

Historical Happenings



Casterton Community Museum



NEXT MEETING:
Wed. 20th May at 2.30pm at the
Visitor Information Centre.

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April: Old Cemetery board unveiling by
Dawn Anson and Marge Rees



KONONGWOOTONG GUNDIDJ CLAN OF JARDWADJALI COUNTRY

Extract is taken from Ian D. Clark, Scars in the Landscape: A register of Massacre Sites in Western Victoria, 1803 – 1859, (P 145 - 152)

Fighting Hill Massacre

The Whyte brothers, William, George, Pringle, James and John arrived in Port Phillip in 1837 and took up land near the Pentland Hills. In 1838 they travelled west and took up country about the Wannon River. They occupied Konongwootong station on Koroit Creek, 6.5 kilometres north of Coleraine, in February 1840.

This massacre was the first of two inflicted on the Konongwootong gundidj clan by the Whyte brothers. Despite the fact that Assistant Protector CW Sievwright had investigated this massacre, and one of the Whytes had personally informed the government of its occurrence, no action was taken. In 1843, a European named Bassett, who lived on Whyte's station, was killed in revenge for these massacres. This slaughter occurred at the Hummocks near Wando Vale, and became known as Fighting Hills. The Hummocks is a unique rocky outcrop dissected by the narrow gorge of the Wando River, and is estimated to be about 150 million years old. Ironically, in 1849 a stone police station and courthouse was erected at the Hummocks, replacing an earlier wooden structure. About this time, the Hummocks is believed to have been surveyed as a site for a township, however settlement did not proceed.

On 8 March 1840, the Whyte brothers hunted down the Konongwootong gundidj, some of whom had made off with 127 sheep. In the ensuing clash, the Whytes admitted killing between 20 and 30 Aborigines, although one of their men deposed before Sievwright that 'between thirty and forty men, exclusive of women and children were shot dead, only one escaping out of the whole tribe'. 'Lanky Bill', the sole survivor, was himself killed the following month by George MacNamara, one of Francis Henty's hut keepers at Merino Downs, on the Wannon River, near Henty. The numbers killed were far too great to dismiss this massacre by referring it to the local magistrate.

On 3 April 1840, La Trobe notified Edward Deas Thomson, the Colonial Secretary in New South Wales, of various conflicts between Europeans and Aborigines in the Western District. In this report he referred to the 'Fighting Hills' massacre as 'a most serious affray'. James Croke, the Crown Prosecutor, subsequently examined the depositions collected by Sievwright in correspondence dated 17 June 1840, and reported that according to depositions of Daniel Turner, William Gillespie and Benjamin Wardle, convict servants of the Whytes, that the 'blacks' appeared to have been the aggressors. The Aborigines had stolen sheep and had made their



Old Cemetery

KENT'S CORNER:

Copies available at the VIC of Volume 2: **Roamin' Round the Town** the Visitor Information Centre: cost **\$25.**

Henty Street /Tyers Street corner /McKinlays Glenelg Inn 1873



Henty Street - 1890s

own enclosure and were busy skinning and cooking the sheep when they were found by the Europeans. William Whyte admitted he killed two Aborigines, but not before a spear had been thrown at him, and John Whyte stated that no less than 200 spears were thrown and not less than 30 Aborigines were killed. In his 1841 journal, George Robinson discussed the attitudes of settlers in the Portland Bay area, and the actions of the Whyte brothers need to be seen in this context. The settlers at the Bay spoke of the settlers up the country dropping the natives as coolly as if they were speaking of dropping cows. Indeed, the doctrine is being promulgated that they are not human, or hardly so and thereby inculcating the principle that killing them is no murder.

Mr Pilleau said the settlers encourage their men to shoot the natives because, thereby, they would the sooner get rid of them. And he himself seemed inclined to the doctrine. He said, and others have said — and said it to me — that there would never be peace until they was extirpated. He admitted they were badly treated and that for every white man killed 20 blacks were shot. He said that after Gibson's shepherd was killed a number of them were shot. He said they did not kill them when there were many together, lest they should be known, but singly. He said it could not but be expected that the natives would retaliate.

I said that the parties who killed natives in the way he had described did it at their peril and if an accomplice gave evidence against them they would be hanged as sure as they had a neck. He said it was hard for settlers to have their sheep taken. I said the law in the case of sheep stealing did not require a life. But the squatters keep on shooting the blacks even under such circumstances were guilty of murder. (Robinson journals 1839–49, 27 May 1841) John G Robertson, who settled on the Wannon River at Wando Vale station in 1840, wrote to La Trobe on 26 September 1853. In his letter he mentioned the massacre at Fighting Hills. Three days after the Whytes arrived, the natives of this creek [Wando River], with some others, made up a plan to rob the new comers, as they had done the Messrs Henty before.

They watched an opportunity, and cut off 50 sheep from Whyte Brothers' flocks, which were soon missed, and the natives followed; they had taken shelter in an open plain with a long clump of tea-tree, which the Whyte Brothers' party, seven in number, surrounded, and shot them all but one. Fifty-one men were killed, and the bones of the men and sheep lay mingled together bleaching in the sun at the Fighting Hills. It must have been a great relief to me and most of this part, for the females were mostly chased by men up the Glenelg, and the children followed them. This I learnt since from themselves. (Robertson, 26 September 1853, in Bride 1983)

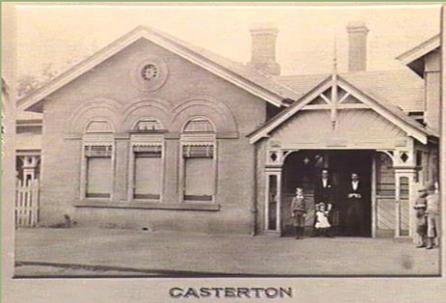
On 6 July 1860, the Gippsland Guardian (in Gardner 1983) published the following account of this massacre under the heading **Shooting Blackfellows**. The anonymous author was presumably either Turner, Wardle, or Gillespie. The names of the squatters are fictitious, however the 'Parks' are pseudonyms for the Whyte brothers.

'Why' said one of them, the elder of the two, 'I can remember when they used to shoot down the blacks in this colony as you would do kangaroos, all because they sometimes killed a few sheep. I remember down in the Port District, when the four Parks and three other men, I was one of them, shot sixty-nine in one afternoon. The devils had stolen about 100 sheep and driven them away to the ranges. When they got them there they broke their legs to prevent them escaping, and were killing them and eating them at their leisure.'



Casterton Community Museum

post office 1897



**Casterton Historical Society
50th Anniversary, 2014**

In 2014 CDHS celebrated fifty years

CDHS is located at the
**Casterton Visitor
Information Centre**
e-mail: castertonhistorical@hotmail.com

PO Box 48, Casterton 3311
Phone: 5580 2070



To visit the Casterton
Community Museum: call David
Coventry on 5581 2475 or email
davidcoventry@yahoo.com.au



To contribute to this newsletter,
please contact Ros at the Visitor
Information Centre on 5581 2070
e-mail: roscov48@bigpond.com
H tel 5581 2875

We all mounted horses, and armed with rifles set off in hot pursuit. It was early morning when we started, and about the middle of the day we came up with the black rascals, and a rare chase we had of it. They set off like mad, about one hundred and fifty of them, never showing fight in the least. The ranges were so rocky that we had to dismount and follow them on foot, and after two or three hours chase we got them beautiful — right between a crossfire, a steep rock on one side they could not climb, and rifles on each of the other.

Well, we peppered them pretty, they stood up firm and stiff to be shot and we dropped them one by one. We were expecting to cook the lot of them, when Mr George fired a shot too high and sent a bullet through one of his brothers face. We all knocked off firing and ran to him. In an instant the blacks were off, and we were too much engaged over Tom Park to think of following them. We counted sixty-nine victims, including some half a dozen or so that were not quite dead, but these we put out of their misery with the butt-end.

The blacks carried off a few wounded ones but as we fired at the body we pretty well spoilt all them as we hit. My word! but they were rascals among the sheep in them days, they aint so bad now; a few goes like that soon thin'd em. Why they even killed a shepherd on Tompkins station only because he wanted one of their lubras; but the two Tompkins were even with them for that matter, for they shot down every blackfellow they met for three years after'.

On 14 April 1840, Assistant Protector CW Sievwright reported the death of 'Lanky Bill', the sole survivor, shot by George MacNamara. '**Fighting Waterholes:** this massacre was the second inflicted on the Konongwootong gundidj clan by the Whyte brothers in the first two months of their occupation of Konongwootong station, which began in February 1840. On 1 April, this second massacre occurred at some waterholes on Denhills Creek, which later became the Konongwootong Reservoir.



Map of Victorian Aborigines language territories

CDHS WEBSITE: we are the Web, visit us at
<http://www.swvic.org/castertonhistoricalsociety.htm>