A Comprehensive Online Database about the Native Mounted Police and Frontier Conflict in Queensland

By Lynley A. Wallis¹,², Heather Burke³ and Mia Dardengo²

1. Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research, Griffith University, Nathan campus, 170 Kessels Road, Nathan QLD 4111, Australia <l.wallis@griffith.edu.au>
2. Wallis Heritage Consulting, PO Box 300, Albany DC WA 6331, Australia
3. Archaeology, Flinders University, Adelaide SA 5001, Australia

Abstract

In recent years the publication of online maps documenting frontier conflict between Indigenous peoples and interlopers in Australia has generated great public interest. These new resources are vital memorials to frontier conflict; however, we note they are still relatively “flat” resources, much more akin to visualized spreadsheets with a spatial element. Another new resource, the Frontier Conflict and the Native Mounted Police Database is a comprehensive relational database that comprehensively presents all elements of frontier conflict across the state of Queensland. It collates transcribed primary documents, georectified historical mapping data, and oral histories with archaeological site and artefact level data, and links these multi-tiered sets of information to the known structure, spread, and personnel of the paramilitary government agency, the Native Mounted Police. Rather than a single map being the main outcome, the Frontier Conflict and the Native Mounted Police Database uses the range of primary data to generate a comprehensive series of interactive maps, including layers relating to key historical data sets, as well as making the mass of primary and secondary data upon which the maps are based accessible to the user. In this Reflection, we describe the extent and limitations of the Frontier Conflict and the Native Mounted Police Database, and compare it with other online datasets. In collating frontier conflict relating to Queensland in a single, freely available online resource, we invite the public to actively engage in “truth-telling,” by assessing historical evidence for themselves,
developing their critical thinking skills, and drawing their own conclusions about the nature and extent of frontier conflict.

Keywords
Frontier Conflict; Queensland Native Mounted Police; Database; Australia

Introduction
From the early 2000s, the “History Wars” have seen extensive discourse over the nature of Australia’s “settlement.”1 The 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart — a call for constitutional recognition made by Indigenous leaders — even made oblique reference to the debate, with the preceding Regional Dialogue Meetings revealing a fundamental need to “know more about Australian and Aboriginal history”2 in order for Australia to reconcile with its past. Consequently, “truth-telling” is again surging to the forefront of the Australian lexicon.

One transformative truth-telling initiative has been an expansion of research into massacres, a key element of which has been mapping the location of such events. Such endeavors are not new: Ian Clarke mapped massacre events across the state of Victoria in the pre-digital era.3 What is different today, however, is that increasingly sophisticated geospatial interfaces facilitate the production of online representations of such events that move beyond static paper maps. Lyndall Ryan and colleague’s Colonial Frontiers Massacre Map has been the most prominent online mapping exercise to date,4 incorporating stringent criteria regarding the number of victims (six or more) and a

1 The word “settlement” implies that the process was peaceful and well ordered. The evidence shows clearly that this was not the case.


3 Ian D. Clark, Scars in the Landscape: A Register of Massacre Sites in Western Victoria, 1803–1859 (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1995).

level of confidence for each alleged incident. Ryan et al.’s map initially focused on southeast Australia, with information about other locations added subsequently; as of late 2020 approximately sixty-five massacre events have been plotted across Queensland. A derivative map and associated series of newspaper articles was subsequently published as “The Killing Times” by the *Guardian (Australia)* and went on to win a Walkley Award. Unsurprisingly, Ryan’s team and the Colonial Frontiers Massacre Map, along with *The Guardian* team and “The Killing Times” project, have recently come under criticism by right-wing ideologues, who suggest the research underpinning both maps is fundamentally flawed.

A more recent massacre map has been produced by Greg Hooper, Jonathan Richards, and Judy Watson, via The Names of Places project. Richards had originally been part of the Colonial Frontiers Massacre Map project and it is not specified how the authors saw their own work differing from Ryan et al.’s. However, two apparent differences are the direct inclusion in Hooper et al.’s version of (some) primary documents and events drawn from “oral history and hearsay.” While Ryan et al.’s map lists the primary and many secondary sources used to map each event, Hooper et al.’s map sometimes, but not always, provides a direct link to a primary source document, such as an official inquest file which details an event, allowing the viewer to read the material themselves rather than having to rely on a researcher’s interpretation of it.

---


While both Ryan et al.’s and Hooper et al.’s maps are extremely valuable for indicating the scale, spread and consequences of frontier violence, making them accessible literally “at a glance,” we suggest that their scope is still limited. Ryan et al.’s map focusses on arguably more “sensational” events, as the minimum criterion for an event’s inclusion is the death of six people or more as per Ryan’s definition of a massacre.\(^\text{10}\) This belies the complexity of the frontier, where larger-scale killings were comparatively rare and usually the culmination of smaller-scale events over preceding weeks or months. We argue that a more holistic approach to mapping violence on the frontier, that includes all conflict “events” regardless of whether these resulted in large (or any) numbers of deaths, is required in order to provide a more nuanced view of the ebb and flow of interactions and the negotiation of relationships. Accordingly, The Frontier Conflict and the Native Mounted Police database\(^\text{11}\) was developed as an outcome of the Archaeology of the Queensland Native Mounted Police project.\(^\text{12}\)

**The Broader Context of the Native Mounted Police and Frontier Conflict in Queensland**

The Native Mounted Police (NMP) were a paramilitary Government force that operated during the second half of the nineteenth century in newly “settled” districts on the Queensland “frontier.”\(^\text{13}\)

---


13 Jonathan Richards, *The Secret War: A True History of Queensland’s Native Police* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2008). While the word “frontier” conjures up a line beyond which was the “unknown” and the “wild,” in fact the frontier should be more correctly considered a “zone of interaction;” see Lynley A. Wallis et al., “Fatal Frontier: Temporal and Spatial Considerations of the Native Mounted Police and Colonial Violence across Queensland,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Australia and New Guinea*, ed. Ian McNiven and Bruno David (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
While they sometimes undertook tasks such as escorting gold shipments, assisting exploration parties, establishing new travel routes and searching for missing persons, their main role was to respond to European requests for police assistance to “disperse” (widely accepted as a euphemism for “killing”) Aboriginal people and destroy their resistance to the process of European expansion.

The establishment of the NMP in Queensland followed a long tradition. Its immediate antecedents can be found in the Native Police Corps established in 1837 in the Port Phillip District of Victoria, an institution which itself mirrored a long British tradition of using Indigenous “outsiders” to police other Indigenous populations across the Empire. The first detachment of NMP arrived on the Darling Downs in May 1849, when Queensland was still part of New South Wales. It was under the command of the newly appointed Commandant Frederick Walker and comprised fourteen Aboriginal men who had been recruited by Walker from the Murrumbidgee and Murray River districts. From these humble beginnings the NMP eventually grew to a more substantive force, with more than 800 troopers and 450 Europeans serving through its’ half-century history. Typically detachments operated with between four and eight troopers under the command of a European officer, stationed in often remotely located base camps. The NMP eventually declined in size until the last camp (at Coen in Cape York Peninsula) was closed in 1929, and relatively little was known about it until about forty years ago, when historians such as Henry Reynolds, Noel Loos, Ray Evans, and, more recently, Jonathan Richards and Timothy Bottoms began to shed light on their activities. This


17 Burke and Wallis, “Frontier Conflict”; see also Richards, Secret War.

18 Timothy Bottoms and Raymond Evans, Conspiracy of Silence: Queensland’s Frontier Killing-Times (Sydney: Allen and Unwin,
was part of the breaking of the “Great Australian Silence” and the dismantling of the “cult of forgetfulness” described so eloquently by William E.H. Stanner in his Boyer Lecture of 1968.\(^\text{19}\)

Funded by an Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery Project grant, the Archaeology of the Queensland NMP project set out to document both the history and material remains of the NMP, and to share our findings with the public in new and innovative ways.

**Beyond Dots on Maps: A Different Kind of Online Resource**

Hooper et al. noted that they had found spreadsheets (aka tables) inadequate for collating all the information generated by their mapping project and turned to ArcGIS to more effectively manage their data. Both The Names of Places and the Colonial Frontier Massacres Map are vital memorials to frontier conflict, but they are still relatively “flat” resources, much more akin to visual spreadsheets than truly comprehensive datasets. For both, clicking on a dot on the map brings up a summary table outlining the basic statistics for each event, including date, description and references. The Hooper et al. map, in some instances, also provides a direct link to a primary document describing the event in question, although these are limited in number. Ryan et al.’s map is more visual in that it allows the

---


user to zoom into a satellite image of the area in question and navigate around it in a 3D landscape. The relationship of that event to other, contextual strands of information, however, is limited by the Google Earth base map that depicts each event in relation only to the modern landscape.

The Frontier Conflict and the Native Mounted Police Database (hereafter “the FC&NMP Database;” see Figure 1), however, goes far beyond this, in that it is a comprehensive relational database (rather than a spreadsheet) covering all elements of frontier conflict of Queensland. It collates transcribed primary documents, georectified historical mapping data, and oral histories with archaeological site and artefact level data, and links these multi-tiered sets of information to the known structure, spread, and personnel of the NMP. Rather than a single map being the main outcome, the FC&NMP Database uses the range of primary data to generate a series of interactive maps, including layers relating to key historical data sets such as mineral fields, pastoral districts, Native Title groups, and language groups, as well as making the mass of primary and secondary data upon which the maps are based accessible to the user.

[Figure 1 near here]

Like every database, the FC&NMP Database is a comprehensive method of storing, managing and retrieving masses of complex information, the individual pieces of which are and can be related to one another and explored in a myriad of ways.\(^\text{20}\) Perhaps the best way to think about it is as a mass of complicated, related spreadsheets, each one collating data about a different aspect of the NMP, but all of which are powerfully interconnected and cross-referenced, as well as being tied to spatial information. The FC&NMP Database is also unique in not just presenting dots on a map, but explicitly making all of the information that underpins each dot (and more) available online, so that users can not only easily access and read all the source material for themselves, but can also interrogate,

analyze, and interpret the data independently.

After four years of intense development, the FC&NMP Database was officially launched at a public event held at the Queensland Museum in December 2019, with an opening address by Dr Jim Thompson (CEO and Director of the Queensland Museum), a keynote presentation by Badtjala (K'Gari, Fraser Island) scholar and artist Dr Fiona Foley, and a special performance by didgeridoo virtuoso Will Barton and performer Aunty Delmae Barton. Since then we have added further content to it, and will continue to do so in coming years. The remainder of this paper provides explanations about the information in the FC&NMP Database and the rationale for its data being generally grouped into four key interconnecting nodes — Sources, People, Places, and Events.

**Sources**

There are essentially two sets of “sources” in the database: historical documents and archaeological materials.

**Documents**

History is constructed in large part on documents, and this is also true of the FC&NMP Database. We consider documents in the broadest sense, thus encompassing primary documents, secondary documents, journal articles, books, manuscripts, photographs, maps, plans, sketches, video files, and audio files. Wherever feasible we have included a PDF copy or image of the original document alongside its transcription, so that readers can access them in whatever format they prefer. This alleviates the problem that exists for many people who are either not professional historians and are thus unfamiliar with how to source primary material in repositories such as the Queensland State Archives and/or who are not able to visit such repositories themselves owing to logistical constraints. Of course, the usual caveats with regards to the transcriptions of primary sources apply, in that we do not guarantee that they are error free (when we could not determine a word in a transcription we have either left it blank, or indicated our best guess); readers are cautioned to refer to the original
documents wherever possible.

Over sixty per cent (n=9075) of the more than 14,000 documents catalogued in the FC&NMP Database comprise articles/letters from historic Australian newspapers predominantly accessed through Trove, though occasionally non-digitized newspapers have been accessed via other means. The second most abundant category of documents are the thirty per cent (n=4326) that derive from government records held in the Queensland State Archives’ collection. In the first instance we focused on materials from the obvious series, such as the Police Staff, Police Stations, and inquest files, but have also included relevant items from other series, such as the Colonial Secretary’s correspondence. Other sources include occasional diaries and letters sourced from other repositories, such as libraries, private and museum collections, and, specifically in relation to the People section, online repositories such as Ancestry.com and the Australian Dictionary of Biography. Secondary sources, such as books and journal articles about the NMP,²¹ are also listed, but owing to copyright issues in most cases only bibliographic information is provided rather than a PDF copy. To differentiate these types of resources from the primary sources, these are termed “References” in the FC&NMP Database.

Regardless of the form they take, all documents are comprehensively cross-referenced to items in all of the other nodes (see below), allowing the user to follow whichever thread they are interested in. Documents are also tagged with relevant keywords, such as “European weapons,” “women,” “mining,” “Chinese” or “illness/health/disease,” thus allowing users to easily view all items relating to a specific topic or theme.

Of course, as anyone interested in history is aware, documentary sources are inherently biased, and are often lacking entirely for large numbers of people, places, and time periods. This is especially the case with regard to frontier conflict. Many settlers took good note of the lessons learned from the Myall Creek case, when eleven Europeans were tried and seven hanged for the murder of at least

²¹ For example, Skinner, Police of the Pastoral Frontier and Richards, Secret War.
twenty-eight Aboriginal people in New South Wales in the late 1830s.\(^\text{22}\) The trials and punishment of the Myall Creek perpetrators both set a judicial precedent and led to a more clandestine culture surrounding the killing of Aboriginal people. It is perhaps not surprising that documentary records are inherently — and perhaps consciously — silent on many of the details of the actions of the NMP, even when events were reported directly by the officer responsible, or in the rare cases when officers were disciplined or arrested for potential crimes against Aboriginal people. We say more about this in specific regard to frontier conflicts events below.

*Archaeological materials*

While documents are obviously an important means by which to reconstruct the NMP story, they are not the only source. We also wanted the FC&NMP Database to be a repository of information about the NMP-related archaeological sites and artefacts that were the focus of our wider project. While obviously an online database cannot be a repository for physical objects, it can and does include descriptive data on all of the archaeological places and objects recorded during the course of the project.

The Archaeology of the Queensland NMP project identified and visited forty-one NMP camp sites and seven other places related to frontier conflict; notes, descriptions, and photographs from all visits are included in the database. Eight NMP sites were excavated, and the FC&NMP Database contains all of the excavation forms, and field photographs and notes, as well as photographs and descriptions of the artefacts. In some instances where we have been granted access to catalogue such materials, we have also been able to include information about artefacts from private or museum collections.

Generally, artefacts were categorized in the first instance as belonging to one of the broad material categories listed in Table 1 and given a unique entry in the database. Depending on the type

---

of artefact, a suite of basic attributes (such as weight, length, width, height, time period of manufacture, raw material type, colour, paste, etc.) was then recorded following standard archaeological practice, and a photograph taken and uploaded. At the time of writing, more than 15,000 artefacts have been catalogued in the FC&NMP Database.

[Table 1 near here]

People

The “People” section of the database holds information about four key categories of people, each of which is tailored to meet the needs of that particular group, with its own unique limitations and challenges.

NMP Officers (n=441)

These records relate to the non-Aboriginal members of the NMP and, in some instances, their senior commanding officers, such as the Commissioners of Police, though we note the latter types of men had broader responsibilities than singularly supervising the NMP.

As noted above, official staff files for some of these men (which often provide snippets of information about their NMP colleagues) survive in the Queensland State Archives, and have been copied, transcribed, entered into our database, and then cross-referenced with related entries. While staff files are a key repository of information about many NMP officers, for a variety of reasons (including poor record keeping in remote locations, and sometimes the [deliberate and accidental] destruction of records) they exist for only a proportion of the officers.

As you would expect, the quantity of information available on each man is highly variable. For some we have only one mention of a name as an aside in a source, such as a letter in another

officer’s staff file. Similar scant references might include a mention in a single newspaper account, although the vagaries of nineteenth century journalism mean there are many misspelt names and confusion about men with similar or the same surnames (such as the Murray and Walker brothers), which complicate understanding. At the other end of the spectrum are men who had extended periods of service with the NMP, often being promoted into positions of authority as their careers progressed and being recalled back to regional centres to serve in the “regular” police force. These men often accumulated an extensive, detailed staff file associated with their service, although their NMP service is not necessarily detailed. Most men fall between these two extremes. A small number of officers were captured in photographs, though these are the exception rather than the rule. In some instances it is unclear whether men were employed in the NMP or the regular police force, and in others it is clear that they moved between appointments in both; in these cases we have flagged such uncertainties pending clarification.

Wherever possible NMP officer entries provide summary biographical information about each man, such as their birth and death dates, and information about their spouse and children, a history of their time in the NMP, such as where they were posted and when, what ranks they held, who their commanding officer was, who the troopers were in their detachment, and what “events of frontier conflict,” if any (either instigating or responding to), they were involved in.

*NMP Troopers (n=881)*

These are records relating to the Aboriginal members of the NMP. Unfortunately, not a single official staff file exists for any Aboriginal trooper, even though they were paid members of the Queensland Police Force. Accordingly, we recognize our list of troopers is far from exhaustive, since many such men were never referred to in any documentation at all, and we generally have far less information about any of these men than their commanding officers.

Complicating attempts to identify the Aboriginal members of the NMP is the fact that most were given a European “first” name when they joined — rarely were they given a surname and rarely
were their Aboriginal names used (though interestingly the latter seems to have happened more often in the early decades of the Force and particularly in association with recruits from the Wide Bay area in southeast Queensland). Consequently, there were many troopers with the same name and it is sometimes impossible to distinguish between them. In such instances we have resorted to allocating a number after their name to distinguish them and indicate in the database entry when we have reason to suspect that two entries may refer to the same individual.

As with NMP officer entries, each trooper entry provides known biographical information about each man, such as when they joined and left the Force, their death dates, the region they were recruited from, and sometimes information about their spouse and children, a history of their time in the NMP, such as where they were posted and when, who their commanding officer was, and what “events” of frontier conflict they were involved in.

Associated Individuals (n=2064)

Associated Individuals are people who were not members of the NMP, but were in some way associated with it or with the incidents of frontier conflict documented elsewhere in the FC&NMP Database. This includes, but is not necessarily limited to, officers of the regular Police Force, Police Magistrates, Justices of the Peace, politicians, landowners, pastoralists, shepherds, miners, victims of attacks, and the wives and/or children of NMP officers and troopers.

One thing that is easy to forget from our twenty-first century viewpoint, is just how small the population of Queensland was in the nineteenth century: just 23,250 people in 1859, rising to 506,721 in 1901 (of whom 120,650 were living in Brisbane or surrounds).24 Cross-referencing all the people mentioned in the historical records in relation to frontier conflict reminds us of this fact, and reinforces the understanding that almost everyone in nineteenth century Queensland would have either had some direct involvement with frontier conflict, known someone who was directly involved

or, at the very least, been aware that it was going on.

In part as a result of the small population size, it is not surprising that often the same people show up in multiple sources, such as pastoralists who were petitioning for visits from the NMP, and/or who were then themselves involved in conflict events. Another example are medical practitioners, as doctors were often involved in carrying out autopsies or tending to people who were wounded during conflict events. Perhaps the best example of the latter is Helmuth Axel Fredrich Bernhard Kor (aka Korteum), a medical practitioner in Cooktown, who treated many European and Chinese people speared by Aboriginal people defending their lands in the Cape York Peninsula region in the 1880s.25

Researchers \(n=52\)

This section of the database includes entries for all of the researchers on the QNMP project. These include academics engaged at various institutions or companies, as well as current or research graduate students working on discrete aspects of the overall project. Aboriginal and other community members who assisted with the project are also included here, particularly when they were actively involved in fieldwork or in compiling and transcribing primary source documents or cataloguing artefacts.

Places

The Places node of the database is generally separated into NMP camps (and other conflict related places, such as homesteads) versus “Other places.” “Camps” includes all historically known instances of NMP camps derived from historical information; within this is a sub-category for those that we physically relocated on the ground and thus were able to inspect and record. The “Other places” are exactly that — any place referred to in a source that is not an NMP camp, such as a watercourse or travel route, the name of a pastoral run, or a township. A search facility allows users to search the

FC&NMP Database by place names (as well as all other categories), thus allowing Queensland residents to identify frontier conflict in their local region, and even on specific pastoral stations.

Events

A key difference between the FC&NMP Database and other online maps is that we explicitly set out to catalogue all elements of frontier conflict, not just those involving deaths of large numbers of people. As such, we have attempted to document all kinds of frontier conflict events which, for the ease of analysis are categorized as attacks against either (1) Aboriginal people, (2) Europeans/Others (i.e. non-Aboriginal people), (3) Property\(^{26}\) and/or livestock, or (4) NMP detachments. In doing so we offer a more holistic (though still partial) view of the frontier, since high profile massacres were not the norm, rarely happened in isolation, and were often either the culmination of a series of more minor skirmishes in the preceding weeks and months, or led to a series of recriminatory actions that could be equally small-scale. We acknowledge that this part of the FC&NMP Database is by no means exhaustive and have drawn heavily on the existing research of historians such as Ray Evans, Noel Loos, and Timothy Bottoms, supplemented by our own independent research. Event entries record information such as where and when an event happened, who was involved (officers, troopers or other individuals), what other events led up to it or happened after it, and copies of written accounts referring to that event. With respect to the latter we have in almost all cases presented the primary source material, as well as noted where secondary sources discuss a particular event or person.

We recognize without apology that the FC&NMP Database events dataset has several limitations, principally its inherent bias that privileges accounts of European/other deaths over those of Aboriginal people, and the fact that many accounts (both oral and written) provide insufficient locational or temporal information to allow mapping with any degree of confidence. For this reason there are far more attacks on non-Aboriginal people mapped, even though this almost certainly was

\(^{26}\) Property can refer to that belonging to Aboriginal people, such as when camps were raided and humpies burned down, or Europeans/others, such as when shepherds’ huts or drays were ransacked.
not the case historically. Most attacks on Aboriginal people drew only a single line mention in historical sources, if at all, and potentially involved large numbers of people being killed although it is very rare for any numbers of deaths to be recorded, while an attack on a single European/other person was routinely widely reported in contemporary newspapers, with explicit details being provided. Despite the shortcomings, the data provide a damning visualization of the extent of conflict across colonial Queensland that contrasts other available maps (Figure 2).

[Figure 2 near here]

Tying any frontier conflict event to a particular spatial location is an intellectual problem that underlies all of the maps discussed herein. Most locations reported in documents are vague at best, especially when referring to NMP attacks on Aboriginal camps, since these were located far from European nodes in the landscape — the places usually plotted on historical maps — and often referred to in relation to the amount of time it took to reach them (e.g. “three days’ tracking”) rather than a physical feature in the landscape. The FC&NMP Database events therefore have varying degrees of certainty regarding these locations. For instance, an attack on a specific named homestead can be pinpointed more accurately than an attack described as occurring “fifty miles from Thornborough” (which could be in any direction). This is another key difference between the FC&NMP Database and both Hooper et al.’s and Ryan et al.’s maps: the FC&NMP Database provides a rationale for why an event has been located to a certain geographical location, including any problems with identifying it and how those problems were dealt with.

Further complications are the limited number of literate Europeans and the often sporadic reporting of frontier conflict in newspapers, letters, and diaries, as a result of which some areas or time periods appear to have few or no events. As such, we note here that geographic areas with few events are more likely to reflect a lack of written sources relating to that region rather than an absence of conflict per se. In a similar vein to Hooper et al.’s approach, we have included, where possible,
information from oral histories about frontier conflict, but the oftentimes lack of geographic or temporal specificity provided in such sources made mapping them challenging. The events we have documented are only those that can be tied to some sort of specific location, although more often than not these events still cannot be mapped with any high degree of accuracy. For example, we might know that an event happened on a particular road or station, or at a certain distance from a township, but no more details are available about exactly where. Unfortunately, there are many accounts of frontier conflict in the literature that are too generic to be mapped at all and therefore have not been mapped in the FC&NMP Database, though they may well appear in the documents section. In effect, the fundamental methodological problem and the solution we adopted are both laid bare. Neither Hooper et al.’s nor Ryan et al.’s maps provide a similar service, although Ryan et al.’s map includes the caveat that “points are imprecise to approx. 250 m.”

**Comparing the Maps**

To visually demonstrate the fundamental difference between the data presented in the FC&NMP Database with that of other maps, thereby highlighting the diversity of sources in the FC&NMP Database as well the volume of information, in Table 2 we present a brief comparison of select events across the three sources discussed here. In selecting the events for comparison we chose three that demonstrated different elements of mapping, confidence level, location, and source evidence: (1) an attack by the ex-Commandant of the NMP, Frederick Walker, and his exploration party on Aboriginal people that occurred near the Stawell and Woolgar Rivers in 1861; (2) the deaths of nineteen members of the Wills family and their party at Cullin-la-ingo in Central Queensland in the same year; and (3) an attack on Mt Larcombe station, near Gladstone, that resulted in the deaths of six people in 1855. The particular definition of massacre adopted by Ryan and colleagues meant that no event on a smaller scale could be compared between the three.

---

27 As “The Killing Times” map is a derivative of Ryan et al., “Colonial Frontier Massacres” map we have not included it as a separate source in our summary table.
As could be expected, the three resources provide differing levels of detail and specific information on each event (Table 2). Without going into too much detail, there are divergences in dates, locations, and sources.

[Table 2 near here]

For example, dates for the Stawell River event vary between each source by up to six years, as does its location between Ryan et al.’s and the FC&NMP Database. Only the FC&NMP Database provides a reference to the historic map used to identify as accurately as possible where the event occurred. Ryan et al. plot this event some 80 kms to the NW of ours (presumably on the Woolgar goldfield), though in this they are patently incorrect, as it occurred at the confluence of the Woolgar and Stawell Rivers, near the location of Walker’s camp 31, as per the 1862 map of Walker and Landsborough’s routes 10 April 1862 by W. Collis (NLA MAP RM 1086). Hooper et al. simply refer to this as the “Stanwell River” and provide no detail, other than a page reference to Bottoms. The divergence in years is more difficult to understand: Ryan et al. date this event to 1863 rather than 1861 and provide the motive of clearing the region for settlers rather than linking it to Walker’s expedition in search of the missing Burke and Wills.

The massacre at Cullin-La-Ringo was a seminal moment in the history of Queensland. The narrative provided by Ryan et al. notes that “Following the abduction of 2 Aboriginal boys by 3 white men, 19 members of the Wills family were massacred mid-afternoon by Gayiri people.” This was certainly one of the reasons provided in the aftermath of the attack, although more sources, including accounts given to Archibald Meston by Aboriginal men who allegedly participated, alluded to prior killings of Aboriginal people who had been accused of stealing and spearing sheep on a neighbouring

---

28 Hooper et al. do not provide the co-ordinates for their locations so it is difficult to plot and compare these independently.

29 As a minor detail, neither Frederick Walker nor the ex-troopers who accompanied him were still in the NMP by the time this event occurred, so it cannot technically be attributed to the Force.
run. 30

The Mt Larcombe example highlights the considerable mythology that is often built up around frontier conflict events and that affects secondary sources to varying degrees. If factored into the process of documenting such events, this mythology helps to demonstrate the dynamic and creative nature of recirculated oral memory and provides users with some tools to help them evaluate the sources more critically. 31 To assist, the FC&NMP Database provides some basic analysis of sources in a “Notes” field that details some of this elaboration and alteration over time. As the FC&NMP Database is intended in part to be an educational resource for secondary school students, and critical historical enquiry is one of the key goals of the curriculum, the presentation of all available primary material facilitates users developing these skills.

No previous attempts at mapping frontier conflict have incorporated information about events that did not result in human deaths, nor built a comprehensive relational database to catalogue their findings, let alone made all of their source material available for open scrutiny in an online format. The FC&NMP Database and its associated maps is entirely unique in this respect. A key benefit of having constructed an interactive database which underpins the conflict events is that the entire dataset can be searched and filtered in whatever fashion the user desires, and data can be exported via .csv files for further interrogation using other software. For example, by identifying all known NMP camps with secure locational data, we know now that camps had an average duration of a little under eight-and-a-half years overall. In contrast, Evans and Ørsted-Jensen 32 calculated frontier

30 For the first cause see North Australian, Ipswich and General Advertiser 20 December 1861, 3 and Courier 21 December 1861, 2. For the second, see Empire 30 April 1867, 5; Evening News 8 May 1875, 3; Morning Bulletin 2 December 1922. 12; T.S. Wills Cooke, The Currency Lad: A Biography of Horatio Spencer Howe Wills 5 October 1811 to 17 October 1861 and the Story of his Immediate Family 1797 to 1918 Using Contemporary Letters, Documents, Daguerreotypes, Paintings and Photographs (Leopold: T.S.W. Cooke, 1997).


32 Ray Evans and Robert Ørsted-Jensen, “‘I Cannot Say the Numbers that Were Killed’: Assessing Violent Mortality on the Queensland
Aboriginal death rates based on an estimated seven-year average for each camp, a figure derived from the research of Richards.\(^33\) Once the camp duration is extended to the more accurate eight-and-a-half years their minimum and parsimonious estimate of a potential death rate of 41,040 Aboriginal people killed at the hands of the NMP between 1859 and 1897 significantly advances in size to over 100,000.\(^34\)

Exploring the spatial dimensions of archaeology using GIS technologies is not new. While the “spatial turn” may have changed the way historians or researchers from other traditionally non-spatial disciplines understand the past, archaeology has always engaged with place and landscape as a critical component of understanding past human behaviour. In this respect GIS is mostly used to create quantitative data layers relating to artefacts, sites, landscapes, and their attributes. In historical archaeology GIS enables a variety of primary source information, such as historical maps, census or other archival data, to be used as a framework for locating sites and associated infrastructure.\(^35\) The use of GIS for historical and archaeological applications has the ability to extend beyond mere site and event locations, artefact distributions, and inventory. It provides a place for storing information and conducting subsequent analyses and provides continuity for historical and archaeological studies, which can be added to or modified over time.\(^36\) Moreover, “[t]here is a strong spatial component to both history and archaeology, and GIS can exploit that commonality to provide a whole that is a great deal more than the sum of its parts.”\(^37\) Spatial data can be paired with geo-referenced historical maps

---

\(^33\) Richards, Secret War.

\(^34\) Wallis et al. “Fatal Frontier.”


\(^37\) Thomas Justus Nolan, “Battlefield Landscapes: Geographic Information Science as a Method of Integrating History and Archaeology
and other archival data to visualise a landscape and shift the interpretation away from archaeological sites per se. “Sites” delineate specific locations at which past activity has occurred, but assuming that activity ceased beyond the borders of a site ignores many other aspects of human behaviour. Cultural landscape studies acknowledge that activities extend well beyond the limits of a site, even if physical evidence is absent from the record, and address relationships between multiple sites.\(^{38}\)

**Conclusion**

The history of frontier conflict in Australia at once surrounds us, yet at the same time is still literally and figuratively hidden from view. The oftentimes fierce debates about whether what happened constituted a war, how many people might have been killed as a result, and whether contemporary Australia should recognize or refute such research, complicates the way we look upon the past and the ways we make the past look to us. For the descendants of frontier violence survivors, Aboriginal troopers, and NMP officers, these stories are their family histories; they define who they are, where they came from, and how they see themselves today. The FC&NMP Database provides anyone interested with a new opportunity to understand this, both as a general process and, for those living in Queensland, as a fundamental part of the history of their region. There is no single story of the NMP; its history is as broad as the hundreds of officers and troopers who constituted it, and as deep as the personal choices, actions, and reactions that contributed to the decades of violence and unrest as people and worldviews collided on the frontier. By allowing people to access the evidence for themselves, everyone will be able to investigate the nature of frontier conflict, critically assess it, and come to their own conclusions about what happened, why, and how. This is a powerful contribution to any truth-telling exercise, although how that plays out socially, psychologically, and culturally remains to be seen.

---

Acknowledgements

The full team for the Archaeology of the Queensland NMP project comprised Heather Burke, Lynley Wallis, Bryce Barker, Noelene Cole, Iain Davidson, Larry Zimmerman, and Elizabeth (Liz) Hatte, with the project concluding in December 2020 (though we continue to add material to the database as it becomes available). In a project of this extent it is impossible to thank everyone individually, so we offer our gratitude to the many communities and individuals who have assisted us over the years, and to the colleagues, students, and volunteers who have similarly offered their support; a complete list of all involved in the project is available online at https://archaeologyonthefrontier.com/acknowledgements/. In particular Cherrie De Leiuen and Kelsey Lowe were engaged for periods as formal Research Associates on the project. Elements of archival research were undertaken by Lynley Wallis, Heather Burke, Bryce Barker, Kelsey Lowe, Alyssa Madden, Ursula Artym, Ryan Tadeucci, and Ellen Tiley. Artefact cataloguing was undertaken by Lynley Wallis, Heather Burke, Bryce Barker, Calvin Logan, Ursula Artym, Leanne Bateman, Lauren Bryant, Lucy McQuie, Yinika Perston, and Tony Pagels. Document transcription was undertaken by Lynley Wallis, Heather Burke, Trish Wallis, Lyndell Janezic, Jonathan Richards, Helen Batty, and Calvin Logan, and oral histories were documented, transcribed and processed by Georgia Moodie, Iain Davidson, Mia Dardengo, and Julie Burleigh. Finally, we thank Glen Maclaren, Troy Mallie, and Steve Wealands from Environmental Systems Solutions for their assistance with database development and their patience in dealing with our many requests to continually “tweak” elements of it.
Funding

This research was funded through the Australian Research Council (DP 160100307 The Archaeology of the Queensland Native Mounted Police).

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on Contributors

Lynley A. Wallis is an Associate Professor at Griffith University, as well as working as a cultural heritage consultant currently engaged as the Cultural Heritage Advisor to Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation. She is a past co-editor of the journal *Australian Archaeology* and is on the Editorial Board of *Queensland Archaeological Research*. Lynley has longstanding interests in the archaeology of northern Australia, palaeoenvironments, and Aboriginal cultural heritage management, and a commitment to undertaking collaborative research partnerships with communities.

Heather Burke is a professor in the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at Flinders University. She is a past co-editor of the journal *Australian Archaeology* and has published widely including the books *Meaning and Ideology in Historical Archaeology* (1999) and the co-published *The Archaeologist's Field Handbook*, a standard manual for teaching archaeological field methods, which was revised and expanded for a second edition in 2017.

Mia Dardengo is currently working as an archaeologist for Wallis Heritage Consulting. She is a member of the Australian Archaeological Association (AAA) and is an associate member with the Australian Association of Consulting Archaeologists (AACAI).
### Table 1

Summary of major categories of data in The Frontier Conflict and the Native Mounted Police database, as at 11 November 2020 (after Burke and Wallis 2019).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Node</th>
<th>Number of entries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sources</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary documents</td>
<td>14,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary documents (references)</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images (inc. maps)</td>
<td>1617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Archaeology</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMP camps identified</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMP camps visited</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMP camps excavated</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artefacts, comprising:</td>
<td>15,349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass</td>
<td>5288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceramic</td>
<td>3072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal</td>
<td>4591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ammunition-related</td>
<td>446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone</td>
<td>717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally modified trees</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bone</td>
<td>490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttons</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Events (n=2042)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attacks on stock or property</td>
<td>664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attacks on Aboriginal people</td>
<td>407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attacks on Europeans/others</td>
<td>951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attacks on NMP</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>People</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMP officers</td>
<td>441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMP troopers</td>
<td>881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated individuals</td>
<td>2064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Type</td>
<td>Data Field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Massacre ID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coordinate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Location Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Station Name/District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Location Description/Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Details</td>
<td>Date of Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nature of Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimum number of people killed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Names/details of people killed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other damage/effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perpetrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cause/Reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Detailed Description of Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Associated Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Associated NMP Camps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Associated NMP Officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Associated NMP Troopers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Associated Individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>Contemporary reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary Source/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notes/Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible Documents</td>
<td>Reference Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related Events</td>
<td>Detailed information regarding related events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images</td>
<td>Contemporary/Primary Images</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Comparison of information relating to the same events in different online maps.
The Queensland Native Mounted Police Research Database

The Queensland Native Mounted Police Research Database is a comprehensive online resource dedicated to the study of the Frontier Conflict and the Native Mounted Police in Queensland, Australia. The database serves as a valuable tool for researchers, historians, and the general public interested in understanding the history of the Frontier Conflict and the role of the Native Mounted Police.

The database provides access to a wide range of resources, including detailed documentation, photographs, maps, and other materials that shed light on this significant period in Australian history. It is designed to promote research and education, offering a platform for scholars and the public to explore the complex issues surrounding the Frontier Conflict and the impact of the Native Mounted Police on the region.

Key Features:
- **Public Interface**: The public interface of the database provides an accessible entry point for users to search and browse the available resources.
- **Landing Page**: The landing page offers quick access to the database's main functionalities, including search capabilities and user-friendly navigation.
- **Database Access**: Users can access the database through a secure online portal, ensuring the protection of sensitive information.

The database is a collaborative effort involving contributions from various institutions and experts in the field of archaeology, history, and Indigenous studies.

**Acknowledgments**

- Contributors include experts from multiple institutions, ensuring a multidisciplinary approach to the research.
- The database is a result of extensive collaboration and input from stakeholders involved in the study of the Frontier Conflict.

**Figures**

*Figure 1 (upper)* The public interface of the Frontier Conflict and the Native Mounted Police Database and *Figure 1 (lower)* the landing page within the database, accessed via [https://database.frontierconflict.org](https://database.frontierconflict.org).
Figure 2 Map showing the distribution of frontier conflict events across Queensland, with pastoral district boundaries shown (based on data in Burke and Wallis 2019). Note that the small-scale nature of this map means many events in close proximity are “collapsed” into a single dot; when using the online database and “zooming in,” many more dots appear than can be distinguished at this small scale.