

HISTORY TAINTED BY DIRTY DEEDS

New light has been shed on our state's colonial days, writes **Phil Brown**

AS A boy, author Timothy Bottoms wondered how colonial Australia was settled and what happened to the indigenous people who got in the way. The gaps in official accounts intrigued him.

Now, he knows the dirty truth and has written about it in the fascinating, if at times harrowing book, *Conspiracy of Silence*.

Bottoms, a school teacher and historian who lives in Cairns, makes no apologies for telling the often grisly story of how Queensland was settled.

The sub-title of his book says it all: *Queensland's frontier killing times*.

"The history I learnt when I was a boy was all about what I call the heroification of white pioneers," Bottoms says. "But the history we have been taught is a lie."

The problem is our early history is not a pretty picture, a fact historians such as Henry Reynolds and others have made clear.

In recent years, the focus has been on Queensland through the work of historians such as Raymond Evans, Ross Fitzgerald and more recently Jonathan Richards.

Richards' 2008 book *A Secret War: A True History of Queensland's Native Police* was about marauding forces of indigenous police working under the

direction of European superiors.

Bottoms goes further, giving us what is arguably the most detailed account yet of frontier violence in Queensland. Following the tracks of the pastoralists as they moved into new lands across the state in the 19th century, Bottoms identifies massacres, poisonings and other incidents.

"I think it is essential that we know about these things otherwise we are basing our identity on a falsehood," Bottoms explains.

"Unpleasant though it is, we should learn from what went on.

"Most people don't really know Australian history and they think the Aborigines just rolled over or moved out of the way. What I'm saying is, 'Hey, they didn't'."

The idea of "peaceful settlement" is



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a fiction and Bottoms explains how the brutal dispossession of Aboriginal people occurred over decades, and was worst in Queensland.

Bottoms, 58, got to know indigenous people when, in 1984, he went to work as a teacher at the remote indigenous community Kowanyama.

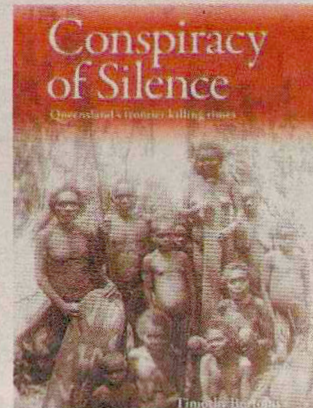
He became interested in indigenous issues, heard about massacres and other stories of early contact. His first book was *Djabugay Country* (1999) an aboriginal history of tropical north Queensland.

He was then commissioned to write *A History of Cairns* by the Cairns City Council, which has yet to be published.

For the past few years he has dedicated himself to the task of setting the record straight about what went on in our state as European settlers systemically "dispersed" the local Aborigines.

"The book is not a condemnation of all early settlers," Bottoms explains. "The problem is that when bad things happened the people responsible got away with it because it was sanctioned by people like Queensland's first governor, Sir George Ferguson Bowen and his executive."

There were thousands of killings he points out, and the Aboriginal people defending their homes and families



Conspiracy of Silence

Timothy Bottoms
Allen & Unwin, \$32.99.

didn't have the firepower the settlers and police did.

As tough as Bottoms' book is, it's also a fascinating look at the colonial period, a time when many voices were raised against what was going on. Timothy Bottoms' book is sobering but important.

Timothy Bottoms will be at Avid Reader Bookshop, West End on Tuesday. For more information visit avidreader.com.au



FRONTIER: Author Timothy Bottoms (left), an indigenous man in chains near Kowanyama in 1894 (above); and Rockhampton native police in the 1860s.