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History of Newcastle

AND THE

Northern District.

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ATROCIOUS COLD-BLOOD MASSACRE IN 1838.

We are told in the early records of the twenties that Mr. Henry Dangar while on his surveying expedition of the Patrick Plains district was chased for his life by wild blackfellows over the very spot where he took up his residence at Neotsfield, and where most of his children were born. Mr. Dangar often spoke of the event, and did not blame the blacks, as the misconduct of runaway convicts and others gave rise to their aggressions. Through fear and sometimes through recklessness the aborigines were shot down like wild animals, and, at length the blacks finding themselves in danger and their hunting grounds occupied by intruders, determined to retaliate or attempt to expel them, hence they speared persons at sight unawares. In 1836 Mr. Henry Dangar took up the Myall Creek station, and while he was absent from the homestead in 1838 one of the most atrocious and cold-blooded massacres (scarcely equalled by any event of a similar character) of unoffending aboriginals took place. The miscreants were Englishmen, whose sanguinary disposition do not deserve that appellation. Fortunately for the vindication of humanity, the unparalleled barbarities were discovered and their perpetrators brought

to justice. The names of the monsters in human shape were Charles Kinnaister, William Hawkins, James Perry, Edward Foley, James Cates, John Russell, and John Johnson, assigned stockmen or shepherds to the settlers. In June, 1838, these ruffians, determined to extirpate the unhappy natives, set out on horseback in pursuit of their helpless victims. Near Kinnaister's hut at the big river (Myall Creek) near Liverpool Plains, they discovered a little tribe of 28 natives, men, women and children, including babes at their mothers' breasts. It was Sunday, 10th of June, when they trapped the natives, who were unsuspecting of danger and unconscious of offence. The blacks were tied with a rope attached to mounted horses, which dragged the terrified group through the bush. Groans and tears burst from the wretched beings whose worst fears were excited, but in vain did the aged and youthful appeal for compassion. Their doom was cast, and they were dragged to a secluded spot in the bush, where the hapless wretches, one after another were brutally butchered. Fathers, mothers, and children fell before the sharpened swords of the self-appointed executioners till all lay a lifeless mass, in death clinging to each other in the throes of natural affection. Only one black was shot by a firearm, and upwards of 30 lay stretched on the ensanguined earth. The demons then placed the bodies in a heap, and kindled an immense fire over them to destroy all evidence of their unheard-of brutality. Fragments of the unconsumed bones remained, and even these were collected and hidden from human eyes. But the vengeance of Providence was not to be thwarted, and although the miscreants' horrible deed was hidden for a time, circumstances led to their detection and apprehension. Birds of prey hovered about the spot, and their gatherings attracted strange stockmen, who ultimately turned up ribs, jawbones, half burnt skulls and other portions of human skeletons. This led to inquiry and eventually to the discovery of the horrible truth.

It chanced, too, that on the night previous to the murders a heavy rain had fallen, and traces were discovered of horses' feet as well as the naked feet of the wretched blacks on the path to the field of death. On 15th November the prisoners were tried before Chief Justice Dowling, charged with the murder of Daddy, one of the gigantic blacks whose remains were found among the ashes. Every possible means were adopted to secure the acquittal of the malefactors by an association of Upper Hunter settlers, which had been formed with the ostensible object of preserving their properties from the incursions of the aborigines. The blacks were speciously charged with killing and spearing the cattle, and strong prejudice was excited against the blacks to such a degree that the jury found the prisoners not guilty. Other indictments were filed against the prisoners, and in December they were again arraigned, found guilty, and sentenced to death. Renewed efforts were made in their favour, and Governor Gipps determined the law should take its course. On 15th December, 1838, the prisoners underwent the execution of their sentence. Attorney-General Plunkett and Mr. Roger Therry appeared for the prosecution. Mr. A'Beckett, Mr. Foster, and Mr. Windyver appeared for the defence. The case assumed the sensational aspect of the recently-heard Dean poison case.

THE HANNELLS OF NEWCASTLE.

Newcastle and the Hunter River districts have been fortunate in drawing to them men of vast energy, enterprise, and perseverance. It has been to such men; that these districts owe their remarkable prosperity, and their steady, though rapid advancement, industrially as well as commercially. Foremost among those who identified themselves with the interests of the city of Newcastle and district for nearly half a century, the name of James Hannell occupies a prominent position. He was born in Sydney in 1813, when the country was impenetrable for 40 miles beyond Sydney, the population depressed by poverty and suffering from various diseases.