

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00632-3 - The Native Tribes of South-East Australia

Alfred William Howitt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)**CAMBRIDGE LIBRARY COLLECTION***Books of enduring scholarly value***Linguistics**

From the earliest surviving glossaries and translations to nineteenth-century academic philology and the growth of linguistics during the twentieth century, language has been the subject both of scholarly investigation and of practical handbooks produced for the upwardly mobile, as well as for travellers, traders, soldiers, missionaries and explorers. This collection will reissue a wide range of texts pertaining to language, including the work of Latin grammarians, groundbreaking early publications in Indo-European studies, accounts of indigenous languages, many of them now extinct, and texts by pioneering figures such as Jacob Grimm, Wilhelm von Humboldt and Ferdinand de Saussure.

The Native Tribes of South-East Australia

A. W. Howitt's classic study, first published in 1904, investigates the organisation, practices and customs of the indigenous peoples he encountered during his forty years exploring Australia. He describes how he made 'close and friendly contact' with tribes who were, in his words, in a condition of 'complete savagery'. Howitt achieved considerable status among the Aborigines, and was even permitted to witness some of their sacred ceremonies. Focusing particularly on the social organisation of the tribes, their kinship systems and marriage rules, his book is a captivating account of a now-vanishing culture. It includes illustrations of people and weapons, maps outlining the locality inhabited by each tribe and diagrams explaining family structures.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00632-3 - The Native Tribes of South-East Australia

Alfred William Howitt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press has long been a pioneer in the reissuing of out-of-print titles from its own backlist, producing digital reprints of books that are still sought after by scholars and students but could not be reprinted economically using traditional technology. The Cambridge Library Collection extends this activity to a wider range of books which are still of importance to researchers and professionals, either for the source material they contain, or as landmarks in the history of their academic discipline.

Drawing from the world-renowned collections in the Cambridge University Library, and guided by the advice of experts in each subject area, Cambridge University Press is using state-of-the-art scanning machines in its own Printing House to capture the content of each book selected for inclusion. The files are processed to give a consistently clear, crisp image, and the books finished to the high quality standard for which the Press is recognised around the world. The latest print-on-demand technology ensures that the books will remain available indefinitely, and that orders for single or multiple copies can quickly be supplied.

The Cambridge Library Collection will bring back to life books of enduring scholarly value (including out-of-copyright works originally issued by other publishers) across a wide range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and in science and technology.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00632-3 - The Native Tribes of South-East Australia
Alfred William Howitt
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

The Native Tribes of South-East Australia

ALFRED WILLIAM HOWITT



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00632-3 - The Native Tribes of South-East Australia
Alfred William Howitt
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo, Mexico City

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108006323

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2010

This edition first published 1904

This digitally printed version 2010

ISBN 978-1-108-00632-3 Paperback

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect the beliefs, practices and terminology of their time, and have not been updated.

Cambridge University Press wishes to make clear that the book, unless originally published by Cambridge, is not being republished by, in association or collaboration with, or with the endorsement or approval of, the original publisher or its successors in title.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00632-3 - The Native Tribes of South-East Australia

Alfred William Howitt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE NATIVE TRIBES
OF
SOUTH-EAST AUSTRALIA

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00632-3 - The Native Tribes of South-East Australia
Alfred William Howitt
Frontmatter
[More information](#)



Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00632-3 - The Native Tribes of South-East Australia
Alfred William Howitt
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

THE
Native Tribes
OF
South-East Australia

BY
A. W. HOWITT, D.Sc.

HON. FELLOW ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

London
MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1904

All rights reserved

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00632-3 - The Native Tribes of South-East Australia
Alfred William Howitt
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

TO
THE MEMORY OF MY WIFE
WITHOUT WHOSE UNFAILING SYMPATHY
THIS WORK
MIGHT NEVER HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKEN

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00632-3 - The Native Tribes of South-East Australia
Alfred William Howitt
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PREFACE

THE materials for this work were collected during the past forty years, commencing during explorations in Central Australia, where I came into close and friendly contact with two tribes who were in a condition of complete savagery. Circumstances later on enabled me to acquire considerable influence over tribes in South - East Australia, and to become acquainted with their sacred ceremonies and be present at them.

In 1873 I joined Dr. Lorimer Fison in investigating the classificatory system of relationships which obtains among these savages. In connection with this inquiry, our attention was directed to the tribal class system, and the rules of marriage and descent connected therewith.

In these investigations we were assisted by correspondents living in places scattered over the greater part of Eastern Australia, and in a less degree in the western half. Without their aid it would not have been possible to have brought together the collection of facts which was necessary to enable us to draw sound conclusions as to the real character of the organisation and beliefs of the native tribes.

In the course of our work we found the conclusions to which we were led regarding the system of relationships, the character and origin of the tribal and social organisation, and the rules of marriage and descent, brought us into conflict with hypotheses as to primitive society and its organisation

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-00632-3 - The Native Tribes of South-East Australia
 Alfred William Howitt
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

and development advanced by certain leaders of anthropological thought.

Such being the case, we deemed it advisable, in anticipation of fuller publication, to make known the preliminary results of our inquiries. This had also the advantage of not only making known our results, but also submitting our conclusions to criticism, and finally, to use a well-known mining term, to "marking out our prospecting claim."

This we did by, in the first place, communicating a series of memoirs to the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland; and secondly, by other publications, all of which are included in the following list.

It will be seen that the several chapters of this work, in one aspect, are those memoirs elaborated, but they also include other facts which have been since obtained.

With the increase of information, due to a wider scope of inquiry, the mental horizon was necessarily widened, bringing the facts into a truer perspective. Thus it has come about that some of the views expressed in earlier papers have been modified, as will be pointed out in several places in this work.

The following list gives the publications referred to, being either the joint works of Dr. Lorimer Fison and myself, or of myself alone:—

Kamilaroi and Kurnai. Lorimer Fison and A. W. Howitt. 1880.
 "From Mother-right to Father-right." A. W. Howitt and Lorimer Fison, *Journal Anthropol. Inst.* August 1882.

"Notes on the Australian Class Systems." A. W. Howitt, *Journal Anthropol. Inst.* May 1883.

"On Some Australian Beliefs." A. W. Howitt, *Journal Anthropol. Inst.* November 1883.

"Australian Group Relations." A. W. Howitt, *Smithsonian Report*, 1883.

"On Some Australian Ceremonies of Initiation." A. W. Howitt, *Journal Anthropol. Inst.* 1884.

“On the Deme and the Horde.” A. W. Howitt and Lorimer Fison, *Journal Anthropol. Inst.* 1884.

“The Jeraeil, or Initiations of the Kurnai Tribe.” A. W. Howitt, *Journal Anthropol. Inst.* May 1885.

“On the Migrations of the Kurnai Ancestors.” A. W. Howitt, *Journal Anthropol. Inst.* 1886.

“On Australian Medicine-men.” A. W. Howitt, *Journal Anthropol. Inst.* August 1886.

“Notes on Songs and Song-Makers of Some Australian Tribes.” A. W. Howitt, *Journal Anthropol. Inst.* 1887.

“Further Notes on the Australian Class Systems.” A. W. Howitt, *Journal Anthropol. Inst.* 1888.

“Notes on Australian Message-Sticks and Messengers.” A. W. Howitt, *Journal Anthropol. Inst.* 1889.

“On the Use of Gesture Language in Australian Tribes.” A. W. Howitt, *Aust. Ass. Ad. Sci.* vol. ii. p. 637. 1890.

“Anthropology in Australia.” A. W. Howitt, *Aust. Ass. Ad. Sci.* vol. iii. p. 342. 1891.

“On Trade Centres in Australian Tribes.” A. W. Howitt, *Aust. Ass. Ad. Sci.* 1901.

The facts upon which my conclusions are based were stated substantially in the above works. But in some cases my views have been modified by a wider experience and more mature consideration. Yet the broad facts on which Dr. Fison and I relied, and the general deductions from the same, remain unaltered. That they were securely founded upon native custom is sufficiently shown by the splendid work done by Spencer and Gillen, who have independently found the same social facts, and have drawn therefrom the same conclusions as we did.

I have to express the very great obligations I am under to correspondents for information about the organisation, customs, and beliefs of the several tribes with which they were acquainted, or as to which they obtained information. My sincerest thanks are due to them, not only for this information, but also for the patience with which they bore my continued questioning, and for the very great trouble

b

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00632-3 - The Native Tribes of South-East Australia

Alfred William Howitt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

which some of them took to work out further details of social questions which their information or my personal knowledge suggested.

In the following list I give the names of the tribes described or referred to, and the name of the correspondent in each case to whom I am indebted for the information recorded. I have also given in the body of the work, in footnotes, the names of the correspondents whose statements I quote. Where there are no such footnotes, and especially as regards the Dieri, Yantruwunta, Yaurorka, Leitchi-leitchi, Wiradjuri, Wotjobaluk, Mukjarawaint, Jupagalk, Jajaurung, Wurunjerri, Thagunwurong, Kurnai, Wolgal, Ya-itma-thang, Ngarigo, Yuin, and Biduelli, I speak from personal knowledge of those tribes-people at some time during the last forty years.

It will be observed in the perusal of this work that there are certain gentlemen to whom I am especially indebted for most important contributions, and to whom my special thanks are due for very valuable assistance, without which I could not have fully given the information as to certain tribes. These are: Mr. Harry E. Aldridge, Mr. A. L. P. Cameron, Mr. W. H. Flowers, the Rev. Otto Siebert, the late Mr. Edward Palmer, Mr. Tom Petrie, Mr. J. C. Muirhead, and the Rev. John Bulmer.

LIST OF CORRESPONDENTS AND TRIBES DESCRIBED
BY THEM

Harry E. Aldridge . . .	Maryborough district, Queensland.
J. W. Boulton . . .	Wilga, Kongait, Tongaranka, Bulali, Naualko, Guerno, Barabinya.
J. W. Boydell . . .	Gringai.
G. H. Bridgeman . . .	Bombarabura. Tribes about Mackay.
Jocelyn Brooke . . .	Kaiabara.
Rev. John Bulmer . . .	Kurnai, Ngarigo, Theddora, Wiimbaio.
John Buntine . . .	Theddora.

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-00632-3 - The Native Tribes of South-East Australia
 Alfred William Howitt
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PREFACE

xi

A. L. P. Cameron	Barkinji, Ithi - ithi, Muthi - muthi, Ta-tathi, Wathi-wathi, Wiradjuri, Wonghibon, Unghi.
R. Christison	Dalebura.
R. Crowthers	Wollaroi, Bigambul, Yualaroi.
Cyrus E. Doyle	Kamilaroi.
C. I. Duve	Kurnai, Ngarigo.
M. J. Fehan	Paruñji.
W. H. Flowers	Kuinmurbura.
Dr. John Fraser	Various tribes through correspon- dents.
J. Gaggin	Herbert River tribes.
Captain Garside	Wiradjuri.
F. Gaskell	Kukata.
S. Gason	Dieri and kindred tribes.
James Gibson	Chepara.
Rev. J. H. Gribble	Wiradjuri.
J. Hogarth	Yendakarangu.
C. F. Holmes	Hunter River tribe.
A. Hook	Gringai.
Frank James	Dieri, Mardala.
Rev. H. Kempe	Aldolinga.
J. H. Kirkham	Buntamurra.
Julius Kühn	Narrang-ga.
James Lalor	Bigambul, Emon, Ungorri.
T. E. Lance	Kamilaroi.
R. Lethbridge	Maranoa tribe.
W. Logan	Mundainbura, Yakunbura.
W. Lucas	Kurnai.
Dr. E. M. M'Kinlay	Wiimbaio, Gringai.
Hon. A. M'Lean	Kurnai.
J. C. Macleod	Kurnai.
J. C. Muirhead	Wakelbura and kindred tribes.
C. Naseby	Kamilaroi.
W. O'Donnell	Kurnandaburi.
John O'Rourke	Ngarigo, Kurnai, Theddora
Edward Palmer	Wide Bay tribes.
Tom Petrie	Turrbal.
Rev. J. G. Reuther	Dieri.
D. Elphinstone Roe	Yerkla-mining.
Dr. W. E. Roth	Annan River tribe.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00632-3 - The Native Tribes of South-East Australia

Alfred William Howitt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii NATIVE TRIBES OF SOUTH-EAST AUSTRALIA

G. W. Rusden	Geawe-gal.
W. Scott	Gringai.
J. Shaw	Wurunjerri, Wiimbaio.
Rev. Otto Siebert	Dieri and kindred tribes.
Mrs. James Smith	Buandik and kindred tribes.
Professor W. Baldwin Spencer	Arunta, Waramunga.
Rev. J. H. Stähle	Gournditch-mara.
D. Stewart	Buandik.
T. M. Sutton	Narrang-ga.
F. W. Taplin	Narrinyeri.
Rev. George Taplin	Narrinyeri.
E. R. Vernon	Kamilaroi.
H. Vogelsang	Dieri.
H. Williams	Yerkla-mining.

I have endeavoured to show on the maps which accompany this work the range of the several class organisations, and the locality in each state, of each tribe referred to. But the reader will kindly bear in mind the great difficulty which always presents itself, not only in defining the true boundaries of any tribal country, but also, in many cases, of giving the true and comprehensive name of the tribe. A member of a clan will probably give its name, and only on closer inquiry will give the name of the tribe of which that clan is a part. It is still more difficult to ascertain the name of what I have termed a nation, that is, of a group which includes two or more kindred tribes.

Some tribes are again spoken of by the name of their language. Such causes have produced errors giving considerable trouble to correct, and it is to be feared that even now they have not been eliminated in all cases.

In the map which faces page 90 I have indicated the approximate boundaries of the several class systems mentioned in Chapter III. The boundaries are necessarily but approximate, as more precise ones could only be obtained by possessing an intimate knowledge of those of each tribe along the common line of division. But sufficient is given to show

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00632-3 - The Native Tribes of South-East Australia
Alfred William Howitt
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PREFACE

xiii

on broad lines the range of the great groups of tribes organised successively from the two-class system of Central Australia, and the more developed four- and eight-class system of the more northern parts of the continent, to the highly-modified organisations of the coastal regions of South-East Australia.

I have more than once drawn attention to the almost complete identity, even in details, of certain tribal customs in places far distant from each other. I now mention this in advance, for the purpose of pointing out that in such cases I have endeavoured to give the expressions made use of by my native informants, or my correspondents, as the case may be, and have given them in detail, in order to impress the coincidence, since it shows a remarkable and widely-spread observance of custom.

By far the greater part of the materials for this work was collected and recorded before 1889. Since then the native tribes have more or less died, and in the older settlements of South-East Australia the tribal remnants have now almost lost the knowledge of the beliefs and customs of their fathers. I have preferred to let my notes remain, as they were written, in the present tense, rather than to attempt to bring them up to the present time.

Among the causes to which the rapid extinction of the native tribes by acquired vices must be attributed, I may note the use of opium in Queensland. My correspondents inform me that it was acquired from the Chinese employed there, and that it is given to the aborigines as wages and gratuities, or is sold to them by retail traders.

Dr. Lorimer Fison and I have been so long associated in investigations into the organisation and customs of the native tribes of Australia, that it was with feelings of the greatest regret that I found his other engagements would prevent him from joining me in this work. It had been

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-00632-3 - The Native Tribes of South-East Australia
Alfred William Howitt
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

always my hope that his name would be associated with mine in it, but although that cannot be, the fact remains, as will be seen from the list of our joint works, that much of what I have done is equally his.

I wish to acknowledge the great obligations I am under to Professor Baldwin Spencer for much assistance during the preparation of this book, and for photographs which have been reproduced in it. He most kindly read over the drafts of the several chapters, and I have benefited by his kindly criticisms and suggestions in their final settlement. I have also to thank him and Mr. F. J. Gillen for generously permitting me to use some of the photographs taken by them in Central Australia.

My thanks are also due to Miss A. J. King for some interesting photographs of Kurnai men and women.

I have to acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr. J. G. Frazer for much kindness and for most valuable suggestions in connection with this work.

The Government Astronomers of New South Wales, Queensland, and South Australia have most willingly supplied me with information as to rainfall and temperature. And to Mr. P. Baracchi, the Government Astronomer of the State of Victoria, are due my especial thanks for the interest which he has taken in this part of my work, and for the suggestions which he has made.

Mr. J. H. Maiden, the Government Botanist for the State of New South Wales, very kindly examined and named a collection of plants from Lake Eyre, some of which have been drawn for this work by Miss Flockton under his direction.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER I	
ON THE ORIGIN OF THE ABORIGINES OF TASMANIA AND AUSTRALIA	1
CHAPTER II	
TRIBAL ORGANISATION	34
CHAPTER III	
SOCIAL ORGANISATION	88
CHAPTER IV	
RELATIONSHIP TERMS	156
CHAPTER V	
MARRIAGE RULES	173
CHAPTER VI	
TRIBAL GOVERNMENT	295
CHAPTER VII	
MEDICINE-MEN AND MAGIC	355

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-00632-3 - The Native Tribes of South-East Australia
 Alfred William Howitt
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

xvi NATIVE TRIBES OF SOUTH-EAST AUSTRALIA

CHAPTER VIII

	PAGE
BELIEFS AND BURIAL PRACTICES	426

CHAPTER IX

INITIATION CEREMONIES, EASTERN TYPE	509
---	-----

CHAPTER X

INITIATION CEREMONIES, WESTERN TYPE	643
---	-----

CHAPTER XI

MESSENGERS AND MESSAGE-STICKS—BARTER AND TRADE CENTRES—GESTURE LANGUAGE	678
--	-----

CHAPTER XII

VARIOUS CUSTOMS	736
APPENDIX	779
INDEX	807

ILLUSTRATIONS

FIG.	PAGE
1. Kurnai man wearing opossum rug	40
2. Man of the Wonkanguru tribe	46
3. Man of the Wonkanguru tribe	48
4. Man of the Narrang-ga tribe	66
5. One of the Krauatungalung clan of the Kurnai tribe	74
6. One of the Krauatungalung clan of the Kurnai tribe	75
7. A Kurnai woman	79
8. One of the Krauatungalung clan of the Kurnai tribe	136
9. A woman of the Dalebura tribe	228
10. Kaiabara record of the sub-class names	231
11. Berak, one of the Wurunjjerri tribe	254
12. Native weapons	265
13. Spear-thrower used at Kurnai <i>Jeracil</i> , and considered to be very strong magically	277
14. Stone axe, ground	312
15. Molongo dance in which decorations of emu feathers are worn	331
16. Shields used to ward off spears ; shields for club fighting	337
17. Boomerangs of Victorian tribes	339
18. Tulaba, one of the Kurnai, as a Wait-jurk	344
19. Tankowillin, one of the Kurnai, as a Nungi-nungit	345
20. A Nungi-nungit preparing to avenge a death by evil magic in the Kurnai tribe	349
21. Guliwils	364
22. Preparation for the Molongo dance	415
23. Molongo dance near Lake Eyre	417
24. A Kurnai bark canoe	424

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-00632-3 - The Native Tribes of South-East Australia
 Alfred William Howitt
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

xviii NATIVE TRIBES OF SOUTH-EAST AUSTRALIA

FIG.	PAGE
25. Spear-throwers	457
26. The Bret or dead hand	460
27. Pigeon rock, Urabunna	483
28. Tikovina used by the Herbert River tribes	499
29. Yuin bull-roarer, Mudthi ; Djeri bull-roarer, Yuntha	517
30. Man decorated for the Kuringal ceremony	539
31. The figure of Daramulun cut on a tree	540
32. Earth figure in relief of Daramulun	553
33. Teeth extracted at Yuin Kuringal and implement used	562
34. Rough figure used at the Port Stephens ceremonies	573
35. Bribbun of the Chepara tribe ; Wabulkan of the Chepara tribe	579
36. Head of Bullawang showing the characteristic markings	619
37. The two bull-roarers of the Kurnai tribe	628
38. Tutnurring, showing characteristic marking	636
39. Urabunna man, showing Wilyaru cuts on the back	659
40. The Narrang-ga bull-roarer, opposite sides	672
41. Token worn by messenger, Wilyaru ceremony. Dieri tribe	680
42. Head-net worn by messenger to call a Pinya. Dieri tribe	681
43. Message-sticks of Wurunjjerri, Narrinyeri, Gournditch-mara, and Wotjobaluk tribes	696
44. Message-sticks of the Tongaranka, Narrang-ga, Mundain- bura, and Yakunbura tribes	704
45. Message-stick of the Wakelbura tribe, and Kabugabul- bajeru of the Chepara tribe	708
46. Wirha (<i>Acacia salicina</i>)	712
47. Kurnai woman with baskets	719
48. An Obal placed as a guide to a following party. Kurnai tribe	722
49. Kurnai woman carrying a child	737
50. Markings which were made upon the skin sides of opossum skins by the Kurnai when they sewed them together as coverings	742
51. Kurnai woman, showing raised scars on back	743
52. Yuin man with raised scars on chest, in ceremonial dress	745
53. A Kurnai man climbing a tree in search of an opossum	757

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-00632-3 - The Native Tribes of South-East Australia
 Alfred William Howitt
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

ILLUSTRATIONS

xix

FIG.		PAGE
54.	Urabunna man making fire	771
55.	Kurnai using fire-drill	772
56.	Kulua (<i>Hakea leucoptera</i>)	788
57.	Paia-moku (<i>Didiscus glaucifolius</i>)	788
58.	Duntyi (<i>Crotalaria</i> sp.)	792

MAPS

Victoria and Tasmania	21
South Australia	<i>To face page</i> 44
New South Wales	50
Map No. 1—Queensland	86
Map No. 2	60
Map No. 3	62
Map No. 4	58
Victoria	72
Sketch map of Gippsland	80
South-East Australia, showing Social Organisation	90