

# Uncle Boydie finalises grandfather, William Cooper's work with delivery of petition

By National Indigenous Times reporter Geoff Bagnall



The last grand work of the great Yorta Yorta leader, William Cooper is on its way to completion after almost 80 years of being frustrated by the government of Australia thanks to the determination of Mr Cooper's grandson, Uncle Boydie Turner.

In 1937 William Cooper penned a letter and formed a petition to King George V of England "begging him to get involved in the way Aboriginal people were being treated at that time". Mr Cooper sent the letter to then Prime Minister, Joseph Lyons to be sent to the King but the government of the time never delivered to letter to King George.

"And of course the letter was never sent and this has been my goal, to have the letter sent to the current English Monarch," Mr Cooper's grandson, Uncle Boydie Turner said.

Mr Turner, who grew up in his grandfather's home until the age of nine, has made it his mission in life to complete his grandfather's grand work, a task he said he finally completed last week with the delivery of copies of the letter and a new petition to the Governor-General, Sir Peter Cosgrove.

"He was 77 but my grandfather never gave up. He was fighting for Aboriginal people up until he died," Uncle Boydie said. "I think he would be over the moon to think what he did in the early days is about to come about."

Uncle Boydie Turner said he had to finish his grandfather's important work to honour what he stood for.

"It's pretty important when you look back at the times when he wrote the letter and how the Aboriginal people were treated in those days," Uncle Boydie said. "I can remember back that far because I was born in the 1920s and I realised how hard it was for the grandfather to do his work, how hard it was for Aboriginal people in those days and I wanted to do my little bit to get it recognised."

Uncle Boydie Turner finally delivered his grandfather's letter on the anniversary of the 1967 referendum. His trip to Canberra was



supported by Reconciliation Australia.

Reconciliation Australia's Alastair Harris said part of what Reconciliation Australia was trying to achieve was "the acknowledgement of the true history of Australia".

Uncle Boydie said it was important not to regard his actions as "just a symbolic act" but as another step toward achieving real change to improve the lives of Aboriginal people.

"It would be good if what I did yesterday helps the people of today, Aboriginal people. I think what I did in delivering the letter and petition that grandfather got is the end of the work that he did. Anything I can do from here on I will do for the people of Australia," Uncle Boydie said.

Despite having delivering the letter, completing his grandfather's tasks, Uncle Boydie said there was still much Aboriginal people needed to fight for and he feared conditions for Aboriginal people would get

worse "from here on".

The 1970s were almost like a summer time for Aboriginal people with the rise of activism and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations but Uncle Boydie believes Aboriginal people today are now "being pushed backwards".

"I do. I think what we will go through from here on is us being pushed back to where we were when I was a kid, which was the 1930s," he said.

For Uncle Boydie the continuing removal of children is one indication of a continued push to assimilate Aborigines and destroy Culture.

"They were still taking kids away from Cummeragunga when I was a kid," he said.

"It doesn't give the children a chance when they're taken away from their Culture, taken away from their families," he said.

Uncle Boydie Turner accompanied by Ms Barbara Miller and Mr Abe Schwarz show the petition to Governor General, Peter Cosgrove originally launched by Uncle Boydie's grandfather, William Cooper. Image: Commonwealth of Australia, Government House. Below: Uncle Boydie in front of the statue of King George V who was supposed to receive his grandfather's petition in the first place. Image: Geoff Bagnall

