

Recent Notes on Massacres 2017

Peter Gardner

“Science... is made up of mistakes, but they are mistakes which it is useful to make, because they lead little by little to the truth.’ Jules Verne

1. Notes on Bruce Pascoe’s *The Convincing Ground*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2007

When *The Convincing Ground* was first published my main preoccupation, after earning a quid, was the economic history of the Melbourne land boom, and in particular extending Michael Cannon’s work on WL Baillieu. Consequently my first impression of the book, though sympathetic, was that as it was predominantly a work on Aboriginal Victoria with little on Gippsland it was therefore outside my area of interest. In the following years up to my retirement in 2010 the politics of climate change loomed large (they still do) and this has meant that I have not given the book the attention it deserved. Recently I have revived my interest in locating the burial place of the Kurnai Bungeleen in the cemetery of the Native Police station at Stud Road. This has meant going over all the readily available sources on the Native Police – primarily Marie Fels – and so have come once again to *The Convincing Ground*. What follows are notes on Pascoe’s references to Gippsland and to a lesser extent the Native Police.

p.56 Pascoe mentions me as a source on tribal warfare – in particular how it has been overemphasized by some historians - but does not acknowledge this in his notes.(1)

p.147 has the barracks at Stud Road paddocks built in the first Native Police formation under deVilliers in 1837 again without a reference.

p.148 commences a fairly long criticism of Marie Fels’ *Good Men and True*, (MUP, Melbourne 1988) most of which I agree with. I wrote a substantial, and in some ways similar, critique of Fels’ book on the native police in the second edition of *Gippsland Massacres* (2) mainly in relation to the hunts for the white woman supposedly held captive by the Kurnai through the 1840s.

p.149 Pascoe is particularly critical of Fels’ analysis of firepower of the Native Police: “She analyses the relative firepower of the Aboriginal member of the Corps claiming the Tower musket could fire only ten shots in four and a half minutes and was only good when fired at point-blank range at rows of infantry.” Note that this is an exaggeration as the musket was accurate up to about 50 metres and this is a similar argument used by Richard Broome and others to justify their relatively low estimates of Aboriginal casualties. (3) Also note that the reference by Pascoe to ‘Henry Martini weaponry’ is incorrect and not relevant to the period

under discussion (ie pre 1850) although there is no doubt that the squatter's guns were modern and sophisticated.

p.152 Pascoe comments on the Cann River squatter Alexander's involvement in two massacres. Aside from a simple single reference in my *Names of East Gippsland* (4) where I note "Many of the Aborigines in the valley were shot by squatter Alexander". I have been unable to locate Pascoe's source for this listed in the notes as *A Brief Journey in Time* by N. O'Connor & K. Jones.

p.153 mentions Fels' dislike of terms like 'massacre'.

p.158 discusses the casualty statistics of Richard Broome who "opts for lower figures than most historians" with which I concur. He then analyses Broome in further detail: "...but even if we accept his figure of 1000 deaths and his estimate of a Koori population [of Victoria] of 10,000, that means that 10 per cent were killed. It would be reasonable to assume that at least twice as many were wounded, and say, another 20 per cent were shot at and escaped. That means 50 per cent of the population were fired upon. If you assume that women and children were targets less frequently, then every adult Aboriginal male was shot at between the years 1836 and 1845. Now tell me there was no war in Australia." My interpretation is at slight variance with Pascoe though with the same conclusion. I consider Broome's casualty statistic for Victoria is conservative and an underestimate. Christie's estimate of 2000 in his *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria 1835-86*, (Sydney University Press, 1979) I think is much closer to the mark. Included in this figure is a substantial number of women and children. Also many of the wounded no doubt later died through infection and inability to treat the wounds. In the massacre situations where the people were trapped against some natural feature the mortality rate must have been much higher and the number of escapees much lower.

p.159 mention of the murders by Frederick Taylor. (5)

p.159/160 on this and the following page is Pascoe's somewhat disjointed account of the Warrigal Creek Massacre which I have written about extensively in *Gippsland Massacres, Through Foreign Eyes* (Ngarak Press Ensay 1994) and *Our Founding Murdering Father* (The Author, 1988). Disappointingly none of these titles are in his bibliography although he does mention two of my later small publications. His brief account is based mainly on a mixture of Dunderdale and Gippslander and has a number of problems and a few errors. Pascoe has the 'Highland Brigade' (Gippslander) led by Macalister (Dunderdale) and McMillan (Gippslander). This has been dealt with quite recently in McMillan descendant Cal Flynn's *Thicker than Water* (Harper Collins, Sydney, 2016) where she definitely placed her antecedent at the head of the 'Highland Brigade'. This was criticised in turn in a review by Dr Peter Crowley (6) and I have also had my two bobs worth. (7) However in *Our Founding Murdering Father* (p.41) I state quite clearly that it is not certain who led the brigade and quite possibly it could have been either. I previously have not been able to establish residency for Lachlan Macalister in Gippsland earlier than 1847, and as the massacre occurred in 1843 there must remain some doubt, as to whether he was the Macalister involved. Recent research

of evidence of Lachlan Macalister's presence in Gippsland much earlier than this has been done by Dr Peter Crowley. (8) Aside from the Macalister who was murdered – Ronald not Donald – there were other relations in Gippsland at the time including Thomas Macalister. It is almost certain that McMillan was a participant in the massacre if not the leader. Pascoe also opts for Gammon Creek (Dunderdale) rather than Warrigal Creek (Gippslander) and has the location of Gammon Creek somewhere northwest of Stratford whereas it is a small creek between Warrigal Creek and Woodside in South Gippsland. I have a detailed account of Dunderdale's work here and note that he had a penchant for changing both individual's names, place names and dates. (9)

2. Robinson's Notebooks Revisited

As with my work on Pascoe's *The Convincing Ground* (above) I revisited George Augustus Robinson's notebooks searching for a few words on the Native Police, the station at Narre Warren, and perhaps even a mention of Bungeleen. Unlike my wading through the very difficult to read notebooks on microfilm many years ago I now borrowed the printed volumes transcribed by Ian C. Clark making life a whole lot easier. (10) Also unlike my previous work of concentrating on Gippsland material I read all five volumes from start to finish as Robinson's visit to Gippsland occurred in 1844 whilst the Protectorate and/or the Native Police were located at Narre Warren from 1842 to 1852. However the fourth volume partly dealing with Robinson's Gippsland journey again grabbed my attention.

A number of pieces of information were excluded or omitted from my original work on Robinson (11) which I now consider of some importance such as his note on Frederick Taylor: "Taylor of native notoriety Portland District is squatting with Lufnon (Loughnan), a bad character..." Robinson noted two of Taylor's men had been killed by natives (12) and despite Taylor's reputation managed to stay at the Lindenow station on his way through.

But of equal if not greater importance are his notes on early European fatalities as a result of Aboriginal retaliation and in particular the murder of Ronald Macalister. He wrote that: "Reginald McAllister was the gentleman killed by natives: they are supposed to have killed him with sticks; there was no spear wounds no person saw it done or saw natives; hence there is no direct proof." (13) This compares with other more remote and exaggerated reports of his being 'butchered' and his 'kidney fat removed'. (14) It may be that the revenge killings that followed on from Macalister's death at Warrigal Creek and other places were part of a double tragedy that these atrocities were carried out in the mistaken belief that he had been killed by the Kurnai, when he could just as easily had a fall from his horse.

Robinson notes that Gippsland's early settlers were quick to lay the blame on the Kurnai for other possible fatalities. He noted: "It was not certain the blacks killed Mr Townsends man, he was silly and it is thought he lost himself." (15) and again "An old man belonging to Taylor's... lost himself and was away three days but afterwards made the hut uninjured. A report however was set on foot that the blacks had killed him." (16)

Robinson made a tally of Europeans killed by Kurnai prior to his visit. They included Mr Townsend's shepherd about whose disappearance there is also no proof, the two shepherds on Taylor and Loughnan's Lindenow, squatter Curlewis's shepherd Clutterbuck, Macalister and two others not specifically identified, giving a total number of between five and seven.

3. A Visit to Warrigal Creek (May 2017)

My third (or fourth) visit to Warrigal Creek occurred recently. On previous occasions I had walked from the Darriman road to the waterhole and so been on the north side whereas the massacre is presumed to have been at the bend in the waterhole on the south side. I was the guest of station owner Libby Balderstone and there to be interviewed and filmed by a Swinburne University School of Journalism Student Film Unit on the massacre.

Nearly twelve months ago Dr Andrew Dodd published a review by Dr Peter Crowley of Cal Flynn's *Thicker than Water* in the online journal [Inside Story](#). In it Crowley described some of my work as 'tendentious'. Perhaps if my name had not been mentioned and the review online not been read or sent to me by a friend this trip and participation in the film may not have happened. This in turn prompted me to write a reply to Crowley whom I described as 'an exceptionally well informed medical practitioner of Gippsland origins' and it directly led to two other short essays on matters he raised. The criticism of my work generated some introspection and careful re-examination and turned out, with the consequent publication of these essays on my website, to be quite productive. I also engaged in an email correspondence with Crowley over various matters in which we were both interested in particular the probable but largely undocumented role of Frederick Taylor in the Gippsland 'black war'.

On the Thursday evening I met Andrew and his team of students at the McMillan monument in Howitt Park Bairnsdale where we filmed for about 10 minutes before the sun set. I had previously been filmed at the same location and on the same subject by an SBS News team earlier in the year. I expressed some doubts about going to Warrigal Creek the following Sunday and Andrew impressed upon me that he wanted me to attend. So early on the Sunday with my wife as chauffeur we went to Warrigal Creek. There we met Andrew and his students again, and also Peter Crowley who was acting as historical adviser to the production. Most of the material I knew off by heart so for the most part there were no problems with the interview and the filming. A drone had also been used for aerial shots of the waterhole and the filming was done on the most likely site of the massacre. I noted environmental changes in the vegetation and, ad-libbing, suggested a sturdy messmate I was standing beside was probably a witness to the massacre.

Libby Balderstone whom I had met on two occasions previously then drove us to Red Hill where the bones from the massacre are thought to have been deposited. Here during the interview Peter Crowley noticed that I had mixed my sources attributing the statement

‘cartloads of bones’ to Henry Meyrick instead of Buntine’s brother-in-law. As the team had already filmed much of this primary evidence in the State Library this error had to be corrected and reshot.

Finally we visited the Ninety Mile beach near the entrance to Jack Smith Lake where Andrew launched the drone for some more filming. It was at this location that a further bone find was made about or just before the start of World War 1. As with Red Hill, and even the massacre site at Warrigal Creek itself, we were in the general vicinity. With a cuppa and cake for sustenance we then said our goodbyes and headed home.

4. Warrigal Creek Sites and Sea Level Rise

In a footnote to my Bones of the Warrigal Creek Massacre essay (17) I speculated that sea level rise induced by global warming may threaten these sites. I then wrote:

“One such threat is a possible sea-level rise caused by global warming. Recent estimates indicate that there is a slight probability that an abrupt or rapid melting of the Greenland (and/or the West Antarctic) ice shelf could occur, raising sea-levels by as much as five metres as early as 2100. Such an event would almost certainly completely destroy and engulf the Red Hill site, and possibly even affect the Warrigal Creek site. Even a 1m rise may well affect this site which is well within current (2008) estimates of sea level rises by 2100. Pers. comm. from A. Barrie Pittock. For more details see Pittock, A. Barrie. *Climate Change: Turning Up the Heat*, CSIRO Publ. Melbourne 2005. Discussing 'abrupt' change and 'uncertainty' on p.212 Pittock noted: "past large-scale climate changes, especially abrupt ones, occurred when some natural change in external forcing was driving gradual climate change, and the climate system hit a threshold where abrupt change occurs. Right now, humans are providing a driving force that is producing gradual, if rather rapid, climate change. This is making it far more likely that the climate system will hit a threshold where abrupt change occurs."

Current estimates of maximum sea level rise by the year 2100 are 2.7 metres. (18) This is for the worst case scenario. The abrupt change considered in the note is all but ruled out over this short time span of eighty years. The image provided below gives an idea of the land inundated with just .74 metre rise at high tide which is well within current predictions and a more than likely occurrence. In this scenario the water approaches the Warrigal Creek homestead. The homestead is located in the centre of the image south of the Darriman Giffard Rd and immediately south of a cropped paddock which ends at the distinctive inverted ‘V’ shaped waterhole. It is of note that images such as these are measuring only the vertical movement of water and make no allowances for coastal retreat. According to Bruun’s rule the coast will retreat 50 to 100 times for each unit rise. Under these circumstances Red Hill will certainly be engulfed and disappear, possibly much earlier than 2100 if the more dire predictions of sea level rise are correct.



Source: <http://coastalrisk.com.au/viewer> accessed 29.5.17. Blue = high tide + .74m

5. The Journals of William Thomas Revisited (July 2017)

In the early 1980s I spent some days in the Mitchell Library in Sydney reading the journals and other papers of the Assistant Aboriginal Protector William Thomas. This research was for an essay on Thomas which later became a chapter in my *Through Foreign Eyes*. Now seeking material on the Native Police I have read them again – this time using the published transcripts of Marguerita Stephens, a wonderful resource. (19) Mostly, aside from a few bits and pieces I either missed or chose to ignore, my conclusions after reading of the Journals again remain unchanged.

One aspect the journals highlighted has been how I have mixed the sources of Henry Meyrick and Hatcher on the question of ‘cartloads’ and ‘packs’ of bones that were supposed to have been transported the short distance from Warrigal Creek to Red Hill. I made this error recently on my last visit to Warrigal Creek which was pointed out to me by Dr Peter Crowley (see above). In my paper *Warrigal Creek Revisited* (20) which I did some years ago I say that the bones were gathered up “by the wagonload” the source for which I cannot locate. This may have been either a confusion of the Thomas sources or from folk history.

Meyrick on his visit to Thomas mentioned “human skeletons & pack(s) of bones” whilst Hatcher stated “a cartload of Blks bones might be gathered up.” (21) Neither source explicitly stated that cartloads of bones were gathered up. For that there is only circumstantial and folk evidence. The circumstantial evidence being that the bones had to be gathered up and hidden before the visit of Chief Protector GA Robinson in 1844 and the folk history that Red Hill was either a massacre site or the repository of bones from Warrigal Creek.

Thomas clearly understood that the work of the Native Police and the Aboriginal Protectorate were opposed. He noted that there those “... who are to awe the Blacks into submission by force of arms are...being augmented in great ration, whilst those whose duty it is to act as Mediators & to prepare the savage for the new kindred among them is disbanded.” (22) On 13 June 1844 he noted that the “Blks very cruel to strangers hence native Police without Moral culture [are] a dangerous body.” (23) There certainly was no love lost between Commandant Henry Dana and Thomas and a direct confrontation occurred between them on 3 January 1844. (24) Thomas made a formal complaint to La Trobe on this matter and it is possible that he was forced to censor an account of this from his reports. (25)

On 19 August 1845 Thomas wrote of the dismissal of Sgt Bennett from the Native Police and that he was treated “shamefully” by Henry Dana. Bennett had given evidence in a case supporting Thomas in one of his many roles as translator and defender of native prisoners in the courts. Thomas was forever short of defence witnesses and in this case he noted that Bennett: “after giving evidence in the case of Ningollobin, he was swore at [by Henry Dana] as ever coming forward as a fool & asked why he did not let the fellow be hung.” (26) Bennett claimed he was censured by Dana for “not Killing the Blacks” and added “but you do not know Sir, what I have to contend with from Mr Dana.” (27) The point of all this is that it from Thomas’ perspective it highlights the violent nature of the Native Police who were regularly in Gippsland from 1845 and who featured prominently in the hunts for the white woman where they were accused of using indiscriminate violence on several occasions.

Another aspect that I may have underestimated is the Aboriginal participation in the black wars although I did highlight their role in the hunts for the white woman. On 16 August 1850 Angus McMillan (called “Mr. McMullen” by Thomas) gave Thomas an account of Aboriginals, presumably from outside Gippsland, being given guns to kill the Kurnai. (28) Meyrick also noted: “the Maneiro Blks...had been very instrumental with the Black Police of awfully thinning their numbers.” (29)

In *Through Foreign Eyes* I note that though Thomas is a “minor figure in Gippsland history” his journal entries confirm specific evidence of the Warrigal Creek massacre, the general evidence of the black war and the violent nature of the Native Police. On this conflict in which he was powerless to act or prevent Thomas generalised: “... your Petitioner fears that many have fallen by the hand of settlers the number will never be known until all hidden things are manifest.” (30)

End Notes

1. See my Myth of Tribal Warfare <http://petergardner.info/publications/myth-of-tribal-warfare/>
2. Gardner, P.D. *Gippsland Massacres*, Ngarak Press, Ensay, 1993, pp.108-111
3. See my recent Firearms and Massacre Statistics in Frontier Gippsland <http://petergardner.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Firearms-and-Frontier-Gippsland.pdf>
4. Gardner, P.D. *Names of East Gippsland* Ngarak Press Ensay 1992 p.29
5. See my Hollands Landing Massacre for more detail of his activities in Gippsland. <http://petergardner.info/publications/hollands-landing-massacrerev-edpdf/>
6. <http://insidestory.org.au/is-this-such-a-man>
7. <http://petergardner.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Notes-on-a-McMillan-Review.pdf>
8. www.gippslandstory.com
9. <http://petergardner.info/publications/george-dunderdale-and-the-kurnai/>
10. Clark, Ian D. (ed) *The Journals of George Augustus Robinson...* (5 Vols.) Heritage Matters, Melbourne, 1998
11. See my Through Foreign Eyes Chapter 4
12. Clark, Ian D. (ed) *The Journals of George Augustus Robinson...* vol. 4 p.72
13. Ibid p.88
14. Gardner, P.D. *Gippsland Massacres* p.55
15. Clark, Ian D. (ed) *The Journals of George Augustus Robinson...* vol. 4 p.92
16. Ibid p.99
17. http://petergardner.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Warrigal-Ck-Revisited.rev_ed_.pdf.pdf
18. Article in the Melbourne Age Accessed 29.5.17 <http://www.theage.com.au/environment/climate-change/the-great-unknown-new-climate-change-data-lifts-the-sealevel-threat-20170522-gwa963.html>
19. Stephens, Marguerita. *The Journals of William Thomas*, 4 Vols., Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages, Melbourne, 2014. Note that I read only the first 2 volumes covering the period 1839-1853
20. http://petergardner.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Warrigal-Ck-Revisited.rev_ed_.pdf.pdf
21. Stephens, Marguerita. *The Journals of William Thomas*, Vol. 2, p.102 when Thomas spoke to Hatcher on 20.4.1845 and p.220 when Meyrick visited on 22.1.1847
22. Ibid p.12
23. Ibid p.20
24. Ibid p.1
25. Ibid p.75
26. Ibid p.123
27. Ibid
28. Ibid p.453
29. Gardner, P.D. Through Foreign Eyes, Ngarak Press, Ensay, 1994 p.52
30. Stephens, Marguerita. *The Journals of William Thomas*, Vol. 2 p.12