

Some Random Notes on the Massacres 2000-2015

Peter Gardner

"Vindicators leave few loose ends. Everything fits seamlessly. Investigators by contrast, can be puzzled and taken by surprise, led to new and different conclusions." Krygier & van Krieken in Manne, R. (ed) *Whitewash: on Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, Schwartz Publ. Melb. 2003 p.104

The notes that follow are roughly in chronological order written over the last fifteen years.

1. The Massacres Debate (1)

Over the last 18 months there have appeared a series of articles by Keith Windschuttle in the right wing magazine Quadrant denying both the numbers killed and the numbers of massacres in Australian frontier conflict. The articles in Quadrant remain unsighted and I trust that material by Windschuttle and others published in the Melbourne Age is fairly representative of the debate. It would appear that Windschuttle and others in this debate have never heard of the frontier conflict in Gippsland even though all my published works on this subject (and that of others) have been available for nearly fifteen years. Gippsland is a small part of the country but my study here is, in most cases, applicable to other parts of Australia.

One of my main arguments about the situation in Gippsland was that where frontier conditions existed (especially the absence of any form of law enforcement) then the conflict, the murder and massacres could be kept secret from the usually distant authorities. In some parts of Australia - notably the settlements of the major towns - such frontier conditions never existed and in other parts they existed only for a short period of time. In Gippsland there was no authority for nearly 4 years and then it was in a fairly 'compliant' form whereby Crown Lands Commissioner Tyers spent most of the decade using his Native Police to defend the stock of squatters from Kurnai attacks.

A brief summary of my own work over the period 1973-1989 is as follows: - long term research on frontier conflict was undertaken involving 1) studying, visiting and collecting information on five major Gippsland massacre sites. A number of articles and essays resulting from this were published in various journals and these were included in my first book *Gippsland Massacres* (WEC Warragul, 1983). 2) a broader more general account of the contact and conflict, studied through various primary sources resulted in the publication of *Through Foreign Eyes* (CGS, Churchill, 1987) and finally 3) all the material related to Angus McMillan, the so-called 'discoverer' of Gippsland was published in a chapter entitled 'The Butcher of Gippsland' in the book *Our Founding Murdering Father* (The Author, Essay, 1988).

This body of work has met with little opposition locally and has been generally accepted. One notable exception has been historian John Wells who has popularised local history, mostly in the western part of the region. Wells attacked my work on several occasions in his syndicated newspaper column calling Warrigal Creek the "might have been" massacre. The gist of Wells argument is that since there has been a certain amount of conflict in the evidence so far

collected that this evidence is therefore unreliable and the event did not occur. My argument has always been that the evidence, despite the conflicts, was generally cumulative and corroborative of the massacres occurring and it was for this reason that I examined much of the conflicting material in detail. This conflicting material was usually related to some very specific issue like the exact location of the massacre site, the numbers killed at the massacre or who were the Europeans involved in the particular incident. Also unlike Wells' publications this work has all been footnoted and documented.

The motivations of the historians who have carried out the research on the massacres have also been questioned by Windschuttle. Whilst it may be possible to accuse certain academics of a political agenda it would seem much harder to accuse local or regional historians of this, much of whose work was carried on in an unfavourable climate with substantial obstacles and sometimes outright hostility. When I first started studying local Aboriginal history (1973) my politics were generally left, with libertarian tendencies, but my efforts in this field have always been motivated by an attempt to get as truthful an analysis of the frontier and Aboriginal history as possible.

In 1973 there was little more than a few pages of information on the local Aboriginal people that was readily accessible and nothing on the conflict. Aside from a few bits and pieces in published works this material was buried in widely dispersed manuscript deposits and libraries. The paucity of material was so great that a school councillor at the local school centenary made a half hearted attempt to deny the prior existence of Aboriginal people in our area - a proposal so ludicrous as to be laughable considering the amount of Aboriginal implements local farmers had previously unearthed. It remains obvious that all historians are of one political persuasion or another, and no doubt politics forms part of the complex motivations for anyone to write history.

Windschuttle requires primary evidence for the massacres and argues that historians have manipulated evidence and fabricated evidence of massacres which never occurred. He claims massacres were rare and isolated and that "where whites could kill blacks with impunity is a myth concocted by politically inspired historians, unwarranted by the evidence." This is just so much garbage. Windschuttle fails to grasp the 'frontier' situation and if eyewitness accounts were [a] prerequisite then much history would not or could not be written. He ignores or is completely unaware of the arguments about secrecy following the execution of those responsible for the Myall Creek massacre and the primary evidence of contemporaries like Meyrick. In *Gippsland Massacres* I use a chapter to examine in detail a primary source of a massacre (ironically in the western district) where 72 Aboriginals were "put out of their misery with the bullet and the butt-end".

One feels that this is evidence that Windschuttle and the Quadrant clique (2) would like to ignore. As generalists the academics involved in this debate may all have political agendas but it is the "denialist" position of the Quadrant school that appears to be most politically driven. One wonders what the Quadrant agenda is. Perhaps it is another attempt to discredit the 'black armband' school but, more frighteningly, it has many similarities with those trying to revise or deny the Jewish holocaust.

2. The Macleod Massacres

In *The Aboriginal People of the Monaro* (3) what is listed as the "McLeod massacre" (4) with a long quote from Pepper & De Araugo's *The Kurnai of Gippsland* (5) is in fact two massacres - the 'Milly Creek' (also spelt Mille) on the Brodribb River, south east of Orbost and the 'Slaughterhouse' north of Buchan. As far as I am aware there is no evidence that these events were in any way connected (aside of course from the fact that they were both reprisals for 'crimes' imagined or otherwise, committed by the Aborigines) other than the undocumented assertion by Phillip Pepper that escaping Aborigines were tracked from the Milly to the Pyramids near Buchan. On the other hand I have dealt with these massacres in depth in Chapter 9 of my *Gippsland Massacres* (Ngarak Press, Ensay 1993) and came to an opposite conclusion - that the events were not connected in any way. What Young lists as the McLeod massacre should be in the plural.

3. Notes on Sites and other recent information (2004)

I have noticed a few minor errors in some of my previous works and have corrected them where I can. Other minor errors have inevitably crept in with people using my work. One example of this I recently noticed was done by Bob Gould in an article, entitled "The Windschuttle-McGuinness attempt to revise the history of massacres of Aborigines on the British colonial frontier in Australia" published on the internet, where he categorised Warrigal Creek as a NSW massacre - probably because my original paper on this event was published by the Royal Australian Historical Society in Sydney. (6)

But the greatest confusion has come with identifying and locating massacre sites. Perhaps naturally enough Butchers Creek at Butchers Ridge is often identified as "the" Butchers Creek massacre site. This is doubly confusing as there may possibly have been a massacre at this site near Gelantipy although there is only slim evidence for this and it is just as possible that it was the place where stock were butchered. The true or main Butchers Creek appears on the maps as Boxes Creek - a small inlet of Lake Victoria just to the east of Metung. Several prominent identities have made mistakes over the Butchers Creek location. Don Watson, who had already written on the massacres in his *Caledonia Australis* (Collins, Sydney, 1984), when on a cruise on Lake Victoria stayed overnight in Boxes Creek, not realising that this was the Butchers Creek massacre site. (7) An energetic ABC reporter after a quick consultation of the map travelled to Butchers Creek, Gelantipy, for some film footage, thinking she was travelling to the Butchers Creek listed in my *Gippsland Massacres* - a further 100ks or so more than was necessary. Although there is a humorous note to all this I have had my own doubts on the exact locations of a small number of these sites. Time casts a different perspective on things and the memory can certainly be faulty. For instance I remembered, incorrectly, that the waterhole of the Warrigal Creek massacre site was near the road, whereas it is some hundreds of metres from it. I suppose it is some excuse that I had not visited there for 30 years. Also the site of Red Hill seemed obvious then but more recently was only located again after much legwork and local consultation.

Of all the massacre sites I have visited and documented the Slaughterhouse is the one over which I have had most doubt. With hindsight I am not so certain that I visited the exact site. Certainly I was in the paddock named "The Slaughterhouse" but it was the best part of a square mile in size. I also definitely located a limestone bluff in this paddock, which the massacre site was supposedly at the base of, although it wasn't a really obvious site and was also removed from the river. One folk story associated with the paddock was that Aborigines were driven over the bluff certainly didn't really fit this site but as I had already discounted this account of the massacre entirely it was of no importance. There remains a need however, to make allowances for clearing and other major environmental changes at all these sites. Still the exact location of the Slaughterhouse site must remain in doubt.

Linda Wilkinson in an otherwise admirable article entitled "Aboriginal Historical Places Along the Snowy River" concentrates on massacres at the Butchers Creek, Gelantipy site which I consider only a possible massacre site, and the Brodribb (at the Mille or the Cabbage Tree Creek) whilst omitting to mention the "Slaughterhouse" on the Murrindal River. (8) This is difficult to understand as she used the Bukkan Munjie manuscript by Carl Grove who was one of the main sources on this massacre. (9)

The definite sites - ones I am confident are correct - include Warrigal Creek, Butchers (Boxes) Creek, Tambo Crossing and the Brodribb. There are two close, but competing sites, on this river - Cabbage Tree Creek and Milly Creek. I have bowed to the authority of Phillip Pepper on this matter and consider the latter site is the correct one though I have not visited it.

The exact location of Boney Point appears clear - most accounts state that it is at the confluence of the Avon and Perry Rivers. But it is just possible that the massacre occurred where the Avon enters Lake Wellington or some other nearby location. A description I received some time ago from Patrick Morgan identified a bluff and a shepherd's hut which did not fit other descriptions of Boney Point. It went as follows:

"When William O'dell Raymond took up this run (Strathfieldsaye) Boney Point was occupied by two shepherds and a blackfellow as hutkeeper and two large flocks of sheep were depastured. The situation of the hut was on a high bluff, with a narrow flat between it and the river. On the return home one evening of one of the shepherds he found his mate's sheep scattered, some having broken legs, the hut pillaged and the keeper killed. He immediately went to the head station with the news, and next morning a party left there for the spot. On arrival, from the top of the bluff the blacks were visible amongst a scene of slaughter gorging themselves on the sheep that they had killed. A curtain is best drawn over what followed, but certain it is that sharp treatment was meted out from that time..." (10)

Without considerable time and effort it is beyond me to establish the exact location of the account above and thus it is left to future interested parties. There can only be a few kilometres between these alternative sites. Suffice to note this is a completely different account of the Boney Point massacre. From this description the location of Boney Point appears to be on the east side river but may have been at the confluence of the two streams. It also offers a different date, later than 1841, and a different general account of the massacre. Odell Raymond of Strathfieldsaye is identified as the 'perpetrator' of the 'affair' rather than it

being carried out by Angus McMillan at an earlier time. I still prefer the latter individual as the one most likely involved.

I must emphasize that although I may have some doubt about the exact location of some of these sites I have no doubt of the authenticity of the events that took place at them. Another massacre site I have never visited is Boomerang Point about which there is virtually nothing known other than Aboriginal and a few fishermen's folk stories. Boomerang Point is located south of Rotamah and is known to local fisherman as "Slaughter Point".(11) On another possible bone find Ray Scott, the main source of information on the Hollands Landing massacre [see Hollands Landing Massacre pdf] has indicated that his great aunt, in her youth, mistakenly collected Aboriginal bones from Marlay Point, Lake Wellington. (12)

Finally there are possible new developments that may assist historians and others interested in the solutions to some of these problems. For instance the use of genetic studies may prove contact between various tribes and whether such contacts were recent or ancient. It would seem, for instance, that connections between Gippsland and the sealers of Bass Strait could easily be established one way or another. And as I have outlined elsewhere I believe the DNA 'fingerprint' should be taken of as many bones as possible including samples of living volunteers with established ancestry, and with identifiable bones returned from Museums and other institutions, and bones discovered in the field. DNA testing would also indicate the exact number of individuals represented in any collection of bones and certainly help prove, or disprove, the massacre thesis. In this matter the support from living Koories and Kurnai/Gunai descendants is vital.

4. Patrick Morgan on Caroline Dexter, Primary Sources and Gippsland Aboriginal History

On page 80 of his interesting biography on William and Caroline Dexter (13) Patrick Morgan wrote:

"But the settling of Gippsland by McMillan and other Highland Scots squatters was not greeted by the Aborigines with equal rapture. The Gippsland historian Peter Gardner has suggested that in the 1840s a 'Highland Brigade', an armed posse led by McMillan, rounded up, harassed, dispersed and in some cases massacred local Aborigines. Caroline's article on McMillan is important because, as a person who knew him, she writes that 'he was compelled in his early struggle to destroy numbers of the more treacherous natives'. This is the only known primary source which confirms recent speculation on this point."

The statement in the last sentence that Caroline Dexter is the "only known primary source" to confirm McMillan's participation in the massacres is certainly open to dispute. It is questionable whether Dexter is a "primary source" at all since she is only repeating a rough summary of events that happened some time - ten to fifteen years - before she came to Gippsland. Further there is no evidence that her unnamed source of information was Angus McMillan as is implied, and though the Dexters were certainly friendly with him they could just as easily have obtained this information from a wide variety of other sources including

Dr. Arbuckle. A number of much later reports such as those of "Bushman" (Rowland Bell) and Judge Box on the Butchers Creek massacre have more veracity than Dexters' since the "lineage" of information, and especially the original source, is clearly documented. None however implicates McMillan in these affairs.

I would also rank Caroline Dexter as a less valuable source than William Hoddinott (Gippslander), who, whilst his original source is not identified, is at least fairly specific in the detail of the event and who also implicates McMillan. And of all the general sources on the Gippsland conflict I consider Henry Meyrick a primary source of great importance. Meyrick was a contemporary of the hunts and massacres and his brother declined an invitation to participate in an attack on a Kurnai encampment. Furthermore Meyrick's information can be made more specific when it is cross referenced with other primary sources such as the diary of William Thomas, where we find that much of Meyrick's general account is referring specifically to Warrigal Creek and its aftermath. (14) It is a pity that the notes and manuscript for Caroline Dexter's publication are not available so that we could more accurately identify the source of her information.

With regards the work of the 'Highland Brigade' I have only claimed that this group was used specifically, and only, for the Warrigal Creek massacre, and those smaller affrays that immediately followed, and as such was a vehicle of retribution for the murder of Ronald Macalister. It was not necessarily the same group that carried out the earlier massacres at Boney Point and Butchers Creek although a number of individuals including McMillan, Arbuckle and MacLaren were possibly involved in all three events. It should also be re-emphasized that the fact that the latter two early massacres occurred whilst only a small number of Europeans were resident in Gippsland, all of whom can be identified, is probably of equal importance with Dexter, in indicating who was involved in these affairs.

Finally I would argue that to call my work (and also that of Phillip Pepper, Don Watson and others) 'recent speculation' is unfair for it is neither recent nor speculative. I am indebted to Patrick Morgan for his assistance with, and encouragement of, my work right through the 1980s. But the only 'speculation' in my three works on the Kurnai tribes specifically on this subject of early conflict is in *Gippsland Massacres* on pp. 65-6 where I hypothesize that there was a series of smaller massacres following the main one at Warrigal Creek. And even this hypothesis cum speculation is not without foundation for it is based on the details provided in Gippslander's account, as too is the story of the "Highland Brigade". Note that this also helps explain the apparent 'diversity' of massacre sites for Warrigal Creek. For the most part rather than being 'recent speculation' the evidence gathered patiently over a period of twenty years (including that by Patrick Morgan) is overwhelming.

More recently Morgan has commented on these matters in much greater depth in an article in Quadrant entitled "Gippsland Settlers and the Kurnai Dead". (15) This article is basically an outline of my work on frontier conflict and the Kurnai, and includes a brief summary of these events. Morgan noted that mine was "the first serious research on these events" and the article offers a fair account, with a few qualifications, of my work to date. After reading the article I wrote to Morgan making the following comments. (16)

I stated that "the idea of guerrilla warfare ... came from C.D. Rowley's *Destruction of Aboriginal Society* (17) rather than from anything to do with my personal 'Vietnam experience'. The latter may have had influence in that it possibly made me more responsive to Rowley's thesis." The "Vietnam experience" referred I suppose to my possible motive and possible (left-wing) bias from my student days and opposition to this war. I also pointed out that the original "suggestion of classifying the evidence (into eight categories) was, I am sure, yours..." Morgan as sub editor of *Through Foreign Eyes* had made a penetrating observation of my work and at his suggestion this was included as a chapter in the book. More specifically I noted that "I actually claimed five major massacres rather than four. I also have added another (Tambo Crossing) event which I originally published in the Gippsland Heritage Journal (18) and later in my booklet *Some Notes on Victorian Alpine Aborigines*."

Compared with his previous emphasis on Caroline Dexter as a critical primary source, in this article his emphasis is all on Henry Meyrick. I wrote "I agree [that] Meyrick is the obvious primary source. I actually used Meyrick as the basis for a brief article on casualty estimates..." And also that 'I agree that I am a 'passionate' researcher. The motivation for such I think was, and has been, twofold - my moral position on violence and my concern for/interest in the underdog."

"With regards *Our Founding Murdering Father* I don't think it was a preconceived thesis but rather consider it to be the negative side in a debate. (The other side being that of Kenneth Cox in *Angus McMillan Pathfinder*) I hint at this in the Introduction without stating it outright and have never claimed it to be a complete or balanced biography. I had been collecting the occasional reference to McMillan and the Kurnai from 1973 onwards with no particular idea of publication in mind other than it was within my general area of interest in the Kurnai and, in particular, frontier conflict. It was only after reading Cox's *Angus McMillan Pathfinder* (1973) some years after publication (I thought about 1977 but as it is listed in *Gippsland Massacres* it may have been earlier) that I began collecting all references on McMillan, Aboriginal and otherwise, in earnest. The idea being that eventually I could use them as an answer to many of the questions Cox posed and failed to answer, and the multitude he failed to ask. The perception of my painting McMillan wholly as bad is caught up with my choice of title which, from memory, came after the book was completed, although I had used it originally in 1973 as the title of a brief popular article. The title was chosen, with the influence of sensational journalism [in mind], hoping that this would help publicity and promote sales."

I had previously and incorrectly assumed that the Windschuttle and Quadrant's political positions were identical. Morgan's article certainly changes that. I also concur with his more recent emphasis on Meyrick as a primary source. I understand his current position to roughly be that he considers the massacres and the killings were a far greater 'crime' than that of the more recent 'stolen generation'. Whilst not denying any of the suffering and heartbreak caused by the latter, for the region of Gippsland at least, this is probably a fair assessment.

5. Richard Broome and the Statistics of Frontier Conflict (2005?)

Whilst "surfing" the internet some time ago I came across an article by Richard Broome entitled 'The Statistics of Frontier Conflict', which was a paper presented to a symposium on the same subject. With regards Gippsland Broome only offered the figure of Bain Attwood as the most reliable guide with an estimate of 350 killed (PHD thesis) which was later reduced down to 250 (19). Broome mentions Don Watson's work but states that he only uses the contemporary estimate of Meyrick of 450 and makes no other attempt to estimate the total casualties for Gippsland. Of my own work he offered the following comment: "Peter Gardner, a Gippsland local historian, has done assiduous archival research for his *Gippsland Massacres* (1983, 1993) but like Watson, gives no overall accounts or estimates, and tends to victimology as well"

One wonders what the term 'victimology' means. If it means the concentration or placing undue stress on the victims of the 'black war' I would argue that my works have been concerned with establishing firstly that these events did occur beyond any doubt and secondly that these events were of extreme importance in the context of Australian history. Much of my work was written in at best an unsympathetic, and at worst, hostile environment. In all my works I outline and test aspects of Rowley's "guerrilla war" thesis. Part of the problem is that the 'guerrilla war' in terms of victims was so one sided. If it is the study of the victims then one is left to ponder how they can be ignored when considering such serious events as these. Further what is actually known about the victims of these events is, in my opinion, miniscule. In a book entitled *Gippsland Massacres* a fair amount of it should be rightly directed towards the study of the victims of these crimes. But the work is mostly directed towards answering who was involved and the why, where and how of these events. Attempts to answer the 'how many' question are, for the most part speculative, and will probably remain so. Also the 'victimology' claim is far less substantial if my total work on the Kurnai is considered.

I have briefly perused Attwood's PHD thesis many years ago and seen most of his published works. From memory the subject of frontier conflict does not form a large part of his thesis. On the other hand his work on the mission stations and individuals of this era is substantial. After delivering a lecture at the Gippsland Institute (Monash Gippsland) under the auspices of the Centre for Gippsland Studies many years ago in answer to a question from the floor he offered the constructive criticism of my work - that it took no account of the many minor clashes that had occurred. Of course this is the nub of the problem in that whilst many of these smaller events no doubt did occur, because they are only identified by a single, often secondary source or none at all, it is extremely difficult to establish beyond reasonable doubt their actual occurrence. At this time I had only published *Gippsland Massacres* and precisely because of this problem had concentrated mainly on five particular massacres documented from a number of sources. Consequently I was not satisfied with Attwood's estimates above and set out my own estimates in some detail and sent them to Richard Broome.

Broome has acknowledged this and my estimates and reasoning below are to be published as an appendix to his paper. With some minor alterations, and the qualifications above in mind, it is as follows:

Meyrick as main source. If comparing Attwood's estimate (250) with that of Meyrick's (450) then I have no hesitation in agreeing with Watson that the latter is the most accurate and reliable estimate we will probably have. It should be noted that Meyrick thought this estimate the bottom line. His exact words were "I am convinced that not less than 450 have been murdered altogether" in his letter home on 30.4.1846. I consider Meyrick most reliable and a genuine primary source. There are also other reasons why Meyrick's estimate should be considered conservative and a bottom line. At the time of his letter the bulk of the hunts for the white woman had yet to occur, as had almost all the clashes, and two smaller massacres (Milly Creek & Slaughterhouse) in East Gippsland.

I therefore offer my own statistics for the Gippsland frontier conflict - deaths as a result of clashes with Europeans and including those inflicted by Aboriginals from outside Gippsland allied with, acting in association with, or the encouragement of, Europeans.

a) Main Massacres

1. Warrigal Creek range 60-150 (the range is estimated in this case taking the plausible figures given by various sources for the event. The actual range of estimates in this particular massacre is from 20-500. In other instances below and also where no estimates are to be found some weight is given to the circumstances surrounding the event e.g. whether in retaliation for the death of a European or for cattle spearing and when the event occurred as the earlier events were probably larger) My estimate 100. This was definitely the largest massacre to have occurred in Gippsland and possibly Victoria if those killed at the lesser events that immediately followed [see below] are included.

2. Warrigal Ck associated massacres. Range 30-80 my estimate 50 (includes all the clashes immediately following Warrigal Ck. probably at Gammon Creek, Freshwater Creek, the mouth of Warrigal Ck/Jack Smith Lake and possibly other unknown locations).

3. Boney Point range 40-80 my estimate 60.

4. Butchers Creek range 30-80 my estimate 50.

5. Slaughterhouse range 20-40 my estimate 30.

6. Milly Creek range 20-40 my estimate 30.

7. Tambo Crossing my estimate 70 (not to be found in *Gippsland Massacres* but appears in my small booklet *Some Notes on Victorian Alpine Aborigines* and was originally published in the Gippsland Heritage Journal). Robinson who visited the site in 1844 and whose informant was Charley, an Omeo Aboriginal, has estimated that there were "upwards of 70" in the group and that two boys only escaped. It is interesting that current Aboriginal groups express little interest in this affair as it was obviously perpetrated by a mixed group of Europeans and Aboriginals.

b) There probably was a further 20 other events - defined as massacres by Broome as being 5 deaths or over. Range 100-140 my estimate 120. This figure includes a number of the white woman massacres, and events that went unrecorded probably at the following sites: early clashes at Nuntin (as many as three), The Heart, Green Hills, Maffra, Skull Creek Lindenow, Boomerang Point, Boole Boole Peninsula, Roseneath (Hollands Landing), Snowy River, Brodribb River, the vicinity of Lakes Entrance, Butchers Creek near Gelantipy and other unknown locations. It is possible that this estimate includes two or more relatively large events. On Boole Boole, for instance, Tyers alleged, and then later retracted, that Billy Lonsdale of the Native Police - "the notorious Billy Lonsdale" - and others killed 150 people here in one night here.

c) 30 other events where less than 5 individuals were killed. Range 60-140 my estimate 100 These 'events' include all the random hunts mentioned by Edgar and Meyrick, and any of the probably numerous attacks against small groups of individuals, including the first death recorded in McMillan's

diary and that of 'One Eye' murdered by brajerak during the hunt for the white woman, and probably includes a large proportion of the 50 individuals C.J. Tyers estimated killed during the hunts for the white woman. Tyers included in his estimate those killed by Aborigines who were associated with the hunts for the white woman, and no doubt those who took advantage of the chaos engendered by these hunts, unlike modern academic accounts such as Fels who do not count them at all. This figure would also include any individuals killed in clashes with sealers and whalers.

Result-

bottom estimate 430

my estimate 610

top estimate 820

My conclusion is that Meyrick's estimate was accurate at the time it was given and that my figure of around 600 deaths for the total period 1800-1860 is as accurate an estimate as possible under the circumstances. It should also be noted that any variations within the estimates probably cancel out overall.

6. Notes on Richard Broome's *Aboriginal Victorians: a history since 1800*, Allen & Unwin, Melbourne, 2005 (20)

The comments below are confined to Broome's work on Gippsland.

p.69 Broome comments that "In most regions violence lasted sporadically for several years, but in inaccessible places like Gippsland, intermittent violence continued for upwards of five years." The figure is more like 10 to 12 years in Gippsland with clashes and fatalities occurring from first contact in 1840 in central and south Gippsland to 1851 in the far east.

p.71 Mention of trouble over the abduction of Aboriginal women. There is one fully documented case of this in Orbost in 1850/1 with the abductor Dan Moylan being speared and with a massacre at Milly Creek on the Brodribb River following. It is possible that there may have at least one other incident of this kind prior to 1843.

p.79 The number of Europeans killed by the Kurnai in Gippsland has not been firmly established and Attwood's figure of six probably only covers the period up to the death of Ronald Macalister.

p.80 "Historians have made educated guesses of the Aboriginal death toll..." They have employed a number of mainly conservative formulae to calculate this figure. Broome estimates a total of 1000 Aboriginal fatalities from gunshot wounds for the Colony of Victoria. This figure is a "guesstimate" that 10% of the pre-European population of the Colony were dispatched in this manner. Broome could as easily have used the figures of ethnologist EM Curr who claimed that 15-25% of the population were killed in this manner. (21) Leaving aside the fact that the pre-European population is itself a debatable figure the differences between Broome and Curr is substantial. My preference is to examine the plausible estimates of as many individual events as possible – and any primary sources where

available - to form the basis for any overall estimates. My conservative estimate of 600 for Gippsland has the primary source base of Meyrick's bottom estimate of 450 plus Robinson's estimate of 70 for the Tambo Crossing affair to 1846 plus at least two massacres and the white woman hunts that occurred afterwards. The only question about this is whether Meyrick was aware of the Tambo Crossing event. I have examined the Meyrick letters in detail and noted his visit to Assistant Protector Thomas where he mentioned Warrigal Creek, but other than that he gives no detail as to location. So the answer to this question is just possibly. If we can I think validly make the assumption that Meyrick was unaware of the Tambo Crossing event then the base estimate of 520 to 1846 is accurate, as is the estimate of 600 for Gippsland overall.

p.81 As well as using the 10% of original population gunshot fatality ratio Broome also uses an Aboriginal to European death ratio of 12:1. Again I consider this a conservative ratio. Somewhere buried in my notes (which I cannot locate) is a reference to a murder retaliation ratio by Robinson of 20:1 which I still considered conservative. Again my preference is to look at the individual events rather than using these formulae when the assumptions on which they are based are doubtful.

Broome then noted: "Such killings are often termed massacres - the killing of defenceless or beaten people. However the word is overused and portrays Aboriginal people as passive victims. Some incidents were not 'massacres' but battles in which one side suffered severe losses. The details of the action are too vague in many incidents to confidently label them 'massacres' rather than defeats." As can be seen from above this generalisation certainly does not apply to Gippsland. The Rowley thesis is far more valid. For a short time there were a number of confrontations in Gippsland where the Aboriginals massed in large numbers and faced the newcomers. But these were short lived when the superiority of European weaponry was quickly established. The guerrilla war that followed was protracted and occasionally punctuated by fierce and large European retaliations that can only be called massacres. Perhaps Broome is reviving his 'victimology' jargon which is surely much worse than that of an overuse of the term 'massacre'. Even so I refuse to concede that it is overused - at least for Gippsland - and argue that it is a far more accurate description of the times.

Broome also noted that : "incidents termed 'massacres' by locals also occurred in Gippsland, although the details are extremely vague, which is why Gardiner's(sic) highest death tally is dismissed in the total count above. These include Warrigal Creek in 1843 (perhaps 60 killed); Brodribb River in 1850; and Slaughterhouse Creek in 1851 in which about 15-20 allegedly died." Broome has used the highest figure in my range of estimates (see above) of 820 rather than the statistic of 610 that I identified as the most likely figure. He then makes extremely low estimates for Warrigal Creek and Milly Creek and the Slaughterhouse (note correct title). My analysis of Warrigal Creek offers a round figure of 100 - far below the wildest high estimates of 500 - and then includes a number of lesser events that followed immediately afterwards that resulted in a further 50 casualties. My "guesstimates" for the other events were 30 each. I would also argue that rather than being 'vague' there is as much information available on these Gippsland events as there is on that other area of extreme conflict in Victoria - the Portland district.

p.82 “Frederick Taylor turned up in Gippsland in 1844.” This is incorrect as Taylor and the Loughnan brothers were in the first rush of squatters into Gippsland via Omeo in early 1841.

7. Notes on Lyndall Ryan’s “Settler massacres on the Port Phillip Frontier 1836-1851” *Journal of Australian Studies* 34:3:257 (22)

My last serious writing on Gippsland frontier conflict was done more than 10 years ago and was also prompted by the Windschuttle denialists. Since then I have been working on coal miners in South Gippsland and the Melbourne Land Boom. The latter resulted in 6 essays one of which was published by the VHJ and the rest self-published online. I admit I like the work of Michael Cannon’s *The Land Boomers* (MUP, Melbourne, 1966). This publication was the base for most of my work in this area. Since 2008 I have largely devoted my time (rather unsuccessfully) to climate change politics. Thus I have been completely remote from the academic sphere on frontier conflict aside from brief contacts with Broome, Kiernan and Clark about 10 years ago.

Now in retirement when I don’t have to worry about where my next quid is coming from I am starting to gradually put my unpublished work online as downloadable pdfs. I have completed my Melbourne Land Boom series and am now working on Kurnai material for which I probably have another 5-6 essays (some brief - basically a paragraph) to complete.

I agree wholeheartedly with the general thrust of this paper. Following are some general and specific comments that apply almost exclusively to Gippsland.

p.258

a) The Gippsland experience certainly does not match the thesis that there were a large number of events where the killing of small numbers of Aborigines occurred although these events certainly contributed significantly to the overall numbers killed. This is the Attwood argument – at least in the 1980s.

b) The “inferior European weapons” argument you formerly used is questionable. This was probably only true for shepherds and other workers. In my only study of a massacre outside Gippsland (Grampians Massacre pdf where I disagree with Clark about the location) the participants – the Whyte brothers with some shepherds - used muzzle loading rifles which had a longer range and were more accurate than the smooth bore musket. Further by firing in turn with 15 to 30 second intervals 8 to 10 attackers could keep up a continuous fire for a long period.

c) Although I placed the massacres in Rowley’s (mostly one sided) guerrilla war perhaps I was actually writing about “settler activism”. This is the first time I have seen this term used.

d) Windschuttle prompted my last essays 14 years ago and hence eventually this correspondence.

p.259

a) I like the “EM Curr” ratio of 15-25% died by gunshot wounds. I mentioned this in a review I did of Christie’s book 35(?) years ago. The upper level applied to Gippsland gives a figure of 750.

b) The Blaskett thesis does not apply to Gippsland as the greater part of the region was covered by the related Kurnai tribes.

p.260

a) The definition of inter-tribal violence is important. In the instance of Gippsland true conflicts of this sort only rarely occurred prior to European occupation. Afterwards these events were heavily influenced and/or exploited by Europeans.

b) I make a modest claim to priority in the use of the term ‘massacres’ in a publication in Victoria (1975) though of course my work was heavily influenced by Rowley, Turnbull’s *Black War* and others.

c) My definition of a massacre, although unlike Clark never spelled out, is the inclusion of the innocents and non combatants - women children and the elderly.

d) I am sceptical of these figures of Pepper/De Araugo.

p.261

a) The figure of 800 which Broome took from my correspondence was actually the top figure in my range of estimates of casualties from 450 to 800. I settled on 600 as the best number.

b) The definition of how many constitutes a massacre (whether Broome’s 5 or Ryan’s 6) accepted but barely relevant to Gippsland where the atrocities studied by me tended to be much larger with minimum fatality estimates of 15+.

c) The actual stand-up battles in Gippsland were short lived and occurred only in the brief period of one or two months after initial contact was made. The Kurnai then reverted to a type of guerrilla war after European weaponry (and tactical?) superiority was firmly established. Thus Broome’s thesis of battles does not apply here. The battles that occurred in Gippsland were in 1840 at Nuntin – the site of the first intrusion - and possibly years later in east Gippsland about 1848. Possibly 3 such battles occurred at Nuntin with enough fatalities on the Aboriginal side perhaps to be called “massacres”. On one of these occasions the Aboriginal attackers forced the Europeans to retreat to Ensay (about 3 days ride) and dispersed their cattle. The massacre at Boney Point followed the European return. The casualties of the earlier battles would have been modest by comparison to the latter event.

p.262

a) Some massacres were spontaneous others were carefully planned.

b) The position of numerical weakness of the intruders probably underestimated as they obviously felt threatened.

p.263

The definition of 6 fatalities as a massacre is fine.

p.264

Table. I am curious as to all the sources of information involved in the Gippsland column. No doubt some of them are mine. But some of my own later work is possibly missing from here. Some I may disagree with. For instance what I call the Tambo Crossing massacre occurred in 1841 or 2 and was reported by Robinson in 1844 (surely a primary source). The death toll was upwards of 70. My brief article on this was published in 1996 in the Gippsland Heritage Journal and now available on my website as a pdf.

p.265

a) It would be nice to have the source details of the 16 Gippsland massacres listed in this table. Surely the Gippsland picture should now be considered more coherent.

b) Ronald Macalister (almost certainly not Donald) was, as nephew of squatter Lachlan Macalister, probably the most prominent person in Gippsland in 1843. McMillan was Macalister's overseer - a position he held through the early 1840s whilst establishing his own station at Bushy Park.

c) The ratio of Aborigines killed in response to European deaths. My opinion only but 1:26 seems too conservative.

p.266

Either the fixed 'battle' or the 'tribal war' was often a settler explanation and/or excuse for a massacre.

p.267

a) There is no documented example of poisoning in Gippsland.

b) Some of the settler massacres were carried out with military precision indicating possible prior experience of some of attackers (see Grampians massacre pdf).

p.268

The "organised process" applies to Warrigal Creek.

p.269

a) Note that Ronald Macalister was possibly more important than McMillan in Gippsland at this time. (see above) Some accounts have Lachlan Macalister (notably Dunderdale) leading the massacre although I generally discount this as there is no evidence of him being in Gippsland until about 1848.

b) Is Warrigal Creek a single massacre or several? I opt for the latter.

p.270

I think that the 11% estimate is too low for Gippsland.

p.273

Note 65. Kiernan has taken this from Dunderdale. The demonstration followed the deaths of 3 Aboriginals shot on Snake Island for plundering the camp of the Clonmel salvage party. The Kurnai demonstrated the next day at the settlement and the cannon was reportedly fired over their heads, though it is difficult to imagine how this could be done with such projectiles. No casualties were reported. This cannon – or its twin - was later held on Strathfieldsaye station and used in the Hollands Landing massacre in 1842.

8. Notes on Josephine Flood's *The Original Australians*, (Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest 2005)

Josephine Flood in her examination of the calamitous fall in the population of the Kurnai after the European invasion follows along the lines of conservative “massacre” estimates as laid out by Richard Broome (see above). The accounts of massacres were “full of lurid invented details” (p.109). Further she quotes Broome at some length on the question of Aboriginals killed by other Aboriginals in inter-tribal affairs. In the period 1835 to 1850 Broome attributes 250 deaths as a result of these inter-tribal affrays but does not attribute any specifically to Gippsland.

However in contrast to this Flood accepts the estimate of Henry Meyrick of 450 deaths as being most reliable. She noted that “Meyrick’s estimate has great weight, as he admitted to the same base attitudes in himself and was privy to the secrets of the other squatters” (p.105). There are problems associated with Flood’s acceptance of the reliability of Meyrick. Foremost it undermines the estimates made by Broome of frontier casualties. In my work I have previously used Meyrick’s figure as the basis for my estimate of 600 deaths in Gippsland up to 1851 – a figure rejected by Broome. Since Meyrick drowned in May 1847 his estimate did not include later massacres at the Slaughterhouse or Milly Creek and most of the fatalities that occurred during the hunts for the white woman (23). They definitely did not include any of the deaths caused by raids into Gippsland by the Bunerong and Wurundjeri after 1839. All these fatalities would be additional to Meyrick’s estimate. Flood’s assumption that many of Meyrick’s 450 were “resulting from raids by Kulin troopers on their traditional enemies, the Kurnai of Gippsland” (p.104) is incorrect. There is no evidence that any of these deaths are included in Meyrick’s figure (24).

In his estimates Broome proposes a ratio of 12 Aboriginal deaths to every European killed in Victoria which Flood also appears to accept though she notes a far more alarming ratio of 90:1 in the Kimberleys. George Augustus Robinson proposed a ratio of 20:1 which I also considered conservative and Lyndall Ryan had a figure of 26:1. However with regards Gippsland if you accept Meyrick’s estimate combined with the fact that a maximum of 6 Europeans had been killed you are left with a ration for Gippsland of 75:1 and that, as I have

argued above and elsewhere must surely be an underestimate. If my estimate of 600 is close to the mark then the ratio become 100:1.

Flood notes the portrayal of massacres “as the victims of frontier conflict, while largely ignoring the impact of new diseases” (p.108) but then notes later that “the only groups of tribes in south eastern Australia never affected by smallpox were the Kurnai of Gippsland...” (p.127). I hope to look into the “smallpox” question in some detail in another essay but conclude in opposition to Broome and Flood that the killing of the Kurnai by Europeans – termed massacres – was by far the greater cause of the rapid depopulation of the Kurnai and the affects of diseases like influenza and measles definitely secondary. The killing of “Aborigine by Aborigine” was also made possible by the European intrusion with the Kulin invaders being armed with firearms.

Perhaps the fact that most commentators - with the exception of Alfred Howitt and a few modern historians such as Don Watson - writing on Gippsland often do so from a Melbourne or central districts perspective. This includes the protectors Robinson and Thomas who both made single journeys in Gippsland in their lifetime. Perhaps the line used in modern tourist promotions – that ‘Gippsland is different’ – is also appropriate for the region in the frontier and pre-European times and should be a guide for generalists and others writing on the “troubled times” in this region.

End Notes

1. Mountain Echoes No72 a political column published (& lost on the) world wide web August 2001
2. At the time of writing I obviously considered the Windschuttle and Quadrant positions to be identical. However since the publication of Patrick Morgan's article "Gippsland Settlers and the Kurnai Dead" in Quadrant (October 2004) this is not so clear. See Note 15.
3. Young, Michael with Ellen & Debbie Mundy (compilers) *The Aboriginal People of the Monaro*, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2000
4. *ibid* p.169
5. Pepper & De Araugo *The Kurnai of Gippsland* Hyland House, Melbourne, 1986
6. Gould, Bob. "The Windschuttle-McGuinness attempt to revise the history of massacres of Aborigines on the British colonial frontier in Australia" <http://members.optusnet.com.au/spainter/Bobgould.html>
7. Watson also wrote a film script with the title 'Butchers Creek' based on the massacres and the dispossession of the Kurnai tribes.
8. Gippsland Heritage Journal No 23
9. Grove, Carl. Bukkan Munjie manuscript held in Bairnsdale Library.
10. "T.G.H." in the Gippsland Times 15.4.1907
11. Conversation with C. Wilson of Paynesville c.2002.

12. These bones were supposedly collected by her as a young child from a large deposit. The 'large deposit' does not fit anthropological evidence of a normal burial - that is Aboriginal bones were deposited singly in an appropriate place and that the Kurnai did not have cemeteries, although logically the most frequented places would have had the largest number of scattered bone deposits. A large single deposit of bones is suggestive of violent demise. But in this instance one is left to ponder over the absence of human skulls which presumably even a young child would have recognised and avoided.

13. Morgan, P. *Folie a deux William and Caroline Dexter in colonial Australia*, Quaker Hill Press 1999, Quakers Hill

14. See *Through Foreign Eyes* pp.51-2

15. Quadrant October 2004, p.26. a copy kindly sent to me by the author.

16. The following quotes are all from my letter to P. Morgan 26.10.04

17. Rowley, C.D. *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1974

18. Gippsland Heritage Journal No 19 March 1996

19. Broome, Richard. 'The Statistics of Frontier Conflict' <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/news/story28.html> Personal communication of Attwood to Broome 1988

20. Rough notes written June 2014

21. As did Michael Christie in his *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria 1835-86*, Sydney University Press, 1979

22. Based on a letter sent to Ryan in June 2014

23. Meyrick's letter homeward with the now famous estimate of 450 was written on 30.4.1846 before the main hunts for the white woman occurred. Also it needs to be stressed that Meyrick considered "not less than 450 have been murdered altogether" – that it was his 'bottom line'. See Chapter 2 in my *Through Foreign Eyes*, 2nd ed. Ngarak Press, Ensay, 1994.

24. It is just possible that some indication of the Kulin raids into Gippsland may have come from Protector William Thomas when he met with Meyrick. The indication from Thomas' journal is that the meeting was all about Meyrick informing him of European atrocities against the Kurnai. Thomas Journal MS214 22.1.1847 Mitchell Library Sydney.