

Settlers in the Area

For my creative project I decided to choose the topic 'Settlers in the Area' for several reasons. The main being I wanted the opportunity to create a respectful and thought provoking infographic, that was both visually appealing and historically correct. The other I was that I was particularly interested in learning about the events that happened during those times and what effects they had on both the Indigenous community and the Australian landscape.

During my research I came across many reports of first encounters with the Europeans and Aboriginals and, to my surprise, many of them were rather positive. Perhaps I had learned the wrong information when growing up: that all first encounters were horrendous and unjust takeovers. Instead, it seemed that there were numerous cases where both the first inhabitants of the land and settlers left each other in peace with no hints of potential harm.

It was not long however, until I was able to find some documents describing some of the monstrous acts that happened after.

1788 was the year that the First Fleet arrived in Sydney, but it wasn't until 1818 when the first colonists arrived in the Upper Hunter Valley area of NSW. Benjamin Singleton and John Howe were the two main men who led exploratory parties and discovered these beautiful, lush lands - later having towns and valleys named after them.

During one of the first classes in the semester, I read a quote from one of the initial encounters in the Newcastle area. The quote came from Benjamin Singleton on the 6th of May 1818; "... the next morning as the party set off they encountered a group of more than 200 Aboriginal men, clothed in skins and armed with spears." This immediately stuck in my mind and powerful images appeared of what that frightful time would have looked like to a group of nervous men in a new land. As the night before hand there had been an attack on the campsite by the Aboriginals in the area (but no casualties). Singleton further stated, "About 8 o'clock Disturbed by the Voices of Natives Cracking of Sticks and Rolling big rocks, stones down towards us every man of us arose and fled from the fire secreting ourselves behind trees with our guns and ammunition..."

Nearly ten years later the fighting had not ceased. On the 4th of August 1828, reports from *The Monitor* stated a man had come across the bodies of "... some half a dozen black natives..." and, when finding a group of white men nearby, he was told that a large number of Aboriginals had approached them and through "... acting in concern, our people commenced a destructive fire of musquetry upon them, and the blacks presently fled."

Similarly, several Aboriginal people were shot shortly thereafter for killing one hundred sheep and tying a shepherd to a bed of ants – leaving him to suffer. This punishment of the Aboriginals was harsh - even when considering the crime they originally committed - illustrating the hostile and sorry state of relations at the time between the two groups.

Even after being imprisoned for crimes, members of the Indigenous community continued to be treated violently. It was whilst being detained as prisoners, that four Aboriginal men were 'deliberately shot' by soldiers - with a witness swearing under oath that, "They took the man about a quarter mile off in the bush. The soldiers had their muskets with them; they placed him by the side of the tree, three of them fired at him. I was standing close by; he fell and the fourth soldier who had not yet discharged his piece, went within a few yards of where the black lay and put a ball through his body... We all came away and left him there."

As retaliation two stockmen were speared and killed, yet sadly, the perpetrators who had committed the initial crimes were given an opportunity in court to contest their charges and prove their "innocence" - successfully terminating their trial after only five minutes of deliberation from the jury – with the result welcomed applause and congratulations.

Not all colonists followed the violent and unjust mentalities of their peers; others chose to take a more appeasing approach when trying to resolve complications with the Aboriginals. This is evident in the Myall Creek massacre case in 1838, when twenty-eight Indigenous men, women and children were brutally murdered by eleven settlers on the station of Henry Dangar in Myall Creek, NSW. Details of the slaughter were given by Governor George Grepps who stated, "More than twenty human heads having been counted on the spot, lead me to suppose that the number of persons murdered of all ages, and both sexes, was not less than twenty-eight.." Govern Grepps later said of the offenders, "...they thought it extremely hard that white men should be put to death for killing blacks," and that until the first trial they never believed that their lives were at risk. The result of the second trial was a great success with seven of the eleven men arrested receiving the death sentence and being hung for their crimes.

Newcastle was the location for all of those who had committed crimes and been exiled from nearby areas within New South Wales, from the years 1804 until 1823. Because of this, there was very little farming and a small population of only 200 which was made up of convicts, guards, and Aboriginals. Even though the tribal lands of the Indigenous communities were not taken over by settlers - due to arriving in other areas first - they had to manage frantic criminals who would escape and make visits to their lands with the aims of abusing members of their clan, usually the women.

Overall, working on this particular project has been enormously rewarding for me. I was able to produce a piece of work about an incredibly sensitive matter and time - in a respectful and tasteful way – without displaying bias towards either party.

Whist researching the project I learnt a lot about my regions history, and, although many stories were disturbing and immoral, I am glad I had this opportunity, as I feel that learning about these events allows us to learn from our past mistakes and ensure history does not repeat itself.