

Afterword

This then, is what I have made of the evidence: there is no conclusion, no grand summing up. I have, it is true, done more than I set out to do, in the sense of ranging outside the stated period of research in search of meaning, but still... no generalisations.

The teacher whom I admired most in my far-off student days was the late Emeritus Professor Greg Denning. Over and over and over again, he taught that the historical effort was to *understand* and to *explain*: not to judge, not to label, not to take sides. In this task of *understanding*, one of the methods is called by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz 'thick description': it amounts to giving the reader as much detail and context as possible, so that the reader is offered the possibility of knowing nearly as much as the researcher. There is then no need to say 'they were this' and 'they were that' because the reader can make up his or her own mind. So... no conclusions.

Time will tell what the textbook writers make of it, amounting, as it does, to a contrarian view to the prevailing orthodoxy. The generalists will be obliged to fit the story of this amiable, intimate, non-violent coexistence on the Mornington Peninsula into their narratives of confrontation, massacres and victimhood throughout the rest of Victoria. There is no doubt that awful things happened in Victoria, but the fact that they didn't happen on the Mornington Peninsula is not explained by the facile 'our lot were a peaceful lot' of the past. If nothing else, this work demonstrates that matters were far more complex than that.

As with the Native Police Corps, *individuals matter, and their feelings shape events*. We are talking about 83 people who owned the land from Werribee to Wilson's Prom, engaged in a relationship with a well intentioned European who kept a diary, of which a few months relate to our district. Yet what an impression Thomas has given us of their humanity.

There is no place to hide from their logic that the sheep eat the grass that belongs to the kangaroo, and the kangaroo are gone and therefore why can't we eat the sheep? The things that they wanted from Europeans were flour, meat, tea with sugar (from the vocabulary, it seems that even the children drank tea with sugar) and guns: I can imagine a different past for Victoria if only we'd paid the rent in sheep, according to *their* logic, instead of arresting them for sheep stealing.

Were I to dedicate this work, it would be to the old Bonurong woman on King Island who cried bitterly at not going home.

'I Succeeded Once'

Were it not so politically incorrect and legally irresponsible, I would like to box Yankee Yankee's ears, and that response itself is a good lesson in bad history, because how do we know whether he *wouldn't* bring her back or really *couldn't* bring her back? (There is possibly more to be discovered about this episode in later records - in this case, in Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VPRS 19).

I stand silent before the logic of those women who would not raise children in a world which no longer held a future for them. What must they have felt? And I hope never to see in print again the falsity that 90 per cent of the Bonurong suffered from the venereal, or that they were the Tal Tals, or that they stole Willoughby's child. The chasing down of evidence in Chapter 11 is probably a bit obsessive, but asking questions, chasing down dead ends and ruling out possibilities is all part of research: in this case, we need to know who Margery Munro was because the foundation narratives of both contemporary claimant groups depend on her.

The biographical details are the platform for future work - every one of them probably leads to another story like this one. And I hope that the next story to be told will be that of the Protectorate at Narre Warren.