NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING

The 5th General Meeting of the Society for 1988 will be held in:-

THE CONSERVATION CENTRE, 120 WAKEFIELD STREET, ADELAIDE

ON

MONDAY 25TH JULY 1988 AT 8.00 PM.

AGENDA

1. Apologies:

2. Minutes of the previous General Meeting:
   Minutes of the previous General Meeting, held in the Conservation Centre, 120 Wakefield Street, Adelaide on 27th June 1988, having been circulated in this journal, to be confirmed.

3. Papers and Journals:
   Papers and journals from other societies and organizations since the last general meeting, will be tabled at this meeting.

4. Speaker:
   Mr Bob Ware, Manager S.A. Aboriginal Heritage Unit, will address the meeting. The subject of his address will be
   "The Aboriginal Heritage Act: and departmental Policy".

5. Supper will be served at the close of the meeting.

R. Allison
Hon. Secretary
120 Wakefield Street
ADELAIDE SA 5000
THE VOCABULARY OF THE ADELAIDE TRIBE.

by John Philip Gell Esq.


Perhaps language is the subject of all others most deserving the attention of those who investigate the character and condition of a savage tribe. The vocabulary of barbarians is a list of their ideas; their grammar is a test of the strength and activity of the reasoning faculty, which still remains to prove that they have not ceased to be men. It is remarkable how a thing apparently so fleeting and so changeable as language survives all other relics of the past, and becomes a monument in which may possibly be traced an ancient connexion with some principal family of the human race.

We must study the ideas of the barbarians, if we would have them enter into ours. It is vain to attempt to bring their scanty knowledge to the level of our own, but by connecting the new notions with the old. In learning their language, we become familiar with their associations and trains of thought, and can inform without confusing their minds.

As a language with a well ordered grammar is at once the result of a high state of mental activity, and the most valuable instrument of thought, we may stimulate the faculties and promote the intellectual progress of a barbarian tribe by establishing the neglected laws of speech, still traceable in the broken language, and by presenting to them the familiar instrument sharpened, tempered and repaired. In this time the German missionaries have done well who teach the natives of South Australia to read and write the - Aboriginal rather than the English language, and instruct them in their own, not in the English grammar.

Again, to the barbarians themselves, as it has been well remarked, all the truster at least all the intelligibility, of the Christian dispensation depends upon the fact of an original pair, from whom they, as we, are descended; and it is not
an unimportant achievement of the philologist, to decipher for
them their title to the inheritance by tracing their origin in
that of their language, the only monument of sufficient antiquity
that remains. A little work, entitled "Outlines of a Grammar,
Vocabulary, and Phraseology of the Aboriginal Language of South
Australia, spoken by the Natives in and for some distance around
Adelaide, by C.G. Teichelmann and C.W. Schurmann of the Lutheran
Missionary Society, Dresden, Adelaide: published by the Authors
at the Native Location, 1840" furnished whatever facts may give
value to the following illustrations of these prefatory remarks.
The Authors are German missionaries in South Australia, a colony
distinguished above all others, for the enlightened efforts made
by these, and men like these, to carry through the often
abandoned experiment of supporting the Aborigines against the
hurtful influence of civilized manners and institutions. (Note :
Since the above was written, a further kindness has been conferred
from the same quarter in the addition of notes upon several
parts of this paper, which will be distinguished by the initial T.)

One essential step towards avoiding the failure which has
hitherto attended every attempt of the kind, is to place our-
selves mentally in the position in which we find the savages,
whom we would exalt to an equality with ourselves. For this
purpose we will study the list of ideas in their vocabulary.
It is hardly four years since the men of the country now called
South Australia were awakened from a long night of forgetfulness
by the advent of the Pinde-mayu, or men of the den (Note :
Pinde is the place of souls - in the far west - from whence the
souls of the unborn come, and, hovering among the grass trees,
wait for the hour of conception, and whither after burial they
return - T.) - for so they called the strangers - in whose white
complexion and unusual activity they believed that they
recognized their forefathers, returned from the habitation of
the dead.

Hitherto a dream of thoughtless indolence had filled up
the time from the birth of the savage, till the day he became,
in the language of his tribe, medu-bulti, or asleep and was carried on a bier of waddies (tirkatti) (Note: Waddies - simple sticks - T) to his grave, attended by the ngarrkuinyo, a man carrying close to his ears in either hand an extinguished fire-stick, as he walks in a stooping posture, and the tutta-kuinyo, a woman bearing the tutta or tuft of dried grass in her hand.

The childhood of the savage had been spent on learning the various names and qualities of the plants, animals, and insects, which are more accurately distinguished by the natives than by the Europeans. (Note: Animals and plants have at least two names which are used as proper names among the natives. When a native dies, the plant is, for a certain time, called by the other name - T). If a boy, he was encouraged to use the kupti, or children's spear; and to learn the ngunya-waista or kuri, which is elsewhere called the corrobory. Here, to welcome the new moon, to drive away the evil one, or after a day of indolence to rid themselves of the exuberance of their animal spirits, they practise their pantomines and dances, amidst the clashing of spears and waddies (ipila) and the cries and beating of the women (monde) who sit on the ground before the performers.

"Warpunna witarninga, ngarnda makketilya." - May your bones grow strong, men, so as to shake well "is a compliment which alludes to the curious shaking of their knees in the dance - a difficult and esteemed accomplishment.

A girl has little to look forward to but a life of toil and degradation. She must learn to collect the different species of barti or gruba. (Note: - Men also collect them - it being the business of the man to collect animal food. The species living in the bark of trees is eaten only by the men. The wild dog is appropriated to the elders - T) with the palya, a small hook, or with a rude spade (karko); also the kadogi, or native ants, which are frequently eaten. (Note: The female white ant is eaten - T). She must dig for roots with the
stick called katta, prepare the kangaroo skins (kartando) by rubbing them with stones, and steep the tarnma, or honeysuckle blossom in water to make a sweet drink.

The larger game and vegetables are cooked in the following manner:— A hole (kanyayappa) is dug in the ground, and a fire kindled in it, upon which stones are laid to be heated. During the time these are being heated they prepare the game or vegetable, and then remove stones and larger remains of wood; and if they stew a kangaroo, they first fill the inside with part of the hot stones, and leaves of the gum tree. The kangaroo is then put into the hole and covered with leaves, the remaining hot stones, bark and earth. It remains there for an hour or more until steam escapes from different parts; when this takes place the meat, or whatever is cooking, is sufficiently done (Vocabulary, kanyandi). Their other arts are, to spin manga (thread) with the cross pieces of wood called manga-tatta and manga-yainki (they use for the purpose the fibres of the warmpa, an aquatic plant, and the hair and sinews of animals) to make rush bags (tainkyedli) and bags of kangaroo skin (tando) — to make the tapurro, or drum of stuffed opossum skin, beaten by the women at the dances, — to sew with the pointed kangaroo bone (wityo or wauwe-wityo) and sinews (tainya), — to make the wika, or fishing net the minde, or wallaby net, and the munta, large hunting net, the fur cloak (watpa) and the hair girdle (gadlotti).

The approaches of the suitor are either by courtship (kakkaba-bandl) or violence; in which case the woman is called milla (a word signifying also violence) and the process milla mangkondi, to take a milla. (Note: — Girls are most frequently promised by the parents from their birth — T).

As he approaches to manhood, the boy is called wilyakundarti, from his under-going the ceremony of being beaten with green branches. (Note:— He is at the same time sprinkled with blood from one arm of one of the male adults — T.). He is also called marndo until he is circumcised. His nearest relative appoints
the time and place for the ceremony, and is hence called Pappamattanya (master of the circumcised) - (Note:- The Pappas are caught from among the children while the women pretend to be angry, biting their sticks (katta) and threatening the men. They are then taken to the place of circumcision and covered with a mantle till the Turlos are caught - the performer of the ceremony is called Turlo: he is supposed to do it unwillingly: he endeavours to escape, but is caught by the pursuers and carried to where the circumcision takes place laid upon the ground, and rubbed over with dust. As many boys as there are to be circumcised, so many Turlos are appointed, and generally a supernumerary one; the reason why is not yet known. After a short time, he is taken by the ears and raised to a sitting posture; loud shouts being made to recover him from his supposed state of enchantment. Then a line is drawn, on one side of which stands a person called Parna (the name of the star of Autumn) and on the other one called Tappo (the name of a fly): the katta (or women's stick) is borne several times round the hole male tribe. None of the women and children may witness this ceremony. The men then follow the bearer of the katta with their hands in their sides, their elbows stuck out, groaning and biting their beards, as they draw near to the Pappas who have been uncovered. Then the katta-bearer pushes the katta into the ground, and lies down, groaning and pressing the katta deeper and deeper; all the rest follow him and take hold of the katta, lying one upon the other, and forming as it were an altar upon which the Pappas are laid and circumcised. From this time they enter the class of youths (Tinjarra) - T.

The boy receives a surname (kangalita) of some animal, or of the district - (pangkatra) which he inherits from his father: he has also a secret name and is introduced to the rude mysteries which are hidden from women and children. The sacred implements are contained in an oposum bag (pinki), and consist of the paityo-watti, a pointed bone with a piece of quartz at the broad end, it is supposed to take away the sight, and may possibly
be a charm against the evil eye — the Kauwemuka, a piece of rock crystal, whose splinters are used in the final tattooing — the kadno-marngutta, a thin oval piece of wood, which the natives swing rapidly round by a string, and thus cause a humming noise in the nights — the puingurru, a peg used for bleeding — and the kariwoppa, or emu feather. The operation of tattooing is performed with sharp pieces of quartz (kanyeppa) by means of which raised lines and dots (bakkurta) are made on the breast. The following charm is supposed to ease the pain of the operation:

Karro karro wimmari
Karro karro kauwemuka
Karro karpo makkitya
Karro yernka makkitya
Makkitya mulyeria ...

of which the first two lines signify — "Blood, blood, the symbol of the lizard. (stay theel : BloodnBlood the crystal (stay thee))." The third may be Blood, Blood, from the sharp glass: "the rest can only be imperfectly made out, perhaps from being in the dialect of a northern tribe celebrated for their skill in incantations.

Once upon whom the tattooing has been completely performed is called ngulta the first of the five stages between youth and old age (ngulta, yellambambatta, tarkanyw, mangkanitya, and burtonna) (Note:— Ngulta—properly a tattoo mark yellambambatti, a fresh cut healing; tarkanyw—from the blood poured on him; mangkanitya — (literally, thin cuts), the trace of the tattoo marks disappearing burtonna—worn out — T.) He wears round his arm the badge of the age of joy and amusement—a piece of string called ngunya-kurla. He adorns his head after the fashion called mamberta, tying a piece of opossum round the forehead, greasing his hair to make it hang down in clots and colouring it with karko, or red ochre adding perhaps the tuft of feathers called witowito. The word kaityandi means, to stick bits of
quartz-crystal on the spear or club, with a gum of excellent quality called narmuyakko. (Note:- the gum (minno) of the wattle is used for this purpose: the gum of the pine (narmuyakko) for smaller instruments. - T). The shield is of dry bark (mulla bakka). The midla is a short and flat stick upon which the kayami, a small spear is fixed and thrown to a greater distance than it could be from the hand. With these simple weapons, the cloak and the girdle of the hair, the Ira-binna, or man of war, considered himself sufficiently equipped. The hunter, when tempted by a night of fleeting clouds and moon-shine, called manarra, to take the favourable opportunity of catching opossums, goes out with his wikatye (a net bag) upon his shoulder, the ngallawirri (a long club) (Note - Used only by the tribes on the Murray. They also tame wild dogs and train them to hunt. - T) and his net or climbing stick (wadna) which is fixed in the trees in which the opossum takes refuge. In hunting he also uses incantations such as follows:-

Kauwemukka minnurappindo Let the crystal egg do its work
Tarralye minnurappindo Let the wood of the tree work
Kirkik minnurappindo Let the gum of the tree work
Worrikarro minnurappindo Let the blood of circumcision flow
Durtikarro minnurappindo Let the blood of the arm work
Wimmari minnurappindo Let the symbol of the lizard work

Under a similar charm the wild dog is supposed to fall asleep when they steal upon him and kill him.

The beginning of the autumnal season is called wadla-worgatti. When they began to build their houses before fallen trees (wadlaworgga); a few bushes suffice them for a covering at the lost inclement seasons of this pure and beautiful atmosphere. The inhabitants of such a climate could hardly be unacquainted with the stars. A red star named Madletaltarni is supposed to be the mother and another named Parnakkoyerli, the father, of the stars in Orion called Tinuiyara, a group of youths who hunt kangaroos and emus in the great celestial plain (womma) while the Mangkamangkaranna (girls) whom we call pleiades dig roots
etc. which are around them. The milky way is with them a large river called wodilparri; the dark intervals of which are ponds, haunted by Yura, who first taught circumcision and was transformed into a sea monster. (Note:- The moon is, according to them the husband of the sun. Once the heavenly bodies were inhabitants of this world; the moon and the sun ascended to heaven, and all the stars followed their example. It is said that most of the stars have some legend attached to them of their doings when on earth. The sun every month slays her husband (the moon); but in dying, he revives again—T). The extreme indolence of the savage forbids us to suppose that their progress in knowledge and in the arts of life, as here described, is universally the same. What has been said may, however, give some general idea of their condition 4 years ago. The arts of weaving and housebuilding unused; their weapons rude unornamental sticks; their clothing (for those few who wear any at all) skins of the animals taken in hunting; their games childish; their wants few; their food grubs, berries, half-raw flesh and guanas.

The strangers disembarked at Yertabulti (the land of sleep or death), since named Port Adelaide; they crossed a plain called in memory of some ancient battle, Milkawomma, or the Plain of Meeting; and coming to the Karrauwirrapparri or River of the Red-gum Forest, called it, after the name of the Chairman of the colonization Commissioners, Torrens; and on Tandanya, or South Adelaide laid out a spacious town sufficient for 150,000 people. The forgotten Aborigine meanwhile, as when Carthage was first colonized of old—

...."Mirantur moles magalia quondam
Mirantur portas strepitosum et strata viarum
Instant ardentas Tyrii : pars necesse muros
Pars optare locum tecto et concludere sulco
Jura magistratusque legunt sanctumus senatum
Hic portus alii effodiunt : hic alta theatris
Fundamenta locant aliiii."

The children of modern Tyre were at first too busy, as the poet
says, with roads, town allotments, the affairs of government, their Municipality (unless sanctum senatum refer rather to the Executive Council) and their imposing theatre to enquire after the names which had been given to most of the natural features of the country in a language more euphonius than their own. The Aborigines, on their part, were not slow to name the host of new objects poured upon them. The mirae was called pindi nambo, the kangaroo from the pit; as his master was pindi mayu, the man from the pit. For the sound of his tramp heard far off over the arid ground, the verb bakkebakkandi was formed from bakka, dry bark. (Note:- Bakkebakkandi comes from bakkandi to dig into the ground as with the forefoot of a horse, a stick &c -T). Karlakarlantanga expressed the tolling of the church bell from karita a cry. Kopurlo (properly sea water means intoxicating drink of which they are fond though not universally so.

The bullet is parndapure from parndeni to crackle and pure a stone gunpowder is tipogalia (a fire-spark) Tindo serves for a watch as well as for the sun. Our rice they call pindi pari (European Maggots); and the flea, which was also imported, is pindi kudlo, the European Louse. Yoko mattanya ship-master is equivalent to a gentlemen.

Tobacco, of which they are fond, they call ka:pi (or e:mitic) probably from its first effects. Sheepi-kangallangalla (sheep-mother) is the name of a shepherd; perhaps as a hunting tribe, they have no idea of so much care being bestowed upon animals not bound to the shepherd by some domestic tie. Probably the social instinct has never sunk to so low a pitch among any other tribe of mankind. A numerous list of words, which express family relationship testifies that domestic society exists among them, and that alone. They have no chief-no judicial trials - no established laws; and we look in vain into their vocabulary for any terms answering to these notions. Weak, treacherous and ungrateful as they are, it will be peculiarly difficult to establish in their minds the forgotten ideas of
social justice. Yet if they are to be protected by European power, they must be subjected to European law. Last year two natives were hung, whose relations are now called Ngarrri-warinya wakandi or willo, son, father, or brother of the Pope. The answer of the Adelaide tribe to the Wirrameyu, or bushmen, who came down to charm the river in revenge for this proceeding, was as follows - "Charm not; it is now enough. The white man has and distributes food. Enough that those two men have been hanged: we are other men." (Note: - "Charm not, it is enough - The Europeans supplied with food dwell here - It is quite sufficient that these two men have been hung, we will live separately - T.).

Here is the true answer to the charge of tyranny in subjecting these people to the penalties of European law. The white man has and distributes food - he is generous to a selfish race. And the answer is true in a deeper sense than those who gave it can as yet conceive - He has food, not for the hungry alone, but for the ignorant, and with him is the bread of which whose eateth shall never die. The parent might as well be excused of tyranny over his child as those men who have brought the chastisement of long-forgotten law to bear on these childish and selfish beings - beings who kill their own offspring (Note: - By suffocating them over the fire - T.) merely for being troublesome. Of course, the question here is not of the justice of any particular sentence, but of the right which Europeans have to execute their laws on savages who have none of their own. It may be worth while to notice a curious ordeal which they use in cases where murder is suspected by an unknown hand. The body is carried about on a bier (called tirkatti - he that knows); one person is asking - "Has any person killed you where you have been sleeping? Do you know him? The negative answer is supposed to be given when the bier does not move round, the affirmative when the bier is moved round; which motion the corpse itself is said to produce, influenced by the kuinyo, who
is hovering over the bier. If the murderer be present, then
the bier seeps him, i.e. rushes on him and a fight ensues.
(Vocabulary. - wadnawadna) (Note:- This lasts at least a week -
then the diseased is supposed to point out his burial ground -
After burial, the spirit - towilla - escapes to pinda. - T).

If the difficulty of forming a sense of justice in these
people be great, much greater is that of exalting their religious
feelings. (Note:- They have words indicating conscience, such
as murderer, thief, liar, slanderer; but none for God, law,
priest, chief, prayer. - T). It is most difficult so far to
sympathise with the children and grovelling bondage of their
minds, as to be able to introduce them to the mysteries of our
religion, and to represent to them our High Priest in all
points tempted like as they are.

Of all superstitions on the face of the earth, theirs has
the least of religion and the most of fear in its composition.
The voice of the hawk, narkanya, the bird of twilight, charms
away the souls of their children after which they grow ill and
die. The black monster Kuinyo or Death with a swollen paunch
waits in ambush at night to destroy them in their sleep. (Note:-
The soul is called yiptytukutya (the small seed) ). His voice
among the trees which they call ngar warns them to keep their
fires burning, as he only approaches when they are gone out.
The assassin Nokunna, in the shape of a black, steals upon them
in the night and kills them. Monstrous vermin called Paitya
enter the bodies of the sick: these the sorcerers (warrara)
draw out by sucking. These men use the puingurra or peg for
bleeding. The last person (for there are generally several
bleeding at the same time) lets his blood drop on the puingurra,
places it near the fire, and repeats while it is drying magic
sentences to prevent headache and death. (Voc. puingurru).
About ten years ago they caught the small-pox (nguya) from the
eastern tribes, it probably came from Sydney. They have no
remedy against it but the nguya palti or small-pox song, which
they learnt from the eastern people. They fear the evil eye;
and for this reason avoid the presence of a man possessed with rage. They hunt (nurnondi) the lives of their enemies with enchantments and profess to charm the rivers, by putting filthy substances into them (kudnamurro) (Note:- These sorcerers are in possession of all the mysterious implements which they have received from their ancestors. Last year one of them is believed to have transformed himself into a she-oak whilst pursued by Europeans; another into water and drowned the pursuers. -T).

They have a legend of Tarro-tarro who divided the sexes and became a lizard. The kadnomarngatta, already mentioned, is his symbol. The wimmaru is the same as the kadnomarngatti, but larger. (Kadno is a lizard).

There is also a legend of Ngarkatta, a famous huntsman, a fabulous person, whose song is still retained; and of Nganno, a fabulous person, said to have given names to different parts of the country (which they at present retain) and after that to have been transformed into a sea monster. (Voc. Nganno) Tarnda, who taught tattooing, was afterwards transformed into a kangaroo; and Yura, who taught circumcision, was changed into a snake, now inhabiting the milky way. We find it impossible not to look with the highest interest and sympathy upon those missionaries who are engaged in the difficult task of reclaiming these savages. It may once more be remarked, that from the vocabulary compiled by them, is derived almost all the information which this paper may contain.

Subjoined is a list of the terms of family relationship, omitted in their proper place. It is probably defective in several points; but its abundance contrasted with the total absence of words, such as God, judge, chief, servant, etc. is worthy of remark -


Kurlakurlando - the youngest child. This system of naming children cannot be explained without a more perfect acquaintance with the language. From one or two instances given in the phraseology it would appear that the names are used as Christian names would be with us.


There are no words expressing relationships more distant than the second degree - Ancestors are called Bukkiana meyu-ancient men.