

## 9. Manufacturing industry on the Mornington Peninsula, 'the successful plan at Arthurs Seat'

Thomas proposed that instead of throwing whole bodies of animals in the fire to cook, the Bonurong could skin them and sell the skins, and the women could sell their baskets, plus hats plus watch pockets for which Mrs Thomas would supply a pattern: this was what he called his 'successful plan at Arthurs Seat'. This plan was in accordance with the Protectors' instructions from England quoted earlier – the Protectors should ascertain what is that species of industry which is least foreign to the habits and disposition of the objects of their care, and should be provided with all the necessary means of supplying them with such employment.

The Bonurong took to the plan with enthusiasm, and within a short time, adapted it. When the Protectorate shifted from the Mornington Peninsula to Nerre Nerre Warren late in 1840, and they didn't like Nerre Nerre Warren, and walked away from being under the control of the Protectorate, they bypassed the Protectorate's middleman role, and sold their skins directly in Melbourne for cash, in order to purchase what they wanted – powder and shot:<sup>1</sup> but the long-term consequences were such misery from being cold that Thomas begged them to go back to sewing cloaks.<sup>2</sup>

On 22 May 1840, Thomas forwarded to Melbourne from Tubberubabel the 'first fruits of Aboriginal manufacturing' – 17 skins and seven baskets:<sup>3</sup> the consignment of skins comprised four opossum, one kangaroo and a dozen 'squirrels'.<sup>4</sup> As he said to the Chief Protector, it was only in May when they all settled down at Tubberubabel that he had made them sensible of the benefits they might derive from labour. He predicted that he could send a great quantity of skins to Melbourne, and if they were saleable, then he felt sure that the money earned would defray a great part, if not all, of 'the supplies granted to them from time to time'.<sup>5</sup> He was very pleased about this consignment, the first

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1 Thomas Petition to Gipps, VPRS 10, unit 3, 1841/909, PROV.

2 The phenomenon known as 'blanketisation', that is, the substitution of traditional waterproof garments for European blankets, which absorbed water, constituted a health hazard when worn in the same way as the former waterproof garments.

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

4 What Thomas calls a squirrel is probably what we know as a ring-tail possum, a member of the family Phalangeridae, arboreal, nocturnal, with prehensile tail.

5 VPRS 11, unit 7/309, PROV.

'I Succeeded Once'

of several such, and subsequently looked back a year later from Nerre Nerre Warren, where almost all was going wrong, at both his success at Arthurs Seat and the reason for it.

## Thomas' successful plan – feed the people and reward additionally for labour

He gave a simple description of the plan when he looked back on it in a later plea to Robinson to sanction rations:

I would most earnestly solicit through your influence with His Honour the permission of adopting at the Central Aboriginal Station Nerre Nerre Warren, the plan I pursued at Arthurs Seat ... the plan adopted at Arthurs Seat was to give all adults on the station one pint of flour or rice daily, and about 2 oz of sugar, rewarding those who laboured extra. This plan secured almost immediate order and satisfaction. The native women might be seen daily occupying themselves in making baskets, while the men were careful in procuring skins.<sup>6</sup>

But though Thomas received a 'gratifying communication from His Honour the Superintendent touching his Pleasure and approbation of the Application of the Aborigines',<sup>7</sup> La Trobe never did sanction feeding everyone; at best Thomas received supplies for the old and infirm, and for the young children, and for those who would attend Divine Service on Sundays.<sup>8</sup> What he did at Arthurs Seat was off his own bat, so to speak, and it amounted to misappropriation of public funds. La Trobe observed to Robinson that Mr Thomas issued indiscriminately rations to the natives, and said he did it on his own responsibility.<sup>9</sup>

In their refusal to feed the people, La Trobe and Robinson acted contrary to what the British government expected. In what should have been experienced by them as a stinging rebuke from the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, Lord Grey wrote the following to Sir George Gipps:

I cannot conceal from myself that the failure of the system of Protectors has been at least as complete as that of the missions. I have no doubt that a portion of this ill-success, perhaps a large portion, is attributable to the want of some judgement and zealous activity on the part of the Assistant-Protectors. Thus the habit of collecting large bodies of natives

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6 VPRS 11, unit 8/392, PROV.

7 Application means work.

8 When the Sabbath flour was 'no good' in their opinion, they refused to attend Divine Service at Nerre Nerre Warren, see Fels 1988: 51.

9 Clark 1988, vol 2: 29.

in one spot, and in the immediate vicinity of the settlers, without any previous provision for subsistence or employment, was a proceeding of singular indiscretion.<sup>10</sup>

This judgement was not fair on Thomas, though it ought to have been sheeted home to Robinson. Thomas did issue rations on his own responsibility, contrary to orders, and got into trouble for it: his logic was quite in line with the thinking of those who sent him out from England. For the year 1840, the total list of supplies from the contractor Manton's, for Mr Thomas' station, is as follows:

<b>Flour</b>	15300 lbs	£167 - 6 - 10
<b>Meat</b>	5000 lbs	£82 - 0 - 7
<b>Tea</b>	198 lbs	£33 - 0 - 0
<b>Sugar</b>	2300 lbs	£38 - 6 - 8
<b>Tobacco</b>	63 lbs	£5 - 15 - 6
<b>Soap</b>	154 lbs	£3 - 4 - 2
<b>Salt</b>	1000 lbs	£4 - 3 - 4
<b>Rice</b>	1200 lbs	£12 - 10 - 0
<b>Total</b>		£346 - 7 - 1

He probably got away with it because of the isolation of Tubberubbabel which has been noted – only four stations between Cape Schanck and Melbourne in 1839, twelve, a year later. He does not appear to have defied policy in the matter of rations again, and in fact, was dobbed in by Robinson to La Trobe and called in for an explanation of why he distributed rations 'indiscriminately' to the people in his care when the rations were meant only for the sick and the aged and for orphan children. A filled in *pro forma* from the days immediately after they abandoned the protectorate on the Mornington Peninsula to re-locate at Nerre Nerre Warren indicates that his largesse, besides getting him into trouble with his superiors, may not have been in the best interests of the health of his people. The Bonurong no sooner helped to select Nerre Nerre Warren than most of them decamped, and for most of September Thomas was feeding only five people, to whom he gave daily, to share between them, four pounds of flour, two ounces of tea and one and a half pounds of sugar.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Despatch no 225, 20 December 1842, enc no 10, in *NSW Legislative Council Votes & Proceedings*, 1843.

<sup>11</sup> Enc. with Robinson to La Trobe, 14 November 1840, VPRS 10, unit 2, 1840/1143, PROV.

## Comparison of ration scales

To get an idea of how that scale compared with others on the public purse, Ration No 2 for gaol attendants, witnesses and persons awaiting bail, consisted of 20 ounces of wheat bread, eight ounces of maize, 16 ounces of fresh beef, a quarter of an ounce of salt, one ounce of sugar and a quarter of an ounce of soap. Ration No 9, for prisoners confined to gaol was 12 ounces of wheat bread, 12 ounces of maize meal, four ounces of fresh beef, eight ounces of vegetables, half an ounce of salt and half an ounce of soap. Ration No 10, for the children of female prisoners confined to gaol was eight ounces of wheat bread, four ounces of fresh beef, one pint of milk and one quarter of an ounce of yellow soap.<sup>12</sup>

For an idea of appropriate rations for the 1839 Protector's Police, La Trobe took a retrospective view of what was issued to the 1837 de Villiers' Corps of Native Police and thought it a bit generous 'My impression is that reduction might be made in this without injury'. This daily ration was one and a half pounds of flour, one pound of beef or ten ounces of salt pork, two and a half ounces of sugar, one ounce of tea, a quarter of an ounce of soap and a half ounce of salt.<sup>13</sup>

But in the early days on the Mornington Peninsula, he had enough supplies to use food as a reward for the children at school and as a part of the reward for work done by adults, in addition to the daily supply of flour or rice plus sugar that he distributed.

The following vocabulary which he recorded, probably in May 1840 at Tubbarubbabel when they were building a bridge across the 'Tubbarubbabel creek', gives a glimpse of his successful plan. The fact that he recorded dialogue seeking information about intended destinations, about lessons to the children, about construction work, but not about manufacturing, doubtless means he had nothing to tell them about skinning. They were already skilled in manufacturing opossum cloaks: they merely extended the range of animals they skinned. For construction work, for going to school and learning the alphabet, for manufactured goods, the Bonurong were paid in trifles of flour, rice etc in addition to the daily illegal ration that Thomas distributed.

## The vocabulary of work

Come my blackfellows, work a little then big one eat – *Murrumbick Koolin Mungear Wyebo Tanganan Bullibo.*

Who made this? – *Willaina Mongeol Kunne?*

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<sup>12</sup> Treasury Letters Received 1838–1846, VPRS 7/P 0000, unit 000001, PROV.

<sup>13</sup> La Trobe to Robinson, 23 November 1839, 39/135, enc with La Trobe to Col Sec, 25 November 1839, 39/12991 in Port Phillip box 4/1135.1, AO of NSW.

Me made it – *Nunnnun Monguit*

Where work today? – *Winda Mongear Yelling...n*<sup>14</sup>

Work at fence – *Mongan Narlargoan*

Here hold up that – *Wa Koonark Nerrim Kulk*

Hold it upright – *Koonark Terremuk*

Ram down the earth – *Kullerbuk beck*

Lift it up a bit – *Tarnbuk Wyebo*

Cut or adze it – *Tarmuk nge*

Turn it over – *Wilgobuk turnit*

Put it down there, very good, no stupid you – *Marbugut nge  
Marnamukniar Nowlunnin Murrumbinna*

No lazy you like another blackfellow – *Utturp Tandoring mungo  
Koolin Murrumbinna Near Tarmdum*

Now, no more work, me give you dinner – *Nebbo Umanara  
Murrumbinna Tanganan Tinderbub Mongan*<sup>15</sup>

It is not the building works they did though, but the manufactured goods that are of present interest. On 20 June 1840 he forwarded from Tubberubbabel a much larger consignment comprised of 13 baskets, two mats, 75 *Tuan* skins, 24 opossum skins, 55 *Bemin*<sup>16</sup> skins and 24 kangaroo skins.<sup>17</sup> In July, the range of manufactured goods was extended by the addition of watch pockets. Watch pockets are interesting. They were made from small skins to a pattern cut out by Mrs Thomas, and put together by the women. It must have been the custom for settlers to hang up their watches by the fireplace in their huts, because that was the market they were aiming at.<sup>18</sup> Very handsome they were, said Thomas. Mrs Thomas found that she could not give the women as much attention as she would have liked because they insisted on working only in the open air and working outside was too cold for Mrs Thomas who had been dangerously ill a few months earlier, an illness brought on by living in the damp and leaking-

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14 Ink blot on three letters – illegible.

15 Transcribed from Thomas 'Brief Vocabulary of the Aboriginal Language as spoken by the Boonurrong and Warvoorong tribe, District of Port Phillip', no date, but currently located next to the letter which describes the Boonurrong choice of Kullurk as their reserve, VPRS 11, unit 7, item 313, PROV.

16 *Bemin* is the ring-tailed possum; see 'Succinct Sketch of the Aboriginal Language' in *Victoria, Legislative Council Votes & Proceedings*, 1858–59: 91, Appendix D.

17 VPRS 11, unit 7/311, PROV.

18 Thomas to Robinson from Tubberubbabel, 9 July 1840, VPRS 11, unit 7/316, PROV.

roofed hut at Tuerong. There might also have not been much room in Thomas' hut; in July, he had so many manufactured goods in it that it gave the appearance of a 'rough store'.

Baskets are interesting too. The first mention of baskets is quite early in October 1839 at Tubberubbabel. The day after his arrival back from Melbourne when he outlined his plan to them, the women presented baskets to Thomas just before sunset, as gifts for his daughters: the women made it explicitly clear to Thomas that these baskets were not for sale, that they were a present – **'make em plenty by and bye for Melbourne. Your piccaninnies them'**. He had enough of an idea of correct behaviour to reciprocate with a gift of flour and sugar from his own private store.<sup>19</sup> Another set of baskets he took back with him to Melbourne for sale.

Nearly a year later Mrs Thomas extended the uses for the traditional skills. She designed and taught them how to do baskets for dogs, and baskets for fruit, and long oval flat baskets for clothes storage.<sup>20</sup> Flat mats were made which Robinson called table mats.<sup>21</sup>

Robinson's advice to the other protectors that their charges be encouraged to follow the example of Thomas' people on the Mornington Peninsula and go in for manufacturing bore fruit. Parker's Jajoworrung (Loddon River people) at 'Lar.ne.barramul' at Mt Franklin sent a considerable amount of manufactured goods to Melbourne in the year 1842. Assistant Protector Edward S Parker's 'Return of the number of hats, Baskets etc made by Aboriginal Women and Girls at the Station Lar.ne.barramul' lists 96 hats of various sizes, 70 baskets, 42 table mats and 11 nets.<sup>22</sup>

The skin industry was a group effort too. Thomas said that three months ago they did not skin animals, but threw them on the fire, turning them to singe off the fur, unless they very much needed a skin for a specific purpose. 'Now however, they are almost ashamed of throwing an unskinned animal on the fire, and the skins furnish them with what they consider to be the luxuries of life'.<sup>23</sup> Old men who were superannuated would stretch the skins. Thomas recorded one instance where 'the men stretched skins got overnight'.<sup>24</sup> Children made *mindermins* which were pegs hardened in fire, for use in stretching the skins.<sup>25</sup>

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19 HRV, vol 2B: 554.

20 Thomas to Robinson, 9 July 1840 from Tubberubbabel, VPRS 11, unit 7/316, PROV. George Langhorne recorded from his mission experience 1835–37 that women already made neat oval baskets of grass tree neatly plaited, HRV, vol 2A: 177.

21 Flat mats: see Clark 1988, vol 2: 29.

22 Appendix No 8, enc. to La Trobe to Col Sec Sydney, 16 March 1843, no 43/398, in *NSW Legislative Council Votes & Proceedings*, 1843.

23 VPRS 11, unit 7/316, PROV.

24 Thomas Journal, 12 June 1840, CY 2604, item 3, frame 147, ML.

25 Second Periodical Report, 7 November 1840, VPRS 4410, unit 3/67, PROV.

One man would draw into fine threads the sinews of the kangaroo tails; another would pin and stretch the skins; another would sew the skins together as neat as any tailor would do a garment, pressing the skins down every three or four inches.<sup>26</sup> He mentions groups of six or seven stretching skins and eight women making baskets.

A later local record describes these pegs as wooden nails about three inches long. One man sits down on the ground and stretches the skin upon a piece of bark at its full length, then he nails one side of the skin and pulls the other side with all his might so as to make it a great deal wider, then he nails the first side down well with one nail and so on until he has finished the whole.<sup>27</sup> Thomas would not accept delivery of any manufactured items from the blacks on a Sunday, in order to show respect for the Sabbath.<sup>28</sup>

The following table of goods manufactured on the Mornington Peninsula was transcribed by Byrt.<sup>29</sup>

Skin	Kangaroo	Opossums	Bemin	Fly Squirrel	Baskets	Mats	Watch Pockets
May 22	1	4	0	12	7	0	0
June 9	0	11	3	18	2	0	0
June 22	24	14	35	75	13	2	0
July 27	54	12	12	46	47	3	6
	79	41	50	151	69	5	6

The articles for sale were taken in the cart by Thomas' assigned servant Davis, and delivered to Mr George Lilly, storekeeper at Melbourne, who did not charge a commission on his services, 'Mr Lilly is agent at Melbourne gratuitously'.<sup>30</sup> Some goods were sold at public auction, perhaps to establish prices. Lilly recorded the following prices for goods sold:

- Baskets – one shilling and sixpence
- Kangaroo skins – ten pence
- Opossum skins – four shillings for a dozen
- Native cat – tuppence halfpenny.

These goods were described as 'Account Sales, Skins and Baskets, for a/c and risk of the Aborigines Establishment'. Some cash went to Bullett, a Sydney

26 27 August 1839, 'Summary of Proceedings during August', Byrt 2004, CD CY 3082 S.DOC.

27 McCrae 1966: 252.

28 Thomas Journal, 12 July 1840, CY 2604, items 3 and 4, ML.

29 Byrt 2004, CD CY 3082, commencing frame 12.

30 Robinson to La Trobe, 21 August 1840, VPRS 10, unit 2, 1840/815, PROV.

native, formerly one of John Batman's blacks.<sup>31</sup> Thomas' plan was that the blacks who made the goods would be the ones to benefit from their labour, for luxuries, because their basic subsistence would be provided, but this document implies that the money received was to go to the Protectorate account with the Commissariat. It is important to bear in mind that everyone in Port Phillip on the government payroll received rations or money in lieu – soldiers, bureaucrats, convicts – under a finely graded remuneration system which took into account the quality of the rations provided. There were three or four grades of flour, and the same for tobacco.

To gain an idea of equivalent values, flour at that time was sixpence per pound weight, tea between two and three shillings per pound weight, salt sixpence per pound weight and sugar four pence per pound weight.<sup>32</sup> A kangaroo skin sold at ten pence in Melbourne would purchase one pound of flour plus a little tea and sugar: this is roughly the daily ration that he was distributing to his people at Tubberubabel, quite against the proposed policy of the Chief Protector. Another comparison may be made with the work/ration scale adopted by the first missionary George Langhorne, at the botanical gardens mission – two hours labour was worth half a pound of bread; four hours labour was worth half a pound of bread plus four ounces of meat.<sup>33</sup>

## The Chief Protector's policy on work

Robinson's policy was simply that the blacks should labour for their food: he thought that supplying rations induced 'vassalage'.<sup>34</sup> It is at least possible that his hardline view was based on his experience with his VDL blacks who were rationed at government expense with no work obligations required from them. Robinson had brought them as his 'family' from VDL but he was sick of them by now, and engaged at this time in arguing with the governor in Sydney about their rations: the government was soon to approve of Robinson's cutting them adrift. Thomas' petition to Gipps of 1841 specifically compares the VDL blacks 'no work obligation' with the obligation of the Port Phillip blacks to work for rations.

There does not appear to be evidence that the Chief Protector thought that any sort of compensation should be afforded 'the real owners of the soil' for the use of their land. What Robinson was concerned about was developing a scale of rations to be supplied in payment for work performed. He wrote to La

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31 VPRS 11/P/0001, 1840, PROV. Bullett was indeed a Sydney black but he was much travelled, coming to Port Phillip from VDL as one of John Batman's blacks in 1835. To give Bullett cash from the Protectorate accounts was surely a misappropriation on Robinson's part.

32 HRV, vol 1: 178.

33 VPRS 4, Box 2, 37/90, PROV.

34 Chief Protector to La Trobe, 23 December 1839, VPRS 10, unit 1, 30/363, PROV.

Trobe in December 1839 on this subject, a letter that reads now as miserable and bureaucratic, showing him to be in almost complete opposition to his Assistant Protector philosophically and morally.

Europeans had been in Port Phillip for nearly four years when the protectors arrived, and for those four years Europeans had been distributing rations to the local Aboriginal groups under the terms of Batman's Treaty. It does not matter now, nor did it matter then to the Aborigines that the treaty was illegal – the fact was that the food was delivered. Batman called it 'the annual tribute to those who are the real owners of the soil'.<sup>35</sup> Food functioned as the rent paid for the use of the land as a sheep and cattle run. In addition many Aboriginal people worked for wages, what they called white money; in fencing, stock handling, shepherding, message carrying, washing clothes, guiding shooting parties, chopping wood, felling trees, stripping bark and so on. In an economy which was short of labour:

Labouring hands are so scarce that the blacks are decoyed from one master to another, persons knowing that the Bench refuses to take recognizance of their agreement.<sup>36</sup>

They worked well, and Europeans relied on them, but what they would *not* do was work day in day out on a permanent basis all year round (see the first hand evidence from Kolloorlook and Yankee Yankee elsewhere in this story).

Where Thomas approved of cash wages being paid for labour, and the Aboriginal owners of the soil interpreted the rations given to them as rent money, Robinson laid out to La Trobe a plan whereby Aborigines would work for their rations. His attitude to work and food in itself probably crippled any good the Protectorate might have done. Set up in England with such earnest determination – that what happened in Tasmania would not be repeated in Port Phillip – the Protectorate needed a better man than Robinson showed himself to be.

The Chief Protector began his letter to La Trobe with a concession – that though ten hours a day was the standard for a white man, 'for a savage bred to war and the chase', the hours should not exceed six or possibly eight. He wrote that ten hours labour a day should be sufficient to pay for a man's needs, but if he had a wife and children who could not work, his needs would be greater: they would also need clothing. He went on to say that:

the ration system is in my opinion totally unsuited to the state of savages, that is when taken in connection with their own civilization. It has a tendency to lower them rather than elevate them in the scale of humanity.

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<sup>35</sup> John Batman to Sir George Arthur, 25 June 1835, *HRV*, vol 1: 9.

<sup>36</sup> *HRV*, vol 2B: 573.

The ration system is prejudicial to the interests of natives, whether it be given as a gratuity or in lieu of labour; in the former it induces to inactivity and in the latter to vassalage. They should be taught to know their want should fit their occupation. A desire for civilization, comfort and for the possession of property should be created, these principles being implanted. The [illegible] of the Assistant Protector should be to induce them to acquire property, by honest and persevering industry, and to protect them in its possession. The work of civilization has then commenced, erratic habits forsaken. The wandering Aboriginal turned settler, his life and property is secured, he is independent in character and appreciates the enjoyment of his improved condition.

Individual possession of property will do more to overcome their erratic habits than any other. It will be the duty of the Assistant Protector to point out to the Aboriginal Natives as opportunity offers the advantages and disadvantages emanating from these various modes of existence, and when the instructions already issued are fulfilled, and when they, the Assistant Protectors are prepared to guarantee that the Aboriginal Natives are ready and willing to settle down in one fixed abode, and not till then, shall I feel it my duty to recommend to the Government the immediate formation for the Assistant Protectors of fixed Establishments.

In the mean time, and until a more Systematic arrangement can be effected, every disposition to industry should be encouraged, and if gratuities of food and clothing are afforded, it ought in no case to be acted upon except for the Sick, Aged, Infirm, Young children and Mothers of Families. The Chief of Tribes should on political grounds<sup>37</sup> be exempt from labour.

If food and clothing are given as remuneration for labour, the scale of reward should be proportionate to the work done, and not to the time occupied. This can be effected, but then there are some kinds of labour that cannot be judged of by quality such as jobbing. This therefore must be regulated by time under the circumstances and for the present and later stated. I think a discretionary power should be vested in the Assistant Protectors permitting them to dispense rewards in food and clothing for the encouragement of industry and good conduct.

The young and hale of the Aboriginals ought not to receive provisions except as an equivalent for industry, for to give it as a gratuity would tend only to idleness, dissoluteness and mischief. Until fixed Establishments are formed the description of Labour for the employment of Aborigines

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<sup>37</sup> Later, when the Native Police Corps was established, the chief was similarly exempted from labour on similar grounds.

is a subject for consideration. As soon however as the Assistant Protector has selected a place in the Central parts of their Districts as a centre of operations and homestead for their families the Aborigines might be employed in gardening and Spade husbandry and fencing, as well as bullock drivers and messengers, instead of Crown prisoners as present.

The women ought to be employed in washing, sewing and other domestic labour. The females are frequently employed by persons in Town and Country in various kinds of industry, fetching water, chopping wood and in washing – it would be desirable to know how many Aboriginal natives are now employed at the Assistant Protectors Establishments, as also the number and names of the persons family engaged, with the description of labour they were engaged in lest my view and sentiment be mistaken.

I beg to remark that I am not one of those who suppose that the civilization of savages must precede their Evangelization for this would be contrary not only to the general order of things but civilization itself.<sup>38</sup> [three words illegible] also teacher, otherwise such a theory therefore if permitted would be mischievous in its tendency, and harmful to its results; if a man is Christianized he is sure to be civilized. Civilization follows, and does not precede Christianity, and if any lasting and real good is to be effected to the Australian Aborigines, Religion, and it alone must be the precursor in all its operations. The Superstitious prejudices of the natives have done more to retard their civilization than any other – months of hard labour and fatiguing service in quest of an Aboriginal tribe<sup>39</sup> has had its hopes and prospects suddenly blighted by the death of a leading member of their community, the cause of which, according to their superstitious faith was attributed to the white stranger.

Cottages also built and fitted up<sup>40</sup> for their occupation have, after the death of an individual been vacated and entirely abandoned, the death of [illegible] party having been attributed to an evil spirit who inhabited the Dwelling.

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38 In espousing this view, Robinson placed himself in opposition to Governor Gipps, whose views were recorded in an interview in Sydney in late 1838 with the Assistant Protectors, and sent to Robinson in Hobart by William Thomas, 'he was most desirous that we should use our utmost exertion to civilize them before we attempted to evangelise them ... he doubted very much if the New Hollanders would ever take the Scriptures ... they seemed to have no curiosity or desire for the Bible or any book ... he did think one of the greatest stimula was teaching them the value of money' (Thomas to Robinson, 27 November 1838, in Plomley 1987: 773).

39 His friendly mission in VDL.

40 At Wybelena on Flinders Island.

Numerous instances might be adduced to show that their superstitious prejudice militates against, stands in the way of their Civilization and which Christian instruction can only remove.<sup>41</sup>

In this letter to La Trobe, Robinson mentions almost all the issues which would confront Thomas in his efforts to set up the Protectorate – location (in the central part of the two tribes' district, rather than where the Bonurong wanted it), rations, employment, the necessity of a census. It was underpinned by the widely held contemporary view that Christianity must precede civilisation, and it was shot through with Robinson's personal conviction that the possession of private property would lead to a sedentary lifestyle.

Robinson's views prevailed, and he was sufficiently impressed by the manufacture of goods on the Mornington Peninsula that he wrote a circular letter to the other three protectors at the Goulburn and Loddon rivers and Geelong, encouraging them to follow Thomas' example:

Mr Assistant Thomas having on several occasions remitted to Melbourne for sale several small articles of Aboriginal industry, His Honour the Superintendent desires that the same encouragement may be afforded to the Aboriginal natives of the other Districts.

In order thereto, it is requested that a scale of prices be fixed for which the articles should be sold, for the natives to receive in provisions or useful articles the full value of the money realized. I have therefore to request that you will inform me what you deem a fair equivalent, when a form will be prepared and printed to enable you to keep account of the Articles received and those given in exchange clear and easy.

His Honour is of the opinion that money on no account should be given to the natives.

In fixing a scale of prices or equivalent, you will exercise your own judgement, as the prices heretofore realized cannot be any criterion; many of the trifles having been bought as mere curiosities, in the articles of skins also, the Markets fluctuate.

Of course the agents will get the highest prices. The supplies will be placed to the credit of the natives (Mr Lilly is agent at Melbourne gratuitously), and no doubt some well-disposed person may be found who will undertake for the benefit of the Natives, a similar duty at [blank]. If not the articles can be forwarded to Mr Lilly at Melbourne.<sup>42</sup>

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41 VPRS 10, unit 1, 1839/363, PROV.

42 Circular to assistant protectors, an enc. with Robinson to La Trobe, 21 August 1840, VPRS 10, unit 2/815, PROV.

Though later in his life Robinson underwent a conversion experience,<sup>43</sup> never, after Arthurs Seat, was Thomas free to distribute rations daily to all comers. The rations for work policy came to have unfortunate consequences in the end. It taught the hungry people to feign sickness in order to obtain food.<sup>44</sup> And it left them cold and exposed to bad weather because they sold their skins instead of making possum skin cloaks to keep them warm. In September 1843 Thomas in Melbourne was concerned for the welfare of his blacks, and went to enquire for them along the beach.

He called at a number of native encampments for which he gave the native name, and in the margin, the squatter occupying the run. These places were Boollerim, Mr Shannessey, Binningean, Captain Baxter<sup>45</sup> and Ballewrungean, Mr Gorringer<sup>46</sup> where he stopped the night having travelled 43 miles on horseback. He found no blacks. Next day he visited Tuerong, then Kangerong, and heard at Kangerong that the blacks were at Kulluck. The next day was a Sunday, and he must have been seriously concerned because he broke his own rule against travelling on a Sunday, and rode from Tuerong to Kulluck where he found them. They then came to Tuerong and encamped by a creek, about 30 of them, all Western Ports except one Barrabool lubra and her child. It was awful weather, wet and stormy, and the poor children and lubras look very sadly, 'poor creatures': he 'begged' them not to sell their skins to the whites but to make cloaks.<sup>47</sup>

Thomas can be left with the last word – 'I used a discretionary power once and succeeded at Arthurs Seat'.<sup>48</sup>

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43 At the end of his time in Australia when his job had been abolished, he recorded in his journal the following 'The natives should be treated [as] men, they work as men and they should be treated same as men, a fair day's wage for a fair day's labour but this is never accorded them. It is thought that if they get food it is enough for blacks' (Monday 28 January 1850, in Clark 2000, vol 6: 16).

44 *HRV*, vol 2B: 547.

45 The run Carup Carup.

46 Ballewrungean is Poleorongong.

47 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 2, frame 113, ML. Thomas crossed out another sentence in this days' entry for which the verb cannot be read. It looks like a matter of regret for the station they once had.

48 Thomas Journal, CY 2604, item 5, frame 282, ML.