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Cultural Conflict in Text and Materiality: The Impact of Words and Lead on the Northwest Queensland Colonial Frontier

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Abstract

The “Frontier Wars” in Australia were a series of conflicts carried out at different times and places by various military and civilian actors between 1788 and c1938. One of the principal agents in this violence in the colony of Queensland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was the paramilitary Native Mounted Police (NMP), who were tasked with protecting settlers from Aboriginal resistance. This paper examines written and oral accounts of frontier conflict between settlers, Aboriginal people and the NMP in northwest Queensland and places them into the context of the archaeological evidence from an NMP camp site. It thus emphasises the different types of stories that arise from different sources of historical knowledge and how oral histories transformed into print interact with oral histories of subaltern peoples. Investigation of the archaeology of related sites suggests that they refer to events at a quite different scale.

Keywords

Native Mounted Police, frontier violence, historical archaeology, colonial Australia, oral history

Introduction

Conflict was endemic to the expansion of European powers into New Worlds from the 15th century onwards, as Western systems of exploitation clashed with the presence and needs of Indigenous societies (see, for example Haecker 2019; Wolfe 2006). In Australia these upheavals are known collectively as the “Frontier Wars” (Attwood 2011; Connor 2005; Foster and Nettelbeck 2012)—in reality a series of conflicts carried out across the continent at various scales by British colonial forces, police and colonists from 1788–c1938. Such conflict was internal to both the geography of Australian colonies and the perceptions of the conquerors, but was external in that it involved violence between colonists and Indigenous peoples who had (and have) not ceded sovereignty. In its ubiquity, this violence centralised conflict as a core component of both the Aboriginal and colonist frontier experience (Connor 2005:xii).

Unequally directed against Aboriginal peoples, the Frontier Wars deployed violence in many forms, including killing, kidnapping, rape, enforced removal and domination through labour and other racially asymmetrical relations. Non-Aboriginal Australia generally knows of these conflicts through written records produced by non-Aboriginal people, more often based on imperfect memories than on contemporary eye-witness accounts. Despite their inherent flaws, such written sources have inevitably emerged through time as the authoritative accounts, and serve to promulgate a version of events that places the victors in a sympathetic light. But there are other sources of historical knowledge that often challenge the dominant narrative, particularly the oral histories held by Aboriginal communities, and archaeology. Oral histories are unlikely to be precise about chronology, become more generalised over longer durations, and are prone to processes of mythologising (Curthoys 2003; Morphy and Morphy 1984). At the same time they can be highly accurate for high emotion events, position people in relation to present day concerns, and are continuously reconsolidated through storytelling (Moshenska 2010; Thomson 2011:85–90). As two alternative forms of “cultural construction through history” (Hill 2015:139) we are particularly concerned here with the power relations created through orality and writing in

colonial contexts. The archaeology results from similar processes, and tells a different but complementary story, without emotion, and generally without evidence about individuals.

In this paper we look at one particular source of frontier conflict in Australia: the Native Mounted Police (NMP). While Native Police forces existed in other colonies, in the northern colony of Queensland the NMP became an entrenched mechanism for frontier violence that lasted for more than half a century (1849–1904). Part of a broader pattern across the colonial footprint of employing Indigenous forces against other Indigenous peoples, the NMP were a key means by which the civilian state expanded its power into contested territory (Nettelbeck and Ryan 2018). Consisting of detachments of Aboriginal troopers drawn from already subjugated parts of the continent and under the command of white officers, the NMP was tasked with protecting civilians, the land they lived on and their livelihoods from Aboriginal resistance (Richards 2008). Falling under the bureaucratic jurisdiction of the civilian police from 1864, the extent of their violence remains unacknowledged due to the prevailing use of euphemistic language (Foster 2009), the deliberate brevity with which they reported their activities and sizeable gaps in the archival record. Consequently, we sought alternative forms of knowledge about the activities and nature of the NMP through archaeology and oral history.

We focus here on a particular event that took place in the late 1870s, the time of the earliest European settlement of western Queensland (Figure 1), as pieced together from various sources.: four stockmen looking after cattle were killed by Aboriginal people and, in retaliation, many Aboriginal people were killed by settlers and the NMP. In exploring the multiple forms of historical knowledge relating to these events we take the various accounts and place them into the context of archaeological evidence for the NMP. Part of our purpose is to emphasise the different types of stories that arise from different classes of evidence, but also to explore how this variation exaggerates cultural differences about the nature of conflicts between people from different cultures. In

conceptualising the interactions between different sorts of historical knowledge, Plato (Phaedrus, 275) lamented that writing would “produce forgetfulness” and was “an elixir ... of reminding” rather than memory; our core argument here is that there are many sources of forgetfulness (such as fossilisation through the printed word) and of reminding (through the material record revealed by archaeology).

[[Figure 1: Places mentioned in the text]]

The NMP in northwest Queensland

European exploration parties began passing through northwest Queensland in the early 1860s, but it was not until pastoral ‘runs’ (stations) were taken up that persistent settlement commenced. The first runs on the Burke River and its tributaries were taken up in 1877 and 1878—Goodwood by William Paterson; Buckingham Downs by Alexander Kennedy and Robert Currie; and a run that later became known as Stanbrook by Roger Sheaffe. If, as Davidson et al. (2018) have proposed, knowledge of earlier killings had spread from elsewhere, Aboriginal peoples of the region may well have been forewarned of the dangers they were about to face.

At the time the nearest NMP were located over 350 km away to the east on the Diamantina River (*Queenslander* 8 December 1877:13), but by November 1878 Sub-Inspector Ernest Eglinton had been ordered to proceed west with his detachment to form a new camp on the Burke River (*Queenslander* 28 January 1879:70). Eglinton established his camp beside a large waterhole on Goodwood station in an area known locally as Mucklandama. The waterhole and the wider region were inhabited by several Aboriginal language groups (Horton 1994; Tindale 1974), including Yalarrnga¹ and Pitta Pitta (see Figure 1). In December 1878 the NMP had been resident on the Burke River for perhaps six weeks when a Russian named Bernard Molvo arrived at Wonomo waterhole on Sulieman

¹ Modern spellings for this group vary, and include Yulluna, Jalanga and Yalarrnga.

Creek in charge of a herd of cattle (Figure 2). Sometime between 12 and 21 January 1879 Molvo and his three male workers were killed by Aboriginal people and their goods either taken or destroyed. This was the first recorded instance of violence in the area and the incident was reported widely in the newspapers at the time and later. The NMP retained a presence at the Burke River camp until 1886, when the detachment was transferred to Toby's Creek, a new camp to the northwest.

[[Figure 2: Wonomo waterhole]]

The Wonomo massacre

Hudson Fysh and Alexander Kennedy's version

The most widely disseminated version of this event was not recorded until five decades later, when it was told multiple times by pastoralist Alexander Kennedy, whose camp was also located on Sulieman Creek about 16 miles (26.5km) from Wonomo. Kennedy was interviewed for his reminiscences in various newspapers beginning in 1920, and in 1933 Hudson Fysh, a close friend of Kennedy's, codified Kennedy's account in a formal biography. Fysh's rendering most likely derived from an oral history recounted by Kennedy himself, though the latter was not present at the time of the Wonomo deaths. Many of the details he reported can therefore only have been communicated to Kennedy by others.

According to Fysh, news of the Wonomo massacre came to Kennedy "like a bolt from the blue", though the note of warning in his account suggests some degree of wariness already existed amongst the Europeans:

No one will ever know exactly how the massacre occurred, but the most likely story is that the black boy from the Boulia district, who had guided the party proved a disturbing element, and excited the numerous members of the Kalkadoon tribe camped in the vicinity with tales of the white men's possessions and of the superiority of beef over kangaroo and lizard.

Kennedy had warned Molvo of the danger involved in allowing the native tribesmen into his camp, a danger that he himself always avoided, but Molvo did not share the same views on the handling of the native problem. The party let the blacks into their camp and friendly relations seemed firmly established, but the desire to possess the belongings of the party was too strong. One hot evening, when the four whites went down to the clear cool water of the lagoon for their evening bath the sheltering trees and undergrowth round the banks were lined with hidden warriors armed with spears and nulla-nullas. The white settlers were attacked either while in the water or when about to enter it, and their mutilated bodies were left floating there. (Fysh 1961:94)

It is possible that Kennedy's sensibilities were heightened because of previous events and experience elsewhere. He had previously managed stations in central Queensland in 1861 (Fysh 1961:11, 25–26), only four years after the widely known Hornet Bank massacre of 1857, when 11 members of the Fraser family were killed by Aboriginal people and widespread retaliation by settlers and the NMP followed (Reid 1982).

Reprisal killings after the Wonomo deaths took place in several stages: some soon after the murders, some slightly later when Eglinton arrived with the NMP, and others later still when Kennedy returned and, together with Eglinton and the NMP, killed another group in 'the hills':

The ghastly murders were avenged and the tribe scattered, but the settlers in the district did not feel really secure after this evidence of native hostility and kept constantly on the watch. Direct action or evacuation seemed the only two courses, and in the history of conquest the world over, the stronger measure has usually won. (Fysh 1961:97)

Accounts by other participants

Various newspapers were swift to publish accounts of the event by several anonymous local sources (*Brisbane Courier* 5 March 1879:3) and by William

Paterson (*Morning Bulletin* 1 March 1879:3) only weeks after the event. Later retellings were provided in 1917 by Frederick Margetts, Kennedy's manager who was resident on Buckingham Downs at the time of the killings (*Townsville Daily Bulletin* 29 June 1917:2), in 1921 by Ernest Eglinton (*Queenslander* 8 January 1921:11), in 1931 by Kennedy's wife Marion (*Townsville Daily Bulletin* 27 January 1931:4), and in 1948 by Kennedy's son, Jack (*Townsville Daily Bulletin* 16 August 1948:5). Like Margetts, Marion Kennedy and her sister Euphemia Currie and their children were present on Buckingham Downs at the time of the attack. It is possible to reconstruct another version of most of the event from these sources. It is also likely that Kennedy himself was aware of many of these accounts by the time he dictated his memoir to Fysh.

Since there were no survivors from Molvo's party, the details of the initial attack can only have derived from the reports of the first visitors to the scene: a party of 'neighbours' (including Margetts and Paterson), who had gone to the waterhole on 22 January to bury the bodies in a communal grave (*Townsville Daily Bulletin* 29 June 1917:2; *Townsville Daily Bulletin* 16 August 1948:5). These neighbours then tried to follow the Aboriginal party but without success, heavy rain having obscured the tracks. In the process, however, several Aboriginal women were captured and questioned:

From what information that could be got from some of the gins [women], the way the outrage was accomplished was this:— Mr. Molvo and the men were engaged either at meals or bathing, and the blacks, at a signal from Mr. Molvo's own black boy, who, it appears, was the prime mover, rushed up between the men and the camp, thus cutting them off from their firearms, and then killed them with tomahawks and nulla-nullas, and threw the bodies into the waterhole. (*Brisbane Courier* 5 March 1879:3).

[[Figure 3: The grave of Molvo and party]]

The NMP were elsewhere on patrol at the time of the killings, but their return on 28 January heralded a more concerted pursuit of those who were considered to

be the murderers (*Brisbane Courier* 5 March 1879:3). According to Eglinton, Aboriginal people “fully seventy miles from the scene of the murders” then “learned something of the tireless persistence of the native police, and were disagreeably surprised when, one evening at sundown, while celebrating their victory by a corroboree, they received a visit from a detachment of the force” (*Queenslander* 8 January 1921:11). Although Eglinton provided no details of precisely what happened, Jack Kennedy’s account implies that mainly men were killed, since at Buckingham Downs about a week later,

... a gin came to the door and said a big mob of blacks were approaching. It turned out they were the gins and picaninnies [children] left after the “clean up” by Eglinton. They were footsore and hungry and were supplied with tucker (*Townsville Daily Bulletin* 16 August 1948:5).

The oral version

Contemporary oral histories relating to Wonomo and the Burke River NMP were recorded in 2018 and 2019 with Yalarrnga man Lance Sullivan. Lance obtained his knowledge from his uncles, Tom and Clem Sullivan, both of whom were taught by their father, Willie Eglinton, as they lived and worked on cattle stations around the region. Willie was taught by his mother’s brother, Momas, who was present at Wonomo during the initial attack. Willie’s father was Ernest Eglinton, the NMP officer, and his mother, Ruby, was a Yalarrnga woman who survived the reprisal killings.

According to Lance, the Wonomo waterhole is the beginning of a ‘songline’ (a sung narrative tracing the journey of an ancestral being, sometimes called a Dreaming track) for the yellowbelly fish, who then travelled south to the junction of the Burke and Wills Rivers near Mucklandama. The deaths of Molvo and his men were not random, but occasioned by their interruption of a ceremony at the waterhole:

When the settlers first came in the Wonomo, they seen all the old people corroboreeing there, initiation time ... they fired shots at the old people and told them to go away from there. This was a serious offence ... So

some of the men went to the banks of the river ... and they waited until Molvo went in first, the other three men followed him behind. ... Molvo ... was swimming around and bathing ... the other men [were] near the bank ... but then they went in a bit further and that's when the men decided to spear them. (Lance Sullivan interview 30 April 2019)

Having killed Molvo and his men the Yalarrnga decided to make a stronger statement by attacking other pastoral runs:

Some of the men said ... "while we all have the numbers, let's send word to the other camps and let's all hit Buckingham, get rid of them one time," because that old Kennedy was at the time riding around the station shooting any Aboriginal that he saw on his property. ... He went right up ... Kennedy rode right up into ... today where Monument and all that areas, he used to ride around there shooting them too.

[So] they ... were running towards the station, gathering other groups of men on the way, word was spreading, so all the men started collecting. And they ran across one of the stockmen, Aboriginal stockman, who was coming back [and] they speared him through the thigh. ... But he survived, and another spear went over his shoulder. He rode back, galloped back to Buckingham and he told them that the Aboriginals were coming.

So the Yalarrnga men, they had some of them Waluwarra people with them [and] they went back to the station. First they tried to sneak up on them, but because they were warned, Kennedy and them all were waiting and fired them with rifles and they started shooting them as the men were sneaking up. They waited until they got very close and they started shooting them. And then some of the [Aboriginal] men tried to rush for the door ... but they were shot. ... They tried to make a head-on rush, they tried it maybe three or four times but every time they were driven back.

Of the textual versions, only Marion Kennedy's reminiscences refer to a further attack on the Stanbrook run that was averted because of a warning from a non-local Aboriginal stockman. The result was that: "After mustering their cattle to a camp [the men] waited in ambush till the blacks approached. and then surprised them with a fusillade of gunfire, which gave them a great scare" (*Townsville Daily Bulletin* 27 January 1931:4).

Subsequent reprisals by the NMP took place along Sulieman Creek and up into the hills in and around Monastery Creek to the northeast of Wonomo (Lance Sullivan interview, 8 August 2018). Lance named Alexander Kennedy as one of the main participants:

Kennedy went out with the troopers and they started shooting them all the way back to past Buckingham ... all the way back to Dajarra ... There was one place where they caught a big crew of the women and children and they shot them all up in the gully towards Monument today ... and the boundary of Sandringham and Chatsworth ... and Stanbrook. (Lance Sullivan interview 30 April 2019)

Survivors, including Lance's great-grandmother, were then taken back to the Burke River NMP camp, prompting the Yalarrnga to attack the camp in an attempt to free them:

... they [the NMP] kept the old people out on the open plains tied to them stockyards ... and they put two of them Waanyi² troopers around them ... the Yalarrnga men ... waited until Eglinton went in ... While they were waiting, the other Aboriginals ... [from] the Black Mountain side of the river to the east, heard what was going on and came over, and the two groups joined together. There were perhaps about ... 50 to 60 men ... They say that some of the old people who were there ... could hear the boomerangs flying at night ... and the spears flying through the air. (Lance Sullivan interview 30 April 2019)

² From the Gulf of Carpentaria

More NMP reprisals followed, culminating in the forced removal of Aboriginal people:

By then the troopers were aroused and they started firing at them and chasing them back across the creek. ... after that Eglinton ... went out and up the Mort River, Burke River ... and started shooting them along there. He drove 'em further back into the mountain. In them days old people would rush... towards Monument area ... Monastery Creek leads right up into ... a big waterhole up there and there's a big bora ground ... But the troopers found out about it, I don't know how, and they started rounding 'em up ... and took them down to ... Mount Merlin ... where they ... put them, like a reserve. (Lance Sullivan interview 30 April 2019)

The material record

The interpretive sign at the Burke River NMP camp

Today the site of the NMP camp is publicly accessible, clearly signposted, and includes an interpretive sign outlining a brief history of the site (Figure 4).

[[Figure 4: Sign at the Burke River NMP camp site]]

The source of the 1875 date for the beginning of the camp given on the interpretive sign is unknown, but it is not substantiated by any source, and the sign's other text does little to convey the complex and challenging history of the Burke River NMP. The sign is notably silent on the relationship between the NMP and local Aboriginal people, thereby giving the impression that the establishment of the camp was neither contentious nor violent. The short text makes no mention of the NMP's activities and the contiguity of the first two sentences elides the repercussions for Aboriginal people of having an NMP detachment commandeer a cultural place of such importance. The segue into general policing hides the NMP behind the regular (white) police, a shift symbolised in Eglinton's own career when he resigned from the NMP in 1883 to become the first Police

Magistrate in Boulia. Overall, the sign tells a tale of law and order that is respectful of other people's values.

The archaeology of the Burke River NMP camp

Beyond the waterhole itself, the most obvious features at the site today are two remnant stone structures, the larger of which measures ~11.5m x 5m (Building 1 on Figure 5) and the smaller ~4m square (Building 2 on Figure 5). The larger structure has at least one entrance indicated by an in situ stone threshold in the southwest end wall and an internal dividing wall separating the space into one smaller and one larger room. The smaller building only has evidence of a single internal space. A large concentration of artefacts (scatter 1 in GG4) extends to the north and east of these structures along the slope to the river (Figure 5). Furniture- and administration-related artefacts (including a docket pin, a key and a lock face) in this area could be associated with the use of Building 1 as a store/office, and possibly officer accommodation. This area has the greatest diversity of ceramic decorative types, including the only specialist vessel types (a fragment of cruet, a possible chamber pot) and the only teacup fragments.

Geophysical surveys followed by surface survey and excavations were conducted at the site in 2017, concentrating in and around six main areas (GG1–6 on Figure 5). Across several discrete concentrations of surface artefacts spread over more than 1ha, many of the artefacts (Figure 7; Table 1) fall within the date range for the NMP. Based on the relatively close spatial associations between conjoining NMP-era artefacts, these are assumed to derive from camp occupation. Material post-dating the NMP presence is also visible across the site, indicating ongoing use of the area and disturbance by visitors (Artym 2018).

[[Figure 5: Burke River NMP camp site plan]]

[[Figure 6: Stone structures at the Burke River NMP camp]]

[[Figure 7: Selection of artefacts from the Burke River NMP camp]]

[[Table 1: Summary of archaeological results]]

Geophysical survey southwest of the stone structures (GG2) identified linear subsurface features that were interpreted as three further probable structures (Structures A, B and C on Figure 5). Analysis of the spatial distribution of forms and types of nails at this location suggests the former presence of small, timber buildings. A possible sixth structure (Structure C on Figure 5) is indicated by a concentrated grouping of used structural cut nails within a dense surface scatter on the southern margin of the site (GG3).

In terms of artefacts, the highest frequency of buttons of various types (n=44), and a wide range of other objects, including flaked glass, transfer printed ceramics, buckles and nails were found in GG2. GG6 had the highest frequency of clay tobacco pipe fragments (n=57), including bowls, mouthpieces, stems and heels from multiple pipes. It also contained the highest frequency of NMP uniform buttons and the presence of small, well-used glass cores (n=5), bodies with bases (n=10) and debitage (n=6) suggests this was a locus of knapping activities, presumably by troopers and/or their wives. The close spatial association between the buttons and pipe fragments at GG6 perhaps signals purposeful button use for other activities, such as gaming. Lance Sullivan's oral history places the troopers' huts in this area (Lance Sullivan interview 30 April 2019), an observation that is borne out by the archaeology.

At the very western edge of the site (GG1) is a circular stone arrangement of probable Aboriginal origin. This has an overall diameter of ~8.5 m, with outer 'walls' 1.5 m wide, and a central inner circular area 2 m in diameter (Figure 7). There is a low density concentration of stone artefacts associated with this feature, but virtually no European-era artefacts indicating it probably pre-dated establishment of the NMP camp (Table 1).

The archaeology of the Burke River NMP camp suggests two things. First, the layout appears to be linear, extending away from the river on a NE-SW alignment, with officers and/or office functions closest to the waterhole and troopers

furthest away. The physical separation of officers from troopers suggests a delineation along racial and/or hierarchical lines, as does the officers' occupation of the more durable stone buildings closest to the water source. Other elements obscure this, however. Although Building 1 is certainly the largest, domestic space allocations in all structures are fairly equivalent, measuring 5m x 7m, including the smaller room in Building 1. Structures A–C, interpreted here as troopers' living quarters, are in fact larger than this, although it is possible that more than one trooper used these since the detachment was composed of ten troopers in its first year, falling to six and four between 1881 and 1885, and rising again to nine in 1886 (Artym 2018:47). Only two officers at any one time are known to have been stationed at Burke River.

Second, the quantities of artefacts such as clay pipes and match boxes—typically issued to individuals and needing to be replaced regularly—are less than expected given the known number of personnel (Artym 2018:173–175). Either much of this material has been selectively removed since the camp was abandoned (quite likely for collectible clay pipe bowls, match boxes or buttons) or relatively few people were regularly discarding material in camp. The latter may suggest a high mobility for the NMP, who were known to spend long periods on patrol.

Discussion

Historian Alan Atkinson (2002) argued that while history deals in material documents it nonetheless results from the spoken words of its actors. In the history of colonial expansions, the written word has been privileged over all other evidence. However, the value of that privilege depends on the accuracy of the translation of physical observations and oral accounts into written, material ones. Providing some balance about the history of interactions between colonisers and colonised requires acknowledging the impact of written Western knowledge systems that have been thought to have more value than the properly constituted knowledge of the colonised, particularly when they were not dependent on the written word. Written history has had a role in dominating the lives of groups with

strong oral histories, not because of the truth of the oral record made material by print, but because of the nature of the use and dissemination of written texts. This is part of the reason it is necessary to consider how these forms of historical knowledge occupy separate spaces.

This point is well made by contemplating how anyone could know about the deaths at Wonomo. The account in Fysh (1933) is the received wisdom. It was evidently written from an oral account given by Kennedy, who was not present at the earliest killings and not candid about the later killings in which he was the prime instigator. Despite these shortcomings, it has become the dominant narrative because the book in which it was recorded was highly regarded and because both Kennedy and Fysh became well known and prominent citizens. The oral history of the victors, in both Fysh's account and the newspapers, leaves the impression that the subaltern community has no memories of these traumatic events. There is, however, oral history available through the Aboriginal community. Furthermore, the Yalarrnga version has a genealogy that connects directly to an eye-witness, a relationship not present in many of the other accounts.

These two circuits of oral history operate at different scales of storytelling. The Fysh version is explicitly about what the author called *Taming the North*, with the subtext that Aboriginal life in the region was undomesticated and that its destruction was part of a larger Australian undertaking. Yalarrnga oral histories speak of the disruption to their well-ordered life before either side had committed violence against the other. On this account the original violence was not the simple presence of Europeans on Aboriginal country, but the specific disruption they caused to particular ceremonies. In the European account the source of the conflict is much more generalised and attributed to preconceived cunning and greed for European goods on the part of Aboriginal people. The first allows for shared space providing that the rules of specific places are not transgressed; the second denies this by presenting Aboriginal people as inimical to core values of the European way of life. European versions thus noticeably

tend to position colonists as blameless victims in order to invert responsibility and mask the violence of the Frontier Wars.

Atkinson (2002) also argued that texts become objects of veneration in themselves, as material objects that can be referred to many times—and, of course, printed texts can be referred to by many people. This is true of the Burke River NMP camp sign, which, though it communicates an inaccurate version of events stripped of almost all historical context, becomes the received version of the “truth” through its materiality in a public space. As a node of interpretation it offers a straightforward story of the camp that requires no engagement on the part of the viewer with the causes or consequences of frontier violence in any form.

The other key public vehicle for the history of Boulia—Kay Cohen’s (2001) *More than Surviving. The Boulia Story*—operates with a different, though no less obscurant logic. In relating the Wonomo story, Cohen claimed that:

An intensive campaign of punitive raids followed ... sparking in the process widespread public condemnation of the Native Mounted Police’s cruelty ... Less than a year after the Molvo ‘incident’, Eglinton’s unit was disbanded and others followed. Regular mounted police detachments gradually took over the responsibilities of the Native Mounted Police (Cohen 2001:19)

Apart from telescoping dates, this account neatly elides the shifting of the Burke River detachment in 1886 with wider, but unrelated, political movements in the 1880s that sought to expose the violence that underlay settlement (Evans 2008; Feilberg 1880). A gradual program of “disembodying” the NMP was begun in 1879 (Legislative Council of Queensland 1880:707) but was in no way connected with the removal of the Burke River NMP, who were simply transferred to a new area to repeat the process of subjugation elsewhere. This rewriting of the camp's closure allows the 21st century non-Indigenous community to acknowledge the existence of frontier violence yet also to deny its occurrence after 1880, at the same time claiming a central role in reforming the system that inflicted it.

Unfortunately this was never true and the violence of the NMP continued in other parts of Queensland for another two decades.

The other form of materiality—the archaeology—records the social divisions between European officers and Aboriginal troopers within the camp, but reveals nothing of the interactions between the European and Aboriginal communities in any other context, and nothing directly about individuals or the emotional events at and after Wonomo. In effect, the archaeology operates on a much tighter scale than either the oral or written histories. For Moshenska (2010:43) this is the scale of individual memories, but in our case via the oral histories those memories were focused on Wonomo. Instead of considering the interactions between colonised and colonisers executed by the institution of the NMP, the archaeological evidence suggests this system was more complex. As expected, the material speaks largely to the domestic details of life in camp. With the exception of spent Snider rifle cartridges (which may have derived from target practice or hunting game for food) and a upper rifle band, none of it speaks directly to violence, the vast majority of which took place beyond the boundaries of the camp. The banal, everyday qualities of the material remains and the domestic processes they represent bely the nature of this place as a central node in the web of violence spun by the NMP. As Clegg et al. (2013) have pointed out, genocide involves a substantial amount of organisation, represented here through the administrative, procurement and provisioning support artefacts that constitute the assemblage.

Conclusion

Analyses of oral history as a mode of historical enquiry often note that its relevance lies not in its content per se but its orientation and purpose (Jones and Russell 2012; Thomson 2011): in other words, intentions rather than events (Bird Rose 2003; Hill 2015). In internecine conflicts in colonial situations history is written—and ultimately printed—by the victors, even more so than usual. Indeed, in this context part of the victory is precisely because the history was written and in consequence could be spread to readers who would not have been party to an

oral history. The victors in colonial situations also promulgate a belief that the losers, being non-literate, have no memory of the trauma and no version of events. When the losers are from a small-scale society, as here, the intention of the colonists is to wipe them out. As a result, the victors assume their version is all there is, and the consumers of their printed history have no means of knowing otherwise. In contrast, we have shown that there is a quite detailed oral history three generations deep of events from 1879. Bottoms (2013:166–167) citing Roberts (2005), and others, showed that there are similar oral histories from other parts of Queensland, though few are so detailed. When Walter Roth (1897:41) wrote the first ethnographic account of the peoples who survived the events discussed here he noted that whole communities had been destroyed by “privation, disease, alcohol and lead.” The lead he was referring to was bullets, but the lead of printing type was no less devastating. Its impact was to suppress the words of the survivors, and hide the history that was passed on within their community.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest relating to this research.

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Table 1: Summary of archaeological results, Burke River NMP camp

Geophysical Grid No.	No. of artefacts	Artefact types	Interpretation
GG1	Buttons=0; Ceramics=0; Glass=9; Metal=4; Weapons and ammunition=2 TOTAL=15	Aqua and green glass; tins; brass foil centrefire bullet cases	Plan and form of stone arrangement suggests Aboriginal origin. Relative absence of European material suggests avoidance by camp occupants.
GG2	Buttons=44; Ceramics=211; Glass=204; Metal=387; Weapons and ammunition=8; Miscellaneous=18 TOTAL=872	Metal trouser buttons, ceramic buttons, collar stud, metal NMP uniform button; refined earthenware (flatware) in a variety of transfer print patterns, refined earthenware with moulded designs, clay pipes (stems and bowls), alcohol bottles, flaked glass, aqua glass; tin vesta matchboxes, rivets, tobacco tags, cut nails, buckles, fork, knife blade, harmonica reed,	Highest frequency of buttons (n=44), and a wide range of artefact types (including a fork and knife blade, flaked glass, a variety of transfer printed ceramics, tobacco tags, buckles and nails). Lance's oral history places the troopers' huts in this area, west of the stone structures.

		tins, cut nails, wire nails; mussel shell, writing slate; brass foil centrefire bullet cases, drawn brass bullet cases	
GG3 (southern margin of site)	Buttons=11; Ceramics=14; Glass=318; Metal=81; Weapons and ammunition=6; Bone=5; Miscellaneous=29 TOTAL=383	Bone; metal trouser buttons, ceramic buttons, clay pipes (stems and bowls); flaked glass, alcohol bottles (incl. case gin or Schnapps), green and aqua glass; food tins, matchboxes, upper barrel band (probably from an Enfield rifle), harmonica reed, buckles, cut nails, wire nails, straight razor, graphite slate pencil; emu shell, mussel shell; brass foil centrefire bullet cases	Concentrated grouping of bent, structural cut nails suggests a possible sixth structure, measuring ~5m x 7m (Structure C on Figure 5). Mix of materials, including flaked glass, emu and freshwater mussel shell, food tins and matchboxes suggests an activity area possibly associated with troopers.
GG4	Buttons=2; Ceramics=29; Glass=117; Metal=174; Weapons and ammunition=17;	Metal NMP uniform button, metal trouser button; red and blue transfer print refined earthenware,	Furniture and administration related artefacts (docket pin, key, lock face) possibly associated with use

	Miscellaneous=1 TOTAL=340	ointment pot, clay pipe (stem), salt glazed stoneware; alcohol, aqua, cobalt and other bottle glass, flaked glass, beads; Ewbanks nail, tin vesta matchboxes, cut nails, wire nails, screws, tin washers, buckles, suspender buckle; writing slate; centrefire cartridge bullet cases.	of Building 1 as a store/office and officer accommodation. Greatest diversity of ceramic decorative types, including the only specialist vessel types (fragment of cruet, possible chamber pot) and the only teacup fragments.
GG5	Buttons=1; Ceramics=8; Glass=61; Metal=306; Weapons and ammunition=1 TOTAL=377	Ointment pots, salt glaze stoneware; flaked glass, alcohol, green, cobalt and other bottle glass; rivets, wire nails, cut nails, food tin, buckles, tin washers; brass foil centrefire bullet case	No refined earthenware, clay pipes, buttons, personal items or food refuse. Highest proportion of pharmacy-related glass and ointment pots. Possible utilitarian work area associated with troopers rather than European officers. Presence of flaked bottle fragments indicates either transference/use of

			flaked glass in this area or possible localised knapping of one or more bottles.
GG6	Buttons=42; Ceramics=216; Glass=141; Metal=36; Weapons and ammunition=11 TOTAL=446	Metal trouser buttons, ceramic buttons, metal NMP uniform buttons (5); band and rim and transfer printed refined earthenware, refined earthenware with moulded patterns, clay pipes (stems and bowls), salt glaze stoneware, ointment pots; alcohol bottles, flaked glass; harmonica reed, boot heel, buckles; brass foil centrefire bullet cases	Highest frequency of clay tobacco pipe fragments (n=57), including bowls, mouthpieces, stems and heels from multiple items. Highest frequency of knapped bottle glass (n=75, or 41%). The relatively high frequency of small (well used) cores (n=5), bodies with bases (n=10) and debitage (n=6) suggests this was a locus of knapping activities, possibly for troopers and/or their wives. Highest frequency of NMP uniform buttons, indicating a possible communal recreational area between the structures.

Figure captions

Figure 1: Places mentioned in the text in relation to main Native Title boundaries. Native Title recognises the connection people have to their country as demonstrated through genealogical descent, traditional law, customs and language.

Figure 2: Wonomo waterhole.

Figure 3: The grave of Molvo and party, Wonomo waterhole.

Figure 4: Sign at the Burke River NMP camp.

Figure 5: Site plan of the Burke River NMP camp.

Figure 6: European stone structures at the Burke River NMP camp (left) and Aboriginal stone arrangement (right).

Figure 7: Selection of artefacts from the Burke River NMP camp.