

RSA/B 15

Letter to Dr Agnew from Dr Story regarding the Oyster Bay tribe of aboriginals

Respected Friend

Dr. Agnew

Having received a Copy of the queries proposed by Brough Smyth of Victoria respecting the flint instruments used by the Aborigines of Tasmania I have endeavoured to gain information on the subject, as from personal observation I could say only that I had never known that in their attacks on the Europeans they had left behind on their flight being repulsed any other weapons except their spears & waddies, & no instruments had ever been found at their encampments – but to be certain I have consulted an Old Inhabitant of the Oyster Bay District – John Radford & his wife, a daughter of the late Thomas Buxton of Mayfield who came early into this District & had many opportunities of observing the manners and customs of the Oyster Bay tribe This tribe traversed the East Coast from East Bay Neck northward as far as Falmouth or George's River where they would come upon the boundaries of the Break O'Day tribe, it is not probable they went farther North if even so far –

J Radford came here in 1818. The Natives then seemed friendly – although looked upon with suspicion by the Settlers – about this time a man was left by a party of Sealors [sic] in charge of their Provisions & stores at a place named Grindstone Bay from their having set up a Grindstone there, and on their return from Sealing at the White Rock they found the man had been murdered & the Provisions taken away & other Articles destroyed. It was sometime afterward that Mosquito joined this tribe and became their chief. Mosquito and Bulldog were two Sydney Natives transported to Norfolk Island for the murder of a White Woman. Bulldog died at Norfolk Island & Mosquito was sent to Hobart Town, he remained in the "Tench" there some time and was afterwards permitted to work for the settlers at Pitwater, here he became acquainted with some old Aboriginal women who wandered about the Pitwater Settlement, and by them he was led to join the Oyster Bay Tribe – Mosquito travelled with this tribe as their Chief and on one occasion the whole Tribe arrived at Grindstone Bay Hut there being then a Station belonging to one of the Gatehouses and in charge of John Radford; they encamped on the north side of a Creek opposite to the Hut on a Wednesday night and remained Thursday & Friday, making their spears & waddies – Mosquito had picked up a Tin Pot and asked Radford if it was his saying he found it at a place near Major Lord's Bluff.

Radford recognised the Pot gave Mosquito & some that were with him some Damper. Mosquito told Radford that he had promised Colonel Sorel [sic] that he would tame the Natives and prevent them from annoying the Settlers, and that the Governor had issued an order that the Settlers should not molest the Natives. The whole Tribe about seventy in number men women & children whilst remaining here were more or less engaged in making the spears & waddies and being apparently friendly

Radford had the opportunity of observing their manners & customs at this time in particular. To form their Spears & Waddies a lump of Black Flint was broken by any other stone at hand and the

piece with the sharpest edge selected wherewith they Scraped the spear & pointed it, alternately scraping & hardening it in the fire until a very hard & sharp point was produced, and if the piece of flint lost its edge it was if large enough again broken or another piece selected The Spears were of different Lengths proportionate to the prowess of the individuals who wielded them; the longest spear found was one belonging to [Ballavyuna?] the chief who succeeded Mosquito. it measured eighteen feet others 14 to 16 feet. The waddies underwent a similar process to the spears the hard part of the waddie was knotted by blows with the flint and in cutting down the tall straight stems for their spears or cutting off the pieces of She Oak for their Waddies they could have no other instrument than the pieces of flint as the spear was bent it was warmed on the fire and straightened across the knee. Saturday Morning arrived & the attack upon their friend Radford & his two companions commenced as is described in Bonwick's book on the Aborigines – and for which Mosquito suffered death. There were no other weapons but spears & waddies in the hands of the Aborigines at this time with the exception of a club used by Mosquito, formed out of young She Oak torn up by its root & having a portion of its horisontal [sic] root left attached to the bulb, something like an axe, it was a formidable weapon that would have knocked down an Ox –

From Grindstone Bay Station the Tribe next appeared at Th^s Buxton's Mayfield, the alarm being given by M^{rs}. Radford then a child & her Sister; before the persons on the premises could be called into the Hut for safety, the Natives had sneaked into it & stolen everything they could take away even to the only Gun on the premises – fortunately an old pistol & being had been placed under a bed to keep it from damp as it was occasionally used to obtain a fire, with this pistol they were kept at bay until assistance was in the night procured from Waterloo Point, in this case after they were driven from their camping ground & had left everything behind them no weapons but their spears & waddies were found. They did not even make use of the knives, and as for Guns it was their custom to hide them in some concealed place. The one taken from Mayfield was found many years afterwards being laid bare by the bush fires, the barrels only remaining and the knives were left in the Hut. It seems that the Women had a practice of shaving each other's heads with very small & sharp pieces of flint. when these pieces were blunt they would rub the edges together as if to sharpen them – a ring of hair was left around the crown of the head as an ornament. The Skin disease which was so prevalent particularly amongst the children was treated by the mothers placing the child across her knees, and with a blunt flat stick, something similar to the end of a table knife, pressing out the purulent matter & rubbing the parts with the marrow from the thigh Bone of the Kangaroo.

The Mothers carried their Babies under their Arms wrapt [sic] up in an Opossum or Kangaroo Skin, the flesh side outwards, it being scraped clean & smooth as they possessed no implements. The skins must have been taken off with the pieces of flint.

The usual practice of cooking ~~their~~ food was by the Aborigines was to throw the Animal on the fire, which burnt off the hair, on the one side, the carcase was then burned & the charred & upper side scraped with a piece of flint when this finished, if a

Small animal as an Opossum it was held by the head & tail and ~~to~~ the flesh torn off with their teeth until nothing more was left but the bones which were thrown to the Dogs. I do not know how the women made the holes in the little shells that were strung on Sinews to form Necklaces as they removed the outer surface of the shell by the aid of the fire & smoke, it would then be easily pierced with a stick hardened & pointed in a similar manner to their Spears – When the Women were friendly with the Settlers they would make little rush baskets & give them to the children – The Oyster Bay Tribe appear to have had great dislike to be hampered with carrying any Articles except their Spears and Waddies with the exception of their care in carrying fire from place to place some of the party were always entrusted to carry & preserve alight the pieces of Bark used for this

purpose. Unacustomed [sic] to clothing they would even throw away Blankets that had been given them, it is therefore unlikely that they would carry flints with them, particularly as they well know where to obtain fresh ones – The Queries must therefore be answered as applying to the Oyster Bay Tribe of Aborigines by saying that they never used any made implements, trusting only to the pieces of flint they would pick up in their wanderings through the District

I shall be happy to supply any other information required

& remain thy friend

George F Story

Transcribed by Teresa Mace 8/1/2020