Cameron Raynes, *The Last Protector* (Wakefield Press, 2009)

For the first time in history, an account of the illegal removal of Aboriginal children from their parents in South Australia has been recorded. *The Last Protector* provides a detailed analysis of South Australia’s Aborigines Department under William Richard Penhall, the last Chief Protector of Aborigines. Using actual South Australian state archival records, this book delves into content which has never been previously made available to the public.

Promoted as being ‘the book they wanted to ban’, *The Last Protector* focuses on the dark side of the South Australian government throughout the mid twentieth century and the secret operations they conducted during this time. Whilst ‘The Stolen Generation’ is no foreign topic to most Australians, no-one has yet been able to show that child removals from families were made contrary to the legislation in force at the time. Raynes has now proven that they were.

In conjunction with voices from the past, Raynes shows a number of written examples taken directly from the records of the South Australian government, to unlock this startling history. A clear picture of the government’s motives during this time is understood with quotations from sources such as ‘from a man’s point of view, when the last black woman dies it will be a benefit to the people of this state’ (38). The book further paints a clear picture of the injustice brought upon Aboriginal people themselves, with heartbreaking evidence to support Raynes’ findings: ‘she has been away from us for seven years and we feel that we have the right to have our own daughter home with us at Christmas … I am only asking what is rightly and legally my own privilege’ (51). Raynes uses these first-hand accounts to portray a shocking system that was clearly flawed.

Although only 80 pages in length, *The Last Protector* provides a comprehensive overview of this increasingly controversial topic. It not only gives insight into William Penhall’s thought processes during his period in office but also illustrates the disastrous consequences these thoughts then had when turned into actions over a period of more than ten years.

*The Last Protector* is recommended reading for anyone who has an interest in South Australian history and politics. It opens the lid on a long forgotten closed box, and rummages through the contents of a history that seems so far away, yet is closer than we think.

Megan Warburton