

Images of  
Aboriginal Australians  
1773-1901

**ROYAL  
GEOGRAPHICAL  
SOCIETY OF  
SOUTH AUSTRALIA INC**





Warumunga men, Tennant Creek ca. 1895

# Images of Aboriginal Australians 1773-1901

▶ This exhibition features dozens of **early photographs** including those from the Elder Expedition in 1891-92 and the Spencer and Gillen photographs from 1901 – see and hear their **wax recording cylinders**, the earliest recordings of Aboriginal songs. See the first published images from the Society's **rare books** collection.

From **3 MAY** to  
**30 SEPTEMBER 2011**  
**Tues., Wed. 10 am – 3 pm**  
**Thurs., Friday 10 am – 1 pm**

In **MAY** only  
**Sunday 1 pm – 4 pm**



**ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA INC**

**RGSSA Library, State Library of South Australia Mortlock Wing (second level, southern end)**

PO Box 3661, Rundle Mall, Adelaide, SA 5000 ■ **WEB** [www.rgssa.org.au](http://www.rgssa.org.au) ■ **EMAIL** [library@rgssa.org.au](mailto:library@rgssa.org.au) ■ **PH.** 8207 7266

## INTRODUCTION

AS PART OF STATEWIDE CELEBRATIONS for the 175th anniversary of the founding of South Australia, the Society is proud to exhibit a selection of images of Aboriginal Australians from its rare books and photograph collections.

The exhibition is in part a tribute to the original inhabitants of our state and Australia as a whole. The images, often with accompanying text, largely speak for themselves. They are the images presented to the world by the Europeans of the time offering a unique insight into their attitudes and prejudices but also a glimpse of the real people behind the portraits.

Most of the rare books come from one of the treasures of South Australia – the York Gate Library – which the Society purchased in London in 1905. S.W. Silver, the original owner collected many of the early books on the discovery and colonization of Australia. As such the earliest published images of Aboriginal Australians are well represented here. In fact it is a selection that would be the envy of many major libraries.

A number of the photographs displayed have links to the Society. For example, the Society managed the 1891-92 Elder Scientific Exploration Expedition which was the first time photographs were successfully used in an Australian expedition.

One of the albums of F.W. Gillen photographs once belonged to Thomas Gill, the Society's first Treasurer and the album of Aboriginal portrait photographs (CA 1883) taken by Paul Foelsche was donated by Lady Frances Caroline Brown in 1911. Lady Brown was an active member of the Society who travelled widely and had a special interest in anthropology.

As a bonus, visitors to the exhibition are able to hear excerpts from the earliest recordings of Aboriginal songs. A member of the Society donated the recording equipment used by Spencer and Gillen in 1901 which is probably why the Society was given the wax cylinders for safe keeping. Collaborative arrangements are in hand with Museum Victoria



*The Spencer and Gillen wax cylinders*

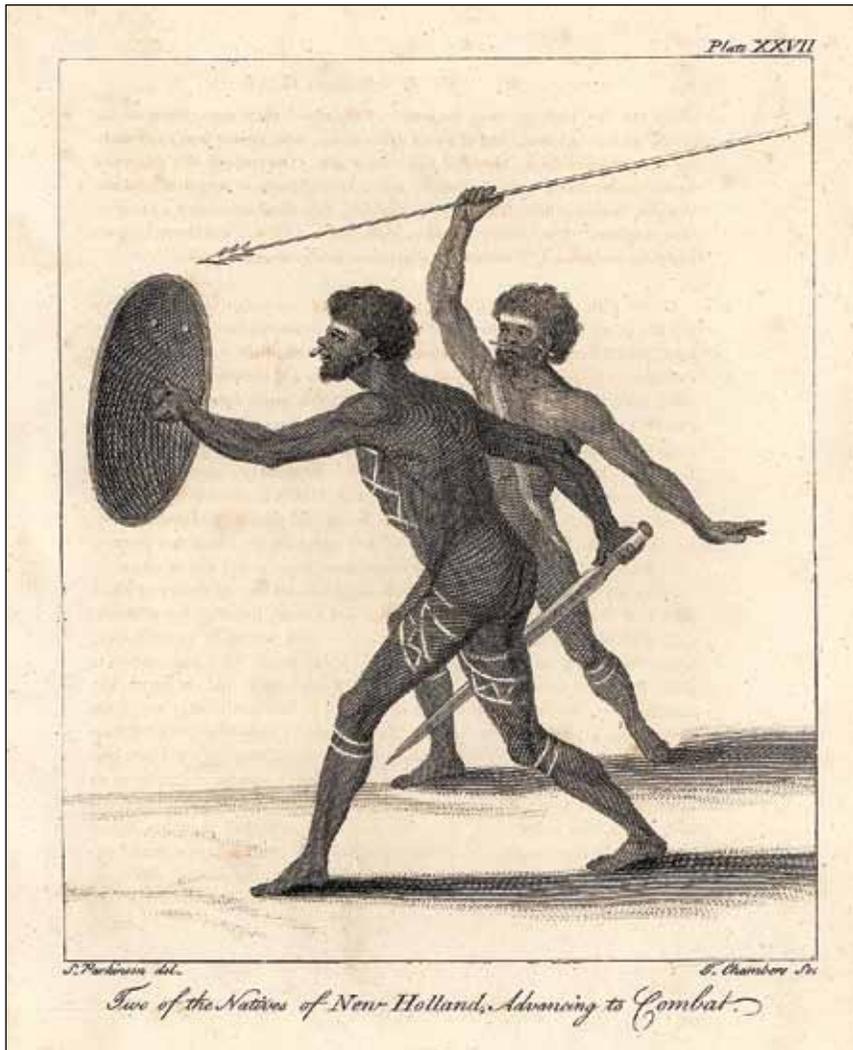
and the South Australian Museum to ensure that these recordings are nationally catalogued and shared.

The images and recordings in this exhibition represent a contribution to our understanding of early European contact with indigenous Australians. It is also a reminder of how geography was enhanced by what were at the time the new technologies of photography and sound recording and this embrace of technology continues to the present.

My thanks to Kevin Griffin, the Society's Library Manager for curating the exhibition and preparing this record of the event.

**Rod Shearing**

PRESIDENT, ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

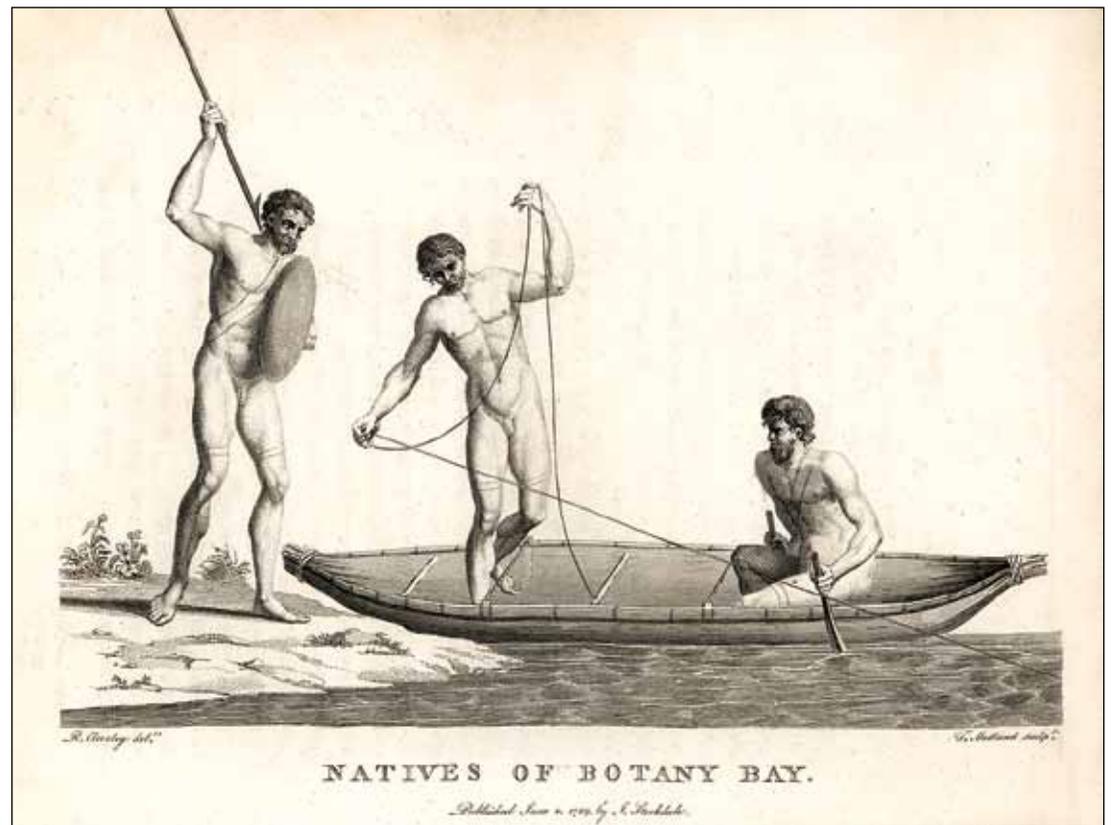


**1773 PARKINSON, Sydney**

*Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas, in his Majesty's Ship The Endeavour...* faithfully transcribed from the papers of the late Sydney Parkinson... embellished with views and designs, delineated by the Author, and engraved by capital artists.

LONDON • PRINTED FOR STANFIELD PARKINSON • 1773

This is the first published illustration of Aboriginal Australians. *The Endeavour* sailed into Botany Bay on 28 April 1770. The crew went ashore to get water and were threatened by two men brandishing weapons.



**1789 PHILLIP, Arthur**

*The voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay...* compiled from authentic papers which have been obtained from the several departments. To which are added, the journals of Lieuts. Shortland, Watts, Ball & Capt. Marshall with an account of their new discoveries, and embellished with fifty-five copper plates.

LONDON • JOHN STOCKDALE • 1789

The illustrations of Aborigines in Governor Phillip's account were not based on drawings sent from Sydney but upon neo-classical ideas of the noble savage.

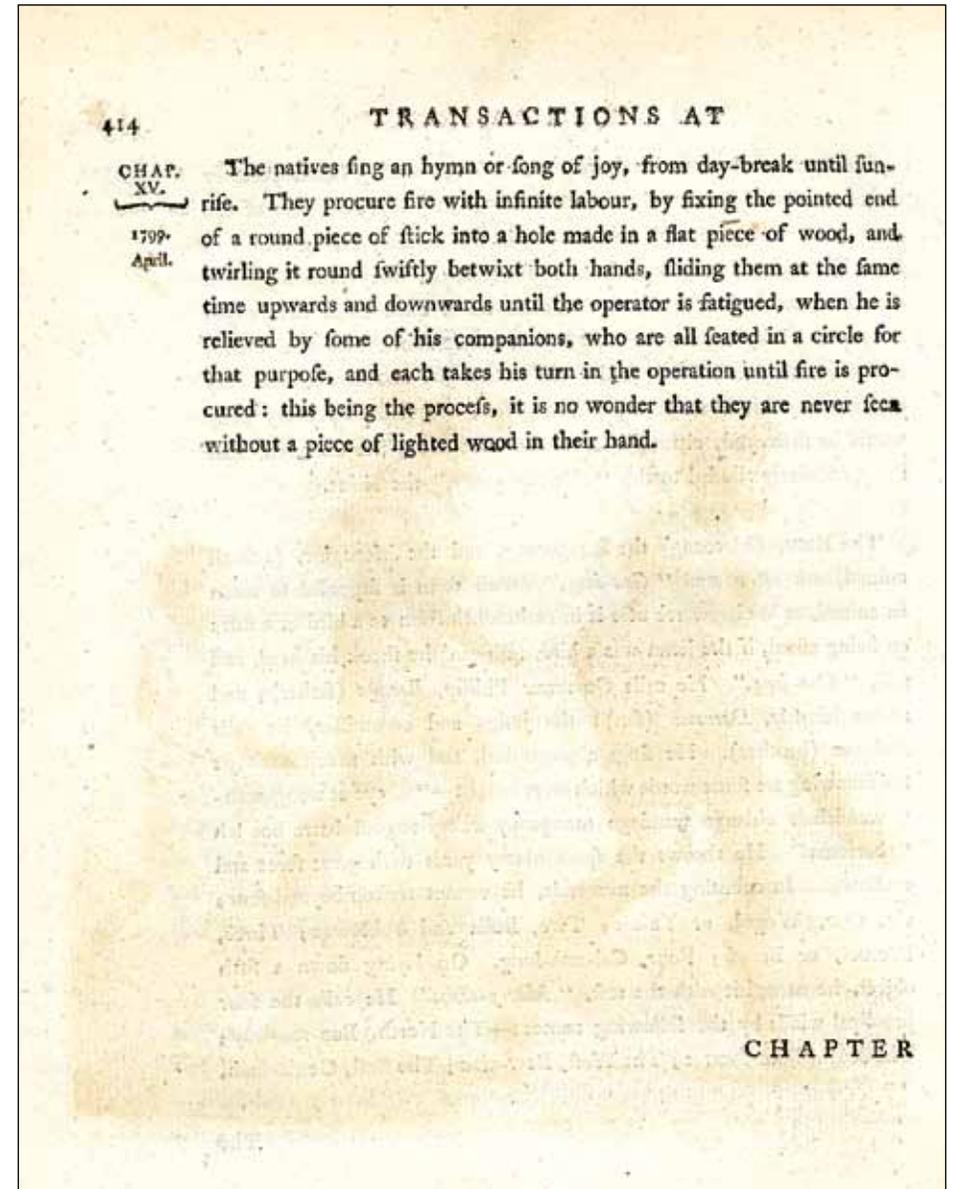


**1793 HUNTER, John**

*An historical journal of the transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island... compiled from the official papers, including the journals of Governors Phillip and King and of Lieut. Ball; and the voyages from the first sailing of the Sirius in 1787 to the return of that ship's company in 1792.*

LONDON • JOHN STOCKDALE • 1793.

This illustration was engraved by the poet and artist William Blake who was personally interested in the place of 'savages' in Christian theology. The text on the adjacent page (p. 414) is included.





**1800 LABILLARDIERE, Jacques J.H. de**

*Voyage in search of La Pérouse... (1791 to 1794).*  
Translated from the French. Volume of plates.

LONDON • JOHN STOCKDALE • 1800

Tasmania is referred to as 'Cape Diemen' – Bass didn't prove it was an island until 1798.



**1802 COLLINS, David**

*An account of the English colony in New South Wales... with remarks on the dispositions, customs, manners, &c. of the native inhabitants of that country.* To which are added, some particulars of New Zealand; compiled, by permission, from the MSS. of Lieutenant-Governor King... 2 volumes.

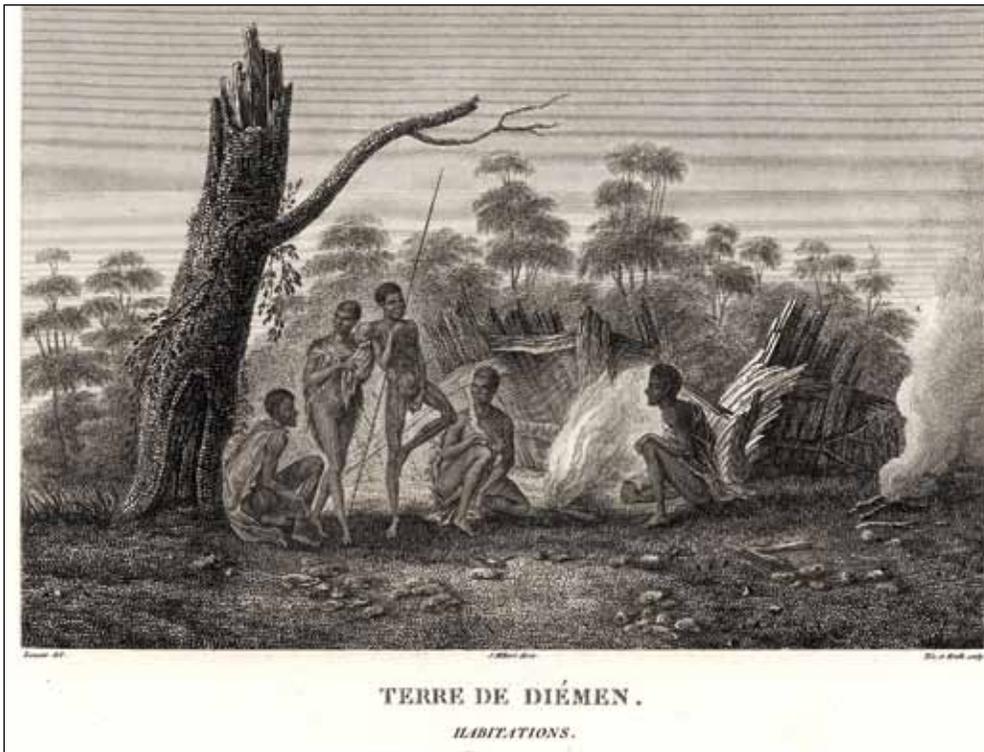
LONDON • CADELL & DAVIES  
1798-1802

No. 1.—Represents the young men, fifteen in number, seated at the head of the Yoo-lahng, while those who were to be the operators paraded several times round it, running upon their hands and feet, and imitating the dogs of the country. Their dress was adapted to this purpose; the wooden sword, stuck in the hinder part of the girdle which they wore round the waist, did not, when they were crawling on all fours, look much unlike the tail of a dog curled over his back. Every time they passed the place where the boys were seated, they threw up the sand and dust on them with their hands and their feet. During this ceremony the boys sat perfectly still and silent, never once moving themselves from the position in which they were placed, nor seeming in the least to notice the ridiculous appearance of the carrahdis and their associates.

We understood that by this ceremony power over the dog was given to them, and that it endowed them with whatever good or beneficial qualities that animal might possess.

The dogs of this country are of the jackal species: they never bark; are of two colours, the one red with some white about it; the other quite black. They have an invincible predilection for poultry, which the severest beatings could never repress. Some of them are very handsome.

The first of a series of eight engravings of an Aboriginal initiation ceremony observed by the author in January 1795. The text on the adjacent page is also included. Collins arrived with the first fleet and was responsible for the new colony's legal establishment.



**1807 PERON, François**

*Voyage de découvertes aux  
Terres Australes... Atlas historique  
par MM Lesueur et Petit.*

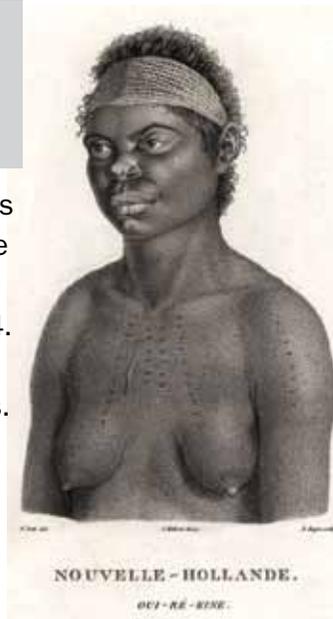
PARIS, DE L'IMPRIMERIE IMPÉRIALE, 1807



Two copper engravings of drawings by Nicolas-Martin Petit, one of the artists on the famous Baudin voyage of exploration, 1800-1804.

He contributed a number of portraits of Tasmanian Aborigines.

Some are hand-coloured. The engraving above is from the same volume from a drawing by C.A. Lesueur



**1820 OXLEY, John**

*Journal of two expeditions into the interior of New South Wales.*

LONDON • JOHN MURRAY • 1820

**A Native Chief of Baturst** (i.e., Bathurst) drawn by John Lewin who was more noted for his illustrations of birds and insects.



DISTANT VIEW OF SYDNEY,  
*from the Light House at South Head,  
New South Wales.*

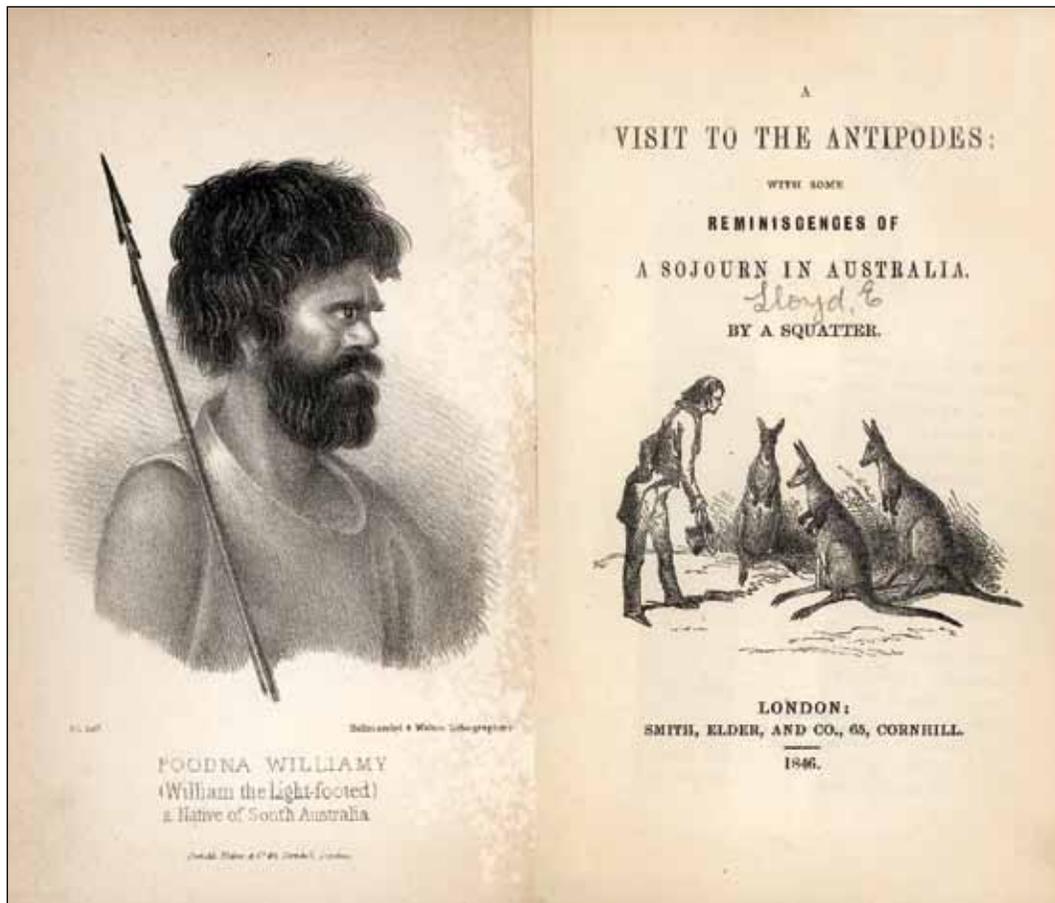
*London Published April 1825, by J. Souter 75, St Pauls Church Yard.*

**1825 LYCETT, Joseph**

*Views in Australia, or, New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land delineated in fifty views with descriptive letter press...*

LONDON • J. SOUTER • 1825

Aborigines are minor players in Lycett's famous book of scenic views. His family group walking out of the composition in this view are obviously based on William Blakes' engraving published in Hunter's book referred to above (1793).

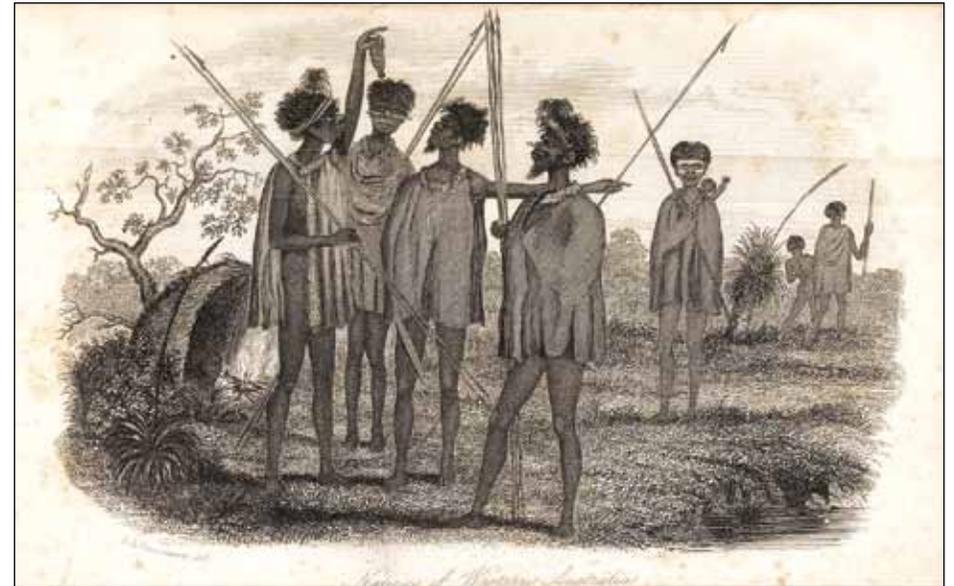


**1846 LLOYD, E.**

*A visit to the antipodes with some reminiscences of a sojourn in Australia, by a squatter.*

LONDON • SMITH ELDER • 1846

The Squatter' is thought to be E. Lloyd who was in Adelaide during Sturt's departure for Central Australia in 1844.

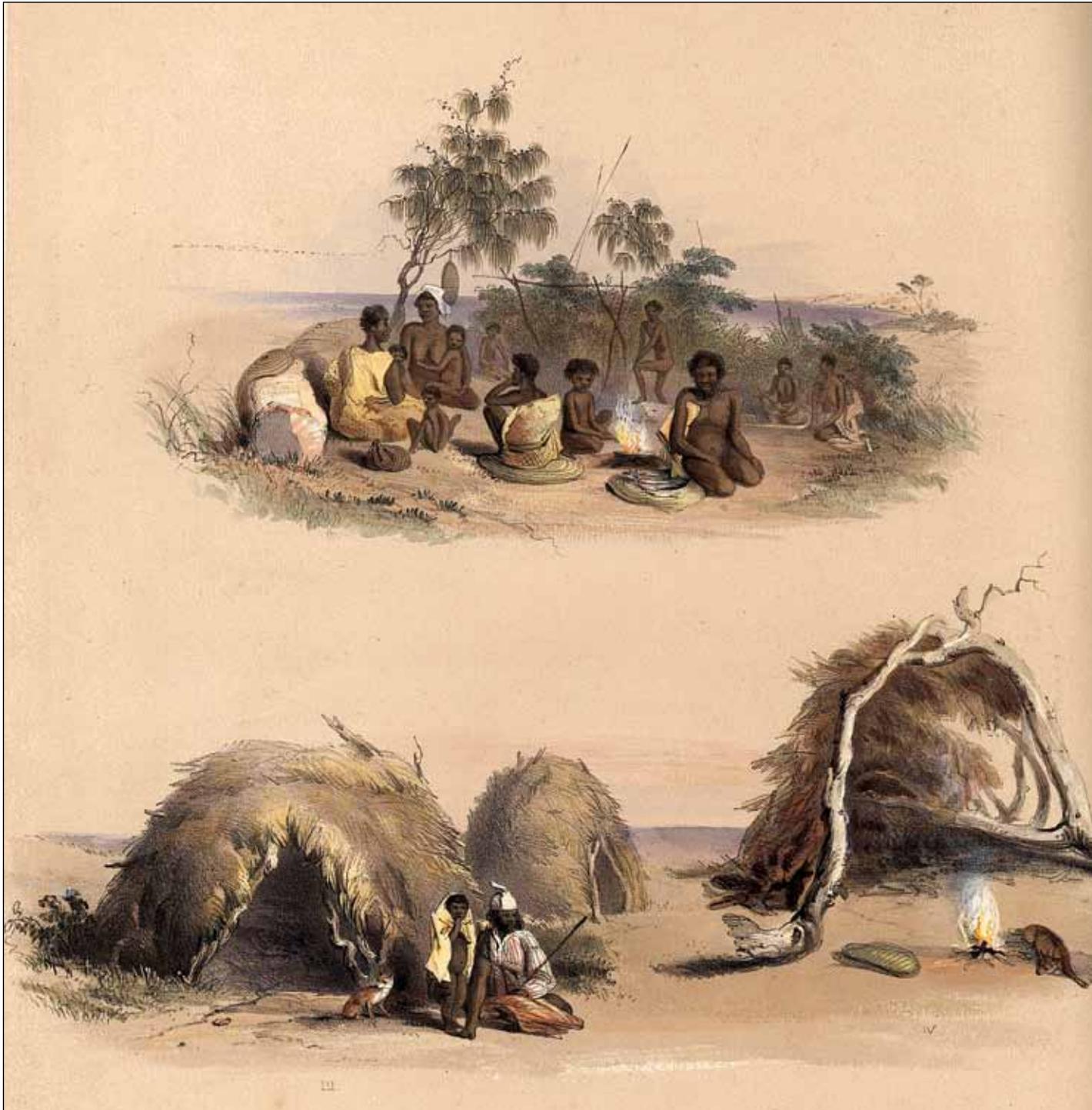


**1846 STOKES, J. Lort**

*Discoveries in Australia...*

LONDON, 1846

FRONTISPIECE: *Natives of Western Australia*



**1847** **ANGAS, George French**

*South Australia illustrated.*  
A large book: 755 x 560 x 50mm (open)  
LONDON • THOMAS M'LEAN • 1847

George French Angas was the eldest son of one of the founding fathers of South Australia.

He first visited the new colony in 1844 and travelled widely painting scenes for this book.

For the many Aboriginal illustrations he drew extensively on the work of William Cawthorne, a local school teacher who had extensive knowledge of Aboriginal culture.

He returned to South Australia in March 1860, and was chairman of the district council of Angaston from 1860-62.

He spent the last 23 years of his life in London.

PART OF PLATE 32 **The Aboriginal inhabitants**



**1874** **BOOTH, Edwin Carton**

*Australia.* Volume 1.  
LONDON • VIRTUE AND CO (1874–1876) • 2 VOLUMES.

ADJACENT PAGE 14: **The Gwalior Plains**



**1875** **FORREST, John**

*Journal of... the exploring expedition through the centre of Australia...*

WESTERN AUSTRALIA. LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.  
PARLIAMANTARY PAPER, NO.1, 1875.

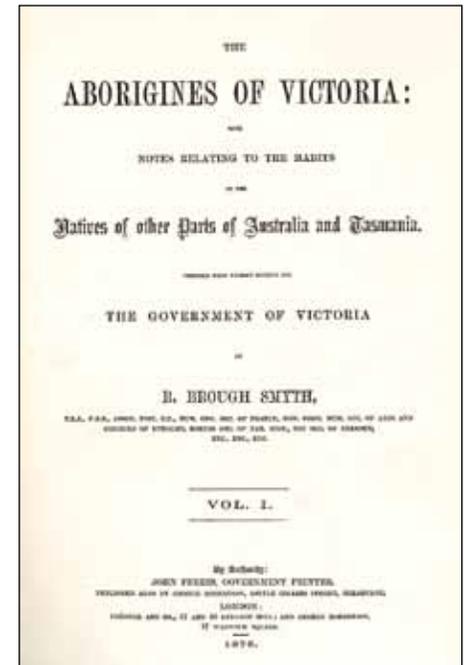


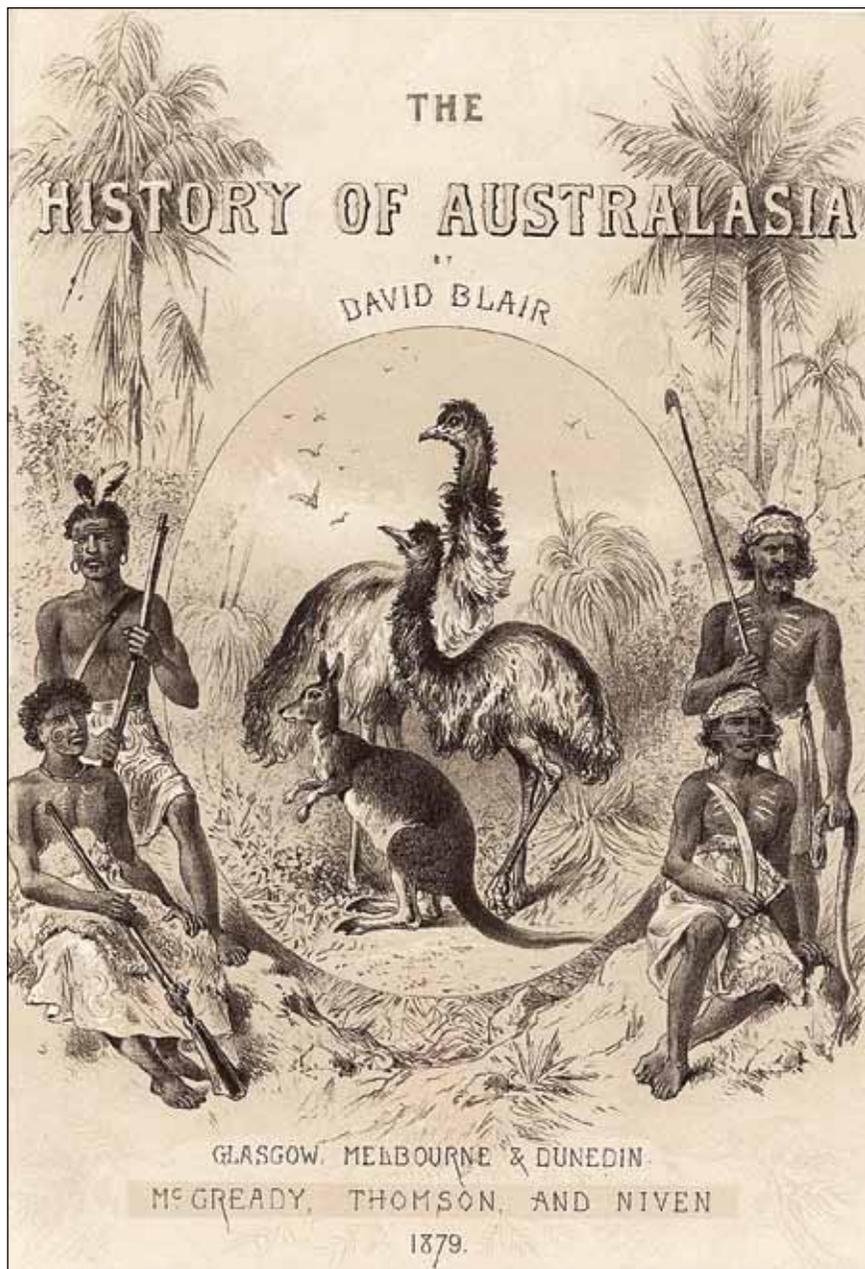
**1878** **SMYTH, R Brough**

*The Aborigines of Victoria: with notes relating to the habits of the Natives of other Parts of Australia and Tasmania.* 2 volumes.

MELBOURNE • JOHN FERRES,  
GOVERNMENT PRINTER • 1878

From Volume 1





**1879 BLAIR, David**

*The history of Australasia.* MELBOURNE • MCGREADY, THOMSON & NIVEN • 1879



**1879 TAPLIN, George**

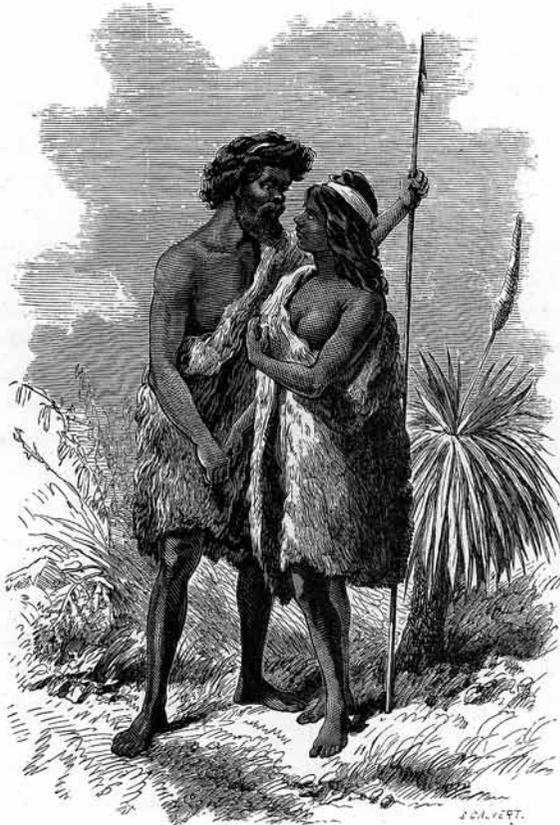
*The folklore, manners, customs and languages of the South Australian Aborigines*  
ADELAIDE, GOVT. PRINTER, 1879.

FRONTISPIECE: **A camp of the Narrinyeri, Lake Alexandrina**

The Library holds four other books by the Rev. George Taplin, mostly on the Narrinyeri, including a grammar of the language.

See! where the allied armies camped,  
Where plumed and painted dancers tramped:  
'Tis still the same—the same wild scene,  
As though the ploughshare ne'er had been.  
Gray Tomboritha still the skies  
With bold and massy front defies;  
And gorge, and chasm, and long-ledged rocks  
Echo the ever-thundering shocks  
Of waters dashed with headlong force—  
Wild cataracts leaping on their course;  
In dark Moroka's vale the stream  
Reflects the slanting solar beam.  
There the proud lyre-bird spreads his tail,

And mocks the notes of hill and dale,  
Whether the wild dog's plaintive howl,  
Or cry of piping water-fowl;  
Or the shrill parrot's answering scream,  
As, dangling gem-like o'er the stream,  
He hears re-echoed from the rock  
The whirlwind whistle of the flock.  
Alas! and what a change is *there*,  
And yet the landscape still is fair!  
Here smiled the woodland by the rill,  
'Tis gone!—the waters turn a mill;  
There, the Mirbango village lay—  
Mirbango maidens, where, O say!



Where the tall "braves" whose warrior-songs  
Once wooed the dark-eyed Darakongs?  
Yon sheltered hollow 'neath the steep,  
Now dotted o'er with browsing sheep,  
Holds the last graves the dark man owns,

The treasure of his fathers' bones.  
All else, alas! has passed, is o'er—  
Time's wing has swept hill, vale, and shore:  
*All* hence, to farthest northern strand,  
Obeys the white, the "blood-stained hand."

## 1881 WALCH, Garnet

*Victoria in 1880*, illustrated by Charles Turner.

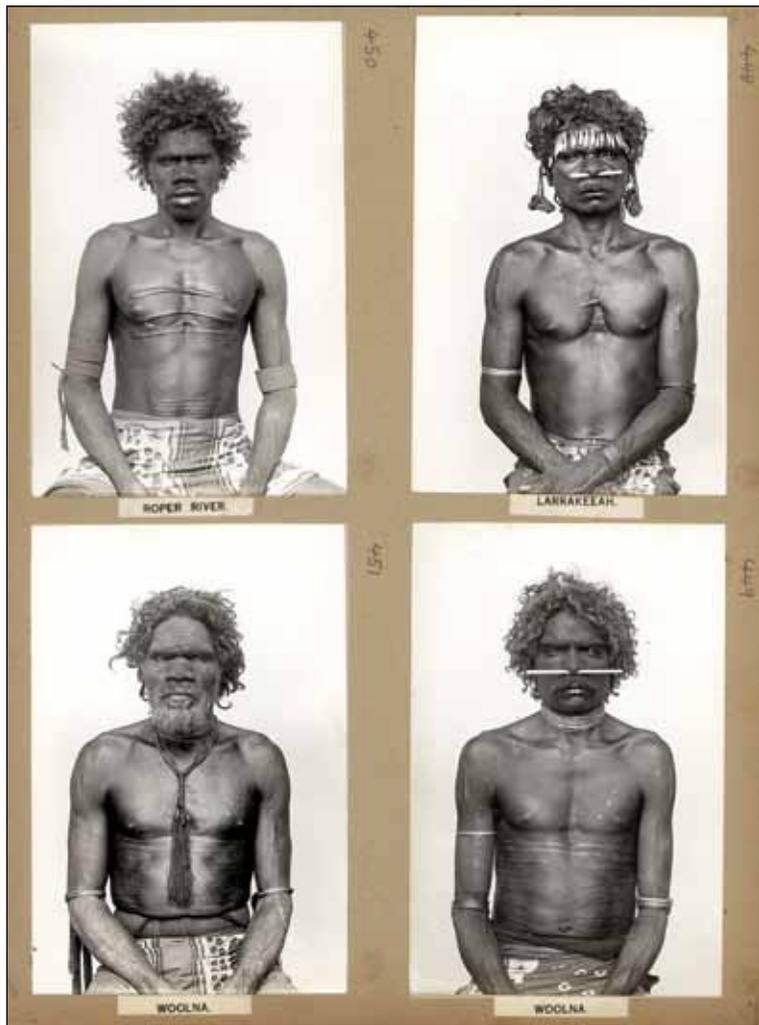
MELBOURNE • GEORGE ROBERTSON • 1881

PAGE 131: **An illustrated poem**



1887

Photograph taken in the grounds of the Jubilee Exhibition building, North Terrace, 1887. From an album of photographs of South Australia.

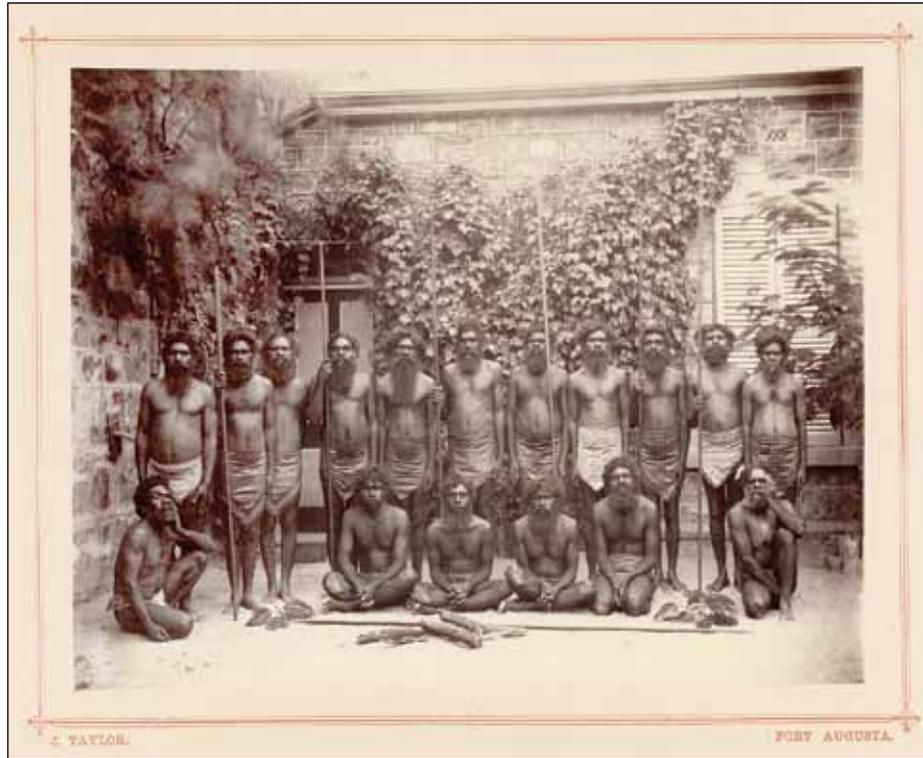


1887

Dick Cubadgee, a young man of the Warramunga people who was brought to Adelaide by the explorer David Lindsay. Photographed at the Adelaide Jubilee Exhibition in 1887. His story is told in Philip Jones' book *Ochre and Rust*, Wakefield Press, 2007 (pages 187–223).

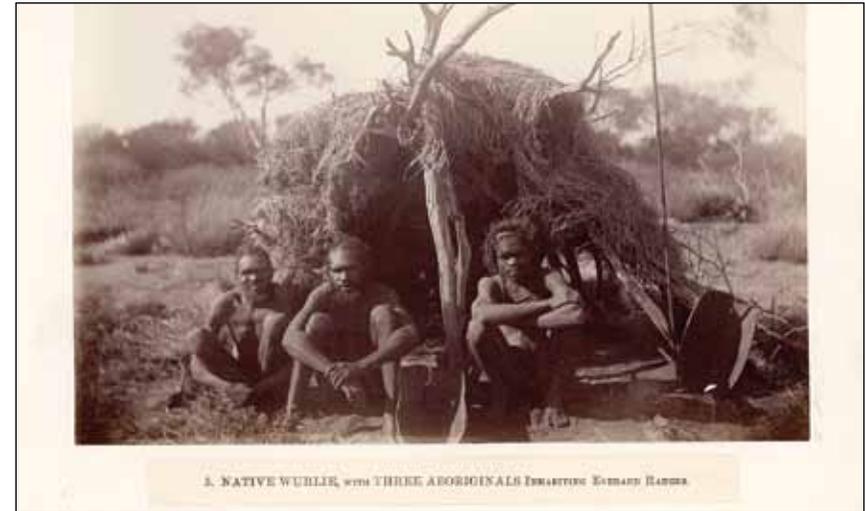
**ca 1883 Album of photographs by Paul FOELSCHÉ (1831–1914)**

Foelsche was born in Germany and migrated to South Australia at the age of 25. He joined the Mounted Police, was stationed at Strathalbyn and then transferred to the Northern Territory in 1869. From the 1870s Foelsche became the leading photographer of the Northern Territory. His photographs were widely distributed. His Aboriginal portrait studies sent to Germany earned him the praise of the Kaiser, who presented him with a gold hunting watch. This album was presented to the Society by Lady Brown in 1911.



1888

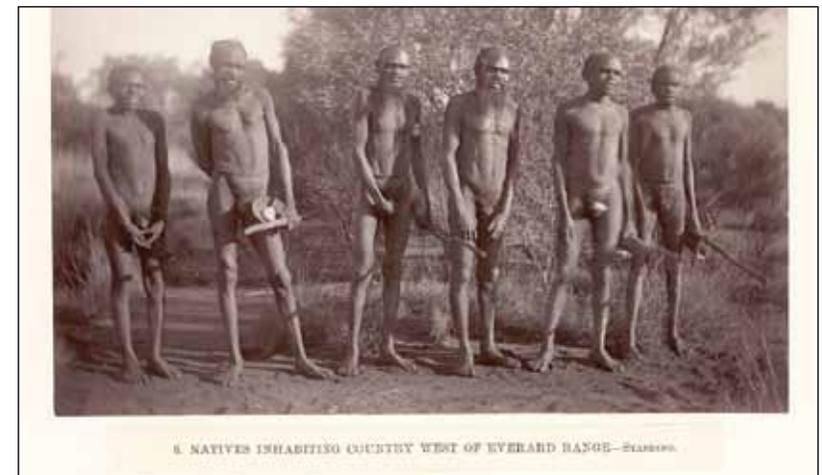
Aboriginal men from the Lake Killalpaninna Region, West of Koppera-manna Mission Station who were acquitted of the charge of murder at Port Augusta, November 1888.



### 1891 The Elder Scientific Exploration Expedition, 1891–92

This was the first expedition in Australia to successfully use the camera. The expedition, led by David Lindsay, was organised by the South Australian Branch of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, and named after Sir Thomas Elder, who provided the funding.

Dr Frederick John Elliot was the expedition's medical officer and photographer. This set of Aboriginal photographs from the expedition is quite rare, probably less than 20 sets were produced. A selection from the 36 albumen paper photographs is displayed here.





7. NINE ABORIGINALS IN VARIOUS POSITIONS—SWISS.



12. GROUP OF FEMALE ABORIGINALS, FRASER RANGE.



10. FIRST NATIVES MET WITH AFTER LEAVING BIRKSGATE RANGE (Close View)



13. NATIVE CAMP—FRASER RANGE STATION.



11. FIRST NATIVES MET WITH AFTER LEAVING BIRKSGATE RANGE (Close view, all standing)



16. NATIVE GIRL SURPRISED IN DESERT—CAMP 49.

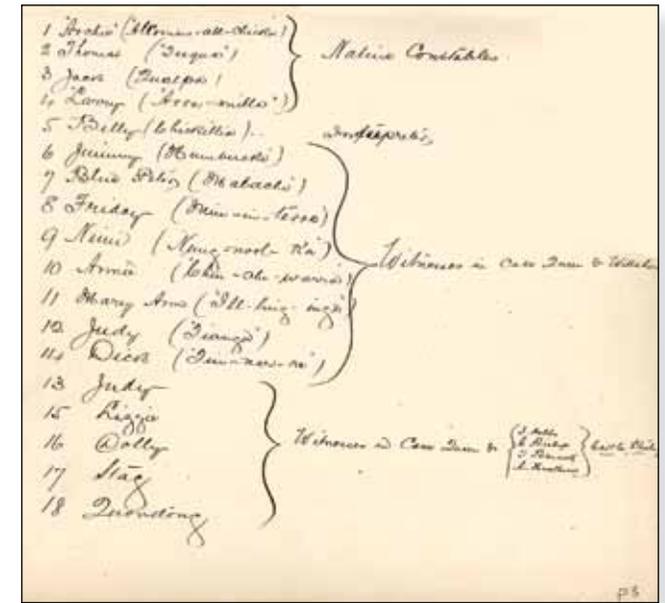
**1891 WILLIAM WILLSHIRE (1852–1925)**

Willshire joined the South Australian Police Force in 1878 and was posted to Alice Springs in 1882.

In 1891 Willshire's men attacked sleeping Aborigines camped at Tempe Downs station. Two men died and their bodies were cremated. F.J. Gillen, Alice Springs sub-protector of Aborigines, investigated the reported episode and committed Willshire to Port Augusta for trial for murder. As he was the first policeman to be so charged, and colonists felt their rights challenged, emotions ran high: public subscriptions provided Willshire's £2000 bail and retained Sir John Downer for his defence. Aboriginal witnesses attended, but problems over accepting their evidence resulted in Willshire's popular acquittal.

From **D.J. Mulvaney**, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 12, Melbourne University Press, 1990, p. 515.

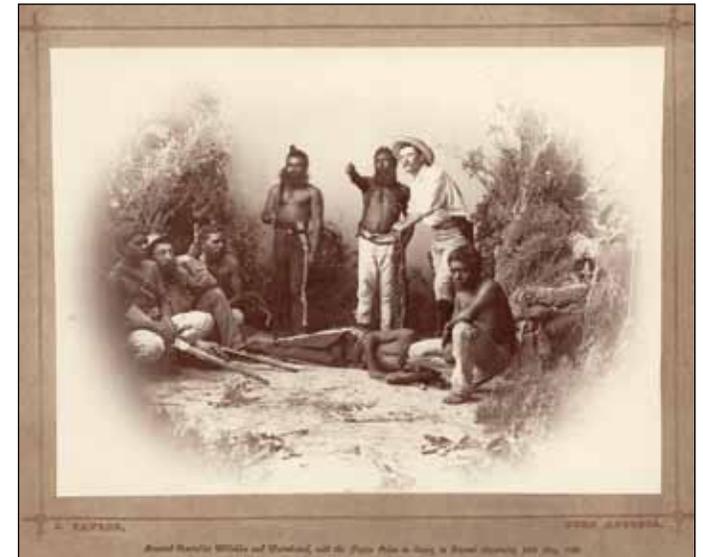
His controversial story is told in a book by Amanda Nettelbeck and Robert Foster, *In the name of the law: William Willshire and the policing of the Australian frontier*. Kent Town, South Australia, Wakefield Press, 2007.



Participants in the case of the QUEEN vs WILLIAM WILLSHIRE (who was arrested for murder in April 1891). Their names are listed on the back of the photograph, with their respective roles.



Eight witnesses in the Willshire case



'Mounted Constables Willshire and Wurmbrand, with the Native Police in Camp, in Central Australia, 26th May, 1887.'



THE AUTHOR AND A BOY NATIVE.

# THE LAND OF THE DAWNING

BEING FACTS GLEANED FROM CANNIBALS IN  
THE AUSTRALIAN STONE AGE.

BY

W. H. WILLSHIRE,

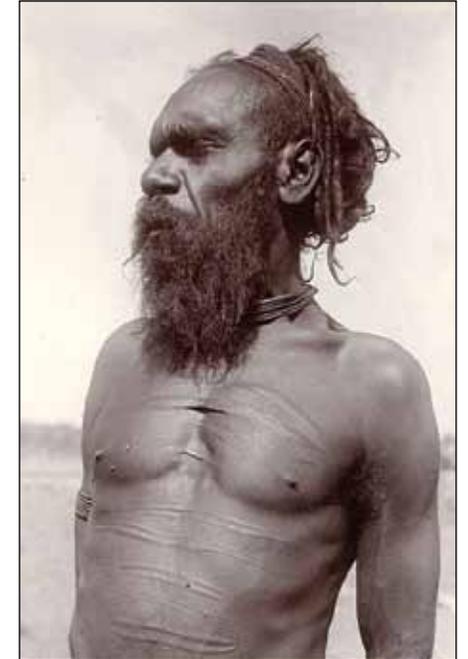
*Mounted Constable, First Class. Officer in Charge of Native  
Police.*

Adelaide:  
W. K. THOMAS & CO., PRINTERS, GRENFELL STREET.  
1896.



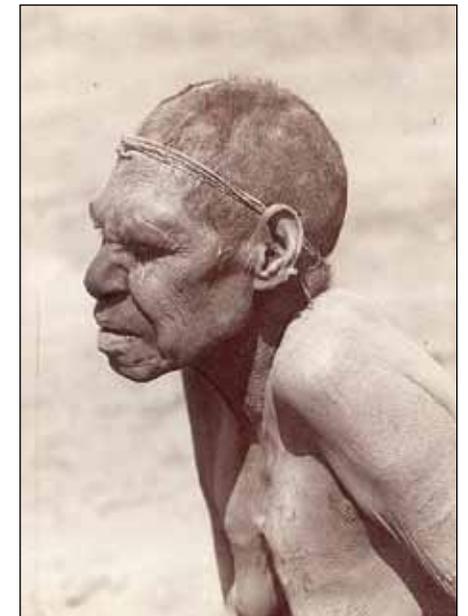
**Two Warumunga men at Tennant Creek**

Photograph taken by Francis Gillen, ca 1895. The original glass plate negative is held by the South Australian Museum (no. 271 in Gillen's original series).



ca 1901

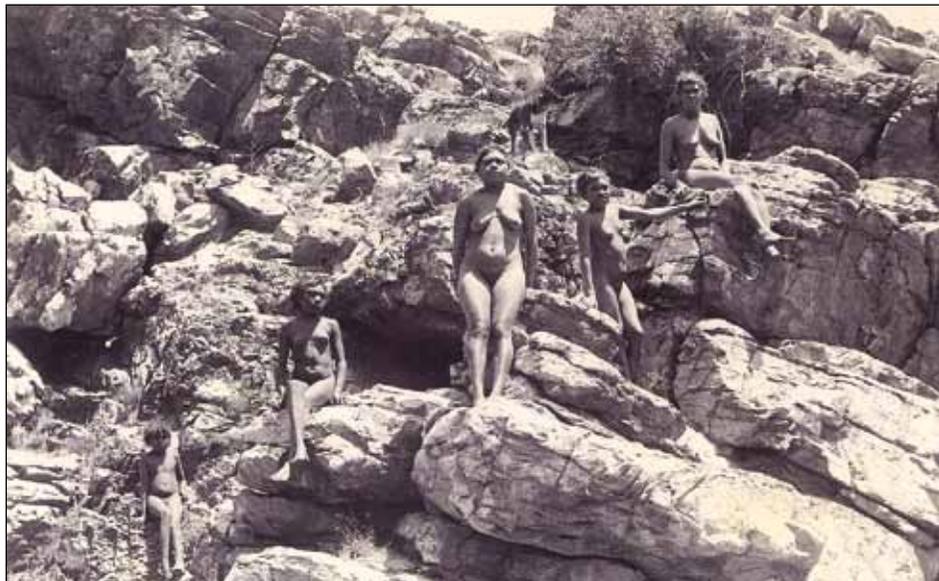
Five photographs from an album belonging to the Society's first treasurer Thomas Gill. Many of the photographs were taken by F.J.Gillen.





1901

An album of photographs taken during the 1901–1902 expedition in which Spencer and Gillen crossed from Oodnadatta in the south to Borroloola on the Gulf of Carpentaria.



1901 **The oldest sound recordings in South Australia – and the first to record Aboriginal songs**

Wax cylinder recordings of Aboriginal songs made by W.B. Spencer and F.J. Gillen using equipment donated by a member of the Society. For a photograph of the wax cylinders see the Introduction to this catalogue.

The equipment would have looked similar to the above. Most of the recordings were made in March 1901 at Charlotte Waters (now part of the Northern Territory, just over the border). In the 1950s the Society arranged for the recordings to be transferred to reel to reel tape and in 2010 the tapes were copied to compact discs. Copies of the discs were sent to Museum Victoria for inclusion in the comprehensive website [www.spencerandgillen.org](http://www.spencerandgillen.org)

Visitors to the exhibition were able to play the first song on Disc 1, a corroboree with an introduction by Sir Baldwin Spencer.

opportunity of close observation will be gone, for the Exterminator has immolated nearly all. Contrary to the general opinion, their customs and habits offer supremely interesting matter for study. There is much in them—circumcision, mutilation, marriage, burial, etc.—which resembles the customs of the ancient Jews, the rites of African negroes, and the habits and beliefs of aboriginal races in other parts of the world. Few peoples have secured less scientific attention, and the omission is almost a slur on the honor of the British student.

In communication with each other the Australian natives had a system of signs and codes as comprehensive, because more universally utilised, as the noble brotherhood of Freemasons. By raising the hands to the ears and lips, and by other rapid, mystic signs, messages of peculiar significance were conveyed without waste of words. These were as aptly understood in Western Australia as in New South Wales and South



GROUP OF SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES

Australia, and varied but little. They knew nothing of writing, of agriculture, or of building houses and ships. There was not much greater difference between the languages spoken in different parts of Australia than between the dialects of English counties and German provinces. The roots of the words were generally the same all over the continent.

The sound of their chattering in their camps was pleasing. Many of their words were exceedingly tuneful, because of the prominence given to vowels. When recounting the incidents of the hunt, or any other of the episodes of their day, they seldom adhered to the prosaic form of ordinary narrative, but gradually had recourse to poetry, and chanted with extraordinary vigor. Battles, hunting scenes, death celebrations, long tramps—all were rendered into song and poetry. Pretty were the vowel cadences, and sweet was the effect of rude dirges and chants carried by the wind over hill and creek and scrub to a distant

1901

*History of Adelaide and vicinity*, edited by J.J. Pascoe.  
Adelaide, 1901

Page 13: **Group of South Australian Aborigines**

Twentieth Century impressions of  
Western Australia. Perth, 1901

Pages 178-183: **Aborigines;**  
their habits and customs

## Aborigines.

### THEIR HABITS AND CUSTOMS.

Historical records of the aborigines of any vast continent invariably disclose the fact that the country was, by some unwritten law, divided into districts, each being inhabited by a different race of people distinctive in features and varying in habits, manners, traditions, and dialects. This, however, would appear to be by no means the case with the aborigines of Australia. Among the compilers of their history there is a pretty general consensus of opinion that they exhibit evident traces of having sprung from one family, the natives of all parts of the continent being similar in build and features, their habits and customs similar, and their language not varying in a much greater degree than the dialects of some of the counties in England. Of course, various theories have been advanced to account for this; but it is unnecessary to refer to these, as the primary object of this article is merely to give a short and succinct outline of a race which probably for many centuries occupied Australia before the advent of the white man. Possibly in no other instance has there been such a rapid disappearance of the original inhabitants of a land before the march of progress and civilisation as has been the case with the aborigines of Australia. The history of the natives of Western Australia differs in no material point from the record of those in other States, and here, speaking of the settled part of the State, with the exception of those who still survive in their original condition in the far interior and in the north, the race is fast diminishing. It is a gratifying fact to record that not only the religious bodies, but also the Government of the State, have been ever solicitous in endeavouring to ameliorate the condition and render the lives of these remnants of a declining race as peaceful and happy as possible. Their limbs are slender and lean to a remarkable degree, appearing to be, though not really, deficient in muscular development. They do not have high cheekbones, but they have retreating foreheads, protruding brows, noses narrow and sunken at the bridge, with broad and expansive nostrils, mouths inordinately large, lips heavy and thick; while, as a rule, their teeth are not only white, but fine. The ears incline a little forward, the jawbone is contracted, the chin small, and the hair is black and wavy, not frizzly or woolly, which is characteristic of the African negro. In fact, when cleaned and dressed, it is fine in texture and extremely glossy, and tends, according to Lyddeker, to prove their claim to belong to the Caucasian race. The cranial formation is narrow and lengthy, and larger in the males than the females. As an indication of the height and girth of the native, it may be mentioned that the average measurement of fifty Rottnest prisoners was 65 inches and 33 inches respectively. In point of intelligence they were regarded as the lowest type of humanity, and this is an error into which several chroniclers have fallen; but reports supplied from the various schools established for abo-



NORTHAM GIN.  
Age, 40.

iginal children are unanimous in affirming that the dusky youngsters of Western Australia are found little, if any, inferior in intelligence to their white brethren. From the different mission stations satisfactory accounts are likewise received of the amenability of the blacks to instruction in the industries carried on in those institutions, and in many instances of the great cleverness and dexterity displayed by them. The maximum length of life of the aborigines has been stated to be about fifty years; but this also is regarded as a mistake, inasmuch as it is well known that the race, uncontaminated by the vices prevalent in towns, can claim a longevity far



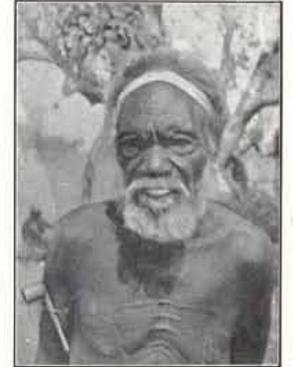
COOLGARDIE GIN.  
Age, 40.

179  
greater than that. In their primitive state they have no form of religion, and neither worship a visible object nor an invisible Being, though they are superstitious, believing that the spirits of their departed relatives revisit their former haunts, and they also place implicit faith in the powers of the "Bullya," or the sorcerer of the different tribes. They do not believe that death can result from natural causes, but entertain the conviction that, except by accident or in warfare, there can be no such thing as death. Consequently, when one "shuffles off this mortal coil" in an ordinary manner, he is regarded as the victim of the wiles and machinations of a neighbouring sorcerer; and the "Bullya" is called upon to state which tribe is responsible for the occurrence, in order that vengeance and retribution may follow, for their creed is "A life for a life." By their marriage customs, polygamy is allowed, but is not practised as a rule. A female child, however, is almost on its birth allotted to some man of the tribe, and on attaining a marriageable age is handed over to the charge of



GIN IN MOURNING, with  
hair in clay.

her future lord and master. Frequently one tribe makes a raid on another for the object of forcibly annexing their women, and by this means obtaining an additional number of wives. The females have to do all the work except hunting and fighting; they are compelled to carry all burdens in the peregrinations of the household. Their wanderings are almost incessant, within the recognised district of the tribe, the aborigines being of a restless, nomadic disposition, constantly roaming, and rarely stopping in any one camp longer than is necessary to consume the food supply they have gathered. They rarely, if ever, take the trouble to erect habitations, usually contenting themselves with making a breakwind of logs and branches, or sometimes by dome-shaped huts of twigs and grasses, called a "mia-mia." These rude constructions are usually between 4 ft. and 5 ft. high, and from 8 ft. to 10 ft. in diameter at the base. One of the principal characteristics of the aborigines is their extreme buoyancy of spirits. They are a laughing, careless race, full of humour, mirth,



A BEAGLE BAY VETERAN.  
Age, 60. Height, 5 ft. 8 in.

and song. Indolent in the extreme, they appear to be believers in the maxim, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," and to take no care for the morrow. Content with what may be termed a hand-to-mouth existence, they are totally negligent with regard to laying up a store of food for emergencies; hence it is by no means a rare occurrence that in the height of summer or the depth of winter they are entirely without the necessaries of life, and on the verge of starvation, going for days without a particle of food. This indolence is amply illustrated by the blacks who at the present time hang about the vicinities of the townships. They make very little attempt to procure a living by



DERBY NATIVE, with tribal marks.  
Age, 35. Height, 5 ft. 10 in.