

8. The raid into Gippsland and the massacres remembered

The evidence for the pre-contact massacre which occurred between Kangerong and Arthurs Seat, at Buckkermittewarrer, comes into the records in the context of the Bonurong raid into Gippsland in February 1840. Thomas was embarrassed that his blacks had deceived him – after this raid, he understood better the meanings of their actions; if they left the women and children behind, and took spears, it meant trouble for him. It is an interesting comment on how well they were reading power and authority at that time, that though they successfully kept knowledge of the purpose of the raid into Gippsland from Thomas, they had no qualms about being frank with the young Samuel Rawson who was told that it was a revenge raid,¹ while Thomas had to work it out for himself from behaviours.

After this raid Thomas obliged them to give him mudmaps of their proposed routes and estimations of their time away on their journeys. He was appalled that they brought back flesh, and he could scarcely credit that they exulted in the event. Bypassing the Chief Protector, he reported this raid directly to La Trobe. Then he set about investigating the raid by seemingly innocuous questions to various participants. It is only through this investigation that we can discover firm facts about the Two Fold Bay² tribe's earlier massacre of nearly half the Bonurong – men, women and children at Buckkermittewarrer: two other raids, one at Brighton and one at Jamieson's at the Kunnung River are also recalled.

Thomas' painful duty

Thomas commences his June 1840 letter to La Trobe with a statement that it is his 'painful duty' to inform him that the Western Port blacks had deceived him in February, by leaving all the women and children and the old men with him at the river Kunnung at Western Port, and telling him that they were off to the east (Gippsland) for *bullen bullen* tails, whereas in fact they had gone with the specific intention of finding and killing Gippsland blacks, eating their flesh and bringing some back to Western Port.³

1 Samuel Rawson, 'Journal from November 1839 kept while forming a new station at Western Port on the southern coast of New Holland', 9 March 1840, Ms 204/1, NLA.

2 'Two Fold Bay' does not mean the place on the south coast of New South Wales, as explained in Chapter 3 with reference to Wesson's study. 'Two Fold Bay' is a descriptor of the Kurnai of Gippsland; but as 'Two Fold Bay' is the expression that the Bonurong and Thomas used consistently, I follow them here, as I do in their use of 'blacks'.

3 The draft version is in Thomas Papers, CY 2946, frames 53–56, ML; the final version is Thomas to La Trobe, 6 June 1840, VPRS 10, unit 2, 1840/569, PROV.

Thomas, in farewelling them on their journey into the country of their enemies warned them not to kill 'wild blacks' and even offered to accompany them and stand between them and the Two Fold Bay blacks and endure the spearings himself. He told them that if they did kill blacks, he would tell the governor. They were away far longer than they had planned⁴ and Thomas feared they had fallen victim to their enemies. They arrived back weak with exhaustion, and he had to nurse them for three or four days; but he was suspicious of the time elapsed and searched their bags. He found nothing, and they assured him that everything was alright, so matters rested.

Then a settler from Westernport (Jamieson) arrived at the encampment at Kunnung and told Thomas that his blacks (Thomas') had shown 'my blacks' (Jamieson's) the flesh of a human body which they said was part of the body of a Two Fold Bay black. Thomas interviewed the 20 Bonurong and they denied it. Then three other settlers told him the same story – Thomas' blacks had shown 'their blacks' the flesh.

Thomas then devised what he called 'a cunning strategy' to determine the truth of the matter. He stated in his second periodical report that it was on the 24 May 1840, a Sunday, at Tubberubbabel that he finally got the truth.⁵ Seemingly innocently, he questioned a youth who had been on the raid, and enquired where they had slept each night. He used his journal to check the number of nights they had been away. Then he confronted 'the principal actors'. He told them that he, Thomas, knew all about his blackfellows, and that God knows, sees, and hears all too. He then repeated back to the principal actors what he had learned from the youth – where and when they encamped each night on the raid. This unnerved them, and one of them began to cry. Then the whole story came out. They had followed tracks and come upon a sleeping encampment of 14 at Taringal by the Snowy River (it was actually the Tarwin River, but Snowy was what he wrote in his first report). They killed nine with spears and tomahawks, one man, two lubras and six children – the rest escaped. The bodies of two of the children were quartered and brought back to Kunnung. As well, the whole body of a little child was brought back and planted in the bush not 20 yards from where Thomas was camped at Tobinerk. They 'showed no remorse', in fact, 'exulted in their triumph' but were 'dreadfully frightened' of what La Trobe would do when Thomas reported.⁶

4 The hunting party was expected back on 29 inst, Thomas to Robinson from Kunnung, 27 February 1840, VPRS 11, unit 7/300, PROV.

5 VPRS 4410, unit 3/67, PROV.

6 Enlarged photocopy obtained from ML: Thomas Papers, CY 2946, frames 53, 54, 55, 56. This is the version in Thomas' Journal. The version that he actually sent to La Trobe is at VPRS 10, unit 2, 1840/569, PROV.

The eating of flesh

Samuel Rawson who was at Kunnung at the time recorded their return on 9 March 1840 'bringing immense quantities of human flesh with them; it seems they had come upon the tribe when the men were away hunting and killed ten, eight of whom were children'. After describing the fine river and the fine countryside around the victims' encampment, Rawson continued:

the blacks on their return staid several days at the station and feasted with the women and children on the flesh they had brought back and seemed to enjoy it amazingly, and were much surprised that I would not join them. It had exactly the appearance of a piece of fat pork with a very thick skin.⁷

In an undated later record, Thomas said that they 'returned with pieces of mutilated bodies of their victims with them, arms, legs and pieces of flesh principally of female children eaten by them and friends'.⁸ About the practices of the Bonurong enemies he wrote:

The Gippsland blacks, Omeo and others are cannibals, so far as eating their enemies – all my blacks that they have killed they eat – and when capture any of another tribe at a distance if practicable bring them prisoner giving them food etc⁹ till arrive at their tribe, when a Grand feed. They watch over him at night, making him sleep in the middle of them, some invariably watch at night – their victim was always killed by Tomahawk at back of the neck – married men and chiefs alone eat the manfood – single men, women and children don't partake.¹⁰

The Chief Protector himself was well aware of much of the detail of eating flesh: a number of Port Phillip men and a Port Phillip woman, including Mr King and Mr Murry produced flesh, including a child's head, hand and foot, and gave killing and cooking details over three days of interrogation by Robinson in September 1839,¹¹ long before this raid.

Robinson had encountered the practice as early as 1836 when he recorded the explanation offered by Buckley. The full quotation is as follows:

A native boy from the Bar.ra.bal hills which Captain Robson had brought to the settlement from this station was killed by the Westernport Aborigines and the body was found in the river mutilated, parts skinned

7 Rawson, Journal, Ms 204/1, NLA.

8 Notebook, Brough Smyth Papers, Ms 8781, Box 1176/6(b), SLV.

9 Thomas inserts a superscript here which seems to read, 'like the American Ind'.

10 CY 2984: 220, ML.

11 The full story is in Clark 1998, vol 1: 79–82.

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and pieces of flesh cut off, and the people at the settlement said it was cannibalism. I say not, I do not believe them cannibals. Buckley says not, says they sometimes eat for or out of revenge.¹²

George Henry Haydon saw human flesh in their possession on several occasions.¹³

They did not eat flesh indiscriminately – there were two categories of 'enemy'. Thomas recorded that:

it cannot be denied that they are cannibals in the strictest sense of the Word, they eat the flesh and drink the blood of their enemies – not those with whom they occasionally carry on a Warfare, but with what they term Marnmate or wild Blacks, who are in the habit of [illegible] all who fall in their way.¹⁴

Clearly there is a world of meaning in the eating of flesh and these are only Thomas' and Robinson's initial encounters with that world:¹⁵ from our stance in the twenty-first century it may be important to attempt to understand it, but not until all the evidence is considered, not merely the earliest.

Mummification

In any analysis of the treatment of the bodies of killed enemies, mummification needs to be mentioned as well. Thomas described briefly the process thus: the hand is placed between two flat stones which are slightly heated. The wrist is filled with red ochre till the hand is hard and dry. The stones are then removed and the hand is perfectly seasoned and not the least offensive in smell. Thomas saw such hands brought back from Gippsland by Port Phillip Aborigines in 1847, suspended round the neck held with great veneration.¹⁶ Robinson recorded that Thomas told him of five mummified hands brought from Gippsland and worn as 'charms belonging to dead persons'.¹⁷

Another part of that world of meaning is the practice of not permitting children born to live. Quite early, in describing the grief of the young mother Quondum, whose baby had died from natural causes as he believed at the time, though subsequently he changed his mind, Thomas made a marginal note scorning the belief held by some Europeans that the Port Phillip people killed and ate

12 Robinson Journal, 29 December 1836, in Plomley 1987: 409.

13 Haydon 1846: 105.

14 Thomas Second Periodical Report, VPRS 4410, unit 3/67: 22, PROV.

15 Robinson learned subsequently of reports of cannibalism from other districts; for example, the reports for the Western District are mentioned in Critchett 1990.

16 Thomas Journal, 1 June 1847 to 31 August 1847, VPRS 4410, unit 4/99, PROV.

17 Clark 2000, vol 5: 171. An illustration of a 'dead hand' is to be found in Howitt 1904: 460.

their babies.¹⁸ Nor have I seen any such evidence – the point that I am making is that their views on life and death demand more respect from us than the dismissive ‘our lot were a peaceful lot’ which denies them their rightful place in our histories.

Trophies

Thomas adds further detail of the raid into Gippsland in his journal record. He insisted that the blacks bring to him what they had left of trophies. They produced one man’s cloak with 16 spear holes in it, one lubra’s basket and a tomahawk. It was Burrenum who broke down and cried bitterly, but even so, none felt sorry for their actions. After showing his disapprobation, Thomas preached to them from the sixth commandment – thou shalt do no murder. He explained the difference between wilful murder and accidental killing.¹⁹

The route to Gippsland

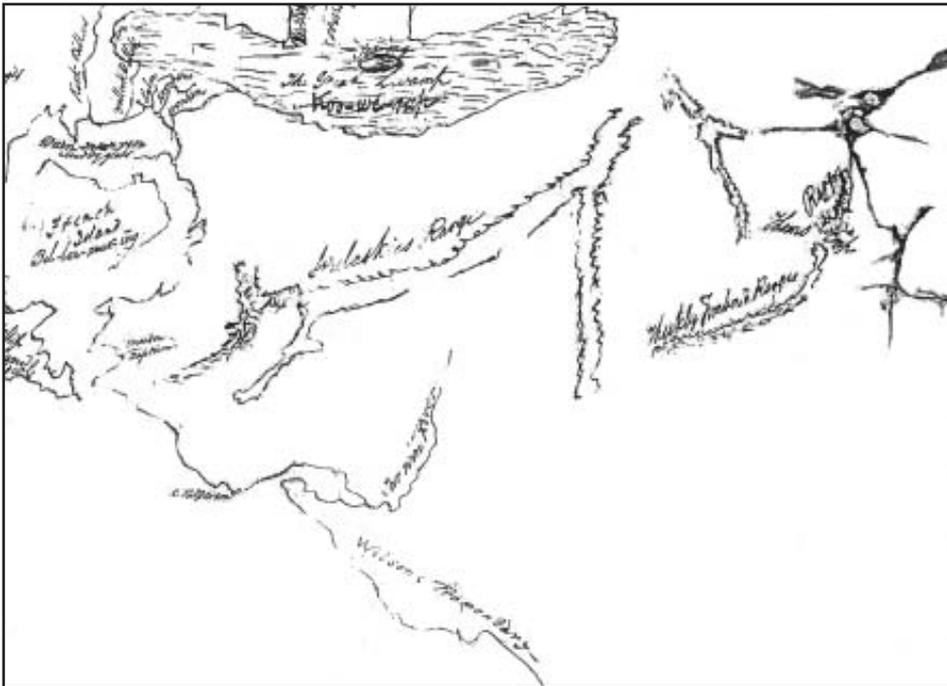


Fig 31. ‘Physical features of country, showing departure point and destination of February 1840 raid’

Thomas sketch, from the William Thomas papers, 1834–1868, 1902, Mitchell Library, reproduced with the permission of the State Library of New South Wales.

¹⁸ 13 February 1840, CY 2605, item 1, ML.

¹⁹ Thomas Journal, CY 2604, item 3, ML.

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The camping places on the raid into Gippsland and the number of nights stopped were as follows:

- 1 night at Perumbo – water
- 2 nights at Langnun – ditto [possibly Lang Lang]
- 1 night at Tenden – ditto
- 4 nights at Barbinbulluk – ditto
- 2 nights at Mullum Mullum – ditto [bracketed with Tondubet]
- 3 nights at Kurlkunduk – ditto, very big *bullen bullen* [probably Kilcunda]
- 2 nights at Bunolm – ditto
- 1 night at Peandum – ditto
- 3 nights at Pulunuruk – ditto
- 3 nights at Boyup Boyup – ditto
- 1 night at Teremit – ditto
- 1 night at Tobinerk – ditto.²⁰

The name of Dr Jamieson's station is Baggal-norruck.²¹ The distance from the starting point near modern Koo-wee-rup to the Snowy River is 165 miles as the crow flies: there and back in 21 days always seemed unlikely considering the terrain. In his second periodical report Thomas gives the destination not as the Snowy River, but 'towards Wilson's promontory', ie the Tarwin River near the Bonurong boundary with the Kurnai, and this seems more likely.²² It would have been from Tobinerk that they gave the great shout that the lubras heard and responded to at Kunnung, mentioned in Chapter 3.

Ross' testimony, as Thomas took it down, does not agree totally with the above. Ross said that there was no water at the first encampment, and that they managed by drinking about ten quarts of water from a hollow in a large dead tree on the ground. Longlun, where they stopped two nights was on a large body of water that goes to Mr Andersons.²³ The 16 February was the last night he encamped with them and they were up all night making spears: at that stage they were keeping to a course NE by N bearing to the E, and getting into country almost impassable, with no food but bears.²⁴

To explain to La Trobe the deadly enmity that had existed for a very long time between the Bonurong and their eastern neighbours, Thomas went on to list the

20 CY 2605, item 1, with vocab, ML.

21 Thomas Miscellaneous Papers, CY 2984, frame 282, ML.

22 VPRS 4410, unit 3/67: 13, PROV.

23 Thomas Massie and Samuel Anderson were at the Bass River, the furthest station out from Melbourne in 1840, Thomas to Robinson, 27 February 1840, CY 2946, item 2, ML. According to Gunson they used bricks from the old 1826 settlement at Corinella in the construction of their first homestead, Gunson 1968: 19.

24 Thomas Journal, 17 February 1840, CY 2605, item 1, ML.

events in which the Bonurong had suffered at the hands of the Kurnai. Thomas was at pains to point out that he was not excusing or justifying their behaviour, and neither were they. Thomas explained to La Trobe that he had known about these historic events almost from when he arrived in Melbourne, and that they formed part of the Bonurong *singing*.²⁵

The Bonurong suffering at the hands of the Two Fold Bay tribe²⁶

'About four years ago [1836] 77 people were killed at Little Brighton not nine miles from Melbourne'.²⁷ Thomas' writing is not easy to read, though as scholars know, it is nowhere near as difficult as Robinson's, but Thomas' numbers are usually quite clear. In this case, he has used an upward sweep before the down stroke of the numeral. At first glance, the number here appears to be 77. But 77 is a very large number of people to be killed in a dawn raid by rushing a sleeping encampment which this event was. For a long time, I doubted the evidence of my own eyes and was inclined to believe that the number must be 11.

The high number though, was confirmed by Munmunginna to Robinson in 1844. A party of five Europeans including Robinson, Sergeant Windredge of the Native Police, George Henry Haydon, another policeman named Keef plus six Native Police including Munmunginna, were pushing into Gippsland in an attempt to open up a road for commerce. As they struggled through the country inland from Cape Liptrap, Robinson recorded that it belonged to the Yowwengerre section of the Boongerong, now extinct, extirpated by the Boro Boro Willum or Gippsland blacks.

The chief or mor mun of the Yowwengerre was Pur. Rine, native place Warmun, is dead. This tribe once powerful are defunct and the country in consequence is unburnt having no native inhabitants. This is the reason why the country is so scrubby. The natives of Gippsland visit the inlet at Pubin.borro and other inlets in the snowing season. There must have been an awful massacre of these natives. Mun mun jin ind's father

25 In his 1858 paper for Mr Duffy on Songs and Dances, Thomas distinguishes between 'sacred or profane' songs. Sacred and traditional songs are usually accompanied by 'effigys' which bear some resemblance to what they represent in song. The carved tree at Worawen and the monuments at Tobinerk would seem to fall into this category of effigies, with sacred songs attached to them (CY 3131, frame 18, ML).

26 Robinson recorded in September 1840 that the Waverong natives called all the Twofold Bay natives Tarn. dil or Bar.bar.ry (Clark 2000, vol 6: 87).

27 This was well known to early settlers, is mentioned in histories of Brighton, and pioneers' accounts – it was commonplace information in early Melbourne history. It happened in, or near, what is now Hurlingham park in East Brighton: the Aboriginal name for it was Worowen meaning place of sorrow (Thomas Quarterly Report 1 July to 31 December 1849, Dixson Library), and the corroboree tree on which stick figures were incised detailing the events was still standing in the 1860s. It eventually fell after a lightning strike, according to early Brighton pioneers' accounts.

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was a Yowengerre; Mun mun jin ind gave me an account of the natives of the country and also gave me the names. The natives of Gippsland have killed 70 of the Boongerong at Brighton.²⁸

In a subsequent account Thomas gives more detail:

blacks remember the awful affair at Warrown (place of sorrow) near where Brighton now stands, where in 1834 nearly a quarter of the Western Port blacks were massacred by the Gippsland blacks who stole up on them before dawn of day.²⁹

In a later paper for Mr Duffy on monuments and inscriptions, Thomas gives further detail of this massacre in his description of an incised tree:

[They have] no monuments whatever further than devices on trees where any great calamity have befallen them. On a large gum tree in Brighton, on the estate of Mr McMillan was a host of blacks lying as dead carved on the trunk for a yard or two up. The spot was called Woorroowen or incessant weeping. Near this spot in the year 1833 or 4, the Gippsland blacks stole at night upon the Western Port or Coast tribe and killed 60 or 70 of them.³⁰

My conclusion is that the high number killed at Little Brighton is correct, 77.

As well, it follows logically, that if the 70 people killed were 'nearly a quarter' of the Bonurong, then the total Bonurong population was of the order of 300 or so in the early 1830s. An early pioneers' history of Brighton states that the Aborigines told early settlers tales of a tradition which they had of a great tribal fight in the vicinity of Landcox Park, in which 'large numbers' were killed. In the early days, settlers found bones and evidences of camp fires having been numerous at the place pointed out as the scene of the fight.³¹ Another pioneer's account mentions ploughing up bones by the earliest settler at Hurlingham Park.³² These two parks are practically contiguous in East Brighton, in the triangle between the Nepean Highway, Hawthorn Road and North Road. Before being renamed separately by Europeans, they would have been the same place or space.

28 Clark 1998, vol 4: 49.

29 Thomas half-yearly report, 1 July to 31 December 1849, VPRS 10, unit 11, 1850/55, PROV.

30 William Thomas Miscellaneous Papers, CY 2984, frame 52, ML.

31 John B Cooper, 'The History of Brighton 1842-1925', Ms Typescript, Brighton City Library.

32 Cheeseman Family Papers, Brighton Historical Society.

**Munmungina/Manmangina/Munmunginna/
Munmunginnong/Mun-mun-gin-non/Munmungeena/
Munmungena/Munmungin/Marnminginner/
Munonmungi/Mr Dun/Dr Bailey/Jack**

Brother to Burrenum (Mr Dredge), recognised authority on the Mornington Peninsula but not a chief (Barwick 1984: 117).

Fine, faithful black, good disposition and temper. Out on three expeditions. Taken ill at the Wimmera and returned before his comrades. Black doctors recommended rambling through the district which he did to no effect. Died at Mahoon 16 August 1845 (Thomas in Bride 1969: 409).

20 Mar 1839 – Munmunginna, Jack, Boonorong tribe, age 18, unmarried male whose family is not ascertained (Dredge census, Robinson Papers, vol 54, ML); Jul 1839 – Mun-mun-gin-non, name taken in encampment (Thomas, set 214, unit 1, ML); 18 Nov 1839 – Munmungin beastly drunk, this youth till morning kept the encampment into excitement, gets the liquor from Mr Lee (Thomas in *HRV*, vol 2B: 558).

1840 – his name is on a list of single men grouped with Mr Young (Nerreninnen) and Pinterginner, determined to go on the raid to Gippsland (Thomas, CY 2605, frame 8, ML); 1840 – his name is on another list of single men who are part of the principal families (Thomas, CY 2605, frame 23, ML); 7 Feb 1840 – Marnminginner and Pinterginner come into the encampment near Tooradin at 11 pm from Mr O'Connors ... signalled with the call of a wild dog ... brought in plenty of damper, potatoes and flour which they got from an old shepherd working for Mr Devilliers (Thomas, CY 2605, item 1, ML); 12 Feb 1840 – Munmanginer was one of those who went to French Island long, long time ago before white man come (Thomas, CY 2605, item 1, ML); 13 Apr 1840 – Barrabools and Mt Macedons shift camp in Melbourne to north side of Yarra but Munmunginum is one of a large group mainly Bonurong who stay with Thomas (Thomas, CY 2605, item 1, ML); 24 Nov 1840 – From Nerre Nerre Warren Thomas sends his dray to Tuerong to bring Mrs Thomas, Munmunginna accompanies dray (Thomas, CY 2605, item 2, frame 192, ML); 26 Nov 1840 – Munmunginna among the party of Western Ports leaving Nerre Nerre Warren for 5 days to go to Korrrarra, Toolum [Balnarring] and Kirkbillesse [near Tooradin] for eels (Thomas, CY 2605, item 2, frame

193, ML); 11 Dec 1840 – At Nerre Nerre Warren after a dispute about work [the Western Ports want to leave, saying **no good work**], Munmunginna comes to Thomas and says Western Port blacks **all gogo me also go goodbye**. They have gone to Surveyor Smyth, have left the lubras behind and Thomas fears they are about to go on a bloody mission (Thomas, CY 2605, item 2, frame 204, ML).

24 Feb 1842 – Munmungina enrolled in Native Police Corps, received blankets and equipment; made his mark; remained at Nerre Nerre Warren till 28 March; Corps then left because of lack of water and marched in easy stages to Yarra Yarra and camped opposite surveyor's paddock (Dana to La Trobe, VPRS 19, box 28, 42/674, PROV); 27 Jul 1842 – 2nd Division to the westward including Munmunginna, rationed since 1 Feb (Commandant to La Trobe, VPRS 19, box 30, 42/1143, PROV); 2 Nov 1842 – 'It was at Mollisons that my black trooper Dr Bailey gave me a lesson about native names, **Mititern – Mimitedon – Momiteden – Momitaten – Momateden – Momatzeden – Monmacedon**' (La Trobe 'Memoranda of Journeys', Ms 130003, Box 79/1, safe, SLV); 1842 – Return of Corps for the year – Munonmungi or Dr Bailey, aged 20, single, no children, never punished, on duty at Western Port and for 4 months at Mt Macedon police station. General conduct very good, well disposed and obedient (*NSW Legislative Council Votes & Proceedings*, 1844).

20 Sep 1843 – Thomas visited encampment at Merri Creek, party of Native Police preparing to depart for Gippsland, Munmungina, Yummerbuk, Murrembean, Kunnunnnerbun, Kulpendure and Mumbo – 'some of the principal families but not a wimper or wild howling as heretofore, only shaking of hands like white peoples. The mother of Kulpendure [also known as Robin, Billibellary's own son] dropped a tear down her sable cheek, but Billibellary soon quiet'd it by saying **no gammon white man plenty come back 2 moons**. They left in good spirits promising not to kill Gippsland blacks only shake hands' (CY 2606, frame 108, ML); 29 Sep 1843 – Munmungina, Dr Bailey, on service sine 19 September in Gippsland (Dana Return, 43/7302 in 4/1135.1, AO of NSW); 20 Oct 1843 – Yankee Yankee, Ben Benger and a few other Western Ports came into the encampment at Merri Creek with some plan or news which caused the Native Police to be 'most trying' and Sergeant Bennett could do nothing with them, some feigning ill, others said direct they would not go. Finally 5 were made to go [off again to Gippsland], 2 currently serving Native Police, Mummungina and Charlie, 2 who had been dismissed Benbow and Poky Poky, and one who was a deserter Kulklo.

Two lubras cried bitterly, Munmunginna's mother and sister (CY 2606, frame 87, ML); Oct – Nov 1843 – With CCL Tyers endeavouring to get through to Gippsland. Back before 25 December 1843 (Dana Return, 43/7302 in 4/1135.1, AO of NSW).

Feb 1844 – Munmunginna is one of the named Native Police among 700 of the tribes assembled at Merri Creek to watch judicial proceedings (Thomas to CP, VPRS 11, unit 8/469); Apr 1844 – Munmunginna is with Sergeant Windredge, Robinson, Thomas and Haydon and five other named Native Police pushing through into Gippsland (Haydon 1846: 122); Jul 1844 – he comes from this country, Tobon.nur.rick, [Jamieson's station] (Robinson in Clark 1998, vol 4: 115); 27 Apr 1844 – Mun mun jin ind's father was a Yowengerre, from Warmun, now dead ... tribe all extinct ... this is why the country is so scrubby. He gave me an account of the natives of the country and also gave me the names. The natives of Gippsland have killed 70 of the Boongerong at Brighton (Robinson in Clark 1998, vol 4: 49); 27 May 1844 – Munmunginnong's conduct is not as good as Sergeant Windredge expected but he hopes that in a short time he can make Mumbo and Munmunginnong as good as the rest (Windredge to Dana, enc to 44/6172 in 4/2666, AO of NSW); 1 Jul 1843 – 30 Jun 1844, Munmungina's name is on a return of Native Police stating that he is obedient and willing (VPRS 19, Box 60, 44/1177 (a), PROV).

19 Feb 1845 – Munmungina is praised by CCL Tyers for his good conduct as one of the 4 Native Police on duty in Gippsland for last seven months (Tyers to La Trobe, VPRS 19, Box 68, 45/324, PROV); 23 Mar 1845 – With six other named Native Police Munmungina is given 3 days leave for good conduct to go to Merri Creek [from HQ at Nerre Nerre Warren] to attend a coroborree (VPRS 90, PROV); 10 Aug 1845 – Munmunginner died at Mahun, Western Port, aged 25, single, one of the NP (Thomas Return of deaths June 1845 – November 1845, in Governor's Despatches, vol 51, MLA 1240, ML); 21 Sep 1845 – Burrenum arrives at the encampment south of Melbourne and confirms the news that Munmunginna died about six weeks ago at Mahun. Much lamentation among lubras especially Billibellary's (CY 2606, item 3, ML).

Then Thomas gives the evidence for the next massacre in the sequence.

'About 9 years ago [about 1831]', 12 Bonurong were killed at the place in Westernport at which 20 Bonurong men left all their women and children and three old men in Thomas' care while they went to Gippsland to kill their

enemies – this is the river Kunnung which flows into Western Port near modern Koo-wee-rup, referred to in the records as Jamieson's station.³³ The importance of this location has already been seen in the elaborate monuments that Thomas saw and described and which are reproduced in this book.

Another version of this massacre was recorded by James Maxwell Clow,³⁴ son of the Rev James Clow, and manager of his station, Tirhatuan, on Dandenong Creek:

Previously to the country which lies on the western side of the bay of Western Port (between what was at one time Manton's, and Allan's run), being occupied by squatters in the year 1835, the Gippsland blacks attacked some five-and-twenty of the Western Port tribe in the gray of the morning, and cut off every one of them. Their tombs consist of many cairns plainly visible to this day. When I went to reside at Dandenong in 1838, the blacks told me of the occurrence, and that they never had been able to avenge the wrong.³⁵

Then he gives the evidence for the massacre between Kangerong and Arthur's Seat: 'about 18 or 20 years back nearly half the tribe were killed between Kangerong and Arthur's Seat'.³⁶ Definitionally, for nearly half the Bonurong to be wiped out, they must have been surprised while asleep in a dawn raid by their enemies. This was the way Aboriginal groups destroyed their enemies when they meant business.³⁷

An important cultural difference needs mention here. Aboriginal cultural practice was to settle matters of honour in large formal gatherings, with one to one combat by trial. When one of the warriors fell or was injured, that was enough; honour was satisfied. It is a very well adapted strategy for small populations. Knowledge of this puts the Gippsland raids into perspective.³⁸

33 See Thomas 'Map of Western Port District', VPRS 4410, unit 3, item 67, PROV.

34 Bride 1983[1898]: 359. Ian D Clark has drawn attention to this reference, which does not seem to have been noticed previously, possibly because it is a footnote in James Maxwell Clow's account of his station in another squatting district, near Lake Hindmarsh in the Wimmera, and not in his father's account of Tirhatuan, the well known account.

35 In addition to their run Manton's Creek at Flinders, Charles and Frederick Manton held another run Tooradan, known as Manton's Heifer station at the top end of Western Port opposite the north-west point of French Island (VPRS 6168, CS 68, PROV); Robert Innes Allen held Balla Balla at Tooradin.

36 Thomas to La Trobe, 6 June 1840, from Arthur's Seat, Letter book 2, Thomas Papers, set 214/8, item 2, CY 2946, ML.

37 For the same reason, Standing Orders for the Native Police Corps of 1842 specifically prohibited surrounding a sleeping encampment and rushing it at dawn.

38 Europeans failed to see that this was an adaptive strategy well suited to small populations. They were inclined to contrast the failure to fight large battles with the cultural strategies of the Europeans' valiant foes the Maoris, who fought in serried ranks exactly as the British did at that time, see Fels 1988: 191.

The fact of the timing was confirmed to Thomas on 21 April 1840, when the Bonurong, fearful, would not continue on their planned route to Arthurs Seat – the massacre happened at night.³⁹

Thomas recorded two aspects of routine group behaviour that lead us in the present to the conclusion that this encampment between Kangerong and Arthurs Seat would certainly have been Baggamahjarrawah/Buckkermittewarrer. He recorded that ‘Natives have their regular staying places’:⁴⁰ these encampments are like train stations. Both the Bonurong and their enemies used the same encampments on the eastern side of Western Port, and anyone travelling to and from Melbourne, even though the route was outside their own country, for example Barrabools, Mt Macedons, Waworongs, all used the regular Bonurong encampments on their journeys, Elsternwick, Brighton, Mordialloc, Carrum, Frankston, Mt Eliza, Mt Martha, on the eastern coast of Port Phillip.

His second observation was that though they usually shifted encampment upon a death, when they knew the cause of death they did not bother, ‘Natives do not shift Encampment when death is occasioned by accident or killing’.⁴¹ The Bonurong continued to use the massacre site Worawen, the place of sorrow: Worrowurk, a Western Port black, aged 28 died on 4 August 1843 at Worawen.⁴² They, and their enemies the Kurnai, continued to use the massacre site at Kunnung where the memorials were erected, and they continued to use Buckkermittewarrer, the only encampment between Kangerong and Arthurs Seat.

This amphitheatre area from Mt Martha to Arthurs Seat appears to have been Bonurong heartland,⁴³ and the evidence from Thomas’ papers suggests that some people were permanently in occupation. They were a fishing tribe according to George Gordon McCrae,⁴⁴ and the prime fishing spot was the mouth of Brokil Creek, a site which has now been destroyed, regrettably without archaeological investigation because its significance was not known, in the construction of the Martha Cove development.⁴⁵

39 Thomas Journal, CY 2605, item 1, ML.

40 Thomas Journal 6 February 1840, Byrt 2004: 31.

41 Thomas Papers set 214/2, item 1, 26 April 1840, summary marginal note, CY 2605, ML.

42 Thomas Summary of Births and Deaths, 1 March to 1 December 1843, Y 2604, item 5, ML. Unusually, Thomas did not write a column for sex but that is a male name and this person is one of the D’Villiers brothers, Warrawaruk, Koolin, married, wife Maryagrook, a member of one of the Principal Families of the Bonurong (CY 2605, item 1, ML). These two men acquired their names from Christiaan Ludolph Johannes de Villiers who instituted the 1837 Native Police in Port Phillip. Note though, the inconsistency that the same person is listed exactly the same way on Thomas ‘Family Connections’ Census of 1846. There were two De Villiers brothers: one of these records is false. I suspect that it is this one, the wrong brother is listed. Warrawurk has ‘a 22 yo son Lively’ on the Family Connections census. The brother who died at Warrowen was only 28 at date of death.

43 Tubberubabel, where Gellibrand’s party found the 100 huts was ‘never deserted’.

44 McCrae 1911: 19.

45 The author of the archaeological report on Martha Cove knew of the existence of the Protectorate, did not know that it was started on the Mornington Peninsula, and hopelessly confused stations established after

The massacres remembered

This massacre of 18–20 years ago was quoted as the reason for their refusal to go back to Arthurs Seat after the big tribal meeting in April 1840. After receiving his marching orders from La Trobe, Thomas managed with some difficulty to get all the five tribes on their way back to their various home countries. They burned all the encampments and the Bonurong set off for Arthurs Seat. Thomas himself set off next day and caught up with a large party of 87 Bonurong encamped by the track at present day Elsternwick. 26 of the men were sitting down in council, frightened – all would be killed if they went to Arthurs Seat. They had met two white men and a Sydney black travelling with a flock of sheep. The Sydney black told the Bonurong that 'plenty' Two Fold Bay tribe, together with the VDL black Ben Lomand, were on their way to kill all the Bonurong. Thomas was furious, and chased after this party, tracking them by their sheep. He hauled the Sydney black back to the Bonurong council, threatening him with jail, and obliged him to tell his story again to Thomas in front of the Bonurong council and 'all came out'. The Sydney black acknowledged that he had not seen this war party from Gippsland, that Ben Lomand and two white men had told him the story. But 'it was all to no avail. My blacks were too much frightened. They said **long, long time ago Twofold Blackfellow kill at night almost all Black Port Phillip**'.⁴⁶ Thomas was not able to persuade them to go on to the Arthurs Seat district, and he and they returned to Melbourne. Next day, he recorded meeting a black on horseback, Dalla⁴⁷ who told him that all the blacks were frightened and that even the white surveyor of the district, Smythe, was frightened of the wild blacks.

When the Bonurong finally got over their doubts about the wisdom of going back to the Arthurs Seat district, another spanner was thrown into the works by one of Robinson's VDL blacks, Isaac, who arrived in the Arthurs Seat district armed with a large musket. He said he was in search of two of Robinson's VDL lubras, Trucaninni and Charlotte, and attempted to ingratiate himself with the settlers by warning them that the Two Fold Bay blackfellows were 'coming down'. He 'bid them get plenty of guns ready'. Isaac then robbed Hyatt's station about 43 miles from Melbourne,⁴⁸ taking food, clothing, tobacco, rug and blankets, pannican, buckshot and about ten flints. Then he disappeared.⁴⁹

1861 by the Board appointed to watch over the interests of the Aborigines, with the Protectorate of 20 years earlier.

46 Thomas Journal, 21 April 1840, CY 2605, set 214/2, item 1, ML.

47 Unidentified as yet. He could be Dalla Kal Keth, or he could be Talliorang (Dollar Dollar), a Western Port black, listed as aged 22, an unmarried man, an orphan, on Thomas Family Connections Census, 1846 (CY 3083, ML); he also appears on Thomas' 1840 list as an unmarried man.

48 Ian Clark identifies this person as John Highett of Pal.lay.rang.un station near Tuerong: it is the same place that Thomas inscribes as Poleorongong. It is the same place as Meyrick inscribes as Ballanarong south of Mt Eliza (Meyrick 1939: 171). The southern boundary of Ballmarang was the northern boundary of Tuerong (*Port Phillip Gazette*, 13 December 1848: 557). Gunson notes that John Highett was believed to be the first person to take stock over the Dandenong Creek, settling near Frankston (Gunson 1968: 19).

49 Thomas to Robinson from Tubberubbabel 14 May 1840, VPRS 11, unit 7/308, PROV.

William Buckley, the convict who escaped from Collins' settlement at Sorrento in 1803 and made his way round the bay where he was adopted by the Waudthourong at Indented Heads, also recounted the massacre, though, as with all of Buckley's recollections which can be checked, he got it partly wrong and partly right. He described the Bonurong as 'a small tribe ... greatly thinned in number by a cruel onslaught made on them in the night by the Waworongs, on which occasion they murdered men, women and children'.⁵⁰ In this instance, Buckley got the name of the perpetrators wrong.

On 12 February 1840, Pinterginner (Mr Hyatt) one of Thomas' Bonurong Native Police,⁵¹ told Thomas that:

all the blacks from Wilson's Promontory ... to Kirkbillesse all this country where we now were dead, not one left. Two Fold Black fellows long time ago killed many, many, rest all dead.⁵²

George Gordon McCrae, writing of the period 1845–51 when his family was living at Arthurs Seat, lists among the three obsessions of the blacks dread of the 'Warrigal' or 'wild blackfellow'. When they were encamped in force, say 100 to 200 strong, he wrote, they encamped in the snug retreat in the bottom between the Cape Schanck Road and the bay, beneath the shadows of the great Coast Banksia, or in the aromatic covert of the *Bimbel* or beach tea tree, but when they arrived in straggling parties by twos and threes, or by the half-dozen, they infinitely preferred the protection of a three railed fence and as close to the house or huts as might be.⁵³

At about the same time in Gippsland, Mr Tommy, a young Bonurong accompanying Edward Hobson's large party to Port Albert in 1844, 'took great pains to explain the whole affair' to Lavinia Brodribb Bennett when they passed the spot where the revenge party cut up some of the Kurnai bodies of those they killed in March 1840. He was present at the time, as well as Billy Lonsdale and de Villiers and two unnamed others. The occasion of telling the story, retrospectively, was the finding of a knife by Mr Sage, one of Edward Hobson's party. On finding the knife, Sage turned to Tommy and said 'dropped by a white man I believe'. But Tommy said '**Boruck** (which means in their language "No")' and went on to tell the story of the revenge raid and the killing of the nine men women and

50 *HRV*, vol 2A: 176.

51 Pinterginner/Bentagunen/Pen.dug.ge.min is a prominent Bonurong in the records of this period. His country was probably Mt Eliza.

52 Thomas Journal, CY 2605, frame 56, ML.

53 George Gordon McCrae, 'Reminiscences not exploits', vol 4, Ms 2523/5(d), SLV. The other two obsessive dreads were the spells of the cordage or magician/doctor, and of the evil spirit Gudyill-Gudyill.

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children, the same story he told to Lavinia Brodribb Bennett: regrettably for us, avid for information, she says that 'I did not pay much attention to it at the time'.⁵⁴

In 1846 Thomas questioned the absence of all the men from an encampment at Grim Grim; the women told him that they had gone to 'catch wild blackfellows', and after a 'little humouring' from Thomas the women gave the names of those gone on 'this murderous errand', 18 men from the Western Port, Mt Macedon, Yarra and Barabool tribes. The Western Port men were:

- Budgery Tom
- Worringittolong
- Worrunteorong
- Burrenun
- Poleorong
- Buller Bullup
- Bobbinary
- Lummer Lummer
- Yal Yal
- Nerreninnen.

The old man Berberry explained to Thomas that:

**The Gippsland blacks are very bad men,⁵⁵ steal and kill white man's
Bullocks and they gone to helpem white man too much frightened
to gogo bush.⁵⁶**

Even as late as July 1850, when Thomas consulted the Western Port blacks yet again on their preference for a reserve, they chose Moody Yallook on the grounds that there were plenty of eels there, but also because 'they should not feel safe at being further on the coast on account of the Gippsland blacks'.⁵⁷

Many years later R Brough Smyth asked Thomas to make a careful estimate of the Aboriginal population of the whole of Victoria just prior to white settlement.

54 Lavinia Hasell Bennett, *Account of a Journey to Gippsland*, 7 May 1844, p. 182 and 26 May 1844, pp. 188–189, in Brodribb 1976. Note that the editor has done an excellent job in transcribing Lavinia's difficult writing, but is not an expert on Bonurong people. He has guessed Mr Jonny as the name of the Bonurong (fn 18, p. 182), the letter formation of the name being ambiguous. I believe that it is most likely that Hobson took 'his' black Tommy on this trip. But if the present whereabouts of this journal were known, and permission was given to read it, the identification might be clear. The other 'sable companion' on this trip with Hobson was Charlie Tara with whom Tommy was associated in the 1846 search for the alleged white woman. More research is needed.

55 Pinterginner/Bentagunen/Pen.dug.ge.min is a prominent Bonurong in the records of this period. His country was probably Mt Eliza.

56 Thomas Journal, Thursday 21 May 1846, CY 2606, frame 353, ML.

57 Thomas Journal, Friday 26 July 1850, CY 3127, ML.

The figure Thomas gave him was 'not less than 6000'. Of that number, Thomas' count of the Aborigines within the counties of Bourke, Evelyn and Mornington was 350. But Thomas went on to state that:

one half at least of one of the tribes inhabiting these counties had perished in 1834 in a war with the Gippsland and Omeo blacks and that previous to the war the number was not less than 500.⁵⁸

At roughly the same time that Brough Smyth was collecting his material but quite independently, a Western Port man named Peter (Tu-ar-dit on 1861 census) working for the McHaffies on Phillip Island, familiar with the traditions, told McHaffie of the almost complete annihilation of the Western Port blacks by the Cape Liptrap blacks.⁵⁹

Gippsland blacks' recorded view of the Bonurong

Those living in the Western Port district of Victoria they [the Kurnai] called Thurung or tiger-snakes because as I [Howitt] have heard them say, 'they came sneaking about to kill us'.⁶⁰ Howitt recorded also his understanding of the extent of Bonurong country: 'It may be mentioned that a strip of country from the mouth of the Werribee River, and including what is now Williamstown and the southern suburbs of Melbourne, belonged to the Bunurong, a coast tribe, which occupied the coast line from there around Hobson's Bay to Mordialloc, the whole of the Mornington Peninsula, and the coast from Westernport Bay to Anderson's Inlet'.⁶¹ He also thought that 'Tradition and legend both point to the Bunurong or Wurunjeri being the parent stock [of the Kurnai]'.⁶² Further, he stated that 'The Bonurong at Anderson's Inlet intermarried with the Jato-wara-wara division of the Brataua clan of the Kurnai, but I have no knowledge of how such marriages were arranged'.⁶³

58 Smyth 1972[1878], vol 1: 32. Brough Smyth inserted a footnote, 'I give this statement as it was given to me'. One wonders at that; it is almost a disclaimer. Note that this description, 'within the counties of Bourke, Evelyn and Mornington', roughly embraces the combined country of the Warwong and the Bonurong. The combined population was counted on the 1839 census, and amounted to a little over 200. Thomas is saying that more than half of the combined population of the two tribes had perished prior to contact.

59 McHaffie was told in 1870: Hardy 1942.

60 Howitt 1904: 41.

61 Howitt 1904: 71.

62 Howitt 1904: 134.

63 Howitt 1904: 257.

Payback, the retaliation raid by the Twofold Bay blacks

The Twofold Bay blacks did come after the Bonurong, on 3 October 1840, seven months after the Bonurong raid into their country. The Twofold Bay blacks got as far west as Jamieson's station on the river Kunnung but they contented themselves with trashing the huts and carrying off much European plunder.⁶⁴ Thomas' detailed account is very interesting because it tells of the remarkable monuments at encampments which were used, in turn, both by the Bonurong and their enemies.

Thomas was told to investigate the raid, and he left Nerre Nerre Warren for Jamieson's then Gippsland with the brothers Nuluptune and Mumbo.

Nunupton/Nunuptune/Nalnuptune/Nuluptune/ Nunnapoton/Nunupthen/Namapton/Billy Langhorne/ Mr Langhorne

A Bonurong man, according to Barwick, a son of Tuolwing/Old George the King who was clan head of the Ngaruk–Willam, whose country has not been determined with certainty: one primary source says Brighton and Mordialloc, another says from Gardiner's creek to south of Dandenong (Barwick 1984: 117). Thomas' 1846 census lists him and his brother Mumbo as Bonurong whose country is Mt Macedon, but on the Yarra blacks section of the census, Nunuptune and his brother Mumbo are listed again as young men principally orphans^I (Thomas, CY 3083, ML).

Remained but a few months in the Native Police Corps. He was a good tempered fellow but as restless as a hyena in confinement. He was accused unjustly of taking Mr Willoughby's child at Western Port.^{II} This so frightened him that for years he scarce rambled further than the coast from Mt Eliza to Pt Nepean (Thomas in Bride 1969: 408)

21 Dec 1837 – The Native Police are doing well with the exception of two men Tom and Namapton whom has left the station without my knowledge (CLJ de Villiers to PM Lonsdale, VPRS 4, unit 3, 37/174, PROV).

I. This discrepancy is of particular importance given the evidence presented earlier related to the long stay of the Mt Macedon blacks with the Bonurong at Tubberubbabel and the arguments about whether they were entitled to be rationed as Bonurong.

II. A rumour gained some credence that the blacks had taken the child from the co-incidence of the fact that a small party were in the district at the time, Lummer Lummer, Nerreninnen, Worrakup, Korrabuk and Old Maria, Joe's lubra: Old Maria was known to be very fond of the child. The child in fact wandered off from the No Good Dampier Inn at Dandenong and was never found. This is only one of a number of lost in the bush events involving children: a child was lost from Barker's at Cape Schanck in 1850; Atkinson's child was lost from the Yarra pound in 1846 and the Native Police searched for it. There were others. The subject of lost in the bush children and Aborigines would make a good minor thesis or journal article.

16 May 1838 – CLJ de Villiers testified that on a few weeks earlier, Bet Bengai had told him that Nunnapoton was concerned in the depredations on Clarke's, Jackson's and Clerk's stations and was present at Mr Atkins (*HRV*, vol 2A: 301); 20 Mar 1839 – Listed on Dredge's census as Nalnuptune, age 18, Waworong tribe, unmarried male whose family is not ascertained (Robinson Papers, vol 54, ML); 23 Apr 1839 – Disturbance in camp ... only Nunupton disappointed of a lubra firing off a gun ... he is a Western Port black, a laughing good tempered fellow, every day some new advice would be taken about his clothes (Thomas, uncat Ms set 214, item 14, ML); Jul 1839 – Nunupton/Mr Langhorne, name taken in encampment (Thomas CY 2604, item 1, frame 31, ML); 1 Sep 1839 – Nunupton returned from a war expedition because he was ill (Robinson in Clark 1998, vol 1: 77); 7 Sep 1839 – Nunupton set off with Robinson and some VDL aborigines plus Nunupton's father en route to Arthurs Seat. Nunupton abandoned the party (Robinson in Clark 1998, vol 1: 78); 18 Sep 1839 – drunk, described another murder [that of Tommy] (Thomas CY 2604, item 3, frame 105, ML); 3 Nov 1839 – Nunupton, Bilbilyerry and several other men and boys came to Robinson's quarters to tell him that Nunupton's father, Old George, had just died (Robinson in Clark 1998, vol 1: 101).

21 Feb 1840 – Two Jajoworong blacks who visited Robinson while he was in their country told him that the Port Phillip blacks were *very good* and said they knew Nunupton and Ningolobin [Captain Turnbull] (Robinson in Clark 1998, vol 1: 176); 7 Jun 1840 – his name is on a list of blacks presently at Tubberubbabel (Robinson in Clark 1998, vol 1: 344); 28 Jul 1840 – Nunupton travelled with us to Arthurs Seat on his way to Merricks to muster the Boongerong blacks (Robinson in Clark 1998, vol 1: 357); Aug 1840 – Listed on Parker's return as Konongwillam section of Waworong tribe inhabiting country of Mt Macedon (4/2512.1, AO of NSW); 15 Oct 1840 – Thomas left Nerre Nerre Warren accompanied by Mumbo and Nunuptune (VPRS 11, unit 8, PROV).

2 Dec 1841 – one of 7 blacks who assisted Thomas and CL Powlett in the capture of the VDL blacks Bob and Jack. As a reward they asked for 1 pr trousers, 1 shirt, 1 blanket, leather belt with buckle, neckhandkerchief, and a straw hat and a gun (Thomas to Robinson, VPRS 11, unit 8, PROV).

24 Feb 1842 – Received blankets, clothing and equipment, enrolled and made his mark in the new Native Police Corps at Nerre Nerre Warren; drilled twice daily; Corps remained at Nerre Nerre Warren till water supply failed then marched in easy stages to Yarra opposite surveyor's paddock (Commandant Dana to La Trobe, 31 March 1842, VPRS 19, box 28, 42/674, PROV); 11 Mar 1842 – Nuluptune in the night fires a gun at [blank] formerly a Goulburn black. Altercation. With assistance of Captain Dana settle the affair. Nuluptune strongly protested that he did not shoot at or to them. I take the gun away (Thomas CY 2605, item 5(e), frame 394, ML); 1842 – Nunupton is on the commandant's return for the year as aged 25, married with 1 wife and 2 children; punished occasionally – rations stopped, and confined. On duty at Nerre Nerre Warren in search of lost woman; often employed as a messenger; duty about the camp. General conduct good at first, fond of wandering, a pretty good messenger, likely to improve (*NSW Legislative Council Votes & Proceedings*, 1844); 27 Jul 1842 – Nulupton, 2nd division of Corps, remained at Merri Creek, rationed since 1 February (Dana Return, VPRS 19, box 30, 42/143, PROV).

1843 – Nunupthen/Mr Langhorne – on service in Gippsland since 19 Sep (La Trobe to Col Sec, 4/1135.1, AO of NSW); Nov 1843 – Nunupton has been in the bush for three months (Thomas Uncat Ms set 214, item 3, ML).

1844 – Nunupthen dismissed (Return of NPC, VPRS 19, Box 60, 44/1177 (a), PROV).

9 Sep 1845 – Nunupton's lubra Tuundergrookk, died at Grim Grim 2 weeks ago (Thomas, CY 2606, item 3, ML).

Jan 1846 – On Thomas' list of Native Police who deserted (Quarterly Report, enc to 46/3341 in 4/2745.1, AO of NSW).

11 Aug 1849 – Nunuptune, male aged 30, married, Yarra tribe, died at Mt Eliza (Return, VPRS 10, unit 11, 50/55, PROV).

Mumbo

Son of Tuolwing/Old George the King, and brother to Nunupton/Billy Langhorne.

1835 to 1837 – At some period between these two dates Mumbo was a pupil at George Langhorne's school on the Botanical Gardens site, and could read and answer questions from Dr Watts' catechism (Thomas Quarterly report, December 1846 to February 1847, set 214, item 6, ML).

1837 – Accompanied a party including Alfred Langhorne, one of the Hawdon brothers and Alick Cockburn to a waterhole seven miles from the Dandenong flat (J Bourke, Memoranda of the early days, Ms ML quoted in Hibbins 1984: 23); Quoted as the source of the name of the No Good Damper Inn; according to Bourke the spring was the colour of ink and the damper they baked was consequently black; according to Bourke when Mumbo got his share he said '**I believe no good damper this one**' (Hibbins 1984: 25).

Jul 1839 – On Thomas' list of names taken in encampment as Bul-len-goong – Manbo (CY 2604, item 1, frame 31, ML).

3 Jan 1840 – Feb 1840 – Mumbo's name is on the list of those determined to go to Western Port on the raid to Gippsland (Thomas, CY 2605, frame 8, ML); 15 Oct 1840 – Thomas left Nerre Nerre Warren to go to Western Port to investigate raid on Jamiesons (VPRS 11, unit 8, PROV).

26 Sep 1843 – Recruited into Native Police Corps; Oct to Dec 1843 – with CCL Tyers in Gippsland; 25 Dec 1843 – returned to HQ (Dana Return, 4/1135.1, AO of NSW, and La Trobe to Col Sec 43/7302 in 4/1135.1, AO of NSW).

Apr 1844 – With Sergeant Windredge and five other Native Police accompanying Thomas, Robinson and Haydon through Western Port (Haydon 1846: 122); 27 May 1844 – Sergeant Windredge is optimistic Mumbo can be made as good as the others (Windredge to Dana, enc with 44/6172 in 4/2666, AO of NSW); 1 Jul 1843 – 30 Jun 1844 – Likely to prove one of the best men. Recruited end of September 1843 (VPRS 19, Box 60, 44/1177 (a), PROV).

19 Feb 1845 – Praised by CCL Tyers, one of 4 Native Police on duty in Gippsland for last 7 months (VPRS 19, Box 68, 45/324, PROV); 23 Mar 1845 – With 6 other named Native Police given permission for good conduct to go to Merri Creek on three days leave (VPRS 90, PROV); 29

Dec 1845 – Native place Yarra Yarra, date of enlistment January 1843, length of service 3 years (Dana return, VPRS 19, Box 77, 45/2179, PROV); 8 Apr 1845 – Sergeant Bennett started with Mumbo and two other native troopers to join CCL Powlett's party (VPRS 90, PROV); 2 Sep 1845 – Mumbo returned to HQ and reported the death of his comrade Moonie Moonie after an absence of five months with Mr Powlett's party at the Wimmera (VPRS 90, PROV).

Jan 1846 – On Thomas' list criticising the Native Police as one of the Melbourne tribes who deserted (Quarterly report, enc to 46/3341 in 4/2745.1, AO of NSW); 10 Dec 1846 – Constable Thornhill in Melbourne in charge of two native troopers Mumbo and Jackey which was sent to hospital for medical aid (VPRS 90, PROV). Dec 1846 – One of 2 Native Police admitted to hospital, both under 18 years of age. Thomas visited him in hospital, told him God knows all things and perhaps was afflicting him for aiding in killing a Loddon black some time previous. Mumbo got 'very wrath' said the Loddon blacks had killed all the native police and taken out his marmdulla. Mumbo staggered out to Thomas' horse, tried to mount, couldn't ... sunken eyes, ghostly countenance ... he died a few days later (Thomas Quarterly Report, December 1846 – February 1847, set 214, item 6, ML).

Thomas left Nerre Nerre Warren on 7 October 1840 with the two brothers, not telling them why he wanted them to accompany him. Just before the first muddy river,⁶⁵ they saw smoke of a large fire and the blacks climbed a tree and came down anxious – it was the smoke of the Two Fold Bay black fellows, they said. Thomas left Bob Davis and Mumbo and the cart here, to wait till he could arrange at Jamieson's to send a boat back for them, and he and Nuluptune swam the next four rivers.⁶⁶ When they got to Jamieson's, the station presented a 'doleful experience': three glazed windows in the house were demolished; watches, plate, china, glass, beds, bedding, wearing apparel, household utensils, tools, mill and plough were all destroyed.

Few stations, Thomas said, were better fitted up than Jamieson's and few had more property on them. Straps were cut from saddles and everything iron was either taken or cut off the leather. Feathers were turned out of pillows, and with sacks they stole, they carried off their plunder. A married couple just arrived from Scotland to work for Jamieson lost £300 worth of property and

65 Woollabin, according to his map of 13 Rivers or creeks flowing into the east side of Western Port, CY 3130, no pagination, after p. 107, before p. 111, ML.

66 Kirkbillase, Lalln, Kunun and Warmbrim, CY 3130, no pagination, after p. 107, before p. 111, ML.

an ex-convict lost his precious certificate of freedom. The raid had commenced before dawn, about quarter past five, and ended around 9 am, and the blacks left behind waddies, large shields and a few spears.

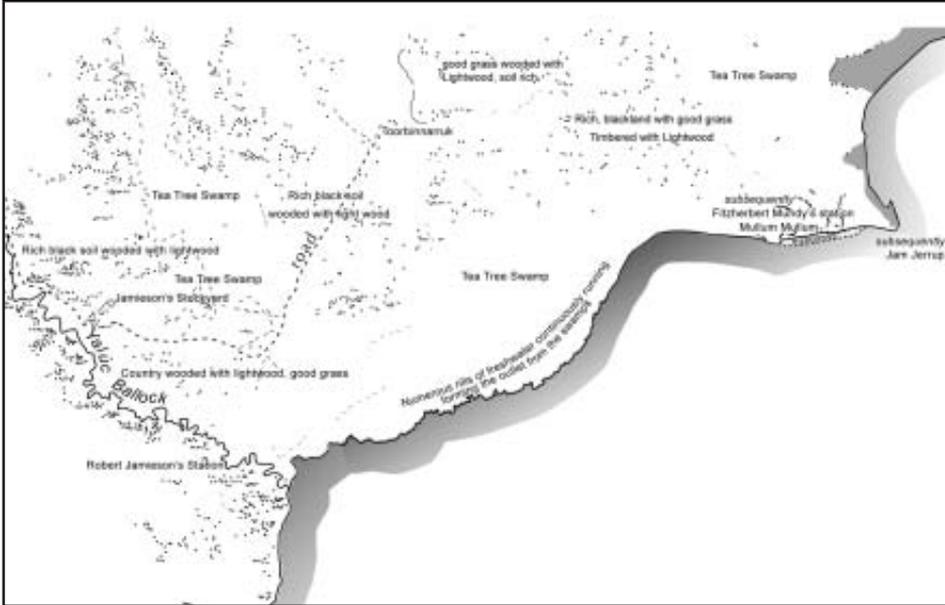


Fig 32. 'Jamieson's Station 1840'

Sketch, © Richard Barwick, 2010, based on George D Smythe's Coastal Survey 15A. This base map is © Crown (State of Victoria), 2010, all rights reserved, Surveyor General of Victoria.

In a second account of the same events, Thomas recorded that the Kurnai had also left behind 'part of a wallaby cloak rather badly formed'.⁶⁷ It was the sight of this cloak which seems to have upset Nuluptune and Mumbo to an extraordinary degree. They were 'terribly frightened', 'cowed', by nightfall, and it was all Thomas could do to keep up their spirits. They would not sleep under cover, and he was obliged to sit up with them keeping guard till midnight, when his man took over the watch. But they were in better spirits next day.

Thomas and Nuluptune and two of Jamieson's men followed the tracks of the departing raiders. About a quarter of a mile from Jamieson's, exactly where Thomas and the waiting Bonurong had camped in February was the spot where the Two Fold Bay blacks had encamped on the night before the raid. Nuluptune went carefully round the fires – there were 18 tiny fires of three sticks each, just enough to keep fire going, smaller than the palm of Thomas' hand. Nuluptune counted the number of blacks who had slept at each fire and notched a stick. The total was huge – 97 men.

⁶⁷ Thomas Journal, CY 2605, frame 149, ML.

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About another quarter of a mile along, again where Thomas and the Bonurong had encamped in January was the place where the Two Fold Bay blacks had encamped one night earlier than the night/morning of the raid. The fires here were larger. There were two devices which Thomas sketched and which Nuluptune could neither decipher nor explain; presumably they were Kurnai markings. They continued on the raiders' tracks to the next river⁶⁸ where the raiders had cut down saplings to carry their booty across. Here was another stoppage, and another formed arch.⁶⁹ Here, the raiders had repacked their plunder more carefully. Thomas found a large milk dish with the ironware wrenched out, a volume of *Dwight's Theology*, part of the back of a looking glass, tops of 'trowzers' cut off, and a quantity of newspapers and flour plus several shields.

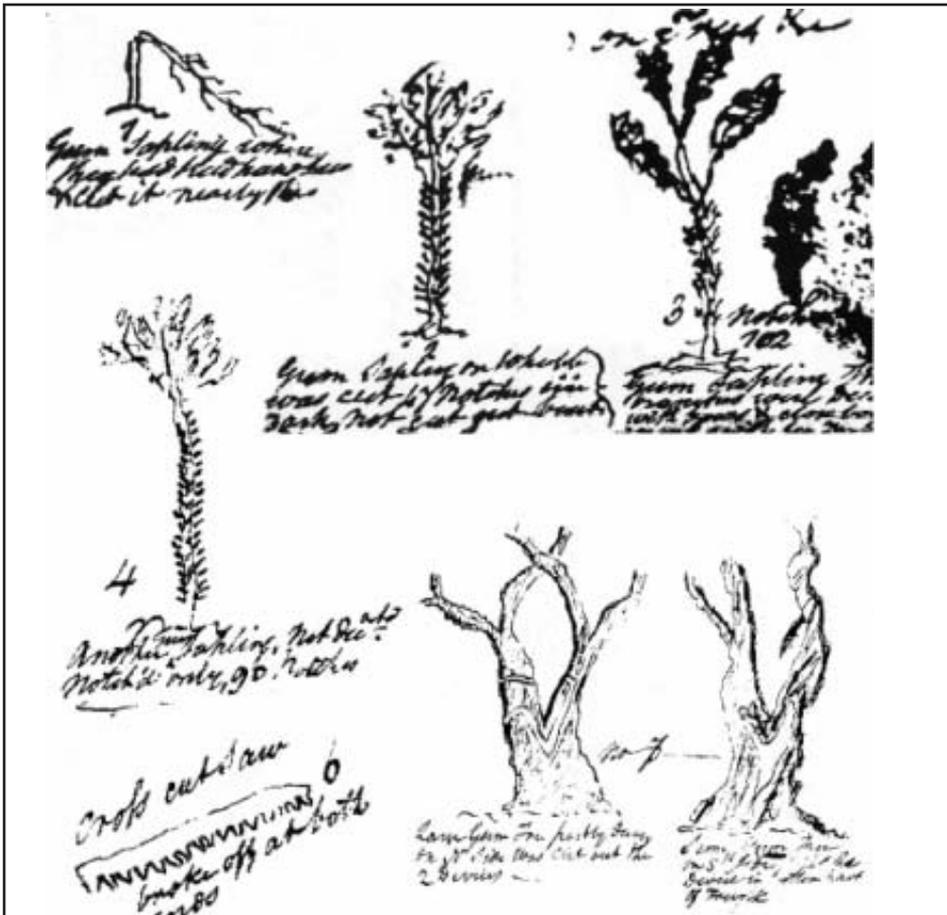


Fig 33. 'Six monuments to the dead, 10 October 1840'

Thomas sketch, from the William Thomas papers, 1834–1868, 1902, Mitchell Library, reproduced with the permission of the State Library of New South Wales.

68 Kunnung River.

69 Thomas had sketched this in February.



Fig 34. 'Monument at Tobinerk, 10 October 1840'

Thomas sketch, from the William Thomas papers, 1834–1868, 1902, Mitchell Library, reproduced with the permission of the State Library of New South Wales.

Nuluptune would go no further, not on any consideration. Thomas even offered to let him ride the horse while Thomas walked, but to no avail. Thomas was able to track them further because their tracks were very plain, as plain as cattle: the horses were often up to their bellies in water. They saw nothing but newspapers and broken china and a hat of Jamiesons, till they came to the river Tobinerk about three miles beyond Jamieson's station. Here they found a crosscut saw

with the ends cut off, and the covers of *Chambers Edinburgh Journal*, fragments of other books, and seven singular devices on trees.⁷⁰ They could not cross the creek because it was too dangerous for the horses – the departing raiders had thrown in to the water so many stumps and trees. But Thomas and his mare did somehow, and on the other side the first thing that presented itself was the artificial arched grove of gum saplings and tea-tree extending over some yards. There was another large milk dish with the wire taken out, straps of stirrups, bullock and other chains, four shields, some fragments of books, more feathers and newspapers. Not four yards from where Thomas pitched his tent in February was a singular pillar of nine dead stumps let into the ground, standing perpendicularly ten feet high with two large pieces of bark standing up against the centre stump.

Thomas thought that the raiders had never seen a white man because they were ignorant of flour and sugar, and he did not think they were from Two Fold Bay because he suspected the existence of two or three large tribes in Gippsland. He returned to Jamieson's, thinking that it was a singular and pleasing feature of this Extensive Robbery that no personal violence was given on either side except in their attempt to walk off with Mrs Houlston. They gave her up without violence except for pulling out her earrings. A gun was fired up in the air but they just jumped and laughed. One of them was injured – the first who attempted the windows shoved his fist through and most dreadfully cut his arm and hand. They afterwards broke the windows with spears. Thomas concluded his account by noting that on their last visit they came within eight miles of Melbourne without ever meeting any civilisation because Jamieson's station was not there then.⁷¹ Thomas expects that they will be back, and Jamieson's men fear it: 'I agree', wrote Thomas.⁷²

Jamieson wrote to Samuel Rawson giving a graphic account of the raid and the damage, describing the attackers as 'mountain blacks ... evidently in search of the Port Phillip tribe'. He gave the most powerful evidential detail in support of his observation that they were unacquainted with Europeans – the fact that they threw away damper, flour, tea and sugar. Jamieson fired one shot to which they paid not the slightest attention, 'I might as well have pointed a walking stick'. The attack went on for four hours, with Jamieson holed up in his hut, preventing their entry via the windows by using his gun 'club fashion'. In spite of his preventing them from entering the hut, they managed to hook out through the windows an 'immense amount of things including blankets, bedding, watch glass, brushes, razors etc'.⁷³ When Rawson wrote to his sister Elizabeth, he added the further detail that Jamieson was asleep when the raid

70 CY 2605, frames 149 and 150, ML.

71 The 1834 massacre at Little Brighton-Warowen.

72 Thomas to Robinson, 15 October 1840, VPRS 11, unit 7/336, PROV.

73 Rawson Papers, Ms 1029, folder 4, NLA.

started, that he was woken by a yell and rushed out of his hut, to find himself surrounded by 100 savages and seized: he knocked two down and got safely back to his hut.⁷⁴ He also told his sister that by this time, the date of his letter, the cattle were recovering from their fright.

A year later in 1841, when Commissioner of Crown Lands Powlett with police, plus Jamieson and Rawson, were tracking the VDL blacks who had killed the two men at Westernport, Powlett asked for military men to accompany the Port Phillip blacks who were tracking Bob and Jack, Trucaninni, Fanny and Matilda because the Port Phillip blacks were so scared of meeting the Gippsland blacks.⁷⁵

This raid retaliatory at Jamieson's by the Gippsland blacks from the east was by any standard big, with 97 fighting men. If their raids in the pre-contact years were of the same magnitude, it is easy to see how they could have wiped out half the Bonurong at Buckkermittewarrar, by surrounding a sleeping encampment and attacking at dawn, and, as well, killed 77 at Waraween in Brighton, and not difficult to understand why the Bonurong were so afraid of them. It is equally of significance that they camped at the same places where they had erected monuments in the past, and that the Bonurong used the same encampments. There is conservatism here, perhaps even a ritual significance.

The original cause of the feud

The root cause of all this death and destruction is as yet unknown, but from an outsiders' perspective now, trying to understand their reality then, the first possibilities to investigate are the common causes of conflict – blame attributed to an outside group for any Bonurong death which was not clearly an accident, dispute over resources, dispute over country and dispute over females.

The 'cup of iniquity'; the attribution of blame for a death to an external group⁷⁶

Father's district was occupied by two tribes of Aborigines the 'Waverong' and the 'Boonwarong' – the Waverongs owning all land bounded in the North by the Yarra, the Bay in the West as far as Frankston – the Boonwarongs the southern part extending to Point Nepean, all round Weston Port Bay to the eastern ranges. These two tribes were on friendly terms and had as long as the memory of Blackfellows carried them, entered into a treaty offensive and defensive. [Marginal note is

74 Letter dated, 19 December 1840, Rawson Papers, Ms 1029, folder 4, NLA.

75 CCL FA Powlett to La Trobe, 16 November 1841, VPRS 19, Box 22, 41/1835, PROV.

76 William Jackson Thomas' explanation is reproduced here in full without comment, CY 3106, frames 56–58, ML.

as follows: against their mortal enemies the Gippsland Native, always designated the Wild Blackfellow]. These two tribes numbered about 450 all told, they were on cordial friendly relations with the settlers, and at the present day [1902] not one remains alive.

The cause of this hereditary enmity between the Weston Port Natives and the Gippsland Natives, I took some pains to search out. It appears according to the firm belief of all Blackfellows that death is in no case (except accident) the result of natural causes, but is always the work of an enemy, of some other tribes who cause the death by craft, charms or muttering some form of imprecation. On the death of any man of the tribe (for they never bother about the Women) – After this man is buried, a space of about one foot is cleared all around the grave, not a blade of grass left; made quite smooth – the graves are always round about four feet in diameter – The medicine men if there are more than one in the tribe, make a long and careful examination of the Ground so cleared, mumbling a monotonous sort of Chant all the time, at length they find or pretend to have found the direction of the Tribe, a member of which has caused the death.

The medicine men of the Western Port Tribe generally spot a member of the Gippsland tribes as the delinquent. This is noted as one against that tribe. After several deaths the cup of iniquity of the Gippsland tribes is supposed to be full, and calls for punishment. For the purpose of inflicting this punishment eight or ten young strong men are selected, who are to show their skill and bravery in an expeditionary raid near the borders of their enemy's country. When they near the borders of the enemy's country they divide into parties of two or three, advance in the most stealthily manner, being careful to leave as little trail as possible. At length they find a weak, detached little group. They wait until they see the young men depart to hunt, then they fall upon the unfortunate old men and women, all of which they ruthlessly murder. They then cut open the bodies, take out the kidney fat, and other portions, with which they return to their own country and exhibit as trophies of the success of their murderous expedition.

This [is] no one-sided affair, for the Gippsland natives act exactly on the same lines. The Western Port Natives tell of many fearful slaughters of their tribe by the Gippsland natives. This unsatisfactory state of the political relations between the several Tribes caused them to be in continual fear and ever watchful.

I have known long consultation among the sages of the Tribe about the fragment of a bone picked up from the ashes of a recent fire, a mile

or two from the encampment. They knew that none of their tribe had lighted that fire, and they believed that the bone was that of a bird or beast from beyond the mountains, therefore their enemies were on the Warpath. The Warriors must be called together, scouts despatched in all directions to track out and expel the intruding blackfellows. I have known a whole encampment to be thrown into a state of panic by the note of a bird or the croak of a frog a little out of tune. The Natives while scouting in the bush signal their position to their company by imitating the note of a bird or some other bush sound previously agreed upon. So when they hear any familiar sound not quite correct, they jump to the conclusion Wild Blackfellows and prepare accordingly.

Dispute over resources as an explanation for the feud

The explanation that the origin of the feud was a dispute over resources is said to have come originally from Barak, the inheritor of the authority of Billibellary via his son Simon Wonga. But there are problems with it. The secondary source uses quotation marks for the following:

‘long before the white men came to Melbourne’ when ‘Mordialloc people went down to the Tarwin to feast on native cabbage’, they followed and killed some of the Port Albert Kurnai who had consumed this resource without permission. The Kurnai had raided Western Port to avenge these killings and ‘the Gippsland and Westernport blacks were never friends after’.⁷⁷

The problem is that I have not been able to find the original reference, which comes originally from the nineteenth century anthropologist Alfred Howitt. He was the Police Magistrate at Sale, and he was a good one, but his deep passion was for all things Aboriginal, and his own knowledge, together with information from correspondents, was vast.⁷⁸ He invited William Barak to come down to Sale from the Aboriginal Station Coranderrk at Healesville in 1884,⁷⁹ to participate in a revival of Kurnai initiation ceremonies, and as well, provide Howitt with information about the Yarra and Western Port blacks. Barak was willing, and the Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines provided a rail ticket.⁸⁰

77 Barwick 1984, pt 2: 116. The reference given is ‘Howitt Papers’.

78 There are large repositories of his papers and correspondence at both the State Library of Victoria and the Museum of Victoria. The Museum’s papers are currently being digitised and are unavailable for six months.

79 Howitt’s biographer states that he made 73 foolscap pages of notes from his conversations with Barak in 1882 and 1884 (Walker 1971: 305).

80 Mulvaney 1970: 205–217.

Unlike William Thomas and George Augustus Robinson, who lived day to day on terms of intimacy with the Aborigines, this was the only time Howitt spent with Barak, about a month. The doubt which must exist regarding the information arises from the descriptor 'the Mordialloc tribe'. The problem has been referred to earlier, the loss of the identity Bonurong, in favour of the European descriptor 'Mordialloc tribe'. It seems to boil down to the following logical possibilities – either Barak was getting old and had forgotten that the Bonurong were much greater than the Mordialloc remnants (it seems to me unlikely that he forgot, but possible that he had got used to the fact of the Bonurong being all gone) or Howitt interpreted Barak as saying Mordialloc tribe because everybody in the European world knew of the 'last of the Mordialloc tribe', or Howitt fed him the descriptor 'Mordialloc tribe' in the conversation. When the original reference is found, and read in its context, this problem may be solved.

The other disconcerting fact about Barak's explanation is that the native cabbage does not appear on the list of native foodstuffs eaten in Victoria, a list prepared for Brough Smyth, secretary to the Central Board by the then government botanist.⁸¹ The list includes the leaves of the *Nasturtium terrestre*, and several species of *Cardimine* and *Lepidium* which were used for cress, and it is possible that 'native cabbage' is subsumed somewhere here. The list also includes the young top shoots of the cabbage palm *Livistonia australis*, another, but more remote possibility.

Then there is the belief to be found on the contemporary Wurundjeri website, which asserts that the dispute was over grass trees, not cabbage grass. The problem with this is that there were extensive grass tree areas on the Mornington Peninsula (Thomas' queer country), and remnants remain still on the walking track through the National Park between Baldry's Road and Cape Schanck. It is difficult to imagine a feud of such proportions over a resource which was plentiful in friends' country.

Dispute over ownership of country as an explanation for feud – 'debatable land'

The secretary of the Central Board was another person with a keen interest in collecting information about all matters to do with Aborigines, and he recorded versions of the myth about Loo-ernn, a spirit believed by some Aboriginal groups to be good, and by others to be evil. Loo-ernn had his home at Wilson's Promontory, and controlled the country between Hoddle's Creek and Wilson's

81 Smyth 1972[1878], vol 1: 212–214.

Promontory:⁸² Smyth explained what the power of control meant – life or death: if anyone intruded into this country without authorisation, they would die at the end of their journey. This was believed. When the members of the Native Police Corps accompanied Robinson and Haydon on the well known 1844 journey, through Gippsland to Two Fold Bay, then across the Alps to Cooma, down to Albury and home, a six month excursion, they performed a ceremony when they got onto this country. Further on, when they came upon an old Kurnai encampment, they worked themselves up into a violent passion and destroyed it. These men were Tunmiel, Mumbo, Munmungina, Waworong, Poligerry and Moonee Moonee.⁸³

Smyth called this land ‘the debatable land’ and he was led to believe by sources whom he does not name, that in former times it was ‘held sometimes by the Western Port blacks and sometimes by the tribes inhabiting Western Gippsland’.⁸⁴

Niel Gunson (with his map maker Keith Mitchell) went to considerable trouble to construct a map showing the tribal boundaries of the Bonurong and their neighbours, and as well, the early squatting stations, clearly showing the ‘Debatable Land’, between the Koo-wee-rup swamp and the Tarwin River.⁸⁵ This country was uninhabited by Aborigines at the time of contact with Europeans, but it was claimed as Bonurong under the following circumstances. In the course of the above-mentioned 1844 journey, when the party was in sight of Cape Liptrap, one of the Native Police, Munmungina, (brother of Burrenum/Mr Dredge), gave Robinson information. Munmungina said that all this country had belonged to the Bonurong who had all been exterminated by the Gippsland blacks except for two people of whom Munmungina was one. Munmungina told Robinson that his own country was Tobin.nur rick Creek and Koornong Creek, ie Manton’s run and Jamieson’s runs at Tooradin and Lang Lang. Munmungina’s dead father was Pur.rine, chief of the Yowenjerre, and his country was Warm.mum or Wilson’s Promontory.⁸⁶ The other Yowenjerre man who was still alive was Carborer (Kurboro).

Without exception, early observers noted and hated the dense, scrubby, almost impenetrable bush country to the south-east of Melbourne. The Native Police Corps made three attempts by different routes to get through to Gippsland in the early 1840s: in the end Commissioner of Crown Lands Tyers had to go by sea to take up his appointment.

82 Smyth 1972[1878], vol 1: 454.

83 Fels 1988: 173–174.

84 Smyth 1972[1878], vol 2: 14.

85 Gunson 1968: 15 for map.

86 Clark 1998, vol 4: 49, 115.

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Gunson believes it very probable that this debatable land between the great swamp and the Tarwin River was never thickly populated, functioning as an Aboriginal 'no-man's land probably only visited at particular times of the year'.⁸⁷

It was the Chief Protector's view that this country was in the state it was because it had not been burnt, all the owners who formerly cared for it, the Yowenjerre, now being dead: as Thomas put it, the tribe was extinct.

All these views have been reviewed recently by the historical geographer Ian Clark for the Native Title Unit of the Justice Department, released under Freedom of Information with considerable portions blacked out.⁸⁸ He believes that the Chief Protector was wrong in assuming that because the country was unburnt, therefore the original inhabitants must be dead: 'This deduction was based on a false analogy with examples of "unnatural ground" (his [Robinson's] term for the neglected estates of clans exterminated or driven elsewhere by squatters) seen on his 1841 tour of western Victoria'.⁸⁹

Clark believes Brough Smyth was wrong too in his 'false conclusion that the area east of Western Port bay was "debatable ground" held sometimes by Kulin and sometimes by Kurnai'.⁹⁰ Clark says that while Howitt's book⁹¹ left some things out, his 'notes proved that the Kulin-Kurnai boundary was clearly defined and that the reciprocal raiding of the 1830s and 1840s was not over land but a "blood feud"'.⁹² Clark's major interest in this report seems to have been not the debatable land of Robinson and Smyth and Gunson, but the land further east between Anderson's Inlet and Wilson's Promontory.

Earthquakes as a factor in territorial ambiguity

My own view on all this is that one piece of possible evidence has been neglected – taking seriously the Bonurong evidence, and as a consequence, considering the shape and extent of Bonurong country prior to the earthquake which the Bonurong remembered as drowning Port Phillip and Western Port.

87 Gunson 1968: 3.

88 Clark 2002. I am grateful to Ruth Gooch for this report.

89 Clark 2002: 247.

90 Clark 2002: 248.

91 Howitt 1904.

92 Clark 2002: 248.

Georgiana McCrae's link between earthquakes and depopulation

Hugh McCrae actually *left out* of both of his editions of Georgiana's journal her final statement following her narrative of Johnny's death in Bogie's arms (Chapter 10):

are these Aborigines of ours of the same race degenerated through the agency of earthquake, floods and famine?⁹³

Georgiana herself recorded two earthquakes, the first on 30 May 1841 and a big one on 28 April 1847. Andrew McCrae was on top of Arthurs Seat for this second one that she recorded, and he said that besides the rumbling under his feet, there was a noise like that of a ship's gun at sea.⁹⁴ And when she was speculating after Johnny died, about similarity in burial customs, she used earthquakes as the first of three possible causes of degeneration, the other two being flood and famine.⁹⁵ From the juxtaposition in the text of Georgiana's account of Johnnie's death, and Bogie, and the speculation about earthquakes, flood and famine, I suspect that she heard the earthquake evidence from Bogie as well.

It *could* be the case that Georgiana was using the word degenerate with its contemporary meaning, ie degradation from type, but she was not a racist, not pejorative in her writing about her sable friends, and I think it is more likely that she was using the word in the sense of the primary Oxford English Dictionary meaning, ie having lost the qualities proper to its kind – in this case, population numbers. Throughout history, the sequence of events – weather event, flood, famine – is associated automatically with the consequences of death and de-population. This is how Georgiana's speculation reads, as an historical sequence.

Further earthquake evidence from Georgiana McCrae

Mr Robert Russell tells me that Mr Cobb converses with the Aborigines in their own language – and believes the accounts they give him of the formation of Port Phillip bay – '**Plenty long ago – gago, gago, gago a long o' Corio**', viz they could go across on foot from our side of the Bay to Geelong – They describe a Hurricane – trees bending to and fro and then the ground sank down – and the sea rushed in at the

93 Weber 2001, 5 October 1851: 654–659.

94 McCrae 1966[1934].

95 Georgiana McCrae's journal, 30 October 1850 in Weber 2001: 656. Hugh McCrae has left it out of his editing of Georgiana's journal.

Heads – and became broad and deep ‘as today’. M^r La Trobe told me long ago that there is a tradition among the Western-port blacks⁹⁶ that – ‘Plenty long – time ago’ the Yarra’s course was along what is now the Carrum carrum swamp – and ran into the sea at Western Port – At Dight’s falls on the Yarra, near Campbellfield are distant traces of some Earthquake, where the Darebin joins the Yarra – and to the North of this, the ground had evidently sunk down with the trees still standing on it – some fifty feet below the former height of the surface – from which it had now been rent.⁹⁷

The Chief Protector’s evidence

George Augustus Robinson recorded in his journal a detailed account of the big earthquake of 28 April 1847:

At 34 minutes past 4 pm on Wednesday 28 April, I was sitting communicating with Mrs Robinson. The weather was calm, the day had been fine and pleasant. We had just parted with a visitor then crossing the river when suddenly the house shook and a loud noise like the noise of carriage running along the verandah and along the roof – the vibrations were short and rapid and lasted about two minutes. Mrs Robinson enquired what was that. I said at once shock of earthquake and the earth did literally quake. My servant cutting wood said he saw the stable shake, and the gardener saw the trees move and the ground under him. Captain Hove my neighbour came to ask my opinion about it. The mercury was below 60 degrees etc where it had been for two or three days proceeding.⁹⁸

Reverend James Clow’s evidence

The Rev James Clow at Tirhatuan near Dandenong recorded three separate subterranean events, one of which, in January 1850 was a significant noise experience, apparently without tremors.⁹⁹ It was a noise like that of an approaching bushfire, and Mrs Clow went outside repeatedly to look and smell for smoke, but the noise came from under the ground: the outstation workers at the mountain gap in the ranges behind Narre Narre Warren heard it too.

96 La Trobe’s favourite black trooper was Munmunginna/Dr Bailey – probably the source of the report.

97 Georgiana McCrae’s journal, 30 October 1850 in Weber 2001: 638–640.

98 Clark 2000, vol 5.

99 Bride 1983[1898]: 111.

The other two events were full earthquakes, one in February or March 1843, the other being the big one of 1847 recorded as well by Robinson and Georgiana McCrae. The 1843 earthquake occurred:

at midnight, when the moon was full, the sky cloudless and the wind still. To me and others at Tirhatuan, the sound was as if a light conveyance, making a sharp rattling noise, had passed rapidly between the house and the kitchen – these buildings being about eight yards apart. The tremour, though distinctly felt, was not great; but at the outstation, near the base of the mountain [Mt Dandenong] both the shock and the noise were very considerable. The two men sleeping in the hut were instantly aroused, and ran out to ascertain what was the matter; but neither seeing nor hearing anything unusual, they conjectured what had happened; and as the shock was experienced in the same manner at Rourke's station, about five miles off, it would appear that it was severest along the base of the mountain.

The second shock was felt in 1847, at the same season of the year. It occurred at four o'clock in the afternoon, and was experienced at the same time in Melbourne and other adjacent places. Those in the house at Tirhatuan, when they felt it moving, ran out in alarm, not doubting for a moment what it was. And a party that were out riding in the direction of the mountain heard it, and were struck with the noise as an extraordinary one, they thought it was caused by horses galloping in the bush.¹⁰⁰

Then there is Thomas' evidence on his sketch of the stations between Narren Gullen (Mt Eliza) and Dandine (Tontine/Mt Martha) 'blacks say **burst from by earthquake between there and Dandine**'.¹⁰¹ This is exactly where the Balcombe Fault is located on a map produced by the geologist RA Keble in 1951,¹⁰² the basis of the Geological Survey Map of the Mornington Peninsula:¹⁰³ it is almost certainly Balcombe Creek to which the blacks referred.

To a non-geologist, another of Keble's maps is disconcerting to say the least: the coast lines of Port Phillip and Western Port are there, it is true, but one has to search to find them. This map collapses time; it is showing 'The stream systems of the Peninsula' but the time is not the present (the present coast lines are irrelevant); the map is showing the abiding stream systems before the

100 Bride 1983[1898]: 112.

101 CY 2984: 543, ML.

102 Keble 1968[1950]: 54, fig 49.

103 I am grateful to Colin Morissey for a copy of the large and valuable Geological Survey of Victoria maps, No 867, zone 7, which have been placed on the Mornington Peninsula Shire database.

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uplift of the central escarpment, as they existed before uplift, and as they still exist today, obscured under the waters of Port Phillip and Western Port, deep water channels of navigation.



Fig 35 Keble's map 'Mornington Peninsula drainage'

Figure redrawn by Richard Barwick from original by AR Keble, 1950.

Bonurong evidence of earthquakes

Earthquakes were also on the Bonurong minds in the 1840s. There is Yankee Yankee's evidence to William Hull: though Yankee Yankee was long dead when the evidence was subsequently published, he must have given it in conversation with the magistrate Hull before his death in 1846. Hull testified thus:

With regard to traditions, I may say it is not generally known that the blacks, – Cunningham [Yankee Yankee], Murray and Old Bembo, say that their grandfather, 'My uncle', as they call him – they do not know the word grandfather, my uncle is the term they use for all progenitors – recollected when Hobson's Bay was a kangaroo ground; they say '**Plenty catch kangaroo, and plenty catch opossum there**'; and Murray assured me that the passage up the bay through which the ships came, is the river Yarra, and that the river once went out the heads, but that the sea broke in, and that Hobson's Bay, which was once a hunting ground became what it is.¹⁰⁴

Hull was cross examined on this in two follow up questions. The chairman, the Hon Thomas McCombie tried to get Hull to agree that the evidence on the ground suggested that the water in the bay had been *higher* once than it was now, and that this suggested a receding of the water rather than a rushing in. But Hull was obdurate; to each follow up question he said 'I only state what their tradition was'.

Recent sedimentary dating of cores from old mines department drilling in Port Phillip has resulted in evidence astonishing to non-scientists. Dr Guy Holdgate, Research Fellow in Geology at The University of Melbourne, has used these results, plus Port of Melbourne Corporation's dredging program multibeam survey results of the bay floor, plus sparker seismic results from his 1970s work with the Geological Survey of Victoria, to model bay water level changes in Port Phillip over the last 10,000 years.

In essence, he believes that climate change has resulted in Port Phillip periodically becoming a dry plain within the last 10,000 years, and most crucially from the point of view of assessing Bonurong evidence, Port Phillip was dry from around 1000 BP to around 3500 BP. The following summary was provided by Holdgate:

1. Port Phillip a dry glacial non-marine surface at 10,000 yrs BP.
2. Between 10,000 and ~7,000 yrs BP there is evidence for freshwater lakes, with marine outside the heads.
3. Marine waters enter the bay at ~7,000 and by 6,000 yrs BP flood to ~+2 to 3m above present reaching to Flemington.

104 Answer to Q. 213, Report of Select Committee, *Victoria, Legislative Council Votes & Proceedings*, 1859: 12.

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- Entrances then block with sand sometime after ~3,600 yrs BP.
- Bay levels start to fall due to evaporation > River/rain input.
- A still stand in Lake Phillip occurs at -20m below sea level.
- Major desiccation to -25m below sea level.
- A hiatus occurs in bay sedimentation between ~3,600 and ~1,000 yrs BP when no sedimentation took place.
- The bay entrances unblock at around 1,000 yrs BP.
- Modern bay levels reached shortly thereafter, and open marine sedimentation in the bay resumes.¹⁰⁵

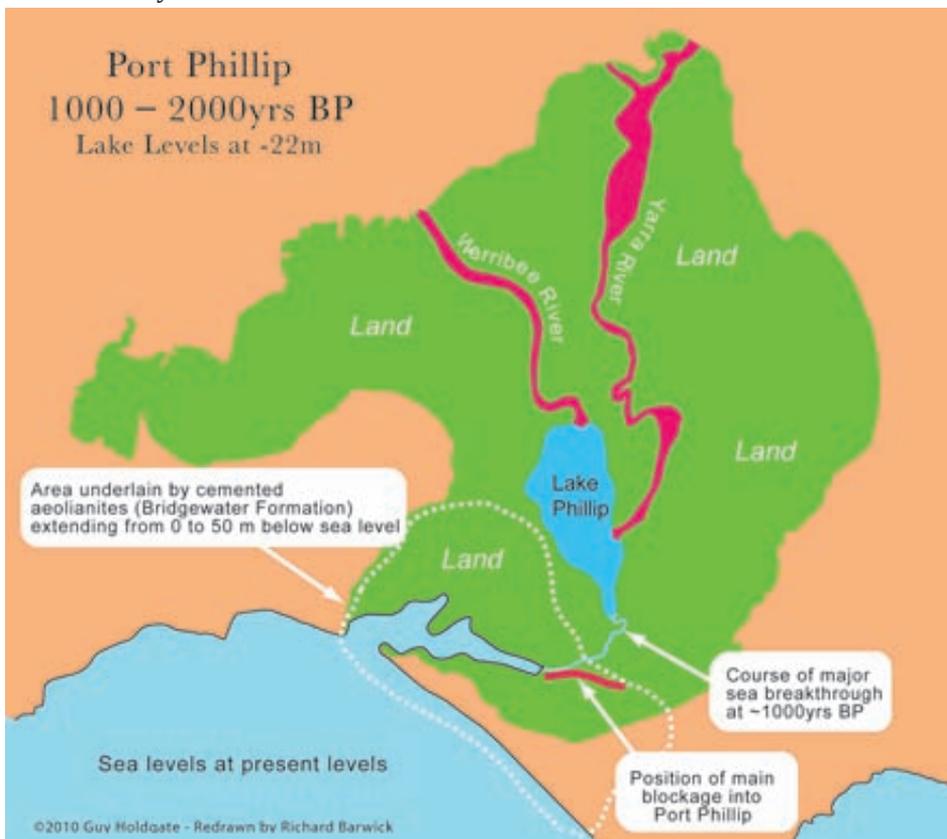


Fig 36. Map of Port Phillip Bay area during the drying period 1000-2000 years BP when the South Channel was blocked

Figure modified from Holdgate et al (2010) in preparation, © Dr Guy Holdgate, 2010.

105 G Holdgate, Seminar, 15 May 2009, Monash University.

Holdgate's explanation is that Port Phillip is mostly shallow, and in extended dry periods the evaporation rate exceeds the infill of water flowing into the bay via the Yarra from its catchment area: parts of the South Channel become blocked with sand. Holdgate's evidence supports Aboriginal evidence that they used to walk across dry hunting land to Corio: 1000 years is a credible span of time for an oral culture to transmit important information from generation to generation.

What the scientific evidence does not do is support the Aboriginal testimony of an earthquake unblocking the Rip with the consequent flooding of Port Phillip from Bass Strait, ie the hurricane and earthquake evidence from Georgiana's journal. Nevertheless, it is still possible to imagine a reconciliation of the oral tradition with the scientific findings. Suppose for example, a Bonurong group were encamped on the deep waterhole near the South Channel, and an earthquake along the Selwyn fault breached the sand banked Rip. It could have flooded this particular encampment and killed everyone even though it did not flood Port Phillip.

It is only fair to state that geological opinion is sceptical about this speculation, and the reason turns on earthquake magnitude. The personal narratives of Clow, McCrae and Robinson are suggestive of an earthquake of around 4 to 5 on the Richter scale. Reading the evidence on the ground of the Selwyn fault, the geologists know that there must have been earthquakes of the magnitude of 5 or 6 on the Richter scale. But an earthquake conforming to the Aboriginal testimony would be around 8 on the scale, and earthquakes of such magnitude are unknown in Australia, though common in New Zealand and other places. Holdgate does not dismiss the Aboriginal testimony out of hand, and can even suggest 'a likely blockage area in Port Phillip where the five fathom contour lines nearly come together just north of Capel Sound'.¹⁰⁶ It is where he believes that the breakthrough occurred of the waters of Bass Strait onto the dry plain around 1000 BP.¹⁰⁷

Undoubtedly there is more to be learned about these processes of drying and flooding and their potential effects on Bonurong lifestyle and population: Aboriginal oral tradition of the sea rushing in cannot be dismissed out of hand.

It seems to me to be impossible that such a catastrophic event as Bonurong loss of the major hunting grounds of Port Phillip and Western Port (though as Holdgate points out, the loss would be slow, over an extended period of time) would not have had some effect on relationships with their contiguous

106 Guy Holdgate, pers comm 28 July 2009. Holdgate has subsequently modified his view on the rapidity of flooding, see *The Age*, 8 May 2011.

107 Enlargement of detail showing choke point north of Capel Sound, reproduced with the kind permission of Dr Holdgate and the Port of Melbourne Corporation.

neighbours. To me, the cabbage grass hypothesis as an explanation for the Bonurong/Kurnai feud is not compelling. Change in Western Port possibly requires more research.

Theft of women as an explanation for feud

The third possible explanation, that females were at the heart of the feud, rests on just a little evidence collected in passing, but whether cause or consequence is problematic. The Gippsland 'Chief' Bungaleena/Bun-je-leene was captured with his two wives and three children by the expedition party in search of the alleged white woman in Gippsland. Commissioner of Crown Lands Tyers wrote that he was a 'wily black who has duped us all'.¹⁰⁸ He and his family were taken to the headquarters of the Native Police Corps at Nerre Nerre Warren where he was confined in a hut with the door open, but guarded. Commandant Dana wrote of him that 'the poor old man was one of the least troublesome and showed more intelligence than any of the old natives who have ever been on this station'.¹⁰⁹

While he was in confinement, Robinson visited him:

inquiring into the nature and fact of the Western Port lubra which was formelly [sic] stolen by Bungaleena and is now in his possession'.¹¹⁰

The woman's name had been given by Bungaleena at the time of his capture as Lundagun.¹¹¹ After questioning Bungaleena, Robinson recorded that she was said to be the daughter of the Western Port man Nerm Nerm also known as Old Man Billy.¹¹² Nerm Nerm will be met with again in Chapter 11 as the father of the young man Poligerry, and a principal in the serious dispute about marriage rules, involving Benbow and Kitty. Two weeks after Robinson recorded his information from Bungaleena, Narm Narm/Old Man Billy visited Robinson in his office at Melbourne: Narm Narm was a Boonwong native, 56 years old, father of Perredit who was a wife of Bungallena. Perredit was a native of Palawrone creek at Mr Horsfold's (Horsfold's station was east of Carrum swamp, roughly on the present Western Port Highway). She was stolen when a girl from Baw Baw¹¹³ at Tarnjil.¹¹⁴

108 CCL to La Trobe, 24 April 1847, 47/789, enc to VPRS 19, Box 92, 47/907, PROV.

109 Dana to La Trobe, VPRS 19, Box 113, 48/2429, PROV.

110 Dandenong Daybook, 14 July 1847, VPRS 90, PROV.

111 Sergeant McLelland to Commandant, 21 February 1847, enc to VPRS 19, Box 90, 47/436, PROV.

112 Clark 2000, vol 5: 163.

113 In discussing the high country and the watershed of the Yarra, William Jackson Thomas mentions a defined Aboriginal track on a spur above Alderman's Creek leading down from Baw Baw, the mere fact of which suggests regular use (CY 3106, frame 90, ML).

114 Clark 2000, vol 5: 165.

Nern Nern/Narm Narm/Murn Murn/Nerm Nerm/ Nannano/Old Man Billy

Nern Nerm (Old Billy) appears on Thomas' 1846 census at the head of the listing of Western Port families as a widow, wife Kurdergoorook, sons Polligerry aged 20 and Tareremo aged 18, whose country is Konniga and the beach [ie Frankston and the 9 mile beach between it and Mordialloc] (Thomas, CY 3083, ML).

1840 – Nern Nerm is on a list of principal families with his lubra Nerven Nerven and his male child Tareum; he is Mr Hill's father,¹ (Thomas Papers, CY 2605, item 1); 12 June 1840 – Nern Nerm/Turtgurrook – his name is on a list with his lubra (unnamed), no children, out on a ramble (Thomas Journal, CY 2604, item 3, ML); 26 April 1841 – Kurdogrook, Western Port, wife of Koolin Nern Nerm died at Mr Horsfold's this day (Thomas Journal, CY 2605, item 5, ML); 5 May 1841 – Thomas records her death again, this time writing that she was 58 years old, a Western Port woman, was the wife of Nern Nerm and mother of Billibellary's wife, and that she died at Polionerrang (Thomas Journal, CY 2605, item 5, ML); before her marriage to Nern Nerm, Kurdogrook was already the widow of Tuolwing (Old George the King), and the mother of Nunupton (Billy Langhorne) and Mumbo; 24 July 1847 – Thomas informs Robinson that he has made diligent enquiries regarding the Aboriginal native of the Boonurron tribe named Old Man Charlie alias Nannanno ... presumes he is Old Man Billy alias Nern Nerm ... he is still out in the bush but expected to come to Melbourne soon (Thomas to Robinson, VPRS 11, Box 10/667, PROV); 28 July 1847 – Narm Narm, Old Man Billy, a Boonwrong native, 56, father of Perredit who is the wife of Bungaleena now at Narre Narre Warreen, came to the office with Mr Murray. She is native of Palawrone creek at Mr Horsfolds, Karome [Carrum] name of big swamp. She was stolen when a girl from Baw Baw at Tarnjil. Old Man Billy is named after Port Phillip which is called Narm Narm (Robinson Journal, 28 July 1847); 29 June 1849 – Nern Nerm alias Billy died during the night (VPRS 11, Box 11/718, PROV).

1. Mr Hill is Murrum Murrum Bean, a member of the 1842 Native Police Corps.

The stealing in pre-contact time, of the child who was Nern Nerm's daughter, from Mt Baw Baw, must be accepted as fact, as it came from Nern Nerm; the presumption is that the child was at Mt Baw Baw with her parents. Mt Baw Baw is one of the highest peaks lying roughly on the boundary of Boonwurrung

'I Succeeded Once'

and Kurnai country, with drainage from its slopes flowing both south-west to the Yarra system and south-east to the Gippsland river system. This tiny piece of evidence could support an hypothesis that the feud was over country, or it could posit an hypothesis that the feud was about females, especially in light of the fact that on the very first time that the natives who accompanied the official expedition in search of the alleged white woman in Gippsland returned to Melbourne they brought back with them 'five girls, children from Gippsland'.¹¹⁵

It is regrettable though, that the origins of a feud with such consequences remain still, a puzzle.

115 Clark 2000, vol 5: 171.