

11. The abduction between Arthurs Seat and Point Nepean, and Yankee Yankee's return

The account which follows considers the so far discovered information about eight females and a boy, those who were taken from Port Phillip 'about a year and a half ago' before John Helder Wedge reported the abduction in March 1836.¹ If Wedge's understanding of his Aboriginal informants was correct, that would place the abduction as occurring in the latter half of 1834. It is a remarkable fact that the abducted boy Yankee Yankee (Robert Cunningham) was the brother of Barebun (Mary) whose story was told in Chapter 6. It is equally remarkable that the VDL woman, Matilda, who originally decoyed the Bonurong women into captivity by the sealer George Meredith, came subsequently to Port Phillip as one of the Chief Protector's 'family', spent time with Trucaninni on the Mornington Peninsula, was charged with the murder of the two whalers at Western Port (for whose killing Bob and Jack were hanged) but like Trucaninni, was not convicted, and with her, was deported back to VDL. When she returned to Port Phillip with Robinson in 1839, she gave her account of her earlier complicity in the abduction of the eight females and a boy from under Point Nepean. She is a first hand participant witness, the type of source whom historians like, because though these witnesses seldom know the complexities of the whole event, what they do know can usually be relied upon.

Previous scholarly research

There are several accounts which examine aspects of the abduction, but only one of them is available in its entirety to the public, and one exists as yet in draft form only. Effectively inaccessible to readers outside universities, they are:

- Diane Barwick's 1985 work² which is used by the Boonwurrung Foundation in support of its claim that they are linked with the original owners via Louisa Briggs, and that they are the rightful inheritors now, of the Mornington Peninsula.
- The yet to be published 'The Problem with Louisa Briggs',³ by Jacqueline D'Arcy, an historian who has been employed by the Bonurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, is critical of Barwick's 1985 work, and concludes

1 JH Wedge to VDL Col Sec Montague, 13 March 1836, *HRV*, vol 1: 35. It is important to note that the Police Magistrate's report records that it was 'upwards of' that is, more than 18 months ago.

2 'This most resolute lady: A biographical puzzle' (Barwick 1985).

3 Jacqueline D'Arcy, Draft Ms, *The Problem with Louisa Briggs*, 8 October 2009.

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that Louisa Briggs is not the person whom the Boonwurrung Foundation believes her to be, and is in fact, a woman of Tasmanian descent.

- There is the 2002 study by Ian D Clark,⁴ undertaken for the Department of Justice on behalf of Native Title claimants: like all Freedom of Information documents, this is available to the public for a fee, but with significant portions blacked out, including parts of the table of contents and the bibliography, as well as Clark's assessment.
- There are three Historical and Genealogical Reports dated 14 October 2005, 10 November 2005 and 8 September 2006, prepared for the Native Title Tribunal, which are not public documents, so the author's name is unknown.
- Finally there is Sue Wesson's report for the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, also unavailable. The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council is the peak body which was established under the 2006 Aboriginal Heritage Act, responsible for deciding which groups in the Victorian Indigenous community have the right to speak for their country and thus be recognised in decision-making relative to their country.

That these reports are closed means that the following research cannot be concerned with claims – they are not available for public discourse so that claims cannot be assessed. But this chapter *can* present for the first time for the general reader as well as the broader Indigenous community, the primary evidence, and it *can* explore some internal inconsistencies in that evidence.

The following chronology is divided into three parts:

Part 1, the abduction from Port Phillip,

Part 2, the evidence for the possibly separate abduction from Western Port, and

Part 3, Yankee Yankee's return home to Victoria eight years after being abducted.

Part 1: the abduction between Arthurs Seat and Point Nepean

As will be seen, numbers are important. John Helder Wedge writing in March 1836 understood that four women were taken.⁵ Robinson too, thought that there were four women abducted, but his exact words will be noted in the quotation below – he 'thought' he heard four: he was not sure. Yankee Yankee was himself a participant, whose journey took him from Port Phillip to the Bass Strait islands,

4 Clark 2002: 3. I am grateful to Ruth Gooch who obtained this report from the Department of Justice under FOI.

5 Wedge to Montague, *HRV*, vol 1: 35.

then to Launceston, King George's Sound, the Swan River and Adelaide, before he finally returned home after eight years: his version mentions eight females. Barwick believes that there were 11, 'In 1833 a sealing schooner made another raid near Arthurs Seat ... Seven women, two young girls and two lads were taken to the Bass Strait islands'.⁶ D'Arcy believes that there were nine. It is not possible to know Clark's opinion because it has been blacked out in his report. From this brief summary it is clear that there is as yet, no scholarly consensus on the facts.

The four females, whom Robinson recorded, about whom the Europeans were concerned in 1836, were the wives of distinguished Bonurong men: they were not 'ordinary' women, in so far as anyone is 'ordinary'. They were the wives of 'chiefs' Derrimut, Betbenjee, Budgery Tom, and by deduction, Big Benbow (because the child Yankee Yankee was taken 'with his lubra'; at aged six or eight years he was too young to have a lubra – presumably, he was with his mother, not with a wife, when they were taken. When he returned to the encampment on the south of the Yarra in June 1841, he slept the first night in his father's miam. Big Benbow was his father; therefore the lubra was Benbow's wife). A fifth named woman jumped overboard near Wilson's Promontory, swam to the beach and walked back to Port Phillip. The concerned Europeans did not mention the female children whom Robinson named in his journal: Robinson mentions two girls, and names them. To recapitulate, Yankee Yankee, the participant eye witness, mentions eight females plus himself. As the details of his first person narrative have been checked with shipping records, and are completely verified (see Part 3 of this chapter), I regard him as the most reliable and credible witness and I take it that there were eight females plus himself taken in the Meredith abduction.

The initial report of the c1834 abduction from under Point Nepean, and the follow-up

15 March 1836

It will be remembered that Batman and Fawkner arrived in mid-1835. Nine months later, the Port Phillip Association representative, JH Wedge wrote to John Montague, the colonial secretary of VDL, and reported the following:

Since my late arrival at this place I have learned that a flagrant outrage has been committed upon the natives at Western Port by a party of men employed in collecting mimosa bark [this is the shooting and injury to Quondum described in Chapter 8], the details of which I feel called upon,

⁶ Barwick 1998: 20.

as one of the parties called upon for their protection, to communicate to you for the information of the Lieutenant Governor [Sir George Arthur in VDL], in the hope that His Excellency will recommend to the Governor in Chief [Sir Richard Bourke in Sydney] to take such steps as he may deem necessary to prevent a repetition of such acts of aggression on a harmless and unoffending race of men, who have evinced the most earnest desire since our intercourse with them (upwards of nine months) to maintain the friendly understanding that has been established ... a few weeks since four individuals had received gunshot wounds ... about a year and a half ago a similar attack was made upon the natives and four of their women were taken from them. It is to be lamented that the like outrages have been committed upon the Aborigines at Portland Bay and other whaling stations, and unless some measures be adopted to protect the natives, a spirit of hostility will be created against the whites, which in all probability will lead to a state of warfare between them and the Aborigines, which will only terminate when the black man will cease to exist.⁷

As a result of Wedge's letter, Governor Bourke sent down to Port Phillip George Stewart, the Police Magistrate of Campbelltown, to investigate: his report includes the following:

In obedience to the commands of His Excellency the Governor ... I embarked on board the revenue cutter *Prince George* ... for the purpose of proceeding to Port Phillip ... I have in the first place to report that the parties who are believed to have committed the two outrages at Westernport, one [the abduction] upwards of 18 months ago and the other in March last [the shooting of Quondom examined earlier in Chapter 3], have long since left the colony. The principal, accused of perpetrating the first, commanded a sealing vessel and was killed by the natives in the neighbourhood of Spencer's Gulf [this is George Meredith]. One of the females he carried from Westernport is reported to have been with him at the time he was killed. The perpetrator of the latter [this is the shooting of Quondom] is, I have every reason to believe, a half-caste named Tomlins, at present employed in a whaling establishment at Portland Bay. In the spring of the year, when the whaling season is over, it is the custom of the men belonging to the establishment to employ themselves in collecting mimosa bark, during which employment an attack was made upon a native family, in which two women were wounded. It is expected that next season they will again return to Westernport, when should the Government not deem it

7 JH Wedge to VDL Col Sec, 15 March 1836, *HRV*, vol 1: 34.

necessary to make any Police Establishment, I have every reason to hope that the delinquent and his accomplices, if any, will be apprehended by the residents at Port Phillip.⁸

Reading this today, it seems that with one perpetrator dead, and the other expected to be caught next bark harvesting season, the Police Magistrate's interest did not extend to recovering the abducted women.

8 October 1836

Six months after first notifying the authorities of the abduction, Port Phillip Association representative, Wedge, wrote again to the colonial secretary in Sydney requesting that he instruct the commandant of Flinders Island (George Augustus Robinson, soon to be Chief Protector at Port Phillip) to rescue some native women, four in number they believed, who had been abducted from the coast of New Holland by sealers, and were now believed to be on the islands in Bass Strait. Two of the women are wives of men who have been 'civilised' by Mr Fawkner and are friendly to the Port Phillip Association.⁹ That is, two of the women are apparently the wives of Derrimut and Betbenjee.

11 October 1836

Robinson received a letter from the VDL Colonial Secretary 'relative to the four Port Phillip Aboriginal females'.¹⁰

24 November 1836

Wedge wrote again to the Colonial Secretary in VDL suggesting a plan whereby he, together with some natives from the tribe from whom the women were abducted would travel from Port Phillip in the VDL government vessel to the islands in Bass Strait and rescue the women. He has pledged it to the natives, he said.¹¹

As a result of Wedge's reports and requests, the VDL government sent Robinson to Port Phillip with two instructions – to acquire information about the women abducted from that district, then to get them back from the sealers. The following are his journal entries leading up to, and including, that visit.

8 Police Magistrate George Stewart to Col Sec Sydney, *HRV*, vol 1: 39.

9 JH Wedge to VDL Col Sec, 8 October 1836, *HRV*, vol 2A: 52. Plomley accepts that there were four women abducted and gives the recipient number of Wedge's letter as CSO 5/19/384, AO of Tasmania (Plomley 1966: 938).

10 Plomley 1987: 398.

11 JH Wedge to VDL Col Sec, 24 November 1836, *HRV*, vol 2A: 53.

The Chief Protector's knowledge of the New Holland women in 1836

In March 1831 long before he came to Port Phillip, Robinson did a sweep through the islands of Bass Strait on behalf of the VDL government ordering the sealers to give up their native women and vacate the islands: in the course of this sweep, he recorded many names of both men and women.¹² 'New Holland women' are Aboriginal women from mainland Australia, from King George's Sound, Kangaroo Island and the south coast of South Australia, and from Port Phillip and Western Port. Whether abducted or in domestic/working relationships, their extensive travels were as part of the sealing, whaling and trading activities in these parts in the early nineteenth century.¹³

Five years later in 1836, while he was Commandant on Wybelena, the station on Flinders Island established for the remnants of the Tasmanian population who were still alive, Robinson collected more information about women still with sealers, including women from the mainland of Australia: this was three years *before* he came to Port Phillip as Chief Protector. He was already familiar with the environment and the population both European and Indigenous before he undertook this task. The following are his journal entries which mention the women abducted from Port Phillip.

12 January 1836

At Gun Carriage Island, there were six sealers, two Tasmanian females, three New Holland females and one Calcutta female. This information came from the surgeon on Flinders Island who had been sent there to make a report on the sealers and their women. Most of the sealers were away on the coast of New Holland. The surgeon was told that Munro (the sealer James Munro/Munroe) gave seven pounds for the New Holland woman he has named Emue.¹⁴

12 Plomley 1966: 325.

13 Lyndall Ryan asserts that there were about 50 sealers and 100 Aboriginal women and their part-Aboriginal children living in the islands in Bass Strait in 1820 (Ryan 1980: 69). The well known illustration of the sealers' hut at Western Port dating from Dumont d'Urville's stay in the *Astrolabe* in 1826, most recently reproduced in Gooch 2008: 31, is but one small piece of evidence of these sealers in Western Port.

14 This woman is identified as a Kaurna from Adelaide or the Adelaide Plains in Amery 1996: 39. When Robinson knew her 'she was the property of Abyssinia Jack', see Plomley 1987: 335–336. Emue known as Sarah, re-named by Robinson Charlotte when she was on Flinders Island, came to Port Phillip with Robinson and absconded with Trucaninni and lived for a while at Tootoorook.

9 May 1836

William Proctor, sealer, told Robinson that the New Holland women were brought to the straits by George Meredith, that Munro has one,¹⁵ Bailey¹⁶ has one, and the other sealer the last.¹⁷

17 June 1836

Maria, subsequently known as Matilda, was landed by the sealers on Flinders Island and walked in to Wybelena; she had come from Gun Carriage Island. Another woman was also landed, but she was taken off by Abyssinia Jack (formerly of Kangaroo Island) who also had a New Holland woman.¹⁸

23 July 1836

Three sealers were on Gun Carriage Island with several New Holland women. In addition, Abyssinia Jack had other New Holland women stolen by George Meredith from their country adjacent to Kangaroo Island.¹⁹

9 August 1836

On Preservation Island, Dr Allen²⁰ spoke with Munro who had a native of New Holland with him, who had recently had a child; Smith was living with him and they had 'several' New Holland women.²¹

30 August 1836

The sealers Tucker, Beadon, Dobson, Abyssinia Jack and a half-caste youth belonging to Beadon, told Robinson that they had heard that there were several native women from Western Port and Port Phillip on Gun Carriage Island and on Clark Island; no names were recorded.²²

15 Polly Munro was a New Hollander from Point Nepean; Samuel Blythe married her in 1845. In 1850 he was at the Victorian goldfields (Plomley and Henley 1990: 38). Margery Munro was brought from Point Nepean by George Meredith; she lived with James Munro. She had a son Robert Munro about 22 years old; she had a daughter Polly Bligh who herself had two half-caste children, girls about eight or ten on Walker Island (Plomley and Henley 1990: 48).

16 Thomas Bailey, convicted 1818, transported for seven years, arrived in Sydney in the *Atlas* in 1819, arrived in Hobart 1820, aged 36, born in Bath (Plomley and Henley 1990: 35).

17 Plomley 1987: 353.

18 Plomley 1987: 360. A drawing of Matilda is reproduced by Plomley on page 338. Elsewhere, in Plomley and Henley 1990: 115, Matilda's real name is given as MAY.TE.PUE.MIN.NER.

19 Plomley 1987: 366–367.

20 The medical officer, married to Robinson's daughter.

21 Plomley 1987: 373.

22 Plomley 1987: 379.

'I Succeeded Once'

5 October 1836

George Augustus Robinson, in Hobart, met the two Port Phillip natives who informed him that the sealers had taken away their wives, and that the women were now with the sealers in the straits. Historian NJB Plomley has identified these men with John Pascoe Fawkner as the Bonurong men Derrimut and Betbenjee (Baitbanger).²³

3 December 1836

An Aboriginal female of Westernport is staying with the respectable Dr Smith at George Town; this is *not* an abduction – Plomley annotates the event as an example of how many Aboriginal persons were travelling in colonial vessels in this early colonial period.²⁴

15 December 1836

Captain Hurburgh arrived at Flinders Island in the schooner *Eliza* to take Robinson to Port Phillip to investigate the kidnapping of some Port Phillip women who had fallen into the hands of the sealers; these were the women removed by George Meredith. This matter had been brought to the attention of Lieutenant Governor Arthur by Fawkner when he was in Hobart Town in October.²⁵ It seems that Robinson was instructed in Hobart Town to try to obtain evidence of this kidnapping.²⁶

22 December 1836

'H.M. Cruiser *Eliza* was dispatched for the purpose of emancipating the New Holland female natives of Port Phillip'.²⁷

26 December 1836

At noon, the *Eliza* entered the heads of Port Phillip. Robinson was aboard, accompanied by some of his Aborigines from Flinders Island, including Matilda who had been the decoy who enticed the Port Phillip women aboard Meredith's vessel in the first place, thus enabling the abduction: the Master of the *Eliza* was Captain Hurburgh. The bush at Point Nepean was on fire.

23 Plomley 1987: 385, 655.

24 Plomley 1987: 397.

25 CSO 1/901/19140, Tasmanian Archives.

26 Plomley 1987: 670.

27 Plomley 1987: 404.

Robinson's journal record of Matilda's story

Matilda the VDL woman²⁸ pointed out the spot a few miles down the harbour at Point Nepean where she said George Meredith and his crew of sealers stole the native women. The men's names were Brown, Mr West the master of the schooner, a man named Billy. Said the schooner anchored off, the sealers went on shore. Said there were plenty of forest boomer kangaroos at the point. Said they deceived the people; gammoned them. Said the native men upset the boat and the men were all wet and fell into the water. Said there was plenty of blackfellows, some on the Port Phillip side, some outside, sea coast. Said the sealers were afraid of the Port Phillip natives. Said they employed her to entice them. George Meredith stole the, I think she said four women, took them in the schooner first to Kings Island and then to Hunter and Clarks and Gun Carriage Islands, and then sold them to the sealers there. I am informed that Munro bought one. She pointed out the small islands in the mid of the port soon after you enter and told me that the natives had killed two white men there; they found their bones and an iron pot and tomahawk. Kept the eastern channel on the Nepean side; Arthurs Seat ahead named after the hill of that name at Edinburgh, of which I conceive it bears no resemblance either in form or magnitude. Borrow the Australian Directory of Bass Strait and coasts of VDL as compiled from papers in the Hydrographical Office; it will be of great use in compiling my work. Bush on fire at Arthurs Seat. Heard the natives cooeing and hallooing to us. Pursued our course along the shore. The land thinly covered with timber (sheoak), thinly wooded and grassy with undulating grassy hills. The woods may be termed open forest. On nearing the shore at Arthurs Seat, heard human voices cooeing from the smoke and bushes which we took for natives. My natives saw some black swans flying and was much pleased on recognising the same birds as they had in their own country ... The natives are highly pleased with the country and want to leave Flinders and fix their abode in this country.²⁹

28 Matilda, a VDL woman, was a well travelled woman whom Robinson used to find and identify women in Bass Strait (Plomley 1987: 695), and whom he brought subsequently to Port Phillip as part of his family (*HRV*, vol 2B: 417).

29 Robinson Journal, Monday 26 December 1836 in Plomley 1987: 405.

Plomley's incomplete quotation of the statement of Matilda

She had been for a long time living with the sealers; and was in Geo Meredith's schooner when he went to Port Phillip. The vessel anchored under Pt Nepean, where there was a tribe of natives. She, Maria, was forced to entice some of the best looking women and girls to the sealers, who seized and bound them, and took them on board the schooner. After a sealing voyage to King Island and the Hunter Islands, Meredith took the women to the Furneaux Islands and left them there.³⁰

The complete statement of Matilda in Tasmanian Archives

'The Statement of [blank] alias Maria alias Matilda'

Says she has been for a long time with the Sealers. That she was in George Meredith's Schooner when he went to Port Phillip. That the Vessel anchored within the entrance of the Port under Point Nepean. That there was a tribe of Natives on the Point hunting kangaroo, that they the Sealer's Men went on Shore in their Boats and enticed the Natives, and told her to do the same. After fixing upon the best looking women and Girls did at a preconceived sign seize upon and tie them with cords, and then conveyed them on board the Schooner and proceeded on a Sealing Voyage to King's Island and the Hunter Islands and thence to the Furneaux Islands were [sic] they were left by Meredith. This woman having accompanied me to Port Phillip pointed out the spot and described these proceedings.³¹

27 December 1836

'Matilda said the sealers did not shoot the blacks, nor did the blacks spear the whites; both parties were afraid to commence hostilities; but the sealers tied the women's hands with rope and put them in the boat'.³²

28 December 1836

Robinson held a conference 'with Buckley and the Port Phillip aborigines during the day'.³³

30 Plomley 1987: 677.

31 Robinson to Col Sec VDL, 12 January 1837, AOT/CSO5/19/384: 171–196, State Library of Tasmania and Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office.

32 Robinson Journal, Monday 26 December 1836 in Plomley 1987: 406.

33 Robinson Journal, Tuesday 28 December 1837 in Plomley 1987: 407.

30 December 1836

Robinson 'conferred with the natives today'.³⁴

31 December 1836

In Melbourne, after several conferences between Robinson and the Port Phillip natives, and after the Commandant William Lonsdale expressed doubt that he could succeed in getting any natives to accompany Robinson, two Bonurong men, 'Dal.la.gal.reeth'³⁵ and Derremart, agreed to go with Robinson to the islands.³⁶ Note that it is not stated specifically that both these men had lost their wives to the sealers, but it is a reasonable presumption.

1 January 1837

'This morning left Port Phillip for the *Eliza* at 11 am. The Port Phillip natives refused to go with me'.³⁷

3 January 1837

Got the vessel off early this morning. Stood across to Arthur's Seat to get into the western channel ... The circumstances of the Port Phillip aborigines not accompanying us is their own fault. The schooner having come here for the purpose of doing an act of justice is a credit to the Van Diemen's Land government, and if the Port Phillip natives objected on the ground of their not liking to accompany strangers it would have been the duty of the government to have deputed Buckley or any other person in their service to have accompanied them; and if it was as the commandant [Captain William Lonsdale] and Buckley said, namely that they did not care about them, then no party was to blame. But this I feel assured is not the case. They like all savages have strong kindred affection. Theirs is not an outward emotion, they feel inwardly and strong natural affection. The fact is they are under the influence of the depraved whites, and those characters have told them they are not going to Launceston or Hobart but to Flinders Island and where they would be kept and would never be permitted to return to their own country. But the circumstance of Buckley having said they having been taken from them a long time and they have forgotten them is false, but it exonerates the VDL government from neglect or inattention to the cause of humanity.³⁸

34 Robinson Journal, Tuesday 30 December 1837 in Plomley 1987: 410. It is important to note that contrary to Clark's citation, Derrimut was *not* recorded as an informant on this date (Clark 2002: 117).

35 Barwick identifies this man as Derrimut's sister's son in 'Mapping the past' (Barwick 1984: 119).

36 Plomley 1987: 410.

37 Robinson Journal, Tuesday 3 January 1837 in Plomley 1987: 412.

38 Robinson Journal, Tuesday 3 January 1837 in Plomley 1987: 412.

'I Succeeded Once'

7 January 1837

Shortly after Robinson departed Port Phillip for Flinders Island, Police Magistrate Lonsdale wrote to inform Governor Sir Richard Bourke in Sydney that the VDL government schooner called into Port Phillip 'a week ago' for the purpose of procuring some natives to accompany Mr George Augustus Robinson to the islands in Bass Strait to bring the women back, but 'they refused saying it was so long since they went away that they did not care about their return'. 'The schooner therefore returned without the intended object being effected'.³⁹

9 January 1837

Robinson, in the government schooner sailing back to Flinders Island recorded that he:

Went on shore at Preservation Island with Captain Hurburgh ... found on shore James Munro who had a New Holland woman a native of Port Phillip. She was ill in bed. Had an infant child by some of the sealers; had also a daughter about 14 years of age that she had in her own country. This was an interesting girl and it grieved me to leave her in such hands for I felt persuaded she would be maltreated. Another daughter belonging to this woman was living with Strognal on Gun Carriage by whom she had two children; she was about 16 years of age ... There is positive proof that Munro bought the woman with whom he was co-habiting and it is currently reported that he gave 7 for her. He denies having given a consideration for her by her being old or as he said he supposed she would not have fallen to his share; but this is only evasive, there is positive proof that not only was a consideration given for this woman, but for every other woman brought from Port Phillip by George Meredith the original importer. The intention of visiting Preservation and the other islands was to endeavour to rescue the women native of Port Phillip from the sealers and to restore them to their own country, but against this measure they the sealers have taken every precaution to frustrate ... Acquainted Munro with the purpose of my visit and that it was the intention of the government to have the Port Phillip native women removed to their own country. He said the woman was ill in mind and that he would bring her to the settlement so soon as she recovered if it met by [sic] approbation. He was very civil but this was all duplicity. Kelly a sealer whom I had employed when at the Hunter Islands was also living with Munro ... Before quitting Preservation Island Richard Maynard a sealer came to Preservation Island from Clarks Island. He had with him a New Holland native of

39 Lonsdale to Col Sec Sydney, 7 January 1837, *HRV*, vol 2A: 54.

Port Phillip. She was far advanced in pregnancy. She was a fine looking woman. She was completely under the influence of the sealer Maynard and when asked whether she would like to go to her own country she replied **she would see me b_____**. Captain Hurburgh was with me at the time. Poor creature, her case and that of the others is truly pitiable. The man was impertinent and I warned him to quit the islands. To some remarks from Captain H he replied that he knew she was stolen from her own country by G Meredith but with that he nothing to do.⁴⁰

This is an important observation. On the one day, in 1837, Robinson can account for the four following Port Phillip females:

- Monro's sick and old Port Phillip woman together with her half-caste infant born in the straits
- Her 14 year old daughter born in Port Phillip, the 'interesting girl'
- Her 16 year old daughter born in Port Phillip, now living with Strugnell, a girl who has two half-caste children by Strugnell, born in the straits (without making unwarranted cultural assumptions about Aboriginal methods of birth control, or the effects of lactation on fertility, a crude guess would be that this girl had been in the straits for two years at least, more likely four)
- The pregnant Port Phillip woman who arrived on the island with Maynard while Robinson was there and to whom he spoke: possibly, but not certainly, this woman was pregnant to Maynard: all writers on the subject note that the sealers swapped or bartered the women, so that a chance observation may correctly or incorrectly attribute the parentage of a child to a certain European, but in reality, long-term relationship observations carry more weight as regards parentage.

12 January 1837

Robinson reported back by letter to the VDL Colonial Secretary on his trip to Port Phillip and his failure to recover the stolen Port Phillip women and he attached to his 25 page report the statement reproduced above, by the Tasmanian Aboriginal woman Maria, alias Matilda.⁴¹ Surprisingly, there is more detail in the report than is contained in the journal. The following points are of interest:

- The meeting at Melbourne with the Port Phillip natives took place on 28 December with Buckley as interpreter.
- Most of the natives were away from the settlement hunting, and only one of the men who had been robbed of their wives was present; the total number

40 Robinson Journal, Monday 9 January 1837 in Plomley 1987: 415. Plomley offers a small biography of George Meredith, Plomley 1987: 964, and James Munroe, Plomley 1987: 965.

41 Robinson Journal, Tuesday 3 January 1837, Annotations, in Plomley 1987: 677.

of natives present was 20; both men and women were present and both sexes spoke.

- 'the whole of the natives bore testimony to the violent outrage that had been committed upon them. One aged woman had had two daughters forced from her and she by signs and gestures evinced the strongest possible feelings at their loss, pointed in the direction whence they were taken from at Point Nepean, the Head of the eastern entrance to Port Phillip, described the kind of vessel they were taken in as having two masts'.
- Because there were only 20 natives in the settlement it was thought advisable to send for the rest of the tribe, but having waited five days for them, Robinson decided to depart, on the stated ground that the Master of the *Eliza*, Hursbugh, had orders to return to Hobart without delay. On 9 January he went ashore at Preservation Island and found James Munro and another man named Kelly whom he had met previously at the Hunter Islands:

There was also two Aboriginal female Natives of Port Phillip, a mother and daughter, the latter of whom a fine young Girl between 13 and 14 years of age. This woman was cohabiting with James Munro, and by whom she had a child which was then at the breast. She was afflicted and confined to her bed. There was also one VDL woman and several half caste Girls on the Islands, one of whom apparently about 14 years of age, the daughter of Scott, a sealer residing on King's Island. This girl was then living with Kelly.

- The mother of the baby was 'more aged than the rest' and in 'precarious' health, and Munro stated that it was because she was aged that he obtained her.
- Munro said that another of the Port Phillip women was on Clarke's Island cohabiting with a sealer named Maynard, on which island several other half-caste girls and VDL native women were staying. Maynard and the Port Phillip woman referred to came to Preservation Island – 'this woman appeared to be enceinte and I subsequently learned that she was far advanced in pregnancy ... this individual as well as the other natives of Port Phillip were the finest I had yet seen. It is the practice of the sealers to select the finest women and Girls of this unfortunate race ... Munro stated that one of the Women brought from Port Phillip had absconded from the Islanders* at a small inlet called Sealer's Cove on the South Coast of New Holland at Wilson's Promontory.' 'As I had no intimation from the Natives at Port Phillip that that this woman had returned I am fearfully apprehensive she was destroyed by these nefarious persons'.⁴²

42 Robinson did not know it but Tootkuningrook did get back.

- Robinson's asterisk is a marginal note reading thus: 'A more appropriate name than sealers since it is a well known fact that these men have not lived by sealing alone for these many years past'.⁴³
- Robinson went on to report on the sealers, singling out Stragnell as a man of 'most infamous description', but saw no more Port Phillip native women himself.
- Robinson left the vessel:

sensing that my presence was wanted at the settlement [Wybelena] I did not visit the other islands. This duty therefore devolved upon the Master of the Schooner who reported as follows. That on proceeding to Woody Island he there found two men James [? Everett] and another alias Abyesinnia Jack with three New Holland women and five children, some of these women are from Spencer's Gulf, and with the exception of one woman said they had no wish to leave the sealers. Found 17 individuals residing on Gun Carriage, that is seven men, i.e. Tucker-Beedon-Riddell-Proctor-Dobson-Stragnell, and a man called Stonehurst, a runaway convict, together with five women – one a native of Port Phillip, an Indian, one half-caste, two VDL females and five children. The Port Phillip woman had two children and said she had no wish to go to her own country.
- Robinson's report concluded with a request for two strong whaleboats and a respectable experienced seaman, sworn in as a constable, to act as Superintendent to patrol the islands.⁴⁴

18 February 1837

A letter from the Colonial Secretary in Sydney to Captain Lonsdale in Melbourne approved of the steps taken in the attempt to recover the abducted women: 'I am directed by His Excellency the Governor to inform you that in acting as you did, by endeavouring to persuade some of the natives to accompany Mr Robinson, you took a very proper view of the case'.⁴⁵

27 March 1837

Strognall and a New Holland woman with two children were seen, allegedly on their way to the Kent Islands but Robinson believes that he was going to the

43 A recently published history by Ruth Gooch (2008), gives a more balanced view of sealers in that she considers as well, the evidence contrary to the received view; her conclusion is that in most cases, the women chose to stay with the sealers.

44 AOT/CSO5/19/384: 171–196.

45 Col Sec Sydney to Lonsdale, 18 February 1837, *HRV* vol 2A: 55.

'I Succeeded Once'

Sisters to hunt. Mr Allen, sent on a mission to tell the sealers to quit this group of islands (because the Tasmanians from Wybelena hunted there) warned him not to go there.⁴⁶

20 September 1837

A sealer named Stragnel arrived at the settlement [Wybelena] and begged assistance to repair his boat ... He had with him a female native of Port Phillip and two children that she had by this man. The woman did not appear more than 17 years of age and was daughter to the woman who was cohabiting with James Munro. She was one of those taken from her country by Meredith. Stragnel is a most notorious fellow.⁴⁷

10 August 1838

There was 'sensation' on Flinders Island with the arrival of the *Hobart Town Gazette*, stating that it was the intention of the home government (Britain) to appoint Robinson as Protector of the Aborigines of Port Phillip, and that the Tasmanian Aborigines at present incarcerated on Flinders Island could accompany him if it pleased them to do so.⁴⁸

Within eight days Robinson had sailed to Hobart and received the news officially from Sir George Arthur. Interestingly, the Governor indicated that previously he had been opposed to such a move of the Tasmanian Aborigines because it was his belief that the natives of Port Phillip would 'destroy them'.⁴⁹ Even more interestingly, considering the links Robinson made between ownership of private property, civilisation and Christianity, it was planned that these Tasmanian Aborigines would bring with them the 1300 sheep they owned, thus 'leading to the excitement in the former [the natives of Port Phillip], of the spirit of acquisition, and consequent civilisation'.⁵⁰

Robinson then took ship for Sydney for an interview with the Governor of New South Wales. He visited the gaol on 3 September 1838, only to find that the eight Bonurong and Warworong men accused of sheep stealing and sent to Sydney for trial, had been liberated from gaol the previous week and sent to the Benevolent Asylum. From there, six had escaped,⁵¹ and two 'were taken out and sent on board of the *Prince George* revenue cutter by the Governor's orders to make sailors of them, an absurd and unjust measure'.⁵²

46 Plomley 1987: 435.

47 Robinson Journal, Wednesday 20 September 1837 in Plomley 1987: 478.

48 Robinson Journal, Plomley 1987: 576.

49 Robinson Journal, Plomley 1987: 578.

50 Robinson Journal, Plomley 1987: 581.

51 Moonee Moonee Senior, Bunia Logan, Mainger, Poen/Murray, Murrummurrumbeel/Mr Hill and Moragine/Jack Sloe (Fels 1986: 117). Georgiana McCrae's Moonie is the son of Moonee Moonee. He walked back to Port Phillip and arrived safely.

52 Robinson Journal, Plomley 1987: 582.

On his return to VDL to settle his affairs and prepare for departure to Port Phillip, Robinson was called to a meeting of the Executive Council of VDL, which was considering the issue of the VDL Aborigines' removal to Port Phillip: this was November 1838. The council had before it correspondence from the Colonial Secretary of New South Wales, vehemently opposing the move: Robinson responded with a plea for his 'special family' ie those who had been with him a long time. In this plea, he made the surprising statement that his special family consisted in total of 35 persons (out of a total population on Flinders Island of 78) and that there would be no trouble at Port Phillip: he added that these people were very friendly with the Port Phillip natives, so that no collisions were likely between them.⁵³

This last observation cries out for an answer – by what means of communication were the VDL Aborigines at Wybelena 'very friendly' with the Port Phillip natives at home in Port Phillip in 1838?

28 February 1839

After a 48 hour voyage from Flinders Island, Robinson and his family of Aborigines arrived in Port Phillip, all sick with influenza; the natives went on shore the next day, and the four assistant protectors came on board the VDL cutter.⁵⁴

Abduction location

'Under Point Nepean' was a specific descriptor of the nineteenth century. Sir Richard Bourke used it to describe the anchored position of HMS *Rattlesnake* when he visited Port Phillip with Captain Hobson in 1837. He described the vessel as being 'under Point Nepean' when it was moored four miles east of Point Nepean and three miles from Colonel Collins' settlement.⁵⁵ This position is Portsea Pier, Portsea Pub, and Point Franklin. The term 'under Point Nepean' was still in use in 1878, as for example when it was reported in a newspaper that it was not often that a boat can land under Point Nepean more especially at this time of the year (April).⁵⁶ This newspaper article was describing the difficulty of hauling guns weighing four tons up the 60 foot cliff at Fort Nepean. This descriptor at least tells us that the place of abduction was not near Arthurs Seat. Taking together the following pieces of evidence:

53 Robinson Journal, in Plomley 1987: 771.

54 Clark 1998, vol 1: 11, 13. A list of the natives is at Robinson to La Trobe, 18 December 1839, *HRV*, vol 2B: 417.

55 Boys 1935: 62–63.

56 *Argus*, 24 April 1878: 5.

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- that Meredith's crew anchored 'under Point Nepean', a few miles down the harbour
- that several of the early navigators seem to have anchored at what is now Portsea beach, that is, that it was in general use as an anchorage
- that the tribe was hunting boomer kangaroos 'at the point'
- that Matilda drew Robinson's attention to 'the point' after they were inside the heads
- that Thomas saw the tracks of boomer kangaroo at Point King, and ran them down, and saw flocks of 50 or so
- that Thomas explored as far south as four to five miles from Point Nepean
- that Point Nepean itself was bush

I suggest that the place of abduction was in the vicinity of either Pt Franklin or Pt King.

Some comments on Robinson's record of the names of the abducted women

3 January 1837

In a list of this day's date, of vocabulary, plus names of natives, which he made on the ship back to Flinders Island, Robinson records the following names: they are published in Plomley's *Journal Annotations*.⁵⁷

- DOOG.BY.ER.UM.BORE.OKE, the mother of the two girls stolen from Port Phillip
- NAY.NAR.GOR.ROTE, one of the girls names taken by the sealers
- BO.RO.DANG.ER.GOR.ROKE, another girl taken by the sealers
- NAN.DER.GOR.OKE, Derremart's wife who was taken by the sealers.

Barwick has identified NAN DER GOR OKE as Elizabeth Maynard and DOOG BY ER UM BORE OKE as Margery Munro, but without showing how the identification was made.⁵⁸ Clark also notes that the evidence is absent from Barwick's account of how she made the positive identification,⁵⁹ and D'Arcy discounts the putative identification. Plomley and Henley believed that the New Holland woman living with Munro in January 1837 was 'probably the Margery Munro who, with her daughter, had been abducted by George Meredith'.⁶⁰

57 Robinson *Journal*, Tuesday 3 January 1837 in Plomley 1987: 675. Note that this account does not mention Yankee Yankee, the male child of Benbow's wife, who was abducted with his mother.

58 Barwick 1985: 227.

59 Clark 2002: 129.

60 Plomley and Henley 1990: 92.

It cannot however, be the case that DOOG.BY.ER.UM.BORE.OKE, the mother of the two girls stolen from Port Phillip, is Margery Munro, because Robinson clearly states in his report to the Colonial Secretary VDL that DOOG.BY.ER.UM.BORE.OKE is still at Port Phillip, still weeping for her two stolen girls, describing the ship, pointing to the heads, describing how her daughters were torn away from her: she was not abducted at all.

The misidentification of DOOG BY ER UM BORE OKE as Margery Munro is important because both the Boonwurrung Foundation and the Bonurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation descent claims go back through Louisa Briggs to Polly Bligh and Polly Bligh's mother Margery Munro.

Taken together, Robinson's two records make plain that the abducted group included the two daughters of DOOG.BY.ER.UM.BORE.OKE (she herself being still in Melbourne), plus the aged woman living with James Monro, ill, and with a baby at the breast, as well as this aged woman's 14-year-old daughter, the interesting girl who was herself born in Port Phillip, plus her other daughter, 16 years old, also born in Port Phillip, and living now with Strugnall. These five are clearly separate individuals from two separate families at Port Phillip. There are two sets of sisters among the abductees.

The fine looking girl, advanced in pregnancy who was living with Richard Maynard, and the Port Phillip woman with two children who was living with Abyssinnia Jack and did not wish to return to her own country, *could* have been the two daughters of DOOG.BY.ER.UM.BORE.OKE. But they are *not* the same people as the 14 year old and the 16 year old girls who have their own mother living in the Straits, not still back at Port Phillip. This identification has serious implications for the genealogical links between Louisa Briggs and Polly Bligh and the putative ancestor, wrongly identified as DOOG.BY.ER.UM.BORE.OKE.

The implication in the Boonwurrung statement to Parliament that a female child, her mother and her grandmother were at Point Nepean for women's secret business is not supported by the evidence, which clearly states that the tribe was there hunting kangaroo.

In another record of the names of the sealing men on different islands, Robinson writes that James Munro on Preservation Island has one New Holland woman, native of Port Phillip, and her daughter aged 14 also a native of Port Phillip, and a half-caste infant child belonging to the mother. Richard Maynard on Clarks Island had one Port Phillip woman.⁶¹ The sealer, Munro, told Robinson that he was told that one woman from Port Phillip ran away from the sealers at Bay

61 Robinson Journal, Tuesday 3 January 1837 in Plomley 1987: 416.

and Back Cove at Wilson's Promontory.⁶² YANKI YANKI, the boy, confirmed this when he returned to Port Phillip in 1841 (see later in this chapter). This woman's name was TOUTKUNINGROOK.⁶³

There is another woman, TOOLOM, with a Western Port name, described only as a New Holland woman living with Isaac.⁶⁴ Clark has noted that there is no other information available about Toolom in the research of those who have constructed the genealogies of the Bass Strait islanders.⁶⁵ KAR.DING.GOR.OKE, living with Morgan in 1837,⁶⁶ was a young woman belonging to the Western Port chief, Budgery Tom.⁶⁷ This information was supplied ten years later to Robinson in Melbourne in 1847, as was the name of Meen.dut.Goroke.⁶⁸ NINJIT, who was living with Jack Williams, NEE.NUT.NOMY and WON.GOR.RUG are also names of New Holland women which Robinson recorded, and Clark lists them as such, but whether he regards them as originally from the Port Phillip or Western Port coasts is blacked out in his report. Their names come from Robinson's 1837 list constructed as he inspected the islands on his way back to VDL after his unsuccessful attempt to persuade the husbands of the women to help him rescue them. Then there is NAN.NERT.GOROKE whose name was supplied to Robinson by Benbow in 1847.⁶⁹

It is crucial to both Indigenous groups' foundation narratives that Margery Munro be identified. As she is not DOOG.BY.ER.UM.BORE.OKE, as previously thought, then who is she? Circumstantial evidence suggests that we should at least ask the question, could she be the wife of Big Benbow/Baddourup whose biographical details were given in Chapter 3? The woman with Munro in 1837 was old, sick, with a newborn baby and her 14 and 16 year old daughters with her in the straits: she is the only abductee described as old, though of course 'old' is a relative term – both Indigenous and European persons described Aboriginal people as 'old' when they were around 40 years. Meredith's crew, as was noted above, made a positive selection for the best looking women and girls. In 1837, Barebun/Mary here in Port Phillip was 12 years old and without a mother – possibly the reason she was living with the Smiths, and possibly the reason why in all the tooting and froing related to her marriage with Billibellary, and her subsequent assault at Buckkermittewarrer, her mother is never mentioned: her mother might have been in Bass Strait. Her brother Yankee Yankee, abducted

62 Robinson Journal, Tuesday 3 January 1837 in Plomley 1987: 415.

63 Thomas Miscellaneous Papers, CY 3130, frame 35, ML.

64 Robinson Journal, Tuesday 3 January 1837 in Plomley 1987: 416.

65 Clark 2002: 120.

66 Robinson Journal, Tuesday 3 January 1837 in Plomley 1987: 416.

67 Clark 2002: 121.

68 Robinson Journal, 1847 in Clark 2002: 121.

69 Clark 2002: 118–120. It needs to be pointed out that although Clark cites Derrimut in Robinson's Journal of 30 December 1836 as his source for these names, Derrimut is not mentioned in the journal for this date and the citation is incorrect.

with his mother, was ten years old in 1837, working in Western Australia. This family structure fits the pattern of big men in early contact society, men such as Billibellary, Old Doctor and Old Mr Mann. Then there is the further detail from Dredge's account quoted above that Yankee Yankee escaped from Preservation Island: it makes sense if Munro's woman was his mother, and he had stuck with his mother until then. I would go even further and suggest that she encouraged him off the island to VDL, and thence hopefully to Port Phillip, and I suspect that there was contact between the abductees and the Bonurong, that Pinterginner's visit to VDL and his removing Barebun/Mary from the Smiths in June 1840 were related facts, exactly as Thomas wrote them in his journal.

And I suggest that we must look for further evidence regarding NAN-NAT-GOOR-RUK (see King Benbow's biographical details below, 7 January 1848) who had recently returned from VDL.

In the Barwick Papers is a photostat of a letter written in 1974 by an Aboriginal woman to a firm of solicitors requesting help about her grandfather's will. The photostat is accompanied by a covering letter from the solicitors requesting Barwick's help. There are two partial drafts of letters from Barwick back to the solicitors apologising for the delay and listing the immense amount of sources she had consulted in trying to work out the genealogy. There is even a partial draft of the article she wrote, its provisional title being 'Sealers, settlements, scandals: a biographical puzzle'. This is the article subsequently published as 'This most remarkable lady: a biographical puzzle'. Barwick's notes on the 1924 Hall and Taylor interviews with Mrs Louisa Briggs shed light on the Boonwurrung foundation story. The original record of interview does *not* state that Louisa Briggs returned from VDL when Melbourne had but three houses, ie sometime between mid 1835 and mid 1836. It says the following:

she returned from Tasmania to Melbourne when that city had more than three houses, but was smaller than Cumerogunga and the Exhibition Ground was all forest. She was at that time a married woman.⁷⁰

George Meredith (1806–c1835)

George Meredith's father, also named George Meredith, was a wealthy, well connected ex Marine officer who chartered a ship to emigrate to VDL, arriving in 1821 (Dr Francis Desailley, whose teenage grandsons looked after Hobson and Smith's sheep at the back of Rosebud, came with him). The family received the usual grants from the government and took up land in the Oyster Bay area on the mid-east coast of VDL. In addition to agriculture and pastoralism, the family subsequently established a whale fishery which prospered. The George

70 Barwick Papers, Ms 13521, Series BAR S 4007, Box 001, Folder BAR I 01634, SLV.

Meredith of our story was the errant son. Though his death was reported in VDL newspapers, his name was not mentioned in society out of respect for the feelings of the now distinguished family: his name is not even *now*, in 2010, mentioned in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* online entry which lists all the other children of George Meredith senior.

According to Barwick, George Meredith junior stole the schooner *Defiance* after a quarrel with his father, and wrecked it near Twofold Bay early in September 1833. This has been checked from newspapers. The schooner *Defiance*, Captain Meredith, departed Sydney on 27 September 1833 on a sealing trip to the western coast of New Holland.⁷¹ Nearly a month later, the schooner *Blackbird* left Sydney on a speculative trip in search of the wreck of the schooner *Defiance*.⁷² According to Barwick, George Meredith then made his way by whaleboat to Kangaroo Island by February 1834 and was killed in the vicinity of Port Lincoln some time after September 1834,⁷³ but there is no indication how she knew that. Cawthorne, a recognised expert on Kangaroo Island society prior to official settlement (he lived locally, his father being the lighthouse keeper and he interviewed sealers), wrote a novel which he stated was a 'narrative of fact to a very large extent'. He mentions Europeans who are known in the historical records, such as Abyssinia Jack and Bumble footed Sal, and Big Bet, two Tasmanian women. In fact Cumpston states that Bumble footed Sal was Meredith's woman in 1833.⁷⁴ He gives the place of Meredith's death as Yankalilla, which is correct, but the year as 1827, which is clearly wrong.⁷⁵ Several secondary accounts, not rigorously researched but feeding off each other, and traceable to Inspector Alexander Tolmer's account in 1844,⁷⁶ locate George Meredith as a permanent resident on Kangaroo Island from 1827 till his death in 1832 or 1834. Tolmer's sources are undisclosed, and his account is written in terms of 'I heard' and 'it was said', but there were apparently sealers living on Kangaroo Island in 1844.

It is worth recalling that the Meredith family only migrated in 1821, and branched out into whaling after their pastoral activities were established, and that George Meredith senior built his first boat in 1828, the *Black Swan*.⁷⁷ It is George Meredith's residence on Kangaroo Island from 1827 till his death which appears not to be true. It places him as an outcast from society at the age of

71 *Sydney Herald*, Monday 30 September 1833: 2.

72 *Sydney Gazette and NSW Advertiser*, Saturday 26 October 1833: 2.

73 Barwick 1985: 231.

74 Cumpston 1970: 132, 191.

75 Cawthorne 1926[1823]: 87, viii. He has interesting detail about the women singing, corroborating, not sleeping with the sealers but in their own wurley village, children, grass tree hearts as food, all of which agree with known facts.

76 Tolmer 1882, vol 2: 6ff.

77 Mori Flapan, 'List of Tasmanian Boat Builders and Ship Builders from the Register of Australian and NZ Vessels', <<http://home.iprimus.com.au/mflapan/TasmanianBuilders.htm>>

21, just at the very time that the family was starting up the whale fishery. He is mentioned in the Hobart newspapers in 1826 as having recently taken two whales in the Straits.⁷⁸

According to Plomley, George Meredith junior went to sea in small vessels trading and raiding in the straits. He built a house on Kangaroo Island, at Western River and lived there with a Tasmanian Aboriginal woman named Sal. He was involved in the abduction of New Holland women, both from Point Nepean and from the coast of South Australia adjacent to Kangaroo Island. These acts resulted in his death at the hands of the natives in South Australia in 1835 or 1836.⁷⁹ This is basically the received version inherited from Tolmer and I think it is true except for the date of death, if the first hand narratives of Matilda and the two English lads, plus the shipping intelligence all detailed below, are accepted as factual. The Bass Strait sealer, William Proctor, told Robinson as early as May 1836 that George Meredith had been killed by the natives off the coast of New Holland. Plomley and Henley state that he was killed at the hands of natives in South Australia in 1835–36.⁸⁰ Police Magistrate Stewart understood that Meredith was dead when he was at Port Phillip in June 1836.

The South Australian Police Historical Society has published an account by a local historian who has worked in South Australian Police Archives, Jean Schmaal:

Another tragedy of those pre-settlement days concerns one George Meredith, the adventurous son of a prominent Hobart Town businessman who came to Kangaroo Island seeking his fortune among the sealers. He had with him, on landing on the island, a Tasmanian native woman named Sal. Later he 'acquired' two young native men from the Encounter Bay area, and these he trained to help him in his hunting expeditions. Meredith, much against the advice of his fellow sealers, decided to come across to the then unsettled mainland. Some time later, his companions came to find the reason for his non-return, and discovering Sal, were told that Meredith, on anchoring in Yankalilla Bay [Fleurieu Peninsula], had been despatched by a blow from a tomahawk by one of his native offsidars, who had then returned to his tribe. Meredith's father asked for enquiries to be made into the murder, but there being no European settlement in the country [pre-1836] nothing could be done. Years later,

⁷⁸ *Hobart Town Gazette*, Saturday 10 June 1826: 2.

⁷⁹ Plomley and Henley 1990: 90.

⁸⁰ Plomley and Henley 1990: 90.

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Police Commissioner Tolmer got onto the case and was able to locate Sal. However by that time the alleged murderer was himself dead.⁸¹ [There are no dates in this article.]

George Meredith and the vessel he wrecked, the 24 ton schooner *Defiance*

There were two schooners named *Defiance* running up and down the east coast of Australia in the 1830s, but it is easy to distinguish between them. The *Defiance* which was *not* George Meredith's vessel was a schooner of 75 tons, Captain Kenneth McKenzie, built at Twofold Bay in 1832, registered Sydney; it must have been a comfortable vessel because it carried the carriage trade in its passenger lists for the few voyages which it made before being wrecked (for example Viscount Lascelles),⁸² and it is always described with its tonnage 75 tons, and its Master and its passengers and its cargo. This 75 ton *Defiance* was wrecked on the night of 27 July 1833 on Cape Barren Island opposite Gull Island in the Furneaux group. She had been chartered by Captain Muggerridge of the *Courier* as a salvage vessel for his own wrecked vessel. Captain Muggerridge's *Courier* struck Gull Island on the night of 4 July 1833, and the *Defiance* had indeed salvaged most of the cargo of the *Courier* when *Defiance's* own anchor parted and she herself was wrecked on Gull Island. The news of her wreck in 'Bass's Straits' reached Sydney on Tuesday 27 August 1833 via the *Hind*, Captain Scott, which left Launceston on 18 August.⁸³

Every voyage up and down the coast can be tracked as this other vessel named *Defiance* plied between Hobart Town and Sydney: she is very visible in the records from being advertised as a new, fast sailing boat when her maiden voyage was advertised,⁸⁴ to being obliged to turn back due to stress of weather,⁸⁵ and having to be hauled up into the mud of the east cove at Sydney because she damaged her bottom on the run up from Hobart,⁸⁶ and finally being wrecked just 12 months after she was launched. She is clearly distinguishable from George Meredith's *Defiance*.

81 Jean Schmaal, *The Place of the Woman's Tragedy being the story of Police Settlement at Normanville/ Yankalilla*, typescript, 1972, courtesy of Alan Peters, Historian, SA Police Historical Society.

82 *Sydney Gazette and NSW Advertiser*, 9 June 1833: 2; *Sydney Gazette and NSW Advertiser*, 9 July 1833: 3 quoting VDL news from the *Hobart Town Courier* of 21 June 1833, that the schooner *Defiance*, 71 tons, Captain McKenzie had arrived in Hobart from Sydney on 19 June 1833, with passengers including Rev Mr Manton; another passenger list included Viscount Lascelles.

83 *Sydney Gazette and NSW Advertiser*, 27 August 1833: 2.

84 *Sydney Gazette and NSW Advertiser*, Saturday 21 July 1832: 1.

85 *Sydney Gazette and NSW Advertiser*, Tuesday 14 August 1832: 2.

86 *Sydney Herald*, Monday 7 January 1833: 3.

George Meredith's *Defiance*, whose captain is sometimes listed as Meredith, sometimes as West, was only a small vessel of 24 tons.⁸⁷ If she was the vessel who abducted the women from under Point Nepean, and I, relying on the evidence of Matilda that both Meredith and West as Master, were aboard, have no doubt that she was the abducting vessel, then the date of the abduction becomes problematic: Meredith's *Defiance* was also wrecked in 1833, and Meredith's subsequent movements are accounted for, so the abduction could only have occurred prior to the wreck. Usually, in presenting evidence of a vessel's voyages, one would start at the beginning and work forward. But in this case, I have deemed it sensible to start with the fact of the wreck and work backwards, looking for any possible opportunity in time which the *Defiance* might have had for the abduction.

Her departure on the voyage during which she was wrecked is listed on 30 September 1833, for the western coast of New Holland (ie Western Australia), on a sealing trip, Captain Meredith.⁸⁸ The next mention of her is a month later when she is reported as wrecked:

The schooner *Defiance*, Captain Meredith, which had left Sydney about a month ago on a sealing voyage was unfortunately wrecked on the coast, about 15 miles below Twofold Bay, all hands saved. The schooner *Blackbird* has gone in search of the wreck. The *Defiance* had about 600 worth of property in her when the accident occurred, and was not insured.⁸⁹

The *Blackbird* arrived back in Sydney from Howe's Island on Saturday 2 November 1833 with part of the wreck of the schooner *Defiance*.⁹⁰

From this time on, it does not seem that George Meredith had either a vessel or the opportunity to abduct anyone from Port Phillip before he died, because his movements are on record. His extraordinary tale is recounted in a West Australian newspaper two years later. Under the heading 'Two English lads' the newspaper published the following first person narrative account of two young crewmen who were wrecked with George Meredith:

The following interesting narrative has reached us by the recent arrival from King George's Sound. The circumstances connected with the singular adventure of these two lads are not so fully detailed as we could have desired; the source, however, from whence our information is obtained, leaves no doubt of the accuracy of the statement as given

87 *Sydney Herald*, Monday 10 December 1833: 2.

88 *Sydney Herald*, Monday 30 September 1833: 2.

89 *Sydney Herald*, Thursday 24 October 1833: 3.

90 *Sydney Gazette and NSW Advertiser*, Tuesday 5 November 1833: 2.

by Manning one of the sufferers. On the 9 August last, two English lads, named James Newell and James Manning, reached King George's Sound from the mainland opposite to Middle Island, after experiencing the most bitter privations for nearly seven weeks on the main, and about two years on the islands in Spencer's Gulph. The account given of their perilous adventure runs thus:

They sailed from Sydney in the month of August 1833, in the schooner *Defiance* of about 25 tons burthen, laden with provisions for trading with the sealers on the islands on the southern coast of Australia,⁹¹ and bound to King George's Sound and the Swan River, Captain Meredith. They were wrecked in September of the same year on Cape Howe Island. They went in a whaleboat with the commander, one man and a native woman to Kangaroo Island; the remainder of the crew of the schooner (six men) determined to make for Sydney, and accordingly started in another whaleboat; they never heard what became of them. They did not reach Kangaroo Island until February 1834, being five months, during which time, they state, they were doing their utmost to make a passage. [It is to be regretted that we have not here a more detailed statement of the manner in which those five months were occupied – it is idle to imagine that they were so long a time '*doing their utmost to make the passage!*']

They established themselves on Kangaroo Island, built a house for the commander and *his native wife*, and made a garden. In September 1834 a black man named Anderson arrived at Kangaroo Island in a boat from Long Island, with another black man named John Bathurst. Manning and his companion took passage with them to Long Island. They were obliged to keep working in the boat, sealing, to obtain their provisions. In November 1834, George Meredith their commander, whom they left on Kangaroo Island, came to a bird island [mutton birds, Althorpe Isles, off the north coast of Kangaroo Island⁹²] where Manning happened to be and accused Manning of robbing him of 4. 10. 0. There was another whaleboat on Long Island with four men in her, named George Roberts, John Howlett, Harry and William Forbes. In November [presumably still 1834], on Boston Island, the people in this latter boat caught five native women from the neighbourhood of Port Lincoln; they enticed two of their husbands into the boat, and carried them off to the island, where in spite of all the remonstrances of Manning, they took the native men in Anderson's boat round a point a short distance off, where they shot them, and knocked their brains out with clubs. Manning believes they

91 Maybe, but the authorities thought they were off to New Zealand.

92 Wells 1978: 77.

still have the native women in their possession, with the exception of Forbes, whose woman ran away from him shortly after they were taken to the island [Kangaroo].

Two of the women had infants at the breast at the time their husbands were murdered; an old woman was compelled to take them away, and carried them into the bush. Another native endeavoured to swim to the island to recover his wife but was drowned in the attempt. In January 1834 a small cutter the *Mountaineer* commanded by Evanson Janson arrived at the island [Kangaroo] in which vessel Manning paid 8 for his passage to King George's Sound; Janson being always drunk, by some misunderstanding Manning lost his passage. Both Manning and his comrade frequently begged of Anderson to land them on the main, that they might walk to King George's Sound but he refused. When Manning landed on Middle Island from the *Mountaineer* he had 50 L. in his possession, in Spanish dollars and English specie. This money Anderson stole; he was seen counting it with a man named Isaac, who also had another lot of money rolled up in canvas. Early in April, Janson the master of the *Mountaineer* arrived at the island in a boat with six men and two women, the vessel having been driven ashore in Thirtle Cove. About the end of May, five of these people left the island in a boat, without any provisions, intending to proceed to King George's Sound. On 23rd June, Anderson at the solicitation of Manning and his fellow traveller James Newell, landed them on the main but would not give them powder. They subsisted chiefly on limpits [sic], and on roots of grass, but were sometimes for several days without little or anything to eat. They found at all times sufficient water, although they never left the neighbourhood of the coast. Arrived at Henley, Oyster Harbour on the 9th August [1835] reduced almost to skeletons and having almost lost all power of articulation.

It is interesting to know that these lads owed their safety entirely to the humane treatment they met with from the natives of the White Cockatoo, Murray and Will-men tribes. From the moment they fell in with them, their exertions were unabated to restore them sufficiently to continue their journey; they nursed, fed, and almost carried them at times, when from weakness they were almost sinking under their sufferings. This is a return which could scarcely have been expected from savages, who have no doubt been exposed to repeated atrocities, such as we have related in a previous narrative. Indeed, to the acts of these white barbarians, we may now trace the loss of some valuable lives among the Europeans, and more especially that of Captain Barker, which took place within a short

distance of the scene of these atrocities.⁹³ We are happy to hear that Sir Richard Spencer, Government Resident at King George's Sound, so soon as he was satisfied of the services the natives had rendered to these lads, issued a small portion of flour to each native, and gave presents to those who were most active and kind in the journey. The gentlemen in the settlement to their credit were very liberal in their subscriptions, to obtain the lads blankets, clothing and other necessities. To the natives they gave a bag of sugar and of rice.

The general vagueness of this report, more especially the five months delay unaccounted for, has left an impression unfavourable to the lads statement; but on reference to the *Sydney Herald* of the 24th October, 1833, two months subsequently to the departure of the *Defiance* from that port, we find the following paragraph: 'The schooner *Defiance*, Captain Meredith, which has left Sydney about a month on a sealing voyage (the variation in the lads' statement of a month, after so long a lapse of time, may be reasonably accounted for) was unfortunately wrecked on the coast about 15 miles below Twofold Bay, all hands saved. The schooner *Blackbird* has gone in search of the wreck. The *Defiance* had about 400 worth of property in her when the accident occurred, and not insured.'

It is to be regretted that our informants were not more minute in their enquiries; a little acuteness in the enquiry would have opened to us the conduct and characters of those employed on the southern coasts as sealers, by our neighbours in Van Diemen's Land. Passing, as they represent they did, along the coast in a whaleboat, with ample time for observation – five months – although we cannot doubt the fact, indeed we believe it to be fully confirmed, leaves an hiatus in the narrative, which may be gratifying to some of our readers, but is annoying to us, searching as we do for facts.

A further inspection of our files of the Sydney Journals may throw more light on this subject, which our leisure, in a future number, will enable us to disclose. The habits of the men left on the islands to the southward, by whaling, or sealing vessels, have long borne the character given them by Manning and Newell; it appears therefore, deserving of some consideration by what means their practices can be checked, as future sealers in the neighbourhood of Port Lincoln will be made to expiate the crimes and outrages of these lawless assassins.

93 Kangaroo Island, where 'atrocities' is a correct term for sealers' behaviors towards mainland Aborigines. Captain Barker's death is well known, believed to be a case of mistaken identity, a revenge killing as a response to the atrocities, but of an innocent man.

Quite apart from the present pleasure of reading an 1827 newspaper doing investigative journalism, this account leaves George Meredith last met with in November 1834 on Althorpe Island in the vicinity of Kangaroo Island, South Australia, without his vessel, without Master West and without his crew.

A chronology of sealers on Kangaroo Island makes the statement 'There are many stories regarding Meredith's death but most seem to agree that it was on the mainland near Yankalilla around 1834'.⁹⁴ As the Commissioner of Police Alexander Tolmer subsequently investigated the death (and arrested two native women but subsequently discharged them), and no-one has apparently attempted research in the South Australian archives to find these records, if they exist, this is one further step that could be taken to confirm the year of Meredith's death. But I accept 1834.

As Meredith was in no position to abduct anyone from anywhere between September 1833 and his death, it becomes necessary to follow the *Defiance* backwards in time so to speak, from September 1833, bearing in mind that Yankee Yankee has proved himself to be an impeccable witness, and he said that the abduction was in 1833. Even if Meredith died a year later than I believe, that is he died in 1835, I doubt that he could have abducted the women. Batman and Fawkner established themselves in the middle of 1835 at Port Phillip, and the abduction certainly did not happen after that. And if it occurred in the first six months of that year 1835, it would have been fresh news, a recent event for the Bonurong to inform the Europeans about, not something that happened more than a year ago.

George Meredith's *Defiance* recorded sailings are as follows:

- 6 December 1832 – Arrived Sydney, 28 November, from Hobart Town, schooner *Defiance*, 24 tons, Farley [Master], Learmonth and Sims agents, cargo sealing stores.⁹⁵
- 10 December 1832 – Sydney. Departure, for New Zealand yesterday, schooner *Defiance*, 24 tons, Captain West with stores.⁹⁶
- 21 March 1833 – Sydney. Departure for New Zealand yesterday, the schooner *Defiance*.⁹⁷
- 28 May 1833 – Sydney. Arrivals, from a sealing trip on Sunday [ie 26 May] the schooner *Defiance*, West Master, with 536 seal skins, 2500 kangaroo skins.⁹⁸

94 Copland 2002; Counterpoints, Flinders University Online Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies Conference Papers. Note that the published version did not include the 18 page chronology, available only online.

95 *Sydney Herald*, Thursday 6 December 1832: 4.

96 *Sydney Herald*, 10 December 1832: 2.

97 *Sydney Gazette and NSW Advertiser*, Thursday 21 March 1833: 2.

98 *Sydney Gazette and NSW Advertiser*, Tuesday 28 May 1833: 2.

'I Succeeded Once'

There is no record of the *Defiance* between these two dates, and this voyage between March and May 1833 is almost certainly the one during which Meredith and West abducted the women from under Point Nepean. The defining evidence is the cargo on return – both sealskins and kangaroo skins. Matilda's evidence (above) specifically states that Meredith went sealing after abducting the women and names the islands in 'Bass's Straits'. This vessel had been in Bass Strait, the only place where it was possible to obtain together, both sealskins and kangaroo skins. It was the practice of the island sealers to shoot kangaroos to trade their skins⁹⁹ as well as sealskins, and so destructive to food resources for the VDL Aborigines was this practice of shooting kangaroos that Robinson banned it.¹⁰⁰

In fact in his journal entry of 23 July 1836¹⁰¹ which discusses this issue (the sealers were caught with 400 kangaroo skins from the Sisters Islands), he mentions the fact that Meredith is now dead, killed by the natives of the country adjacent to Kangaroo Island, and that Matilda was (yet again) an eyewitness. I am satisfied that the Meredith abduction took place between March and May 1833.

Part 2: the possibly separate issue of the Port Phillip women living at St Georges Sound in 1839

When Barwick wrote her original article on Louisa Briggs, published in 1985, she was interested in names, in genealogical links with ancestors. She did not even question that the women reported as living at King George's Sound in 1839 were part of the Meredith abduction. She saw the record of them in Thomas' journal, the evidence from Smythe, and she quoted it accurately, and footnoted the reference. Since then, everyone has followed her assumption, and no one has seen the original record, all writers citing Barwick as their reference, not the original record from Thomas.

But Barwick's interest was in the names, and she made no comment on the provenance of the information, or its detail. In fact, this record by its mere existence, challenges the assumption that the women living in Western Australia in 1839 were part of the Meredith abduction.

99 Plomley 1987: 38.

100 Plomley 1987: 624. I am grateful to Ruth Gooch for informing me that there were, strictly speaking, no kangaroos in the straits, that the animal to which the records refer is actually a wallaby.

101 Plomley 1987: 366–367.

It cannot remain unconsidered as one of the names, Eliza Nowen, appears on the list of apical ancestors from whom the Bonurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation derives its authority to be the traditional owners of the Mornington Peninsula.

On 11 December 1839, in Melbourne, the surveyor George D Smythe, recently arrived from Western Australia,¹⁰² informed Thomas that three Port Phillip females and their children were living in Western Australia. Thomas forwarded the information to Robinson thus:

Mr Smythe, Surveyor at Swan River called ... He also stated that there were 4 Port Phillip natives, 3 women and a boy at St Georges Sound who were stole away by the sealers in the year 1834. They were stole by the Captain of the *George*, the fourth Cutter,¹⁰³ which left Sydney touched at Western Port on its way to St Georges Sound. One lubra was cut over the face which she said was done by her father.

One woman named Mary has two children, is 20 years of age, her husband is Captain Williams of Water —

Eliza Nowen on Balls Island has 7 children.

Julian Morgan aged 22 years has several children.

These lubras are all anxious to come to Port Phillip to see their friends at Western Port.¹⁰⁴

There is a brief mention in another journal 'In the evening a Mr Smyth, Brother to Captain Lonsdale [actually brother in law] gives me an account of Blacks at St George's Sound & in the islands in straits'.¹⁰⁵

Some comments on Smythe's account

The report of this abduction is quite specific in relation to the year, 1834, a different year to the *George Meredith* abduction: it is also specific in relation to the abducting vessel, the *George*, the fourth cutter, a different vessel to Meredith's *Defiance* (as well, a cutter is a one masted vessel, rigged fore and aft, whereas Meredith's abducting vessel is specifically stated by the Aboriginal

102 According to Marten Syme's *Shipping arrivals and departures, Victorian Ports*, Vol 1 Index: 287, a 'Surveyor Smythe' arrived in Melbourne in the revenue cutter *Ranger* on 26 May 1839. This Surveyor Smythe however is almost certainly his brother Henry Hutchinson Smythe.

103 This seems to be saying that the women were abducted by a government vessel 'the fourth cutter'. There was a government vessel, a revenue cutter, the *Prince George*, engaged in government service operating out of Sydney in this period.

104 Thomas Journal, Monday 11 December 1839, CY 2604, item 4, frame 251, ML.

105 Thomas Journal, Monday 11 December 1839, CY 2604, frame 131, ML.

informant to be a two masted vessel); it is also specific in relation to the place of abduction, the body of water called Western Port, where the abducting vessel called in for water, and specific in relation to the destination, King George's Sound. And Thomas' brief mention in his second journal indicates that Smythe gave information about the women in 'Bass's Straits', which Thomas did not record, as well as information about the women at King George's Sound.

Where this brief account is incoherent is that it seems to attribute the abduction to two separate abductors – both to the sealers and to the captain of the *George*. And the number of children is a problem, for two reasons. It seems unlikely that sealers would snatch a woman with a number of children, yet if Eliza Nowen gave birth to one child per year for the five years from 1834 to 1839, it would be the first such record that I have ever come across.

Given the law of the sea, and the prevailing customs of the times, it would not be a matter of surprise to discover that a government cutter picked up people in distress and gave them a lift: there are quite a few records of government vessels picking up stranded seamen and carrying them to a port. Even international vessels did this, for example Commander Dumont D'Urville in *L'Astrolabe* picked up abandoned sealers at King George's Sound in 1826 and brought them to Western Port. Another example is Yankee Yankee himself who travelled in the revenue cutter *Prince William* from Launceston to King George's Sound (see below). But it *would* be astonishing to find a government cutter engaged in the abduction of native women.

It is such a small detail 'the *George* the fourth cutter', but considering the source, Surveyor Smythe, and the recorder, Thomas, my view is that both considered this fact to be noteworthy, possibly blameworthy. Then there is the detail that the cutter called at Western Port to take on water. This is a defining fact. No small vessels would call into Port Phillip to take on water, because there was no easy source inside the bay, whereas Western Port had a number of convenient and well known watering points. These women were taken from the shores of the bay called Western Port (not from the district called Western Port which included at the time Port Phillip), and they were taken *after* the initial settlement of Western Australia at King George's Sound in 1826, and *after* the revenue cutter *Prince George* arrived in New South Wales in 1833, so the firm date of 1834 may well be correct.

These women cannot be assumed with certainty to be part of the George Meredith abduction in 1834: they may be, but not until all the evidence is considered. It is worth drawing attention to the fact that Police Magistrate Stewart's report states that he embarked in the revenue cutter *Prince George* for the 'purpose

of proceeding to Port Phillip', and mentions as well 'the settlement': it seems unlikely that he is using Westernport as a *district* name, but rather as a *place* name.

These women have been considered to be part of the George Meredith abduction only, I suspect, in ignorance of Thomas' primary record, because of the difficulty of accessing it, and then reading it on microfilm.¹⁰⁶

In order to test the credibility of Smythe's account to Thomas, it is necessary to investigate the details.

George D Smythe

George D Smythe (1806–1857) surveyor ... was brother to Henry Hutchinson Smythe. After the Smythe family arrived in Western Australia in 1829, Governor Stirling was able to use the Smythes' surveying skills ... Smythe was surveyor with Captain Thomas Bannister's overland expedition to King George's Sound leaving in December 1830 and arriving at Albany in February 1831. Bannister was a difficult character and blamed Smythe for their getting lost; at one point he threatened to shoot Smythe. [The parents] moved to Launceston in March 1831. Henry departed in February 1833 to join his father in Launceston ... In October 1834 Governor Stirling led a party of surveyors and mounted police to the upper reaches of the Murray River [the Western Australian Murray River] to deal with the Aborigines. En route they were joined by Smythe and some police. After spending the night at Thomas Peel's station Mandurah House, an assault was made on the Aborigines, the so called 'Battle of Pinjarra'. Eighty Aborigines were killed for the loss of one European life. Although Smythe is usually included in the party, he was not with the assault, for the archive reports indicate that Smythe had been bitten by a venomous insect and was forced to stay at Mandurah House with the Peels [sic] family at Mandurah House on the day of battle.

Smythe surveyed land around the Bunbury area and up into the Avon valley. By 1838 Smythe was in the Tooday area and still required soldiers

106 J D'Arcy believes they were part of the George Meredith abduction (D'Arcy, 2009, 'The Problem with Louisa Briggs', Draft Ms: 6); Barwick notes the existence of the women at King George's Sound but offers no opinion on whether or not they were part of the Meredith abduction – her text reads as though she did not think they were (Barwick 1985: 232, fn 18); Clark cites Barwick, adds further facts but offers no opinion as to whether or not the women at King George' Sound were part of the George Meredith abduction (Clark 2002: 113).

to protect him from the Aborigines. He is reported as accidentally shooting his Aboriginal servant, Narral in late 1838. In late 1838 or 1839 Smythe left Western Australia possibly due to this incident.¹⁰⁷

The above biographical entry (not by an historian) leaves the reader with a vague feeling of unease about Smythe and the Aborigines. It is incomplete though: a newspaper search for Smythe reveals one entry only for Smythe, regarding his earlier experience with the Indigenous people of King George's Sound:

The King George's Sound Natives. On Thursday last Mr Dale proceeded to Monger's Lake in company with Mr Smythe and two Natives of King George's Sound, Manyat and Gyallepert, in consequence of a wish to see the latter understood to have been expressed by Yagen and others of his tribe.¹⁰⁸

This newspaper account continues on to relate that the two Aboriginal languages (of Perth and King George's Sound) were mutually unintelligible, and the Aborigines communicated mostly by gesture, but that both parties appeared pleased, and that the meeting ended with a corroboree. Unselected, (it is the only one turned up via an index name search of early Western Australian newspapers) it seems to fit better the fact from Port Phillip that we have seen earlier, that Smythe had good relationships, and in fact, was accompanied permanently by Aboriginal groups.

The friendliness of the relationships and the purpose of the meeting in Western Australia are confirmed in a recently published history (2009) of early contact in King George's Sound: a whole chapter is devoted to examining this meeting. It was a facilitative effort on the part of the authorities to please the Perth Aboriginal chief Yagan who asked to meet the 'chiefs' from King George's Sound. Smythe is confirmed as a surveyor with the Surveyor General's department, an escort of the two Indigenous King George's Sound men.¹⁰⁹ Smythe was experienced and trusted in Western Australia, knew the King George's Sound country and people, and unless and until there is evidence to the contrary, I take him to be a credible witness with his information about the women.

107 IM Stuart, in Forth 1998: 147.

108 *The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, Saturday 26 January 1833. The whole article can be read on National Library of Australia (NLA) Newspapers Online, <<http://newspapers.nla.gov.au>>.

109 Shellam 2009: 163.

Prince George

The problem lies in determining the meaning of the phrase 'the fourth cutter *George*'. The National Maritime Museum believes that it could have been the practice that names were re-used in the colonies as they were in the Royal Navy, ie there were four consecutive colonial revenue cutters named *Prince George* since 1788.¹¹⁰ But the 'bible' for matters maritime for this colonial period¹¹¹ lists only one revenue cutter named *Prince George*, so that the most likely meaning of the phrase 'the fourth cutter' is that it was the fourth of four government cutters then in service around the Australian coast. Government cutters and Government revenue cutters in service around Australia in the period of the 1820s and 1830s include the *Charlotte*, the *Royal William*, the *Mermaid*, the *Sally*, the *Governor Arthur*, the *Opossum*, the *Swallow*, the *Duke of York*, and the *Prince Leopold*: some of these little vessels circumnavigated Australia in servicing the outlying settlements of Swan River, Port Essington and Moreton Bay.

The revenue cutter *Prince George* was a wooden vessel of 51 tons, built at Hastings, Great Britain in 1832 for the Port of Sydney. It arrived in Port Jackson on 30 August 1833 and remained in service till 1845 when it was sold out of government service. After being sold into private hands, she was wrecked in 1846.¹¹²

This *Prince George*, Master Roach, is recorded as lying off the dockyard, refitting, in September 1833, after arrival from its delivery voyage.¹¹³ The other Sydney newspaper adds the further detail that it arrived in ballast, having left England on 17 April 1833, Master Roach.¹¹⁴ It is next recorded in May 1834 as 'Revenue Cutter *Prince George* returned from a cruise'.¹¹⁵ It was the *Prince George* which brought Mrs Eliza Fraser (of Fraser Island fame) the second mate, and five of the rescued crew back to Sydney after the wreck of the *Stirling Castle* on the Great Barrier Reef on 13 May 1836,¹¹⁶ and it was the same revenue cutter *Prince George* which brought visiting magistrate Stewart to Port Phillip to report on the settlement in June 1836,¹¹⁷ and the same vessel that 'went round to lay buoys in Western Port' during a ten day stay at Melbourne in 1837.¹¹⁸

110 Graham Thompson, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, 1 December 2009.

111 Ian Nicholson, 'Ships of the "Colonial Marine" i.e. Government Vessels of NSW and VDL, 1788 to 1850s, together with Nominal Lists of Officers Afloat and Related Dockyard Officials etc', Typescript, undated, Launceston Library.

112 Jane Miller, SLV search, 23 October 2009.

113 *The Sydney Gazette and NSW Advertiser*, Tuesday 19 September 1833, NLA Newspapers Online.

114 *Sydney Herald*, Monday 2 September 1833: 2.

115 *The Sydney Gazette and NSW Advertiser*, Tuesday 1 May 1834, NLA Newspapers Online.

116 *The Sydney Gazette and NSW Advertiser*, Tuesday 18 October 1836, NLA Newspapers Online.

117 Bonwick 1856: 87.

118 *The Sydney Gazette and NSW Advertiser*, Tuesday 28 March 1837, NLA Newspapers Online.

It was the outward bound *Prince George* which transported the eight Port Phillip Aborigines to Sydney for trial in 1838,¹¹⁹ and the same vessel for which tenders were called in Sydney for re-coppering its bottom,¹²⁰ and replacing its lower mast.¹²¹ It was the vessel sent from Sydney to search for any evidence of the *Britannia* which left Melbourne on 9 November 1839 and was believed to have foundered off the Gippsland coast about a week later: Aborigines had seen a boat lying on the Ninety Mile Beach and footprints had been seen in the sand. The *Prince George* discovered a boat with a mast washed up on the beach near Cape Howe.¹²² There is a plethora of reports from the *Prince George* in 1840 after it took government surveyor Hoddle to Portland Bay and to Western Port to report on soil type and minerals (it reported coal).¹²³ Two images exist, published in 1836: one is of the vessel enduring a great hurricane off the island of St Paul en route London to Sydney, and the other depicts the *St George* chasing the French ship *Victorine* on the same voyage – the *Prince George* merely wanted to hand over mail for England, but the French vessel fled in fear, and the *Prince George* chased her down.¹²⁴ This revenue cutter *Prince George* of 72 tons¹²⁵ accompanied HMS *Fly* on its charting of the Torres Strait islands 1842–1846, acting as its tender.¹²⁶

The problem is that its service record lists voyages, 1834–1843, to and from the ports of Melbourne, Sydney, Western Port, Jervis' Bay, Moreton Bay, Howe's Island (modern name Gabo Island), Kangaroo Island, Geelong, Portland Bay, Port Phillip, Port of Melbourne, Williamstown, but *not* King George's Sound nor the Swan River settlement.¹²⁷

Nor is the revenue cutter *Prince George* accounted for during the period from when it finished refitting sometime after September 1833 and when it returned from its cruise in May 1834: destinations and ports of call on its cruise were unrecorded in the Shipping Intelligence section of the newspapers of the period, where they would be expected – the ship is simply missing from ports, and presumably at sea. Unless evidence is found for the *Prince George* between

119 Commander *Prince George* to Lonsdale, 28 May 1838, 'have returned to Williamstown ... bad weather ... have landed natives under boat on deck ... they have been under water since I left', VPRS 4, unit 4, 38/107, PROV.

120 VIC *Government Gazette*, 23 January 1839, no 384, p. 104, SLV.

121 VIC *Government Gazette*, 23 October 1839, no 460, p. 1182, SLV.

122 Shipwrecks of Victoria, <<http://oceans1.customer.netspace.net.au/vic-wrecks.html>>

123 Boys 1935: 103.

124 Both these images can be seen in the Rex Nan Kivell Collection, NLA; both can be seen online.

125 According to the National Maritime Museum, the discrepancy in tonnage is simply explained by the fact that the Royal Navy in 1835 changed its formula for measuring ships, and all vessels subsequently were accorded a different tonnage.

126 Nicholson 1988: 421; and google HMS *Fly*.

127 Jane Miller, SLV search, 23 October 2009.

these two dates, then I suggest that the evidence from Smythe, recorded by Thomas, must be kept in mind as possibly true, and that further research is required to confirm or refute it.

William Nairne Clark's account of native women with sealers at King George's Sound

This man was a lawyer and publisher whose entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* asserts that his main claim to fame was that he fought a duel and was acquitted of manslaughter.¹²⁸ That may be so, but from our point of view, his several excursions between 1840 and 1842 to the south-west of the Colony of Western Australia and the series of articles which he wrote, provide another glimpse of the women abducted by the sealers. In the article published the week previous to this one about to be quoted, he stated that he would be revealing facts previously unknown to his readers.¹²⁹

His account gives a different year and a different set of abductors, but it does agree with one of the names given by Smythe, and it offers an explanation of 'Captain Williams, Water—'. It is accepted by Plomley and Henley in their biographical notes on Gamble, Robert/Bob Gambell.¹³⁰ It is noteworthy that Bob Gamble worked as a pilot for Robinson in 1831 when he went round the Bass Strait islands, moving the sealers on and attempting to collect the VDL women whom they had with them. Bob Gambell was subsequently sent to Hobart by Robinson to be tried for killing two women.¹³¹

The first sealers on the south-west coast of Australia came from the penal settlement of Van Diemen's Land ... one party landed in the district of Port Phillip, and forcibly brought away with them several native women, of a much more handsome and engaging appearance than those in this part of the island [Western Australia]. These poor creatures became reconciled to their lot, and attended on their white associates with a fidelity that might have put to the blush many of their sex. Several children were the fruits of this intercourse, some of whom are to be seen at King George's Sound, their complexions being much lighter than those of other native children. *Previous* to the foundation of the Colony [Western Australia founded 1 June 1829] the coast was likewise visited, according to the traditions of the natives, by parties in search of fur seal. They frequently made inroads into the

128 'Clark, William Nairne (1804 – 1854)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol 1: 227.

129 'Remarks respecting the Islands on the Coast of S.W. Australia', *The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, Saturday 8 October 1842: 3, 4. This whole article can be printed off NLA Newspapers Online.

130 Plomley and Henley 1990: 81.

131 Plomley 1966: 1013, 478, 468, 450, 392.

territory of the aborigines, and endeavoured to carry off the women, which infringement on their natural rights roused the natives to fury, and several collisions between the blacks and the whites took place. Even now, in talking of these marauders, the natives describe them with symptoms of loathing and innate hatred.

The first aggression on the rights of the natives by the sealers, since this Colony [Western Australia] was formed, occurred at Port Phillip in the year 1831. A marauding crew from Van Diemen's Land arrived on the coast and forcibly abducted several native women; afraid of the consequences, they left that part of the territory of Australia and steered in a westerly direction along the coast, where they had frequent encounters with the aboriginal inhabitants, which sometimes ended in the loss of human life on the part of the blacks. They have been described as a warlike race of men, chasing the sealers to the water's edge, and hurling their spears at the boats.

The great rendezvous of the sealers was the Archipelago of Islands to the eastward of Doubtful Island Bay, where they chiefly subsisted on wild geese and seal's flesh, and occasionally made a run to King George's Sound to purchase flour and other necessities and sell their sealskins. Another party of sealers was composed of the crew of the *Mountaineer*, a small craft from Van Diemen's Land, which was wrecked near the Archipelago many years ago ... One of the most daring of these people was a man of colour of the name of Anderson, and lawless as these men were, they looked up to him with a sort of dread ... [he] usually kept one or two black women to attend on him and minister to his wants, when not engaged in sealing ... The favourite resort of Anderson was Manduran Island ... [which] contains some natural salt pans from which immense quantities of that commodity might be annually obtained ... The late Mr Henty, when on that part of the coast, took away with him to Van Diemen's Land a considerable quantity of the salt as a specimen. Strange to say the salt on this island is of a reddish colour, formed probably by some vegetable substance. The last time that Anderson paid a visit to Manduran he had a full boat's crew with him, and a black woman, but neither he nor the woman were ever more seen. [Both murdered]. The person who has been the luckiest in sealing is one of the name of Williams who is still resident at King George's Sound. From first to last he has made from 1000 to 1500 and his boat *Fanny* is well known as a remarkably fast-sailing, safe boat. She was built in Van Diemen's Land.

During the winter months, when not engaged in sealing, the sealers hunt kangaroo around the various bays, and supply the crews of

American and French ships with fresh meat ... it may be said with truth there is a considerable traffic carried on with foreign shipping in that part of the settlement. Others pilot foreign ships into the various bays where the whales are most abundant and receive a gratuity of about 50 for the season, according as the ships are more or less successful. Rather than be at the expense of living at the settlement, and going to work, some of these men prefer to lead an idling life on one of the islands with their black women and children, entirely excluded from human society, and sleeping away their existence ... Bald Island, about twenty miles to the eastward of the Sound has been inhabited frequently by them on account of the number of wallabees that abound on it. One of the sealers named 'Gemble' or familiarly 'Bob Gemble' originally from Van Diemen's Land, used to reside there with his black gin and his children for months together, and for aught that I know, he may be either there or somewhere else in the Archipelago to this day. He belonged to Anderson's party, and first let out the fatal secret respecting his murder, but it came in such a vague shape to the ears of the authorities that no notice was taken of it, and all the parties implicated have long ago left the Colony.¹³²

Balls Island

It sounds as though Thomas just didn't hear the name properly. According to State Records of Western Australia:

Balls Island probably is Bald Island. The latter is located 50 kms east of Albany at the southern end of Cheyne Beach, then a popular haunt for American whaling vessels. The seamen on these ships operated beyond the writ of the Colonial government in Perth and Albany. Therefore one could surmise that George Smythe's contact with the women who lived with the whalers was on an informal basis.¹³³

Summary

Clark believes that 'at least 20 women, girls and boys were abducted from the coasts around Port Phillip and Westernport in the 1820s and 1830s'.¹³⁴

132 *The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, Saturday 8 October 1842: 3, 4.

133 Tom Reynolds, Archives Research Officer, State Records Office of Western Australia, 29 October 2009. Tom Reynolds searched the index to the correspondence between the Resident at Albany and the Western Australian Colonial Secretary in Perth, but these women were not mentioned. At the very least, nothing about the women was remarkable enough for the Resident to report on to the Colonial Secretary at the Swan River. As the Residents' correspondence is not itemised, it will be necessary for someone to go to Perth to follow this up, as well as Water Police and Customs records.

134 Clark 2002: 3.

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D'Arcy, quoting Plomley, suggests 50.¹³⁵ The early settlers mention four, presumably because they were the wives of four men with whom the settlers were engaged at the time. The Police Magistrate Stewart mentions four. The first person participant witness Yankee Yankee mentions eight 'women' taken from Port Phillip; this number of persons apparently subsumes the young girls as women: and one of the women was pregnant. Surveyor Smythe gave an account of a further four females who were abducted from Western Port and were living in Western Australia in 1839. These may be a separate abduction.

Part 3: the return of Yaunki Yaunker

Yaunki Yaunker/Yankee Yankee/Yonker Yonker/Yanki Yanki/
Youki Youka/Yunk Yunker/Yonki-Yonka/Bob Cunningham/Robert
Cunningham/Robert You Yang Cunningham/Yang Yang Alias Robert
Cunningham

On 6 June 1841, Yaunki Younker strolled in to the encampment on the south side of Melbourne, though Thomas does not write it up on that day which was a Sunday.¹³⁶ He slept that night in his father's tent, as will be seen, and he was given a formal ceremonial welcome on the Tuesday. Following his arrival back in Port Phillip, Yankee Yankee abandoned the trappings of civilisation and immersed himself in local affairs: he was in everything. He married Bungurook, daughter of the Warworong 'chief' Billibellary. He was an excellent speaker of English and was offered good jobs but refused them. He was sought after for his information, and he divulged it to white people whom he considered trustworthy. He had influential friends who paid his fines when subsequently he was frequently before the courts on drunkenness charges. He was called the 'civilised black', and considered dangerous because he moved so easily between two worlds. He joined the 1842 Native Police Corps but stayed only a short time and was listed by Thomas as a deserter. He was highly critical of the fact that he was not taught to read and write during the years he worked for white people. He was equally critical of the broken promise to give the Bonorong their own reserve at Kullurk/Coolart.

135 Jacqueline D'Arcy, 8 September 2009, Draft Ms, p. 2, fn 7.

136 Thomas Journal, CY 2605, frames 283–284, ML.

11. The abduction between Arthurs Seat and Point Nepean, and Yankee Yankee's return



Fig 44. 'Yonki Yonka'

Sketch, George Henry Haydon.

Assistant Protector William Thomas' two accounts of Yankee Yankee

Civilization does not alter the Australian Aborigine. Yaunki Yaunker after six years absence [Thomas has overwritten the word six with the letter 8] appeared in the Native Encampment Sth of the Yarra, his appearance was intelligence & nought of the savage appeared in his countenance, he had fine eyes, Long black hair which appeared to have been taken much pains with, hung in curled ringlets on his shoulders, & waved each side on his face and on his brow. He was about 18 yrs of age and could not have been more than 10 yrs of age when kidnapped from Pt, just the age that would seem to be ripe for modelling [sic] the character. This youth was kidnapped with 8 lubras [Thomas annotates at the bottom of the page] one of these Toutkuningrook, afterwards escaped, jumped overboard when the craft was near the coast by Cape Howe, and got safe to her tribe and is still alive, on the coast between Arthurs Seat and Point Nepean, by the sealers.

Captⁿ West since dead of a government schooner¹³⁷ took Yanki Yanki to VDL. [Crossed out is the following: 1 lubra March run away.] Yanki was 1 year in VD Land. He was taken away from VD Land in the *Royal William*, cutter, Captⁿ Patterson, to Swan River where he was 4 years at wages of 15 shillings per week. He came from Swan River on the *Minnerva* Schooner, Captⁿ Reed, paid 9 for his passage to Adelaide. He left 3 lubras behind at Swan River with the sealers. He was at Adelaide 1 Year at 1 per week as Dairy Man & Stock Keeper. Yanki took his passage or worked his passage from Adelaide to Pt Phillip in the *Diana*, Captⁿ Skein.

His masters were, at Swan River, 1 & 2 Mr Barker, 3 Mr Phillips, 4 Mr Mundy. He gives Mr Barker the best character. His occupation at the Swan River was Shepherding and Stock-keeping. His master at Adelaide was Mr John Gombel. He stated that the sealers use the women very ill, making them get Mutton Birds etc by day & work by night.

However strange it may appear, this Yanki, the 2nd night was as the other blacks, naked and bedaubing himself over, and before a week, was in every respect as the other blacks. I was most anxious to secure him in order to aid me in some of the idioms of the language, & also to assist me in pressing upon the blacks the comfort of civilization, but no entreaties

137 It has to be asked if 'Captain West of the government schooner since dead' who took Yankee Yankee to Launceston is the same Captain West as the Master of the *Defiance*. Captain West does not appear on Nicholson's list of masters of Government vessels for either VDL or New South Wales.

could prevail. Other gentlemen, settlers, offered him good wages but Yanki would not be again entangled with again to live, and I verily believe that he has not from that period as a civilized man. He has now most awfully deteriorated in appearance, & is as filthy dirty & I think more so than his companions.

Now how can this be accounted for in any other way than their opinion that their life is the best. I was about to attribute this instance of Yanki to the Masters he was serving, find that during the 6 yrs he had never been taught his alphabet, or had any religious example, but in the evidence of Mrs Schelly it will be seen that such has been the case when every religious care has been taken of those who it was to be anticipated would have been good Members of Society. It perhaps may be urged now that the Sydney and many other Blks are about the country as Civilized, useful etc. I answer their case is like Yanki – they run away from home, & are afraid of being killed if they take to the bush, or have been taken in infancy and are not aware of their country and language.¹³⁸

no date

Another version recorded by Thomas commences as a 'little history' of Bob whose native name is Yonker Yonker meaning far away. Yonki Yonker was kidnapped with eight women near Point Nepean when he was nine years of age, four years before the first settlers came to Port Phillip.

He appeared where I was encampt on the south of the Yarra in the afternoon. His appearance was intelligence, fine keen eyes, long black hair which hung in ringlets on his shoulders & which he appeared to have bestowed much care, He came to my tent and told me he was a native of this place which I did not believe at the moment but which a few hours convinced me was correct by the caressing and joyous formalities among the natives. He slept that night with his father [Big Benbow]. The next morning I got him to my tent where he related his history, which I communicated to His Honour the Superintendant and the following morning I introduced him to His Honour. Strange as it may appear but such is the fact on the 3rd day Yonker totally discarded all European dress and was bedaubed with grease and clay and his only cladding an opossum cloak – nor has any offer from that hour to this been successful in drawing him aside from the native habits of the Aborig^s. Many in the district offered him most advant.¹³⁹

138 Thomas Miscellaneous Papers, mf CY 3130, frame 35 ff, ML.

139 Thomas Journal, Ms set 214, item 2, CY 3126, frame 23 ff, ML.

James Dredge's Diary record of Yankee Yankee¹⁴⁰

16 June 1841

During the week a young man of the Boonworongs arrived in the *Edwina* from Adelaide. It appears that about five years ago this Tribe was on the coast of the Bay near Arthur's Seat when a vessel came in, and having anchored, her crew went ashore. Early one morning they induced nine women and two boys to go into their boat and took them on board their vessel and sailed out of the harbour. One of the women contrived afterwards to make her escape and returned to her own people. The others were taken to Preservation Island in the Straits where they used very cruelly. The young man now returned, was, after a time taken to Launceston where he escaped in a vessel which he thought would take him home. Her destination however was Swan River settlement where he lived amongst Europeans and made himself useful as a Stock keeper and eventually obtained one pound per week wages. An opportunity offering he took his passage in a vessel bound to Adelaide for which he paid 9 and then hired himself on the *Edwina* to work his passage to Port Phillip where he joined his relatives and friends whose joy at his arrival was unbounded.

He is a fine youth and speaks English pretty well. He has however, assumed all the habits of his countrymen. It is to be feared that if his partial civilization is not turned to judicious account he will become an instrument of considerable mischief.

The blacks say that many years ago a vessel put into Western Port and attempted to carry off some of the women who saved themselves by running away; the whites however, fired upon them, killed two and wounded others. Some of them carry the shots in their flesh to this day.¹⁴¹

Verification of details in Yankee Yankee's story

Yankee Yankee states that one lubra ran away in March, and as she ran away from Wilson's Promontory on the voyage from Port Phillip to Preservation Island, the abduction took place earlier than March in whatever year. After one year in VDL, Yankee Yankee's story was that he went to the Swan River in the *Royal William*, Captain Patterson. The *Royal William*, 42 tons, cutter, modelled on Hastings lugger lines, was launched in 1832 from John Petchey's shipyard at Kangaroo Point, Hobart Town.

140 At the time of writing this account Dredge had already resigned from the service of the Protectorate.

141 Ms 11625, Box 16/4: 196, SLV.

She appears for the first time in shipping records as having left King George's Sound on 4 March 1834, returning to Hobart with a cargo of seals and salt, arriving 5 April 1834, her master being Captain Patterson.¹⁴² Her departure for VDL for King George's Sound is not recorded, but given the roaring forties, the voyage towards King George's Sound would be longer than the voyage home with a following wind. She must therefore have left for King George's Sound early in 1834, perhaps January.

Given that this is the vessel on which Yankee Yankee sailed, then, considering that he spent a year in VDL before going to King George's Sound, the George Meredith abduction is pushed back in time to 1833. This agrees perfectly with Thomas' crossing out of 'six' years and substituting '8' in his first account of Yankee Yankee's narrative (see above).

Yankee Yankee's second intercolonial voyage is confirmed as well, as is the name of the Captain. The *Minerva*, an 89 ton schooner, Captain Reid, arrived in Adelaide from Leith, Scotland in January 1840:¹⁴³ she then made two return trips, Adelaide to King George's Sound and the Swan River in March and May 1840, her master being the same man Captain David Reid.¹⁴⁴ Importantly, her notice of sailing for one of these voyages specifically stated that she was to depart Perth on 13 April for King George's Sound and South Australia.¹⁴⁵ As ships were guided into King George's Sound by sealers, under the authority of Captain Williams (Nairne's account above) Yankee Yankee could not only have heard news of the Port Phillip women, he could have met them.

Yankee Yankee's last leg of his journey is also confirmed: Thomas must have heard the name of the ship incorrectly, but fortunately he recorded his version of the Captain's name and Dredge heard the name as *Edwina*. In the absence of passenger lists, the following account confirms that the ship made the voyage from Adelaide to Port Phillip in June 1841:

The mainmast of the *Edina*, [Captain] Skinner, 557 tons from Greenock to Adelaide, shortly after her arrival in port was found to be deficient, so that a new mast was required ... stringybark ... mainmast for the *Edina* 75 feet in length, perfectly straight without a knot ... [was obtained] ... brought from the Tiers in a timber carriage drawn by 26 bullocks ... shortened to 68 feet ... prepared by the ships crew ... in five days ... stepped and rigged ... cost 60 ... the *Edina* sailed immediately for Port Phillip.¹⁴⁶

142 Cumpston 1970: 131–132.

143 *The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 4 April 1840.

144 David Leadbeater, *South Australian Passenger Lists (Shipping arrivals), 1803–1853*, Archives South Australia.

145 *The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 11 April 1840.

146 *Sydney Herald*, 8 June 1841: 3.

'I Succeeded Once'

The *Edina*, Master Thomas Skinner, 470 tons, with seven passengers and four steerage passengers, arrived in Port Phillip on 31 May 1841 from Greenock and Adelaide.¹⁴⁷ Yankee Yankee turned up at Thomas' encampment on the south side of the Yarra on 6 June 1841. His story checks out. Because Yankee Yankee's story is confirmed in every detail which can be checked, I take it to be truthful and accurate in those parts which cannot be checked. In particular, because Yankee Yankee was so specific about the four men for whom he worked at the Swan River, even giving them character references, I accept his time frame as well: he cannot be the boy reported by Smythe to be at King George's Sound in 1839 because he was working on a farm 200 miles away at the Swan River in 1839.

7 June 1841

Thomas breakfasted with His Honour and agreed to present Yankee Yankee to him at the wharf. In the evening, Yankee Yankee, Big Benbow and Thomas' men took Mr William Humphrey in charge but the case could not be substantiated because Wigal was not found on his premises.¹⁴⁸

8 June 1841

Thomas sent 'Yaunki Yaunker', on horseback (?Bess, Thomas' beloved Arabian mare) to visit La Trobe:

the bearer of this letter is the intelligent native of whom I spoke yesterday, who with his lubra was stolen from the beach between Arthur's Seat and Point Nepean about 6 years back. He states his story in good English and answers to the name of Yunki Yunker.¹⁴⁹

On this day, Yankee Yankee was given a formal welcome back in a ceremony called Woolworkbullunberlin.¹⁵⁰

Kobin Koolin or Embracement

Kobin Koolin is a term given to the affecting embrace of one who has returned after long absence or confinement from his tribe. When the individual appears, his kindred fall on his breast and weep (tho evidently he has difficulty to restrain) but is, at it were, motionless during the scene which is truly affecting to behold. The one who receives the embrace is

¹⁴⁷ *Port Phillip Gazette*, in Syme 1984: 62.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Journal, CY 2605, item 5, frames 283–284, ML. Wigal/Mary Anne was the wife of Burrenum/Mr Dredge. She was co-habiting with this man, a carpenter, in Elizabeth Street opposite the Bank of Australasia. When her relatives went to take her away, she was put in a box, and they found it impossible to prove that she was there (5 June). Wigal returned to the encampment in the evening of 7 June; Humphrey came looking for her. Wigal identified him.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas to Superintendent, 8 June 1841, VPRS 10, unit 3/843, PROV.

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Journal, CY 2605, frame 284, ML.

sometimes sitting; the one who embraces bends on his knees, presses his face to the breast of the preserved, weeps, mutters some expressions and remains weeping 3, 4, or 5 min. Occasionally the embraced cannot refrain dropping [sic] a tear which falls upon the head of the embracer, but he never stirs or speaks to any till it is all over. When the embracer lifts up his head & takes his seat, when all due ceremony, the blacks come and sit round: the preserved will relate all that has happened to him, his whole adventures, which is eagerly listened to by his tribe with now and then ejaculations from his listeners – they in return relate what has happened, Deaths, fights etc during his absence. I have seen several such scenes, but the most affecting was one of Mr Parkers Blks from the NW who was liberated from Jail about 1840 – and Warree & his Father meeting at Nerre Nerre Warren in 1843, the latter different but equally affecting.¹⁵¹

Elsewhere, Thomas describes this ceremony as exactly like the situation described in the Bible between Joseph and his brothers. He witnessed a ceremony like this when Wigeculk/William was defended by Redmond Barry and acquitted by a jury in Melbourne on 15 July 1844. The ceremony affected Thomas so much that he wrote 'the greeting of the tribe cannot be described'.¹⁵²

23 June 1841

Thomas' petition to Gipps states that eight lubras were abducted six years back, Yankee Yankee being the only one to get back to his native tribe.¹⁵³

24 June 1841

The intelligent young man 'Yanki Yankie' said he would come soon but that first he was going with some blacks to the Barrabools.¹⁵⁴

9 August 1841

Yankee Yankee taken ill; 'a black after being for years used to civilized habits is not able to bear exposure'. Thomas gave him a new blanket and a dose of rhubarb and magnesium.¹⁵⁵

151 ML MSS 214/3, CY 2606, page 76, frame 49; I am grateful to Mark Hildebrand of the Mitchell Library for providing me with a large clear copy of this frame. I have added punctuation.

152 CY 2606, frame 206, ML.

153 VPRS 10, unit 3, 1841/909, PROV. Thomas is incorrect; his own narrative from Yankee Yankee states that Toutkuningrook jumped overboard, got back and was still alive at the time of writing.

154 Thomas to Superintendent, 24 June 1841, VPRS 10, unit 3/940, PROV.

155 Thomas Journal, CY 2605, item 5, ML.

'I Succeeded Once'

29 September 1841

Yankee Yankee going to Arthurs Seat.¹⁵⁶

19 December 1841

Yankee Yankee with Kollorlook, Yal Yal, and Beruke alias Gellibrand gave Thomas information including names of the blacks who had murdered an Adelaide Aborigine named Jemmy at Whitehead's station and removed his *marmulla* (kidney fat).¹⁵⁷ Jemmy had arrived on horseback to drove Whitehead's fat stock to market: he camped with a Monaro black working for Whitehead, apart from the locals. The two foreigners watched a Goulburn corroboree, then the Monaro black went back to their camp. The Goulburns and two Yarra blacks, Worrangulk and Terap, snatched the Adelaide man, crushed his head, removed his kidney fat, and flesh from the back of his thighs. Thomas arrived on the property, investigated, buried the Adelaide man and wrote two official reports on it.¹⁵⁸

5 February 1842

'Mr Dana [Commandant of the 1842 Native Police Corps, in the process of establishing the Corps and feeding his enrollees even before official establishment] draws for five police only; Yankee leaves without leave'.¹⁵⁹

24 February 1842

Yankee Yankee received blankets, clothes, equipment; enrolled in Native Police Corps and made his mark; drilled twice daily; remained at Nerre Nerre Warren until 28 March; the Corps then left because they ran out of water when Dandenong Creek stopped flowing in the big drought; marched in easy stages to Yarra Yarra opposite the surveyor's paddock.¹⁶⁰

30 June 1842

'Yanker Yanker', male, aged 23, suffering 'from Pseudo Syphilis, treated internally with Liq Arsenic plus aperients and externally with Black Wash [Copper Sulphate]' is listed in the Medical Dispenser's reports for 1–30 June at Merri Creek.¹⁶¹ Henry Jones' July report states in the remarks column that

156 Thomas Journal, CY 2605, item 5, ML.

157 Thomas Journal, CY 2605, item 5, ML.

158 VPRS 11, unit 8, items 417 and 418, PROV.

159 Thomas Journal, CY 2605, item 5, ML.

160 HEP Dana to La Trobe, 31 March 1842, VPRS 17, Box 28, 42/674, PROV.

161 Henry Jones Report, VPRS 4410, unit 2, item 48, PROV.

Yankee Yankee was for a long time on the sick list by the Yarra but he was perfectly recovered and was one of the ones who benefited from a three week excursion around the district with Mr Thomas.¹⁶²

27 July 1843

'Yanki Junker' and a Native Policeman Murrummurrembean 'thwarted the ends of justice' by warning three Barrabools of a plan by the chief protector, the assistant protector and the chief constable to capture them.¹⁶³

20 October 1843

Friday. Yankee Yankee, Ben Bengier and a few Western Port blacks come in to encampment.¹⁶⁴

9 December 1843

Saturday. Yankee Yankee accuses Thomas of writing a letter to the governor to put Billy Lonsdale and de Villiers in gaol.¹⁶⁵

7 April 1844

Police Report, Melbourne.

Woolorong was suspected of murder, and condemned to be speared by seven of the best men of the Western Port tribe; as he ran by them at a certain distance, he escaped the spears thrown at him; but a general fight took place and police had some difficulty in suppressing the affray, after many were seriously wounded.

Also: 14 April 1844

Police Report, Melbourne.

Yang Yang (alias Robert Cunningham) brought up for obstructing the chief constable in his attempt to take Woolorong¹⁶⁶ (alias Lonsdale), a Goulburn black, for the murder of an Aboriginal boy in the service of Mr Manton at Westernport. Yang Yang pleaded to the bench that Woolorong was about to submit to the ordeal of spearing, viz. seven of the principal men of the Western Port tribe were each to throw a spear at him. If he warded them off he was no longer amenable. If he was killed satisfaction

162 Henry Jones Report, VPRS 4410, unit 2, item 49, PROV.

163 Thomas to Robinson, VPRS 11, Box 10/596, PROV.

164 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 2, ML.

165 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 2, ML.

166 The Police report is actually wrong in the name; it was *not* Woolorong and he was *not* a Goulburn black. It was the famous Poleorong aka Billy Lonsdale who undertook this ritual spearing with another Western Port man of great stature Warrador aka Jack Weatherly.

'I Succeeded Once'

was complete. He further pleaded that had they not been interrupted, he would afterwards have induced Wooloorong alias Lonsdale to surrender himself to the chief constable, or aided to take him. Upon this occasion the Native Police refused to act. At the intercession of Mr Protector Thomas, Yang Yang got off with an admonition and forty-eight hours confinement.¹⁶⁷

23 August 1844

Yankee Yankee, 'a disapproving' says 'Benbow¹⁶⁸ a baby go crying to the police office about his lubra'.¹⁶⁹ The circumstances of Benbow being a sook in going off to the Europeans for help are as follows: the account takes up three pages of Thomas' journal.

Marriage entitlement

Ningerranow, a Western Port black, aged 27, died at Pallemaramg (at the back of Mt Eliza) on 19 July 1844, with no cause of death recorded. His lubra Burdingrooc, aged 23 died six weeks later at the encampment south of the Yarra on 22 August 1844, 'of sheer grief', Thomas wrote.¹⁷⁰ The day after Burdingrook died of sheer grief there was serious trouble.

Ningerranow/Ingrianowl/Eggeranowl/Ningerranowl/ Ning-e-ra-non/Niggerenaul/Negronoule/Negre-Moule/ Negremoule

8 Dec 1835 – The Sydney blacks sent in Negrenoule to ask Mr Batman and Buckley to come and see them (Billot 1982: 20).

13 Jan 1836 – Derramut and Negrenoule reported seeing two vessels at Indented Heads on Tuesday (Billot 1982: 28); 16 Jan – Merape and Negre-moule Batman's stolen piece of iron (Billot 1982: 29); 6 Jun – Negremoule at the Head of the Blacks dug a good grave and interred Wir-ar-bill who died two days previously (Billot 1982: 87).

167 Smyth 1972[1878]: 81–82. There is a discrepancy here, probably Brough Smyth's error, in that Thomas' Journal gives the date of the spearing and Yamki Yamker's insolence to the Constable and subsequent arrest as February 1844, not April (VPRS 4410, unit 3/79, PROV).

168 This is not Yankee Yankee's father Benbow/Baddourup; it is his uncle King/Little Benbow/Bullutt.

169 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, frame 219, ML.

170 Sheer grief, Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, frame 219, ML.

14 Jan 1839 – a fine young Aborigine his wife and 2 boys about 9 and 11 years old paid us a visit; the two boys threw the boomerang (here called a Wonguim) ... the woman was dressed comfortable, had a fine opossum rug ... wrapped around her; seemed very different to the naked wretches I had seen at Sydney; gave them tea, sugar and tobacco (Thomas Journal CY 2604, item 3, ML); 12 Feb 1839 – Ningerranow was the son of the old woman Dinoo and a brother to Derrimut, came into Thomas' camp with his wife suffering from influenza (CY 2604, item 3, ML); 12 Feb – 20 Mar 1839 – Ingrianowl alias Wooldelaruck, aged 28, Bonurong tribe; lubra is Plentybruthen, Susan, aged 18, Boonworong (Dredge census in Robinson Papers, vol 54, ML); Jul 1839 – Ning-e-ra-non/Jimmy, name taken in encampment (Thomas 'A' diary Jan-Jul 1839, set 214, item 1, ML); 17 Sep 1839 – Eggeranowl, aged 26, his lubra Susan aged 16, name taken in encampment Melbourne (CY 2946, ML); 22 Nov 1839 – his wife was recorded as Berbingrook, aged 20, wife of Ningeranook (VPRS 10, unit 1/ 242, PROV).

3 Jan 1840 – Four Waworong and Bonurong await Nigaranow's return from the Barrabools (Thomas to Robinson, enc to 40/2215 in 4/1135.1, AO of NSW); 7 Jun 1840 – Billy Lonsdale gave Robinson a list of blacks at Tubberubbabel including Niggerenaul, No 3 on the list after Derrimut and Pardynup (Robinson Journal in Clark 1998, vol 1: 344); 12 Jun 1840 – in a list of Aborigines at the head protectorate station Tubberubbabel, Thomas records Ning*, lubra and Dindow in a group of three (CY 2604, item 3, ML).

19 Jul 1844 – Ningerranowl, a Port Phillip black, aged 27, married, died at Pallemarangun [at the back of Mt Eliza], with no cause of death recorded, 'a black highly respected' (Thomas Return of Births and Deaths, CY 2604, frame 284, ML); 22 Aug 1844 – Burdingrook, age 23, married, Port Phillip tribe, at South Yarra, wife of the one who died on 19 July, this female had on my arrival in Colony a fine infant and has been twice pregnant since but has not left an infant behind Infanticide ... (Thomas return of Births and Deaths, CY 2604, frame 284, ML).

At the encampment to the north of Melbourne, Benbow (Little/King, Chief Protector's messenger) complained that his wife (Kitty) had run away from him. Thomas found her and brought her back to Benbow's miam and only then discovered that she had not run away at all, but had been taken away from Benbow and given to another Western Port black (a son, at this stage unnamed, of Old Nern Nern) by her uncle Ningolobin. Ningerranow, whose death on 19 July triggered this sequence of events, was Benbow's wife's father, and as he,

the dead Ningerranow had no father still alive, and no son,¹⁷¹ it fell to Benbow's wife's uncle, Ningollobin, to dispose of her. Thomas argued vehemently with Ningollobin, on the grounds of the length of time – four years – that Benbow's wife had been with Benbow. Ningollobin countered with the fact that Benbow and his lubra had no piccaninnies. Thomas said that no black lubras have piccaninnies now so why was Ningollobin sulky with Benbow?

Thomas won in the end by heavy use of a threat: he had received a letter from La Trobe regarding Benbow's lubra: clearly Benbow had friends in high places. He told Ningollobin that he would take Benbow to the police office and take out a warrant to apprehend Kitty, and take into custody whoever had her, and that if Benbow could not have her, none other should have her. This produced the desired effect, causing Ningollobin to 'beg' Thomas not to do so, and he told Thomas where she was. Thomas found Kitty hiding in the back of her mother's miam but he could not get her out, so he started destroying the miam, only to find her packed between the boughs at the back. He returned Kitty to Benbow, then went and told Old Nerm Nerm how angry he was at him for allowing his son to have Benbow's lubra.¹⁷² The son of Nerm Nerm (Old Billy) was Poligerry aged 18 years whose country was Konigo and the beach (Frankston).¹⁷³

Thomas as a source for the anthropologists has been found wanting in the past compared to Robinson, partly because Thomas failed to recognise the principles that lay behind relationships. Here he did though. His account of the principles under which Ningolobin acted is constructed with perfect grammar, no spelling mistakes, beautiful clear writing and underlined: Thomas knew he was recording important information. But they never forgave him, he wrote later, for interfering in customary practice.

It follows that a father has the disposal of his female offspring, for whom he will; in the event of not having the father, the eldest son; in the event of no father or son, that right devolves upon the uncles, in this case Benbow's wife's father dies and he has no brother, the uncle Ningolobin claimed his right and notwithstanding his niece has been four years married to Benbow, he not having had any children from her, the uncle claims his right and gives her to another.¹⁷⁴

171 Ningerranow had his brother Derrimut still alive but Thomas does not mention any action of his, so, apparently, Derrimut had no rights or responsibilities in this matter. And the problem remains – where are Ningeranon's two fine sons? If their ages were estimated correctly by Thomas in 1839 as 9 and 11, they would be, in the normal course of events, initiated by now, putatively aged 14 and 16.

172 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML. Thomas recalled these events later, stating that La Trobe asked him to intervene, and though he got Kitty back to Benbow 'it was evidently far against the consent of the blacks and by them considered a great infringement on their rights', Thomas to Robinson, 8 November 1846, VPRS 11, Box 10/647, PROV.

173 Thomas Family Connections census, January 1846, CY 3083, ML.

174 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, frame 220, ML.



Fig 45. 'Boollutt/King Benbow'

Reproduced with the permission of the State Library of New South Wales.

Barlut/Bullut/Bollut/Boollutt/Little Benbow/King Benbow

Portrait in *HRV*, vol 2B: 546.

Harmless man, short time in Native Police Corps, not adapted by nature or disposition to police; seldom out of uniform; good and inoffensive, a chief (Thomas, no date, in Bride 1969[1898]: 406).

17 Apr 1836 – Benbow with Fawkner's party fishing (Fawkner's Journal in Billot 1970: 62); 24 Apr 1836 – With Derrimut and Fawkner's party fishing (Billot 1970: 65).

8 Mar 1837 – Governor Bourke distributed blankets and clothing to about 120 natives ... gave 4 brass plates for good conduct to natives recommended by Captain Lonsdale (Bourke's Journal, MS 7759, Box 640/11, SLV).

Jul 1839 – Bul-lut/Benbow, name taken in encampment (Thomas 'A' diary, set 214, item 1, ML); Oct 1839 – Daniel Bunce who came from England originally as a collector of plants for Kew gardens, met Benbow on arrival in Port Phillip; he and his wife Kitty dwelt in a small hut of his own construction in a corner of Mr Batman's garden; everything within clean, in good order; Benbow often consulted by the settlers; always willing to impart information; the only teetotaller Bunce ever met (Bunce 1857: 64); Benbow – one of Daniel Bunce's guides, intelligent and really worthy (*Victoria, Legislative Council Votes & Proceedings*, 1858–59, Select Committee Report: 103);

6 Jan 1840 – With his brother Mangerrer and sister Lillernook, among the party who left Melbourne (Thomas CY 2605, item 1, frame 30, ML); 1840 – Little Benbow and his lubra are listed with Big Benbow as a party of three who are not going to Western Port (Thomas Journal, CY 2605, frame 8, ML).

19 May 1841 – Made drawings of native Benbo and placed them in Kerr's windows today; Benbo is chief of the Weraby tribe ... agile ... told me that last summer was the hottest for many years ... is in want of a musquet ... often goes out with me and I let him have it ... turkey narrative; 23 May 1841 – Benbo and others prevented Derrimut Chief of the Melbourne tribe from murdering his wife (George Henry Haydon, mf, NL); no date – Benbo speaks English, wears a brass plate Chief of the Weirabee, wears the uniform of a Captain of Marines ... expected homage to be paid ... 'approached with a majestic step, as if treading on the neck of an emporer' ... wears hair plastered with fat and ornamented with kangaroo's teeth tied to the hair in little bunches ... wife a short woman about 18 years (Haydon 1846: 49–68).

27 July 1842 – Benbow, 2nd Div of Native Police Corps, on duty with CCL Powlett; rationed since 1 February (Dana return, VPRS 19, Box 30, 42/1143, PROV).

1 Feb 1843 – Sergeant, aged 35, married, 1 wife, no children, never punished, on duty at the Mt Macedon police and at the Loddon and Goulburn (*NSW Legislative Council Votes & Proceedings*, 1844); 23

Feb 1843 – Little Benbow's absence noted by Thomas from the full complement of the Native Police, daubed, in battle formation, with approx. 60 Yarra and Goulburns; they crossed river at the punt to fight with Western Port and Port Phillip (Thomas to Robinson, VPRS 11, Box 10/586, PROV); Benbo – Jul to Sep 1843 – at HQ; Oct to Nov 1843 – with CCL Tyers to Gippsland; 25 Dec 1843 – returned to HQ sick; Mar 1844 – sick; remarks – willing but worn out by his trip to Gippsland (Return, 4/1135.1, AO of NSW); 31 Mar 1842 – Enrolled not at same time as others but some time after (Dana to La Trobe, VPRS 19, Box 28, 42/674, PROV); 3 Nov 1843 – Benbo and Kulklo have I understand accompanied Mr Tyers party (CY 2606, item 2, ML);

29 Jul 1844 – Thomas questioned Benbow re murder of Taurang, aged 22, a Barrabool; Benbow confirmed it and Thomas went to the beach where he found Bobbinary who supplied further info (CY 2606, item 3, ML; Thomas to La Trobe, VPRS 19, Box 61, 44/1308, PROV); 23 Aug 1844 – Benbow's complaint to Thomas that Kitty has run away but actually she has been removed by her uncle (CY 2606, item 3, ML).

Jan 1845 – Chief Benbow who was once instrumental in saving his life farewelled George H Haydon at Williamstown – more regal than ever in the neat white uniform of the Native Police (J Whitlock, 'Gentleman Felix', unpublished Ms: 148); 29 Dec 1845 – Benbo, native place Yarra Yarra, enlisted May 1842, old and useless 1843 (Dana Return, VPRS 19, box 77, 42/2179, PROV).

Jan 1846 – Listed on Thomas' criticism of the Native Police as one of those from the Melbourne tribes who deserted (Quarterly report, enc to 46/3341 in 4/2745.1, AO of NSW); Jan 1846 – Thomas' family connection census lists Bollut, male, Little Benbow and his wife Mortkuningrook as a family of 2 (CY 3083, ML); 1846 – Thomas recalls a tragic case concerning King Benbow in which La Trobe asked him to interfere some years ago. Benbow's wife Kitty, her father died, her uncle claimed his right and insisted on it and Benbow's Kitty was given to another. Thomas got her back but 'evidently far against the consent of the blacks and by them considered a great infringement on their rights' (Thomas to Robinson, VPRS 11, Box 10/647, PROV).

Prior to 1846 when Yankee Yankee died – Old Bembo, Cunningham (Yankee Yankee) and Murray told magistrate William Hull of Port Phillip once being a hunting ground (*Victoria, Legislative Council Votes & Proceedings*, 1858–59: 12).

1845 to 1848 – Benbow sometimes named King Benbow is being rationed by the Aborigines Department; weekly chits signed by GA Robinson are recorded in the departments account book; 12 Mar 1847 – note says same scale as Native Police (VPRS 19, Box 78, unit 46/161 (a) and Box 77, 45/2183, PROV); rations for messenger Benbow, 1 Jan – 31 Dec 1847 (VPRS 26: 42, PROV).

20 Mar 1847 – King Benbow is introducing the Gippsland lubras to Europeans (Thomas Quarterly Report, 47/9842 in 4/2784, AO of NSW); Apr 1847 – Benbow told Robinson that Karn.jin.ditto, a young lubra belonging to Budgery Tom was taken by the sealers (Clark 2002: 121, referring to Robinson Office Papers, April 1847).

7 Jan 1848 – 'King Benbow obtaining a Passage by steamer *Aphrasia* to go to Geelong for the following purpose. Some time ago a white man near Mt Eliza took a black female NAN-NAT-GOOR-RUK down to Kings Island and thence to Geelong on board a ship, and King Benbow is proceeding to Geelong to see this woman and give information of the case to the Chief Protector' (GAR Office Journal of this date, A7079, vol 58, part 6, ML); 18 Mar 1848 – King Benbow accosted by a drunken man who wanted eels which he had caught; King Benbow said '**Me no sell em you, me catch them for gentleman Melbourne, the man took them² and went off. Me go after him and take my eels out of his hand and he drunken man gave me knock on my mouth & kickd me. Me then put down eels and fight him**' [Thomas' quotation marks]; within five minutes the man came to Thomas and Benbow foaming at the mouth; Thomas sent Benbow on horseback for 2 constables (CY 2606, frames 497–498, ML); 31 Mar 1848 – King Benbow, 'dressed more than ordinarily fine' impressed Thomas with his acknowledgement of breaking a window '**Me been very bad; two Gentlemen make me drunk; me brake'm window; now going to pay for it or let the man take to the Police Office**' [Thomas' quotation marks]. Thomas offered to go with him but Benbow said in reply '**No. Man, a very good man, and me think he no sulky, me pay**' (CY 3084, no frame no, p. 44, ML); same story with the added detail that King Benbow dressed himself very stylish in the uniform of the Commissariat (CY 2606, frame 497, ML); 14 Aug 1848 – Thomas presses King Benbow to resume his duties at the Chief Protector's office as messenger (enc with 48/10697 in 4/2824, AO of NSW); 31 Aug 1848 – Signed memo from La Trobe to GA Robinson stating Benbow wants a blanket and some rations; if his requests are reasonable satisfy them (Papers of GA Robinson, vol 57: between 429–434, A 7078, ML).

28 Feb 1849 – Benbow and his party leave the Saltwater River and camp south of the Yarra. They press me very hard for a country to locate themselves upon (Thomas CY 2606, frame 470, ML); 20 Mar 1849 – King Benbow well equipped in his commissariat uniform waited at the entrance to the Royal Hotel in a queue to be introduced to Governor Fitzroy; he sent up his brass plate, **like white man's letter** [calling card] and bye and bye would see him – his object was to ask the Governor for a country for Western Port blackfellows – he was duped by the white men (Thomas half-yearly report to 30 June 1849, 4/2872, AO of NSW); 10 Apr 1849 – Benbow and his family connections are the only Aborigines permitted to frequent the town of Melbourne but Thomas has just permitted some others who came in for the races to stay until they were over, especially as the Native Police were also attending the races (VPRS 11, Box 11/716, PROV); 11 Dec 1849 – Thomas came to town to hear the case of King Benbow against a man called Thomas, a shoemaker at Brighton, for assault. It was proved that the King was a little the worse for liquor – a rare occurrence – and gave the first provocation. Case dismissed (Thomas Half yearly report 1 July to 31 December 1849, VPRS 10, unit 11, PROV).

25 May 1850 – Kitty and Benbow get blankets from Thomas; 3 Jun 1850 – Benbow asks Thomas for a pair of boots; Thomas says His Honour is out at the moment but when he returns Thomas will ask him; 6 Jun 1850 – Heard His Honour is back, requisitioned him for boots for King Benbow (CY 3127, frames 27–28, ML); 5 Aug 1850 – Thomas' census of the Boonurong or coast tribe lists King Benbow and Kitty at the top of a list of 26 (CY 3127, frame 36, ML); 31 Jul 1850 – Awful murder of a lubra at Geelong by a Geelong black – Benbow^{sr} says it is his daughter Bourdgrook (CY 3127, frame 35, ML).

13 Dec 1851 – Thomas' census lists Boollutt alias King Benbow, wife Tallumungrook alias Kitty; Thomas has inserted later that he was dead by 1852 (Thomas Journal, set 214, item 12: 143, ML).

1 Jan 1852 – King Benbow, well known favourite of the old population was carried to Melbourne by the blacks in a helpless condition with rheumatics in every limb. After one months careful attention, he left well (CY 3078, frame 48, ML); 20 Apr 1852 – Thomas requisitions 24 blankets plus other food stores for King Benbow and the coast tribe who are now peaceably encamped within 15 miles of Melbourne (CY 3085, frame 22, ML); 5 Jul 1852 – King Benbow died at Little Brighton on his way to Mordialloc; his subjects were drunk for three days and neglected their king (Thomas in Bride 1983[1898]: 406).

No date – Benbow's wife Kitty died on his grave having refused to move away from it (Smyth 1878, vol 1: 139).

Death from sympathy

Thomas' original account from which Smyth took his story about Kitty dying of grief, not moving from Benbow's grave, lists a number of deaths from sympathy:

- The young lubra [one of three] of Bungerring, an old Mt Macedon black of great family who died 9 March 1848: she greatly burned her body and lacerated herself dreadfully ... refused treatment from the Colonial Surgeon and Thomas ... sat moping and smoking the whole of the day ... said she would die to be with Bangorong ... she died 16 days after her husband.
- Ningeranowl's lubra though hearty died a few days after him.
- The same with King Benbow ... his lubra could hardly be kept from his grave ... died within a few days.
- Pumpkin Murray's lubra died at the foot of Mt Disappointment and he died two days after.
- 'But the most remarkable case of sympathy in death was in two Portland Bay blacks who were brought to Melbourne gaol in 18.[blank]. One was taken ill no doubt through confinement. He was carefully attended to by the Govern^t D^r, but the sick black eventually died. Altho his companion in trouble was apparently in good health, he died the next morning'.¹⁷⁵

27 August 1844

Tuesday. Thomas was reading the riot act to the blacks about murder ... Yankee Yankee assured him that the blacks knew well our laws and that they would be afraid to kill blacks any more.¹⁷⁶

30 August 1844

Friday. 'Talk to Yanki Yanker on the miserable way of living. What is his answer?'

If I like it what's that to white man? He said why not white man learn him to read when take him away. No, he stated, only make me work work and Blk Fellows no like work and never live like white men. He said he believed there was a God but did not believe there was a hell or else white men would not get drunk and swear, they would be afraid of going there.¹⁷⁷

175 Thomas Manners and Customs, CY 2606, frame 64, ML.

176 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 2, ML.

177 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 2, ML.

3 September 1844

Tuesday. Thomas told Yankee Yankee that great good might be done if he would prevail upon the Western Port blacks to settle down and cultivate the ground. His answer was:¹⁷⁸

Where set down? Black Fellows want Kulluck¹⁷⁹ and white man would not let them have it. You know when you was at Tubbarubbabel¹⁸⁰ Black fellows stopped with you and worked and wanted to sow potatoes but you go away and go to the Yarra blacks. These observations were so [illegible]. I am so often upbraided by the Western Port tribe for removing from them that it is useless arguing with them when I know I have not the power to accede were they so disposed. Go to my quarters for 2 hours and rest.¹⁸¹

28 January 1845

Tuesday. Two blacks, Yonker Yonker and Lanky got the body up of Mr Gauld drowned in the Yarra River; Thomas made an enquiry and found that they had behaved very well.¹⁸²

31 June 1845

Yonker Yonker and Nerrimbineck arrive in Melbourne.¹⁸³

3 October 1845

Friday. Yonker Yonker and others arrived this morning.¹⁸⁴

5 October 1845

Sunday. 'Hear that Yonker Yonker was beastly drunk in the encampment but cannot find him in the encampment'.¹⁸⁵

178 These are Thomas' own quotation marks, unusual for him; he must have regarded Yankee's comment as important.

179 The reserve at Western Port (now Coolart) which the Bonurong chose in June 1840.

180 Thomas' Protectorate Station on Tubberubbabel Creek, about one mile north-east of the crossover of Nepean Highway with the Freeway near Mt Martha.

181 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

182 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

183 Thomas Journal, 1 to 30 June 1845, Byrt 2004: 104.

184 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

185 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

'I Succeeded Once'

7 October 1845

Tuesday. Three blacks – Yonker, Nerrimbineck and Bungarie – go as messengers for the Goulburn blacks.¹⁸⁶

8 October 1845

Wednesday. Yonker Yonker and the other blacks return who left on Monday.

A strange account in the *Patriot* this day touching Bob Cunningham. I read it to him; he denies the whole except the drunken part. I tell him that I will make enquiries and if his tale is correct I will contradict that part that is wrong, but not in the least extenuate his drunkenness.

In the margin Thomas noted that he reported this, presumably to the Chief Protector.¹⁸⁷

8 October 1845

The *Port Phillip Patriot* news item reads as follows:

The Aborigines. We feel assured that it is only necessary to point out to the Licensed Victuallers the injury which must necessarily arise from supplying the aboriginals with intoxicating liquors for them to abstain from the practice. All hope of bringing these benighted beings within the pale of civilised society must be at an end as they obtain a taste for and can procure supplies of, ardent spirits. So late as Saturday last an aboriginal, well known in Melbourne as Bob Cunninghame, and who is probably the most enlightened of his countrymen was reeling about Little Flinders St in a state of intoxication and beating his lubra with a waddie, who thereupon took refuge in the home of Mr Peacock, the teacher of the aboriginal school, and the door was closed upon her intoxicated husband. Cunninghame became furious, and putting a waddie under the door, forced it open, rushed into the house, overthrew a child six years of age, knocked down a nurse with an infant in her arms and frightened Mrs Peacock into fits, then [mf unclear and the original has a hole in it] his lubra by the hair, he dragged the unfortunate female into the streets towards his miam on the Yarra. Passing through Richmond he was so brutally using the poor woman that a sailor passing interfered and gave Bob Cunningham a sound thrashing. Thus, from the facility of obtaining ardent spirits by an aboriginal has also sanctity

186 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML. Messengers were men of status; they could travel anywhere on their job, were always treated courteously and never molested, no matter what the message. Thomas recorded that three messengers denoted an embassy of the greatest importance.

187 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

of the dwelling of a respectable citizen been violated – public decency outraged by a woman being beaten in the streets – and the demoralized habits of the black himself only the more strongly confirmed.

9 October 1845

Thursday. Early in the morning 'make an enquiry of Mrs Peacock [wife of the teacher at the Baptist Aboriginal school at Merri Creek], and find that Yonker's account was correct with the exception that he was very abusive and by his manner frightened Mrs Peacock's nurse, but he never maltreated his lubra or anyone'.¹⁸⁸ In the margin Thomas wrote that Mrs Peacock denies the assault attributed to Yonker Yonker.

10 October 1845

Friday. 'Yonker Yonker still in dudgeon on account of the paragraph. I tell him that he had better write to the journal and state it as he stated. I will forward any contribution'.¹⁸⁹

11 October 1845

Saturday. 'Yonker tells me what to write and signs it with his mark'.¹⁹⁰

12 October 1845

Monday. 'Yonker Yonker enquired if his letter had gone to the newspaper. I told him that it had'.¹⁹¹

Mid 1840s

Youki Youka, stolen from his tribe at Westernport (Haydon's spelling) and taken to an island in the straits; lived there seven or eight years; taken to Adelaide, overlanded to Port Phillip, received with joy by his tribe on his return. Haydon saw him in the 1840s and said he could be distinguished from others only by the good English he speaks; Haydon also said that he was 'a dangerous character ... half civilized and more mischievous'.¹⁹²

January 1846

Yonker Yonker is listed as one of the Native Police who deserted in Thomas' criticism of the Corps.¹⁹³

188 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

189 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

190 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

191 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML. I read the 'Local Intelligence' section of the *Port Phillip Patriot* for the next ten days but could not find that the paper printed Yankee's letter.

192 Haydon 1854: 119.

193 Thomas Quarterly Report, enc to 46/3341 in 4/2745.1, AO of NSW.

'I Succeeded Once'

6 January 1846

Tuesday. Yonker is one of six persons drunk last night in the encampment, sad this morning; Thomas scolded them.¹⁹⁴

January 1846

On Thomas' Family Connections Census of the Boongurong of this date as Yonker Yonker, male age 23 years; father Buddurup aka Benbow; mother Mullingrook; sister, Bareboon, female 18 years, aka Mary.¹⁹⁵

16 January 1846

Friday. Yonker Yonker and one lubra¹⁹⁶ at Thomas' encampment by Yarra.¹⁹⁷

18 April 1846

Saturday. Yonker Yonker – his name is on a list requested of Thomas by La Trobe, of men suitable to send to King Island.¹⁹⁸

20 April 1846

Thomas sent the list to La Trobe with Yonker Yonker's name heading it:

- Yonker Yonker – Bob Cunningham
- Kulpendure – Robin
- Gibberook – Net-krum
- Nunuptune – Mr Langhorne
- Poky Poky – Wor rung bare
- Davy – Kur-gun
- Warrengitalong – Ter-roo-urnin
- Yal Yal – Mr Merrick.¹⁹⁹

18 May 1846

Monday. Yonker and Nerimbineck return from King Island.²⁰⁰

194 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

195 Thomas Correspondence and Returns set 214/10, CY 3083, ML.

196 On Thomas' Family Connections census of 1846, he lists a daughter of Billibellary named Bungurrook, aged 16, as married to Yankee Yankee, CY 3083, ML.

197 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

198 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

199 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, frame 347, ML.

200 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

23 May 1846

Yonker Yonker and Wigegulk have returned from a voyage to King Island with Mr Sutherland to recover portion of the wreck of the ship *Cataraqui*.²⁰¹ They told Thomas that 'there are 3 VDL black lubras there, plus 1 half-caste boy about 12 years of age, and an old Port Phillip lubra who *cried bitterly* and wanted to come away but the white men would not let her; that there were 5 white men living there and that in the scrub some distance from the white men were a number of casks of spirits – gin, rum and brandy'.²⁰²

The old Port Phillip lubra who cried bitterly

Clark has recovered a good deal of information about this old woman who cried bitterly (though not her name): the following is taken from his report:

The identity of the 'three Tasmanian women, half-caste Aboriginal boy, and old Port Phillip lubra' seen by Yonki Yonka in May 1846, is revealed in correspondence of 20 June 1856 of William Wilson, from Collingwood Victoria to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Tasmania respecting the welfare of Maria and Georgia.

...I would first mention that I did not apply to your Lordship's assistance for these people as a matter of right, but as a matter of charity, and being but an occasional visitor at Robbins Island, it certainly did not occur to me whether they were all natives of Tasmania or not, but knowing they had been on these islands for many years I took it for granted. When I visited Kings Island, three years ago there were two Aboriginal women there Maria and Gudague. The first a native of the East Coast of Tasmania, at Ringarooma River, the last belonging to the Oyster Bay tribe who died on Kings Island, and Maria was removed to Robins Island by Mr Howie.

Upon making enquiry respecting the other aged woman under Mr Howie's protection I am obliged to admit, however it may militate against the poor creature's interest, that she is not a native of Tasmania, her history is this, she was brought over from Western Port, about thirty

201 The *Cataraqui*, an emigrant ship with 415 souls on board, was wrecked on reefs off King Island at 4.30 am on 4 August 1845, with only nine survivors. News reached Melbourne on 13 September and a special edition of the *Port Phillip Herald* was published (Loney n.d.: 12).

202 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML. Jack Loney says that Mr Sutherland was Alexander Sutherland, later the author of *Victoria and Its Metropolis*, who purchased the wreck and contents for £86. He also states that George Coppin held a benefit concert at the Queen's Theatre, which raised £160 for the survivors and the rescuers, Loney n.d.: 12–13.

years ago by a sealer named Munro,²⁰³ with whom she afterwards co[h] abited, that she has one daughter an Aborigine born on the islands, and that daughter has also two girls by a white man who left them soon after their birth and whom they have never seen since, as they are all natives of Tasmania, except the old woman and she has lived there for thirty years I trust the Government will do something for them, the two old women have already reached the span allotted for human life and while I am writing may have one or both passed away. The information I have been able to get and which I believe to be correct is as follows

Maria, a native of Tasmania, Ringarooma River

Old woman, ditto Western Port, Victoria, but living on Kings and other islands 30 years

Pol, an Aborigine, daughter of the above, born on Kings Island

Robert Munro, son of the above, who has assisted in supplying his family for years, and needs nothing himself

Two girls daughters of Pol of 8 and 10 years natives of Tasmania.

Now my Lord, if they are not all positive Aborigines, they have been brought up and live the same, housed in a miam, hunt for a meal before they can eat it, and but for the kindness of Mr + Mrs Howie, would have gone positively naked, I will not presume to dictate to your Lordship, or the Government, but I do sincerely trust something may be done for these poor creatures, if your Lordship could see them, I feel my humble advocacy would be unnecessary.²⁰⁴

This letter to the Bishop gives the date of the abduction of Munro's woman as 'about thirty years ago', that is 1826, and the abductor as Munro himself, both facts which are quite contrary to the accepted version derived from Robinson.

2 July 1846

Thursday. 'Yonker Yonker returns from servitude'.²⁰⁵

203 That Munro brought her over from Port Phillip in the 1820s, or that Meredith brought her over and sold her to Munro is a key issue in the variant interpretations of the abductions.

204 Quotation taken in full from Clark 2002: 111–112. Clark cites the original as Wilson, 20/6/1856 in CSDI/92/2439, Tasmanian State Archives. It is this woman, Pol, about whom opinion differs.

205 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

18 August 1846

Yonker Yonker had up before Police this morning; spent the night in the watch house, 'does him good'.²⁰⁶

1 September 1846

Yonker Yonker, 'called by some the civilized black' was caught drunk, lodged in gaol, fined ten shillings which was paid by a gentleman.²⁰⁷

13 October 1846

Bob Cunningham put in watch house for drunkenness.²⁰⁸

14 October 1846

Wednesday. Yonker Yonker committed for assaulting a constable.²⁰⁹

14 October 1846

Yonker Yonker alias Bob Cunningham was caught drunk, far from the first time, obstreperous, committed to gaol for 14 days.²¹⁰

15 October 1846

Thursday. Thomas visited Yonker Yonker in gaol and he expressed sorrow for his conduct.²¹¹

18 October 1846

Sunday. Thomas visited Yonker Yonker in gaol and had 'a serious talk' with him (Thomas says just that – he does not state what the serious talk was about).²¹²

21 October 1846

Wednesday. Thomas visited Yonker Yonker in gaol. He was concerned that so many blacks were going to Gippsland and not him.²¹³

23 October 1846

Friday. Thomas visited Yonker Yonker in gaol and found him very unwell – 'may this punishmt have its desir'd effect'.²¹⁴

206 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

207 Thomas Quarterly Report, June to September 1846, enc 46/7609 in 4/2744, AO of NSW.

208 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

209 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

210 Thomas Quarterly Report, 1 September to 30 November 1845, enc to 46/9277, in 4/2745.1, AO of NSW.

211 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

212 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

213 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

214 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

'I Succeeded Once'

1 November 1846

Sunday. Thomas visits blacks' encampment – 'Yonker a little indisposed like all others are after confinement in gaol – hope he'll be benefited by it'.²¹⁵

4 November 1846

Yonker Yonker died south encampment: a Western Port black.²¹⁶

4 November 1846

'Yonker, Western Port black, aged 23, male, married, died south of the Yarra. Remarks: The most civilized but a great drunkard, who after being reared by the whites to manhood, returned to his native habits'.²¹⁷

5 November 1846

Yonker Yonker, a Bonurong member of the Native Police, while in jail told Thomas that he intended to construct his hut between the Assistant Protector's quarters and the Merri Creek Aboriginal school but did not get the chance, dying after leaving jail.²¹⁸

5 November 1846

Thomas saw a fresh grave, and, aware no one was ill in the district got the district constable to dig it up; it was Yonker Yonker who but a few days previously was released from gaol for drunkenness and assaulting a constable; no marks of violence; he had been slightly poorly since release; reburied him; Thomas deplored the end of this young man 'who had been almost bred and matured to manhood under the whites ... at one time he had one pound sterling per week plus rations'.²¹⁹

6 November 1846

Friday. Thomas is concerned who died – no one was ill except Yonker who merely had a pain in his limbs 'on a/c of confinement in gaol'. Thomas got no answer to his question, who died? To his 'utmost surprise' it is Yonker. Thomas decides to have the body exhumed. The blacks are not in mourning.²²⁰

215 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

216 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

217 Thomas Return of Deaths, September to November 1846, enc to 46/9277 in 4/2745.1, AO of NSW.

218 Thomas Quarterly Report, 1 September to 30 November 1846, VPRS 4410, unit 3/93, PROV.

219 Thomas Quarterly Report, 1 September to 30 November 1846, enc to 46/9277 in 4/2745.1, AO of NSW.

220 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

9 November 1846

Monday. Thomas applied to the magistrate for permission to exhume the body, and the services of two constables to do the digging. Granted. They dug up the body but there were no marks of violence.²²¹

17 November 1846

This day's entry in Robinson's Journal merely records 'Bob Cunningham dead'.²²² Robinson had just returned from a visit to the Goulbourn protectorate station from 10 to 16 November, but he was in his office all the previous weeks and failed to mention Yankee Yankee.

9 November 1858

William Hull JP gave the following testimony to the Select Committee in Melbourne:

He was an authority on blacks beliefs ... Robert Yang Yang Cunningham, who was a very superior person indeed and a highly intellectual man, and spoke English fluently ... Yang Yang became very confident and I could get almost anything [information] out of him, but always with the strict injunction to secrecy ... Robert Cunningham told me [about the transmigration of souls] **'White fellow come from Pindye; black fellow when he die go to Pindye one way west then come back again east, jump up whitefellow'** ... I may mention that one night I showed Robert Cunningham the pleides and he said they were children of the moon moon – moondick, and very good to blackfellows.

Robert You Yang Cunningham is ... a very superior man indeed, and a highly intelligent man and spoke English fluently ... one of the blacks who told Hull that his progenitors recollected when Hobson's bay was a kangaroo ground ... the passage up the bay through which the ships sailed is the old river Yarra which once went out to the heads ... the sea broke in.²²³

221 Thomas Journal, CY 2606, item 3, ML.

222 Clark 2000, vol 5: 120.

223 Evidence of William Hull, Esq. J.P. to the Enquiry of the Leg. Co. Select Committee on the Aborigines, *Victoria, Legislative Council Votes & Proceedings*, 1859: 8–12.