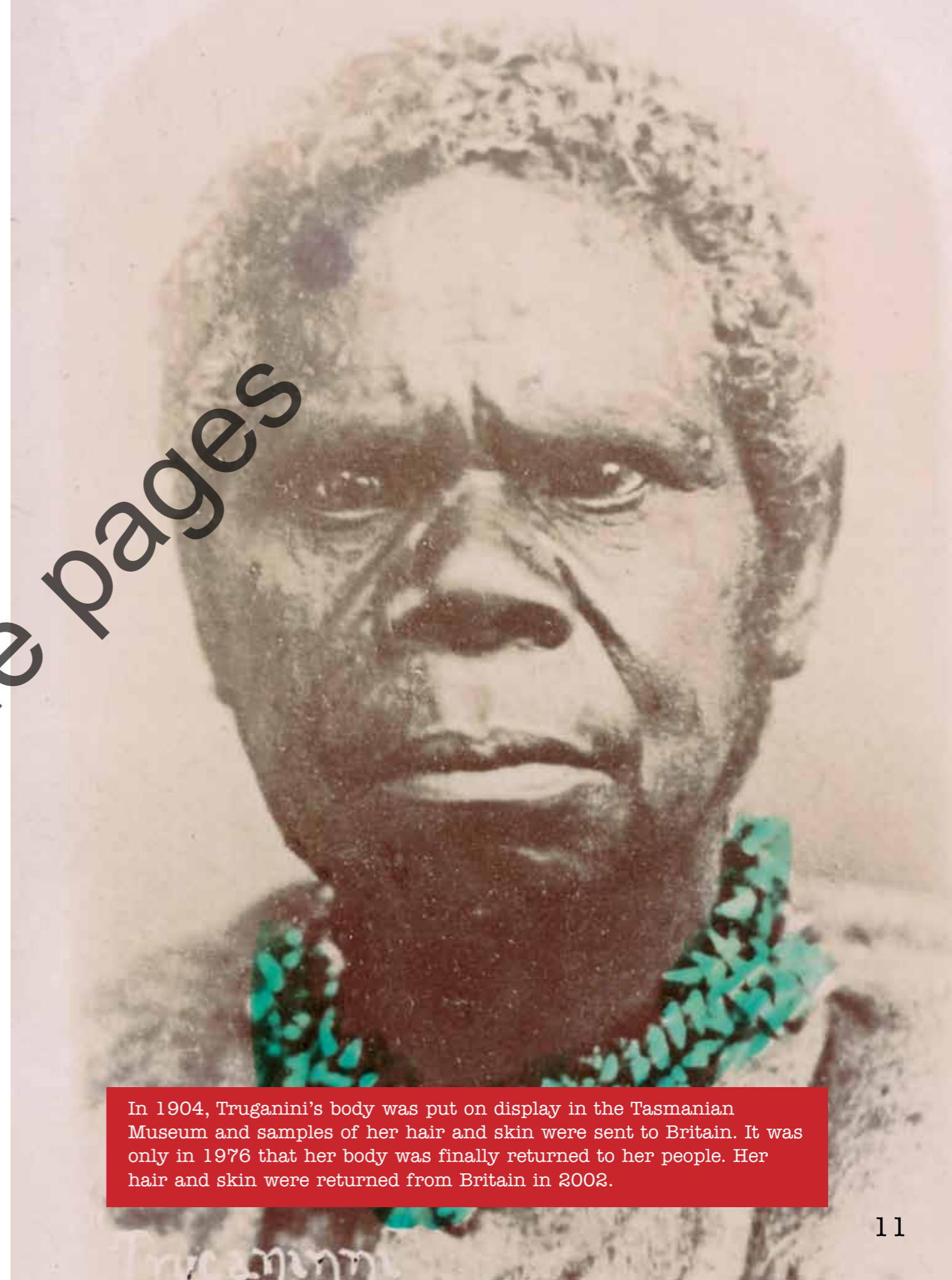
There were many deaths from European diseases at the Flinders Island mission as well.

In 1847, the government moved the last 47 people left in the mission back to the Tasmanian mainland. However, the Aboriginal people were forced to live in a deserted convict station. They were not allowed to return to their homelands as the government had promised.

After a short time, only three people remained alive. Truganini was the last person from the mission to die in 1876.

Tasmania Today

Fortunately, some Aboriginal people escaped the missions and lived in small communities both on the mainland and on other islands in Bass Strait. Their **ancestors** today are very proud of their Tasmanian Aboriginal **heritage**.



In 1904, Truganini's body was put on display in the Tasmanian Museum and samples of her hair and skin were sent to Britain. It was only in 1976 that her body was finally returned to her people. Her hair and skin were returned from Britain in 2002.