



The Discipline of Dress: Uniform Buttons and Accoutrements of the Native Mounted Police in Queensland, Australia

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Abstract Clothing is capable of providing a range of insights into aspects of identity, authority, power, and hierarchy. Here we present the results of an analysis of an assemblage of uniform buttons and accoutrements from seven 19th-century Native Mounted Police (NMP) camps in Queensland, Australia. As part of wider colonial structures of discipline and expropriation, the NMP uniform was a powerful symbol of control: over troopers' bodies, over NMP detachments by officers, and over "wild" and "savage" Indigenous peoples by the NMP. Exploring the history and development of the NMP uniform, its

intent in constructing officers and particularly troopers, the indexical qualities it acquired as a symbol of violence and fear amongst Indigenous people, and some of the alternative ways in which uniforms could be worn provides a variety of insights into the role, nature, and experience of the Queensland NMP.

Resumen La ropa es puede proporcionar una variedad de conocimientos sobre aspectos de identidad, autoridad, poder y jerarquía. Aquí presentamos los resultados de un análisis de un conjunto de pertrechos y botones de uniformes de siete campamentos de la Policía Montada Nativa (NMP, por sus siglas en inglés) del siglo XIX en Queensland, Australia. Como parte de estructuras coloniales más amplias de disciplina y expropiación, el uniforme de la NMP era un poderoso símbolo de control: sobre los cuerpos de los soldados, sobre los destacamentos de la NMP por parte de los oficiales y sobre los pueblos indígenas "salvajes" y "descontrolados" por parte de la NMP. Explorar la historia y el desarrollo del uniforme de la NMP, su intención de construir oficiales y, en particular, soldados, las cualidades indexadas que adquirió como símbolo de violencia y miedo entre los pueblos indígenas, y algunas de las formas alternativas en que se pueden usar los uniformes, proporciona una variedad de ideas sobre el papel, la naturaleza y la experiencia de la NMP de Queensland.

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Résumé Les vêtements ont le potentiel d'apporter une variété d'éclairages sur les aspects liés à l'identité,

l'autorité, le pouvoir et la hiérarchie. Nous présentons ici les résultats d'une analyse d'un assemblage de boutons d'uniforme et d'habits provenant de sept camps de la Police montée (Native Mounted Police—NMP) du 19^{ème} siècle dans le Queensland en Australie. S'inscrivant dans les structures coloniales plus vastes de la discipline et de l'expropriation, l'uniforme NMP était un symbole puissant de contrôle, à savoir sur les corps de ses membres, sur les détachements NMP par les officiers et enfin sur les peuples indigènes « sans retenue » et « sauvages » par le NMP. L'étude de l'histoire et du développement de l'uniforme NMP, de son intention quant à la construction d'officiers et particulièrement de membres de la police montée, des qualités indexicales dont il a été investi en tant que symbole de violence et de peur parmi les peuples indigènes, de même que certaines des manières alternatives dont ces uniformes pouvaient être portés, fournit une variété d'éclairages sur le rôle, la nature et l'expérience de la NMP du Queensland.

Keywords uniforms · buttons · Queensland · Native Mounted Police

Clothing the Native Mounted Police

The stranger turned round and revealed a rather prepossessing face, and I noticed a row of glittering buttons, which at once proclaimed the native police officer. (Boomerang 1879:109)

Clothes are a powerful channel for communicating social identity, ordering the movement, carriage, and self-perception of an individual's body, as well as influencing the many ways in which both body and person can be viewed, interpreted, and engaged with by others (Loren 2001; White 2008; Hayeur-Smith et al. 2019). Archaeological studies of social identity as expressed through clothing, whether exploring ideas of gender, religion, age, political affiliation, ethnicity, authority, or other aspects of hierarchy, wealth, and status are naturally typically centered on the durable elements of such items that survive—principally buttons (Heath 1999; Lindbergh 1999; McGowan and Prangnell 2011; Putman 2011), but also other forms of closure and personal adornment (White 2008, 2009).

Inherent in much of this work is the role of clothing as something other than just a practical covering for

the human body. The concept of the “social skin” (T. Turner 1980; Loren 2001) or “second skin” (Hayeur-Smith et al. 2019) highlights the semiotic role of bodily coverings as an expression of individual and collective identity that is connected to both subjective and social experiences of the items being worn. Situations where the subjective and the social come into contradiction generate ambiguity, ambivalence, and tension, giving rise to the potential for alternative practices (Tranberg Hansen 2004). Diana DiPaolo Loren (2001) has pointed to the dense web of interconnections that existed between clothing and European ideas of control (over the body, self, and others) and civility, both as an imagined and a lived experience, especially in the colonial context. For Loren, “dress was not a straightforward matter of ‘putting on’ a fashion, but ... a process by which individuals ‘became colonial’—ambiguous, contested, and created at the intersection of doxic beliefs, orthodoxies, and daily practices” (Loren 2001:185). Doxic beliefs are those unquestioned values that people bring with them from prior cultural experience and orthodoxies are the edicts, laws, or regulations that govern what is considered to be “appropriate” behavior. Orthodoxies are often deemed necessary to restore order in contexts where doxic beliefs are threatened by dissenting or alternative behaviors, also known as heterodoxies (Loren 2001). This was particularly pertinent in frontier spaces where control could be tenuous, contested, and contentious, and where doxic behaviors came more frequently under threat. In colonial situations the imposition of clothing upon Indigenous bodies was therefore as much a technique to break down existing notions of personhood as it was a means to create new values, selves, and modes of being that accorded with European ideals of the moral, Christian, submissive individual (Montón-Subías and Moral de Eusebio 2021).

This article presents the results of an analysis of 51 uniform buttons and 9 accoutrements from 7 19th-century Native Mounted Police (NMP) camps across Queensland, Australia. It derives from the broader Archaeology of the Queensland NMP Project (AQNMP), which aimed to identify the physical locations of NMP camp sites and use their material evidence to shed light on aspects of the NMP experience. The current article focuses on the role of the NMP uniform as a marker of social identity for this frontier force, as well as some of the many meanings

attributed to particular elements of the uniform by the NMP and those with whom they interacted. Originating in 1848 as a paramilitary force, the NMP was designed to subdue, often violently, Indigenous resistance to European settlement across what was then the far northern frontier of the colony of New South Wales. After the separation of Queensland from New South Wales in 1859, the suppressive tactics of the NMP became intrinsic to the economic success of the colony, accompanying the vanguard of European presence into new areas, as pastoral, mining, agricultural, and fishing interests shifted successively north and west throughout the second half of the 19th century. The last named NMP camp in Queensland, Coen, closed in 1929.

Operating as a widely distributed force, a typical NMP detachment consisted of one or two white officers in command of between 4 and 15 Indigenous¹ troopers camped in a central location from which large areas could be patrolled on horseback. Troopers were typically drawn from other previously settled areas of the country or colony, a tactic deliberately designed to prevent partisan connections with local people and discourage desertion, exploit displaced and disempowered Indigenous populations, and weaponize existing frameworks of cultural difference between Indigenous groups.

Initial conceptualizations of the NMP stressed its potential as a force for civilization, both through the inculcation of habits of discipline, cleanliness, and routinization in the Aboriginal men who became troopers and via its potential to conciliate the Indigenous groups it was sent to pacify (Nettelbeck and Ryan 2018). As a policing force predicated on the use of cheap Indigenous labor to repress other Indigenous peoples—a tactic common across the British Empire—however, “civilizing” came to have a double meaning as both a means of inculcating Western materialist and colonial values in the persons of the troopers and as a euphemism for extermination achieved through an expedient, cheap, and effective frontier force armed with the latest weaponry and

ammunition (Kirkman 1978; Nettelbeck and Ryan 2018). Despite its initial ideological underpinnings, the subsequent history of the NMP has highlighted its more entrenched reality as a force for opportunistic violence and repression (Richards 2008).

The organization, regulation, and routines of the NMP were, therefore, devices largely intended to transform Indigenous men into well-ordered troopers via various forms of personal and group discipline, as well as the use of corporal punishment, including summary execution, to reduce infractions (Richards 2008:140; Burke, Barker, Cole et al. 2018). The age of troopers on recruitment—where this can be known—varied from 10 to 39, with an average age of 23 (Burke and Wallis 2019). These were young men who were unmoored from former traditional ways of life and familial networks, and either already coopted into European values and allegiances via the mission system or viewed as potential troublemakers (sometimes both). Recruitment took place variously through coercion (including as an alternative to jail or execution), cooption (often by older, serving troopers), and voluntarily, suggesting a complex field of contingent identities, shifting loyalties, and individual choices within this colonial context (Burke, Barker, Cole et al. 2018; Burke, Barker, Wallis et al. 2020).

The function of a uniform in this context was multifaceted. Uniforms, particularly military ones, are a very specific form of clothing. They are an explicit symbol of a hierarchical structure of rank and command, and the wearing of one is a critical part of adhering to a particular set of rules and behaviors. The effective performance of an NMP detachment depended on obedience to orders, which in the colonial context was enmeshed with wider attitudes about civilization, savagery, capitalism, and control. NMP uniforms were thus one element of much wider colonial processes for controlling Indigenous people and ensuring the continued expansion of the frontier for various forms of settler capitalism. For the members of the NMP the experience of wearing and maintaining a uniform was considered central to developing discipline and a key element in the external social identity they presented to others. The NMP uniform was one of the main external apparatuses used to authorize their activities (the other being the gun, particularly the Snider carbine after 1870) and display allegiance, obedience, conformity, and regulation. While the experiential dimensions of wearing a

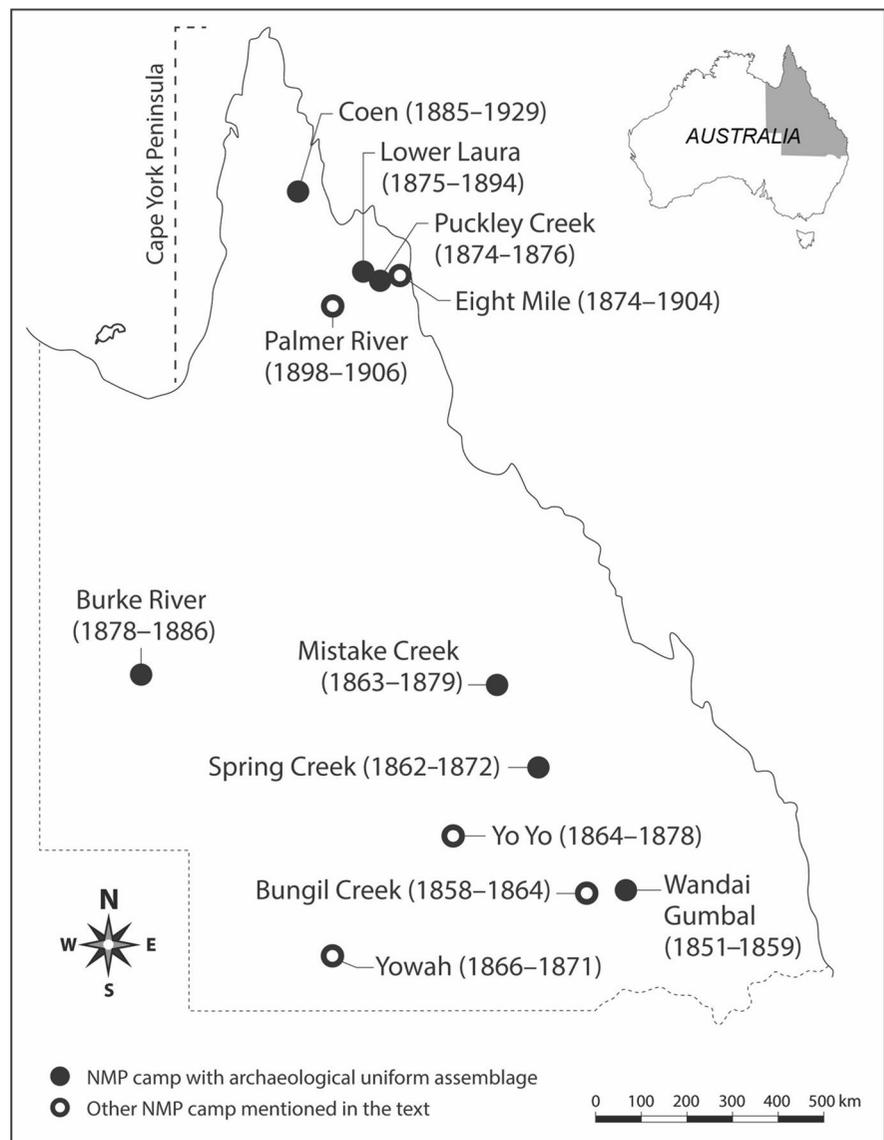
¹ We use “Indigenous” to refer to people of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, and “Aboriginal” to refer to people or groups from mainland Australia only. The troopers of the NMP included both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, although the former were numerically predominant.

uniform would have differed between European officers and Indigenous troopers, the uniform—or at least the most readily recognized elements of it, including buttons and caps—came to symbolize a range of meanings on both sides of the frontier. Its presence was deployed and its absence negotiated in various ways, helping to construct different interpretations of troopers and officers over time.

The seven sites studied here span the entire history of the NMP across Queensland (Fig. 1). Wandai Gumbal is located in southern Queensland and

operated from 1851 to 1859. Spring Creek and Mistake Creek are both in central Queensland and operated from 1862 to 1872 and 1863 to 1879, respectively. Puckley Creek and Lower Laura were integral to the colonization of Cape York Peninsula, particularly the economic success of the Palmer River goldfield in the 1870s, and operated from 1874 to 1876 and 1875 to 1894, respectively. Burke River is in far western Queensland and operated from 1878 to 1885. Finally, the operation of Coen, also in the Cape York Peninsula, spanned 1885–1929.

Fig. 1 Queensland, showing sites and places mentioned in the text. (Drawing by Heather Burke, 2021.)



Methods

Uniform-related artifacts were recovered from excavated contexts at Burke River, Lower Laura, and Wandai Gumbal, and from mapped surface contexts at Burke River, Puckley Creek, Mistake Creek, and Coen. The artifacts from Spring Creek derive from a private metal-detectorist's collection, part of which was gifted to the NMP Project, and so have no accurate spatial provenience. At Burke River, the only site where intensive analysis of spatially recorded artifacts has been carried out, refits of ceramic ($n=42$) and glass sherds ($n=23$) in surface contexts were spatially close (maximum of 1.8 m for some refits) in all but one survey grid, suggesting that horizontal movement of artifacts was limited.

Uniform buttons are specifically designed to be seen and therefore have a distinguishing device identifying the wearer as part of a specific organization. These buttons are described here as either “large” or “small.” Large buttons are those with a diameter of ca. 19–22 mm and were exclusively used on the fronts of tunics where they would be prominently visible. Small buttons are those with a diameter of 14–17 mm and were commonly used on shoulder cords, cuffs, pockets, and caps.

The faces of the buttons have either an integral or a mounted device. Integral devices are those that had the motif stamped or cast into the face, forming a single unit, whereas mounted devices have the motif created as a separate component that is then crimped, soldered, or riveted onto the face of the button. The form of the devices varied, including a crown, an ornate intertwined VR (for Victoria Regina), a combined crown and VR, and a crown over ER VII (for Edward VII Rex) (Table 1).

The term “accoutrements” refers to the belts and slings that supported weapons and the pouches used to carry ammunition (P. Turner 2006:7). It is therefore easy to appreciate how integral they were to the effective use of weapons, even if they are arguably the least-understood items in terms of uniformology. Pierre Turner (2006:7), an authority on 18th- and 19th-century British Army accoutrements, observed that little attention has been paid to their study for the simple reason that very few such objects survive. Accoutrements, by their nature plain and utilitarian, were the property of the government and were used until they wore out (P. Turner 2006:7). Accoutrement components were

cataloged similarly to the buttons, recording “site,” “ID code,” “site date range,” “class,” “form,” “ferrous or non-ferrous,” “length,” “width,” “thickness,” and “notes.”

Owing to a lack of published dress regulations, apart from one set in 1866, we have relied on written and photographic sources to reconstruct the sequence of changing styles, forms, and types of NMP uniforms, and some of their accompanying accoutrements. It is important to note that the artifacts we have studied are only a sample of the total that would have been originally discarded or lost at each site. Although some camps are remote and thus unlikely to have been substantially impacted by collectors, others, such as Burke River, are well-known tourist locations, and the sites of Lower Laura and Spring Creek have both been subject to the actions of metal detectorists in the past. Although there are known museum collections of uniform buttons and accoutrements recovered by a detectorist from several NMP camps, including Lower Laura, Spring Creek, and Wandai Gumbal, only the collection of the AQNMP Project was physically accessible for this research.

Uniforms of the NMP

There were effectively two phases to the NMP uniform. The first covers the period from the force's 1848 establishment until ca. 1866, when it was reorganized and brought under the jurisdiction of the civil police; this included the period of its administration by the New South Wales colonial government before 1859. The second phase covers the period from ca. 1866 until the 20th century. The uniform worn during the first phase is referred to here as the “early uniform,” and that of the second as the “later uniform.” Unlike the uniform of the troopers, of which only two types are shown, photographs show at least five different officers' uniforms across these two phases, although only two of these appear to be reflected in written sources, one in 1866 and the other in 1896. We have designated the latter as the “1896 officers' uniform.”

Phase 1: Early Uniform (1848–ca. 1866)

Early Officers' Uniform

The uniform for NMP officers ca. 1850–1866 consisted of a dark blue wool tunic with a red standing

Table 1 Known NMP-uniform button types

	Face	Back	Size	Device	BACKMARK (Manufacturer)	Refined Date Range
Early Uniform (Pre-ca. 1866)			Large	Integral VR	HEBBERT & CO LONDON (Hebbert & Co)	1852– ca. 1866
			Small	Integral VR	HEBBERT & CO LONDON (Hebbert & Co)	1852– ca. 1866
			Small	Integral crown (pronounced dome)	HEBBERT & CO LONDON (Hebbert & Co)	1852– ca. 1866
Early or Later Uniform			Small	Integral VR	T STOKES MAKER MELB (Thomas Stokes)	1856– 1868
Later Uniform (ca. 1866 onward)			Small	Integral crown over VR	FIRMINS LONDON (Firmin & Sons)	ca. 1866– 1878
			Small	Mounted crown over VR	EXTRA SUPERIOR (Unknown)	ca. 1866– 1901
			Small	Mounted crown over VR	EXTRA TREBLE (Unknown)	ca. 1866– 1901
			Small	Integral VR	V & R BLAKEMORE BIRMINGHAM (V & R Blakemore)	1870– 1895

Table 1 (continued)

			Small	Mounted crown over VR	SIMPSON & ROOK LONDON (Simpson & Rook)	1875–1896
			Small	Mounted crown over VR	FINE TREBLE GILT Butterfly motif containing S & W (Smith & Wright)	1882–1887
			Small	Mounted crown over VR	SMITH & WRIGHT BIRMINGM (Smith & Wright)	1885–1887
1896 Officers' uniform			Large	Integral crown over ER VII	SWORD MAKE / TRADE MARK / MADE IN ENGLAND Crossed swords motif (Thomas Carlyle)	1901–ca. 1904
Early Uniform or 1896 Officers' Uniform			Large	Integral crown (pronounced dome)	Unknown	ca. 1849–1866 or 1896–1901

Note: Photos by Kylie Macey, 2020.

collar with silver or gold trim and short skirts that extended to the top of the thigh, rounded off in front (Fig. 2 left). The tunic was essentially a “sack coat,” a cut that was immensely popular from the 1850s–1870s in both military and civilian fashion. It was closed by six large (i.e., jacket-sized) uniform buttons. The sleeves had pointed cuffs in red with silver or gold trim. Silver- or gold-cord epaulettes fastened with a small uniform button were also worn. In contrast, images dated 1863–1865 show officers wearing a tight, waist-length “shell jacket” closed with hooks and eyes concealed with a row of seed buttons, red pointed cuffs trimmed with gold or silver braid and epaulettes (Fig. 2

right). The dark blue trousers had two gold or silver stripes down the outside of each leg. Given the photographic evidence, both the more ornate shell jacket and the buttoned sack-coat uniforms were contemporaneous, representing the full dress and non-dress versions, respectively. Buttons associated with this uniform could be either large (tunic front) or small (shoulder cords) and have a manufacture *terminus ante quem* (TAQ) of 1866. “Pea” buttons (small, closely spaced metal beads) would also be associated with the full-dress uniform. Headwear consisted of a forage cap with a downward-angled peak and gold or silver trim, as well as a wide gold or silver band.

Fig. 2 The two types of officers' uniforms associated with the first phase. *Left*, 1865–1868 sack-coat-type tunic closed with six large uniform buttons and epaulettes; *right*, (standing) 1864 tight shell jacket closed with hooks and eyes and with decorative seed buttons. Note that all three officers have the same pattern cap. (Photos SLQ147045 [*left*] and SLQ10686 [*right*] courtesy of the State Library of Queensland.)



Early Troopers' Uniform

The early troopers' uniform followed the same basic pattern, minus the metallic braid. It consisted of a dark blue sack coat with red collar and pointed cuffs, six large uniform buttons on the front, and shoulder cords in red secured by small uniform buttons. Trousers were either dark blue wool with two red stripes down the outside leg, or white cotton in hot weather. The dark blue wool cap was circular with a flat top and a red band. It was provided with a black leather peak and chinstrap (Fig. 3). A white cotton cap cover was sometimes worn as a hot-weather option. A blue overshirt with red facings at collar and cuffs, also known as a "jumper" (Queensland Legislative Assembly 1861:149), was in use by 1860, worn as bush garb (*Queensland Government Gazette* 1860:135,535). Buttons associated with this uniform could be either large (tunic front) or small (shoulder

cords) and have a manufacture TAQ of 1866. The red accents on coats, shirts, and trousers echo the uniform of the third incarnation of the Native Police in the southern colony of Victoria, which operated from 1842 to 1849, though their uniform color was green rather than blue.

From the NMP's inception the uniforms worn by the troopers were simplistically considered by white observers to be one of the key attractions for Indigenous men joining the force. In giving evidence to an 1857 Select Committee enquiry, for example, William Foster thought that the troopers "seem to be a better race than the wild men they were taken from. The vanity of each individual is affected by having an uniform, and being made a soldier of, and an esprit de corps is formed among them" (New South Wales Legislative Assembly 1858:11). It is more likely that, for Indigenous men, uniforms were part of a labor contract between themselves and Europeans: in some

Fig. 3 Two 1860s images of the early troopers' uniform showing the sack-coat-style tunic closed with large uniform buttons. Note that the chinstrap of the cap on the table to the *right* is clearly not attached using buttons. The trooper on the *left* wears a percussion-cap pouch on his belt, and both wear the percussion-era carbine belt over their left shoulders. (Photos SLQ10686 [*left*] and SLQAPA-74 [*right*] courtesy of the State Library of Queensland.)



instances officers claimed that failure to be able to deliver a uniform in a timely fashion resulted in the desertion of new recruits, implying that uniforms were viewed as part of a reciprocal exchange relationship (*Moreton Bay Courier* 1853:3; Bligh 1862).

Phase 2: Later Uniform (ca. 1866–1929)

Later Officers' Uniform

A detailed description of the uniform regulations for officers from 1866 specified both dress and non-dress forms (*Queensland Government Gazette* 1866:261). The 1866 “Rules for the General Government and Discipline of the Native Mounted Police Force,” of which the dress regulations were a part, required that “the men at out stations, when in quarters, will, invariably, parade on Sundays in full dress.” When in town the troopers were not to “appear in the streets unless

dressed strictly according to order” and were “at all times ... expected to be smart and clean” (*Queensland Government Gazette* 1866:260). Several photographs confirm adoption of those regulations.

The officers' uniform consisted of a dark blue jacket with baggy sleeves, closed at the front with hooks and eyes. This type was known as a “Garibaldi” jacket, after the popular Italian general whose troops wore baggy red shirts. Both full-dress and non-dress versions of this jacket are represented photographically, the full dress being trimmed with gold cord down the front, gold Austrian knots on the sleeves, and gold shoulder cords secured by small uniform buttons. On the non-dress jacket red cord was substituted for gold (Fig. 4). Full-dress trousers were also dark blue with two gold stripes down the outside leg, with red stripes substituted on the non-dress trousers. Alternatively, drab-cord pantaloons could be worn for non-dress. The dark blue cap with black oak-leaf



Fig. 4 The later officers' uniform, 1868. This is the full-dress version with gold shoulder cords, gold braid on the front of the Garibaldi jacket, and gold trouser stripes; for the non-dress uniform these features were in red. The shoulder cords are secured by a small uniform button. The cap is shown fitted with its white cloth cover. (Photo courtesy of Frank Uhr.)

band and gold Queensland Police badge was worn for both full dress and non-dress (*Queensland Government Gazette* 1866:261). Buttons associated with this uniform should only be small (shoulder cords and collar closure) and have a manufacture *terminus post quem* (TPQ) of 1866.

1896 Officers' Uniform

In 1896 a new uniform was introduced for the “country police” (*Warwick Examiner and Times* 1896) and issued to the officers of the NMP, although not to the troopers, who continued to wear the same uniform as before (see below). The adoption of this uniform seems to have resulted in two parallel dress-code systems within NMP camps, described as “Blue and khaki” at the Palmer River camp in 1900 (Marrett

Fig. 5 NMP officer (standing) wearing the khaki 1896 officers' tunic, dated 1898. The five, large, uniform button closure is clearly shown, as well as the breast pockets and shoulder straps, almost certainly secured by small uniform buttons. (Photo courtesy of the Queensland State Archives 1154345.)



1900) and “khaki and N. Police” at the Eight Mile camp in 1901 (Marrett 1901).

The 1896 officers' uniform consisted of a khaki, wool, hip-length tunic with a short standing collar, shoulder straps, and two breast pockets closed by small uniform buttons. The single-breasted tunic was closed by five large uniform buttons (Fig. 5). The trousers were either khaki or white for hot-weather wear. The headdress was a khaki, wide-brimmed, felt “slouch” hat with the left side of the brim turned or pinned up. It was worn with a khaki band known as a “puggaree.” Buttons associated with this uniform could be either large (on the tunic front) or small (on breast pockets and shoulder straps) and have a manufacture TPQ of 1896.

Later Troopers' Uniform

Although there is no record of a parallel set of dress regulations for troopers, photographic evidence reflects a change similar to that which took place for the officers in 1866. What is clear is that the early troopers' uniform was entirely superseded by the time Snider carbines were issued to the force in 1870 (J. Robinson 1997:41). It is probable that, given the parsimonious attitude of the government toward funding the NMP and the unreliability of systems of resupply for clothing, troopers' uniforms were gradually

Fig. 6 Troopers in the later uniform. *Left*, the standard uniform; *right*, 1880s hot-weather version with white cotton trousers and cap cover. Note the shoulder cords secured by a small uniform button and a small button at the throat closure of the collar. (Photos SLQ14003 [*left*] and SLQ57330 [*right*] courtesy of the State Library of Queensland.)



replaced between ca. 1866 and ca. 1870 as the earlier iterations wore out, e.g., Murray (1866).

The later troopers' uniform of a dark blue wool tunic with a red standing collar was accented with red braid, ca. 25 mm wide, down the front, around the cuffs, and on the cuffs to form a point. Small uniform buttons were used to fasten red twisted shoulder cords on each shoulder and the collar at the throat. The tunic closed either by means of buttons or hooks and eyes concealed beneath the red braid running down the front. If it was closed with buttons, the fact that they were not visible suggests they were probably cheaper sew-through forms. Most images show an external pocket on the left breast, which also appears in some images to have red trim along the top. Trousers were either dark blue wool with two red stripes down the outside leg, continuing the red accents adopted in 1860, or white for use in hot weather. Caps were dark blue with a red band and black leather peak and leather chinstrap (usually worn above the peak). Like those of the early uniform, caps were often worn with a white cotton cap cover for sun protection (Fig. 6).

Buttons associated with this uniform should only be small (shoulder cords and collar closure) and have a manufacture TPQ of 1866. One example of

a surviving uniform tunic and trousers from a local museum collection in central Queensland and identified as a tracker's uniform from the 1920s (Cole 2010:25) is strikingly similar to the later (and in many ways also the earlier) troopers' uniform, suggesting that the external appearance of the Indigenous members of the force changed little throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Accoutrements of the NMP

The main accoutrements considered here are those associated with weapons, since these are most readily identifiable in historical photographs. The accoutrements accompanying muzzle-loading percussion arms prior to the introduction of Snider carbines ca. 1870 (J. Robinson 1997:41) differed from those used with the latter arm. The Snider used a brass center-fire cartridge with integral primer, whereas the earlier arms (with the exception of pin-fire carbines issued for a very limited time between 1867 and 1869) used paper cartridges and required a separate pouch for percussion caps. Paper cartridges were fragile and could not be stored in a bandolier, instead needing to be carried in a pouch in order to keep them dry.

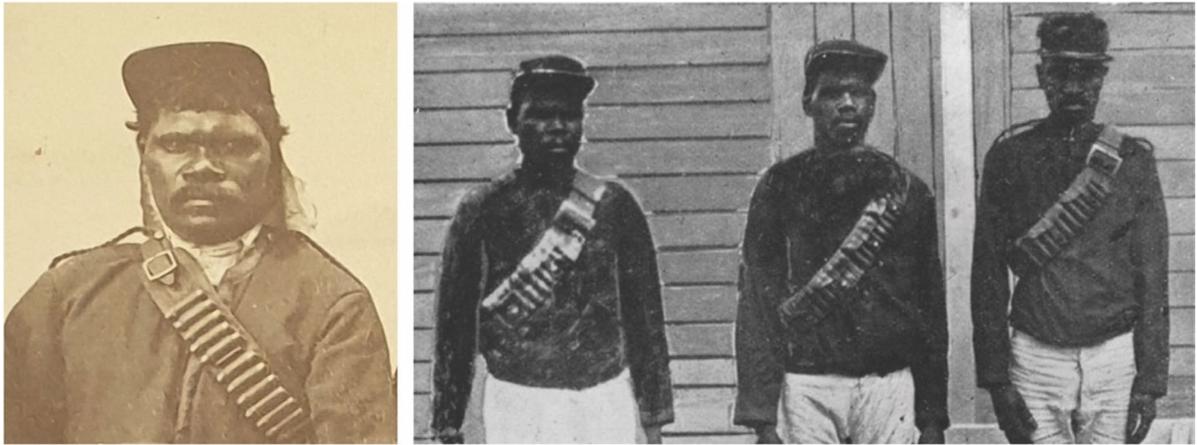


Fig. 7 *Left*, pre-1882 bandoliers and *right*, 1882 Pattern Snider-era bandoliers. (Photo SLQ10074 [*left*] courtesy of the State Library of Queensland; photo [*right*] from Haydon [1911:398].)

Percussion Era (1848–1870)

The accoutrements accompanying percussion carbines consisted of a leather carbine belt worn over the left shoulder from which was suspended a leather cartridge pouch and a swivel, and a percussion-cap pouch worn on a waist belt (Fig. 3). The carbine belt was adjustable by means of a large, rectangular, single-pronged brass buckle and had a shield-shaped brass tip. The swivel was clipped to the side bar of the carbine when mounted so that it hung at the right side of the trooper.

The percussion-cap pouch used by the NMP appears to have been what is loosely known as the “1840 Pattern.” It was a small pouch with a rounded bottom and a flap that closed with a brass stud (Fig. 3). It was worn on the front of the waist belt attached via leather loops. The waist belt itself appears to have been similar in width to the carbine belt and was fitted with a rectangular, single-pronged buckle, very similar, if not identical, to the one fitted to the carbine belt.

Snider Era (Post-1870)

The introduction of breech-loading Snider carbines from 1870 obviated the need for percussion caps and pouches to hold them. The carbine belt and swivel also became unnecessary, as Snider carbines were carried in a “bucket” that attached to the saddle harness. Owing to the sturdier and more watertight

construction of Snider cartridges, bandoliers came into favor, echoing their use by military mounted-infantry units of the time. Based on contemporary images, the accoutrements issued to the NMP with the Snider carbines consisted of two different patterns of bandolier, called here the “pre-1882 type” and the “1882 Pattern” (Fig. 7). The earlier type was not based on any official British government design, but the latter clearly followed the official 1882 Pattern to some extent.

The pre-1882 type bandolier consisted of a broad leather shoulder belt with at least 14 loops to hold the cartridges. One end narrowed into a tongue that passed through a small, double-framed buckle, the latter being the only metal component visible. It had no brass belt tip or studs. The 1882 Pattern bandolier was officially adopted by the British military for mounted infantry armed with the Martini-Henry carbine, although the design was also suitable for Snider cartridges. On this style of bandolier the loops were arranged in groups with flap covers to prevent the cartridges falling out. Assuming the bandolier adopted by the QNMP was similar to the British government pattern, the loops would have been arranged in 4 compartments containing 10 loops each and 2 compartments containing 5 loops each, giving a total capacity of 50 rounds. The flaps were closed with brass studs, and the belt was joined by a wide, single-pronged, rectangular buckle. It is not known whether this pattern of bandolier possessed belt tips, though the archaeological evidence would suggest it did, as

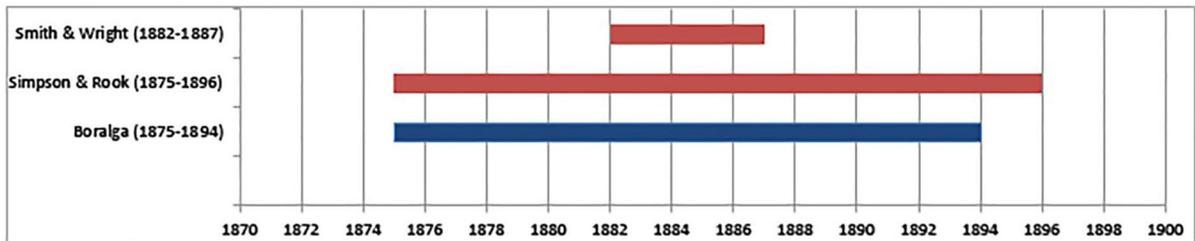


Fig. 8 Temporal relationship among button makes at the Lower Laura (Boralga) NMP camp and the camp's occupation span. (Drawing by Nic Grguric, 2021.)

belt tips were found at NMP camps postdating 1870 when Sniders were in use.

The Button Assemblage

Fifty-one uniform buttons were recovered. Based on variations in size, device, and back mark, these can be divided into 13 different types. Table 1 presents this as a synthesis, with the 13 types divided into 4 chronological phases: (1) those associated with the early uniform prior to ca. 1866, (2) those that could be associated with either the early or later uniform, (3) those associated with the later uniform only post ca. 1866, and (4) those associated with the 1896 officers' uniform.

The majority (90%, $n=46$) of the buttons were the small kind used on collars, shoulder cords, cuffs, breast pockets, and caps; only 10% ($n=5$) were the larger variety used to close tunic fronts, a not unexpected result given that small buttons were used throughout both uniform periods and the majority of recovered specimens came from later period sites. All buttons were made by between seven and nine different manufacturers/retailers (Figs. 8, 9, 10) (Table 1). Six of the seven named firms were English, with only one, Thomas Stokes, based in Australia. Despite being in operation until 1894 (J. Robinson 1997:41), the London-based Hebbert & Co. (1852–1894) (Naylor 1993:38–39) was clearly associated with the early uniform, buttons of its make only being recovered from Wandai Gumbal (which operated from 1851 to 1859) and Spring Creek (1862–1872), but also noted in private collections from the Yowah (1863–1870) and Bungil Creek (1858–1864) NMP camps. Hebbert & Co. was a major 19th-century military equipment supplier that turned to outfitting police and railway departments in the second half of the 19th century.

With the exception of one early 20th-century button discussed below and another missing its back, all of the large buttons in the assemblage were made by Hebbert & Co. and had an integral VR device or cypher. Documentary evidence shows that Hebbert & Co. was supplier to the New South Wales government as early as 1855 (*Sydney Morning Herald* 1855:2), when the NMP was still under its administration. Three different small Hebbert & Co. buttons were also recovered, representing those worn on the shoulder cords of the early officer tunics. One example from Wandai Gumbal had a much more pronounced dome to its face, with an integral crown device. The other two types, both from Spring Creek, display an integral VR and integral crown device.

There was one button type that could not be confidently ascribed to either phase of uniform. This was represented by three small integral-VR buttons found at the Mistake Creek site (occupied 1863–1879) made by Thomas Stokes between 1856 and 1868 (Glover 2015) (Fig. 9). Stokes only began supplying buttons to colonies outside Victoria in 1861 after he imported a specially designed button press from England (Cossum 1988), and, given that he ceased production in 1868, these buttons are most likely to derive from the early uniform.

Seven button types were identified as being associated with the later uniform. All were small uniform buttons used on shoulder straps, throat closures, and other accessories. At least four different makers were identified in this phase, two in London (Firmin & Sons and Simpson & Rook) and two in Birmingham (V & R Blakemore and Smith & Wright) (Table 1). Two of the Firmin & Sons buttons came from Mistake Creek and one from Puckley Creek. Both were small, with an integral crown over the VR device. Given the date range for the Puckley Creek camp, these were associated with the later uniform. The two

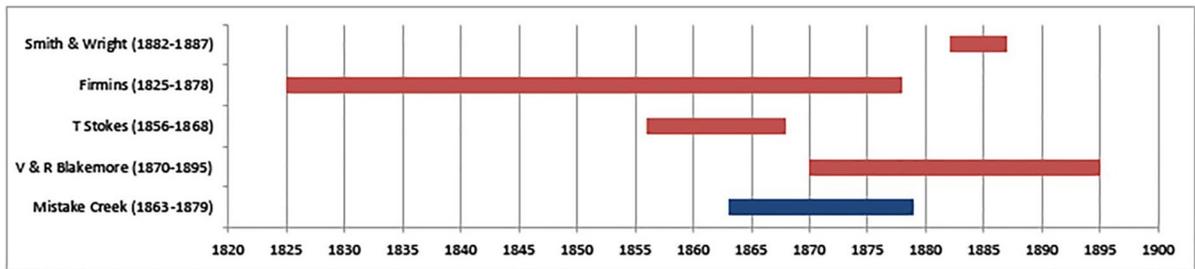


Fig. 9 Temporal relationship among button makes at the Mistake Creek NMP camp and the camp’s occupation span. Note the anomalous presence of Smith & Wright. (Drawing by Nic Grguric, 2021.)

V & R Blakemore buttons from Mistake Creek were also small, with an integral VR device. Although the occupation of that site spanned both uniform phases, V & R Blakemore at its Birmingham address has a TPQ of 1870 (British Militaria Forums 2016), associating these buttons with the later uniform. Not coincidentally, V & R Blakemore was a general military outfitter that also supplied weapons to the Queensland government in 1872.

The two button types with unidentified makers have a mounted crown over VR devices and are simply back marked “extra superior” and “extra treble.” These have been ascribed to the later uniform based on the fact that they were recovered from sites that were only occupied well after the introduction of that uniform (i.e., Lower Laura, 1875–1894, and Burke River, 1878–1885). They may therefore have been manufactured by V & R Blakemore, Simpson & Rook, or Smith & Wright.

The two Simpson & Rook uniform buttons have a mounted crown over VR device and were recovered from Lower Laura, occupied during the post-1866 uniform phase. The association of Simpson & Rook buttons with the later uniform is supported by that manufacturer’s date range of 1875–1896 (Nayler 1993:64). Two types by Smith & Wright were present in the assemblage, both small with a mounted crown over a VR device (Table 1). The majority (18 out of 19) had a back mark consisting of a butterfly with the initials: S & W within its body and the words: FINE TREBLE GILT. This type of button was found at Mistake Creek (1863–1879), Lower Laura (1875–1894), and Burke River (1878–1885). This particular back mark provides a narrow manufacture date range of 1882–1887 (Nayler 1993:64), which places these buttons firmly in the later uniform phase.

A single example of another Smith & Wright button was found at Burke River, back marked: SMITH & WRIGHT BIRMM (Fig. 9). The inclusion of the Birmingham address refines the date of this particular type to 1885–1887 (Nayler 1993:64), also clearly associated with the later uniform.

One button associated with the 1896 officers’ uniform was recovered from Coen. This was a large example with an integral crown over ER VII device (Table 1). The back mark consisted of crossed swords with the words: SWORD MAKE TRADE MARK MADE IN ENGLAND, which identifies the button as having been made by Thomas Carlyle. This company registered the crossed swords trademark in early 1893 and merged with Buttons Ltd. in 1907 (British and Commonwealth Military Badge Forum 2014). However, the shape of the crown and the ER VII (for Edward VII Rex, who reigned from 1901 to 1910), combined with the back mark, refines the date range to 1901–1907. The 1896 officers’ uniform was the only NMP uniform to use large uniform buttons at this time, and this example clearly dates from the last phase of the NMP’s existence.

In most cases, the dates ascribed to the buttons tied in well with occupation periods for the camps derived from historical sources. There were, however, two anomalies. The first was from Mistake Creek, a camp that was suggested to have been broken up in 1879 (*Western Champion* 1879:2). A Smith & Wright button found here with a TPQ of 1882 (Table 1) (Fig. 10) suggests that the camp may have been inhabited later than previously thought. The second is a button from Lower Laura. This camp is known to have been occupied between 1875 and 1894, which places it squarely within the later, post-1866 uniform phase, so any uniform buttons should

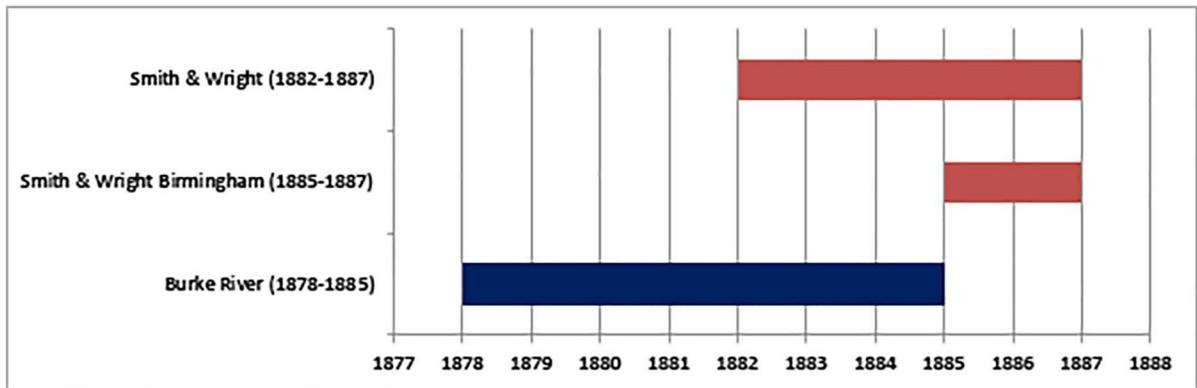


Fig. 10 Temporal relationship among button makers at the Burke River NMP camp and the camp’s occupation span. Of note is the Smith & Wright Birmingham button that very nearly postdates the site’s occupation. (Drawing by Nic Grguric, 2021.)

be small sized. The button in question, however, is large, with a pronounced domed face and an integral Queen Victoria device. The back showed evidence of having been made of ferrous metal and had corroded, so no back mark was available. This type of button could therefore be associated with either the early uniform or the 1896 officers’ uniform. Stylistically, this button is closest to a small button with a pronounced domed integral crown made by Hebbert & Co. that is associated with the early uniform. The presence of this button at Lower Laura suggests that NMP uniforms, at least at this camp, were carefully curated and made to last a considerable time. This accords with other archaeological evidence from Lower Laura that shows some of the weapons and ammunition were also approximately 10 years out of date.

Unfortunately, there were no quality or stylistic differences to differentiate between officers’ and

troopers’ buttons, making them of limited use in distinguishing between living or specific-activity areas in camp. Rather, the introduction of mounted-device buttons appears to have been purely the result of supply, first appearing in the assemblage post-1875 on a button made by Simpson & Rook and in the 1880s on all of the buttons made by Smith & Wright. As Table 2 shows, the prevalence of integral vs. mounted-device buttons at a camp site is entirely dependent on time period, with integrated-device buttons dominating the assemblage in the earlier phase and mounted-device buttons dominating in the later phases. At either end of the spectrum each type dominates to the exclusion of the other (i.e., all of the buttons from Spring Creek were the integral-device type and all of the buttons from Burke River were the mounted-device type). Nor were gilded buttons reserved for officers; the evidence suggests that all NMP buttons were gilded, despite the fact they

Table 2 Relative proportions of integral vs. mounted-device uniform buttons vs. non-uniform buttons

NMP Camp	Occupation Span	Integral Device	Mounted Device	Total Number of NMP Buttons	Total Number of Non-NMP Buttons
Wandai Gumbal	1851–1859	1	0	1	2
Spring Creek	1862–1872	7	0	7	10
Mistake Creek	1863–1879	6	1	7	38
Puckley Creek	1874–1876	2	0	2	6
Lower Laura	1875–1894	1	11	12	82
Burke River	1878–1885	0	21	21	198
Coen	1894–1929	1	0	1	0
Total		18	33	51	336

would have been considerably more expensive than plain brass versions and the Queensland government was extremely frugal. No documentary evidence was found to explain why the buttons of all ranks were gilded, although it may simply have been due to their tarnish-resistant qualities, since this allowed their appearance to be maintained in the harsh conditions of rural Australia without the need for polishing.

Considering this assemblage as a whole also provides an insight into how the NMP was supplied with its uniforms. Advertisements make it clear that tenders were called for the provision of uniforms (*Queensland Government Gazette* 1860:535), and, although documentary evidence is patchy, different suppliers were evidently successful. NMP uniforms are known to have been manufactured both domestically and abroad, including by “a Sydney firm” in 1861 (*Courier* 1862:2), Hebbert & Co. in 1862, and using Queensland prison labor in the late 1870s and early 1880s (*Brisbane Courier* 1877:3; *Sydney Morning Herald* 1880:7). The presence of between 7 and 9 different button makers, plus variations, indicates that various contractors supplied buttons in at least 12 batches to the NMP during its existence. It appears that Hebbert & Co. was the main supplier from the inception of the NMP until the uniform was overhauled ca. 1866. The only other known early suppliers are Nutting & Co. (of London, in operation from 1800 to 1840) and D. Jones & Co. (of Sydney, post-1838), each represented by a single button from the Wandai Gumbal camp held by the Queensland Police Museum. The D. Jones & Co. button is also embossed: NEW SOUTH WALES POLICE on its face.

The presence of three subtypes of small Hebbert & Co. buttons may be reflective of at least three supply batches between ca. 1852 and ca. 1866. One successful tender for clothing from this company points to one such batch in 1862 (Hebbert & Co 1862). Between 1862 and 1868 Australian manufacturer Thomas Stokes supplied buttons, most probably for the early uniform. Firmin & Sons and V & R Blakemore supplied buttons for the uniforms in the 1870s, with Smith & Wright taking over in the 1880s. Thomas Carlyle was evidently only involved in supplying buttons for the 1896 officers’ uniform in the final phase of the NMP’s existence.

It is important to note that, as part of the general policing uniform, buttons such as these will also be

found in association with regular (non-NMP) police sites. The devices found on the buttons from the Coen camp (combinations of the monarch’s cypher and/or crown), for example, are generic “general service” devices that were used on the uniforms of a range of government agents, such as the New South Wales General Service (1870–1880) and the Tasmanian and Western Australian Volunteer Staff, Medical Staff and Retired Staff (1870–1901) (Cossum 1988:23,26,29). It is thus only the context that identifies as NMP buttons the particular specimens presented in this study.

The Accoutrements Assemblage

Only nine accoutrements were confidently identified: three studs, three belt tips, and three buckles, all made of brass (Fig. 11). It seems probable that such items were lost much less frequently than buttons, as they were more securely attached to leather objects than buttons were to uniforms. It is also possible that the relatively large size of the buckles and belt tips made them easy targets for metal detectorists, and, indeed, one private collection referred to above contained no fewer than eight such items (five large brass buckles and three belt tips).

All of the studs were recovered from the Burke River camp, occupied from 1878 to 1885 and well into the Snider era of the NMP. It is probable that these represent some of the 10 studs that were present on the 1882 Pattern bandolier and were presumably deposited after the TPQ of 1882, thus dating them to the last three years of the camp’s occupation.

Two of the three belt tips in the assemblage were of similar dimensions and came from Snider-era camps (i.e., Lower Laura, 1875–1894, and Burke River, 1878–1885). Their width indicates that they were intended for a belt approximately 56 mm wide, precluding them from being associated with the pre-1882 type bandolier, which possessed a narrow leather tongue. It is therefore probable that they are from 1882 Pattern bandoliers. The third belt tip was recovered from Spring Creek and is smaller than the other two. Spring Creek was occupied from 1862 to 1872, which places it predominantly in the percussion era. This type of belt tip can confidently be associated with the shoulder belt used with the percussion carbine (date range 1848–ca. 1870).

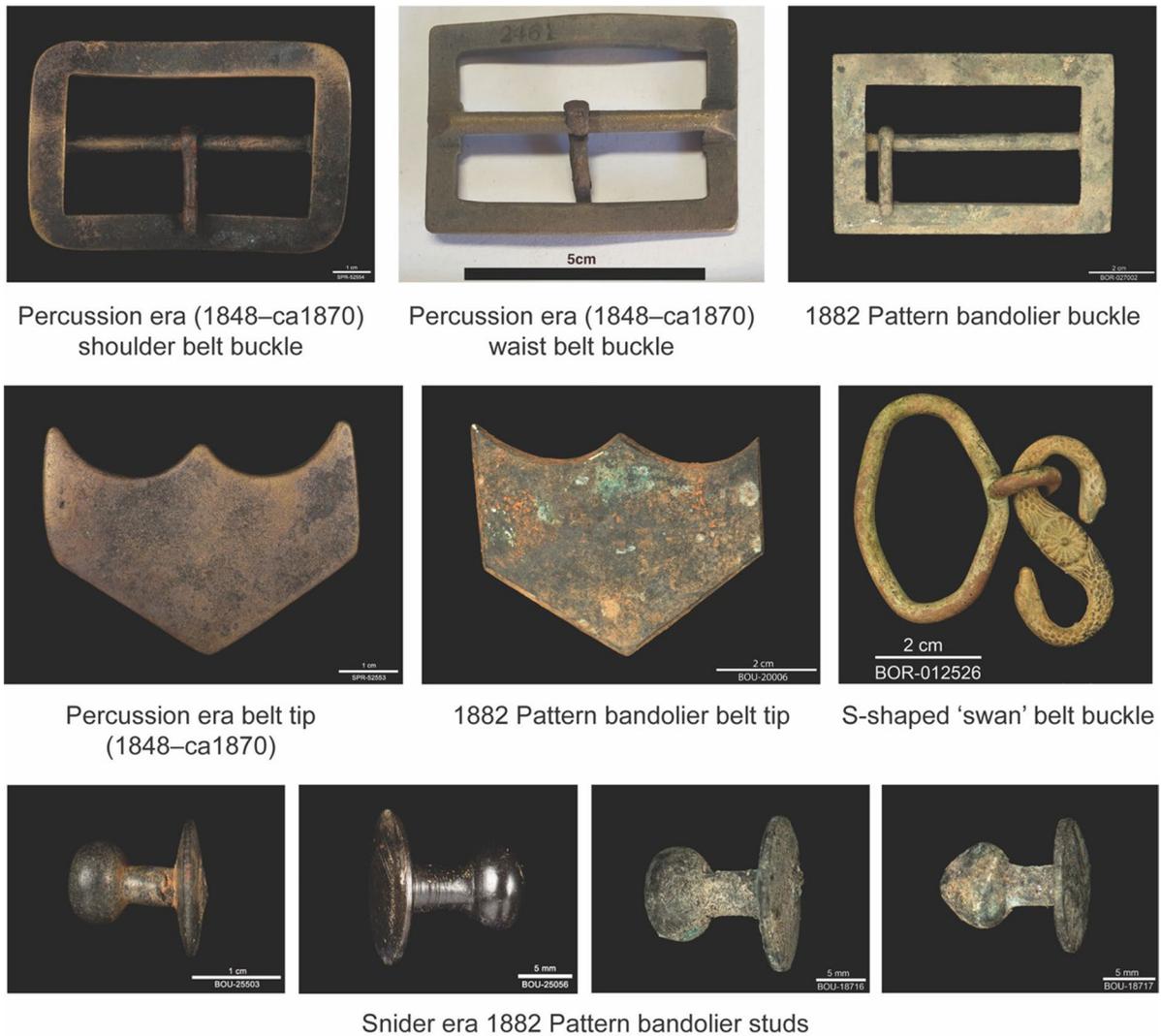


Fig. 11 A selection of NMP uniform accoutrements. (Photos by Kylie Macey, 2021.)

A large (80 × 53 mm) brass, double-framed buckle in the assemblage was recovered by a metal detectorist from the Spring Creek camp. This distinctive, rounded-corner buckle is evidently from the same percussion-era shoulder belts as the smaller belt tip described above (TAQ ca. 1870). Contemporary photographs of troopers with percussion-era accoutrements show a large rectangular, double-framed buckle securing the waist belt on which the percussion-cap pouch was worn. Although superficially similar in appearance to the shoulder belt buckle, surviving examples indicate that the waist belt buckle was somewhat smaller than the shoulder version and

lacked rounded corners. Examples of the smaller waist belt buckles were present in the same private collection from Spring Creek. One other large (82 × 54 mm) brass, double-frame buckle, from the Lower Laura NMP camp (1875–1894), had square corners and is associated with the 1882 Pattern Snider bandolier.

The final identifiable accoutrement was an “S-shaped” belt buckle in the form of a double-headed swan, with a rosette in the center, recovered from the Lower Laura NMP camp. S-shaped buckles, in swan but also snake forms, were popular throughout the 19th century on military and other

government-service uniforms. This buckle represents the type that would have been worn by officers on a waist belt to support such items as a revolver holster, cartridge pouch, or sword.

The Discipline of Dress

Historian Jonathan Richards (2008:8) has argued that “the Native Police should be regarded as a military force, albeit an odd or irregular one. Just as it was an exceptional police force, it was an exceptional military force.” A key element of this was the wearing of a uniform as a statement of authority and martial occupation, revealed most clearly through the photographic representations of officers and troopers that emphasize their soldier-like appearance, drilled orderliness, and regimented attitudes. Requiring troopers to wear and maintain their uniforms was considered by NMP management to be central to developing military discipline. The 1866 “Rules for the General Government and Discipline of the Native Mounted Police Force” mandated:

Officers and troopers will at all times wear correct uniform when on parade, patrol and other duty; and in this respect it is particularly necessary that the officers should be careful in showing a proper example; as thorough cleanliness in person, clothing and accessories must be rendered compulsory on the part of the troopers, every inducement should be held out to them to assume a smart and soldierlike appearance. (*Queensland Government Gazette* 1866:260)

Uniforms also construct obedience, since by their nature they codify and instill various learned techniques of the body that are perhaps most significant for what they repress; they therefore represent one of many technologies of personal discipline (Foucault 1979; Romero 2005): “[T]he uniform created a persona in individuals and a powerful collective presence. [It] became a means of shaping actions—both physical and mental—and instilling new habits—including movement and posture, developing an aesthetic sensibility, and inculcating new habits of cleanliness” (Craik 2003:132). Adherence to a uniform was therefore part of breaking down the identities of young Indigenous men and remaking them by incorporating them into the corporate institution of the

NMP. Other elements of this system involved renaming them with generic and often derogatory names on their entry to the force, controlling their relationships with Aboriginal women, and shifting them regularly through different detachments, camps, and officers, although there are also examples of men who retained their Aboriginal names, countrymen from the same area being posted together, and fathers, sons, and brothers being kept together in the same detachments. We have no firsthand perspectives on this transition from the troopers themselves, although personal investment in the possession of a uniform by at least some troopers is suggested by various historical accounts and photographs of troopers retaining their uniforms in private contexts. One historian (Rowse 2018:15) has suggested that, from the perspective of the troopers, uniforms might have been part of “a new order of masculine privilege ... fashioned from the gifts, threats, and solicitude of white men,” while also denoting a “sense of noblesse oblige” on the part of officers toward Aboriginal men supposed to be amenable to reform.

On the frontier NMP uniforms were thus a powerful orthodox statement of control over otherwise “uncivilized” Indigenous bodies and behaviors. Their symbolic nature was multifaceted, connoting control over troopers’ unruly bodies, over potentially mutinous NMP detachments by officers, and over “wild” and “savage” Indigenous people by the NMP. Jennifer Craik (2003:128) has observed, however, that “[w]earing a uniform properly—understanding and obeying rules about the uniform-in-practice—turning the garments into communicative statements—is more important than the items of clothing and decoration themselves.” Uniforms were thus as much a public as a private performance. In the context of the NMP it is the communicative statements we wish to focus on in the following section, centered around the indexical qualities that the troopers’ uniforms acquired as a symbol of violence and fear amongst Indigenous people and of safety and security for non-Indigenous people, as well as some of the alternative ways in which uniforms could be worn (or not).

First, far from being a peripheral aspect of dress, the red-and-blue color scheme that characterized the troopers’ uniforms throughout the 19th century became an inseparable and distinctive part of their identification. In 1861 Charles Dutton referred disparagingly to “bluemen” when unwelcome troopers



Fig. 12 “Native Police Boys Palmer River.” (Image courtesy of the National Museum of Australia, 1898–1899.)

came on to his run in central Queensland (Dutton 1862:6), and a rare series of 19th-century drawings by a young Aboriginal man from far-north Queensland, known only as “Oscar,” captured the vivid red accents as one of the essential markers of a trooper (Fig. 12). Oscar was “obtained” by Augustus Glissan, the manager of Rocklands Station near Camooweal, in 1887 when he was only 9 or 10 years old. It is likely that his family were killed, since he was handed over to Glissan by the NMP, who were renowned for kidnapping women and children (S. Robinson 2002, 2013). Oscar was a keen observer, and his depictions of troopers on the Palmer River use slashes of red to emphasize the jacket facings, shoulder marks, trouser stripes, and cap bands (and possibly also the opening of the breast pockets) of the NMP uniform. If Oscar was born around 1877, as estimated by Glissan, then these drawings would date from the early to mid-1880s and therefore reflect the second phase of the troopers’ uniform.

Second, the strictures of the uniform were open to at least some negotiation in the geographical and social space of a frontier that was contested, uncertain, and therefore somewhat malleable. Henry Lamond (1949:32), the son of an NMP officer, noted that troopers customarily discarded their boots “as soon as the parade ground was left behind,” and other elements of their uniform were frequently dispensed with when on patrol (Richards 2005:269). Officers were highly dependent on their troopers to



Fig. 13 Troopers after having discarded their uniforms, according to the *Illustrated London News* (1863:146).

track Indigenous people successfully, particularly through the thickets of scrub and other dense vegetation that constituted a key refuge for those fleeing the NMP. Officer Frederick Wheeler noted that his troopers often went out of his sight and that “when they go into the scrub they then dismount and take off their trousers” (Queensland Legislative Assembly 1861:16). The *Illustrated London News* (1863:146) visually captured a version of this practice with a sketch that was captioned: “Native Police preparing for an engagement.” In explaining this image to readers, the paper noted that “[a]ll natives have great difficulty in reconciling themselves to the restraint of clothing; so that, when active service is the word, those most advanced in civilization will strip themselves of everything superfluous” (Fig. 13).

While discarding many if not all other elements of their clothing, this and other images show troopers retaining their caps, implying that these were valued above other elements of their uniform. This may have largely been a strategy for self-preservation, since once divested of the remainder of their uniforms they were indistinguishable to trigger-ready Europeans from the “wild” Indigenous people they were policing; see, for example, *Brisbane Courier* (1875:2). One resident of north Queensland in the 1880s (Corfield 1921:69–70) recalled an incident at the Laura River in 1876 when, going down to wash before dinner, he saw “a mob of blacks bathing, and one running towards the bank.” He immediately sprinted back to his camp, yelling to his companions to ready their rifles, only to find that the men he had espied were an NMP detachment

from Lower Laura who were also bathing in the river. The man he had seen running “went to get his uniform cap to denote a trooper,” presumably to avoid being shot by Corfield and his party. For the same reason, Corfield noted that the troopers took their caps when on patrol to ensure that they recognized each other at a distance when it counted most:

It was a weird procession, as we wended our way along the river. Five naked blacks in single file in the lead, their only dress consisting of a cartridge belt round the waist, and cap in hand. The latter they were most particular in wearing on their head when going into action, otherwise they would have difficulty in recognising each other. (Corfield 1923:95)

The third and final element of meaning to the troopers’ uniform was its significance to Indigenous people who resisted the NMP. In this context the caps, shirts, trousers, red stripes, and boots were not signaling safety, but danger. Cole’s detailed work on contact rock art in the Cape York Peninsula has included a study of a series of images identified as paintings of the NMP made (post-1873) by the Aboriginal landowning groups who vigorously opposed colonial invasion (Cole 2010). These consist of stylized male human figures, variously depicted with caps, shirts, trousers, boots, and leggings, though without fine details, such as buttons. While the Queensland government used official photographs to present the trooper uniform as a symbol of its authority, the Aboriginal resistance movement, traditionally cognizant of the symbolic value of imagery, reimagined and graphically reproduced police apparel as a way of gaining power over the enemy (George et al. 1995). For example, a group of paintings, specifically identified in the 1960s by “Traditional Owners” as representations of the NMP (Trezise 1985), include two figures with cap-like shapes on their heads, gridded infill on their lower bodies, and grayish-blue paint thickly applied on the chest areas (Fig. 14). This rare, selectively procured pigment of unknown source points to very dedicated efforts to depict the troopers’ blue shirts. Other figures use carefully drawn lines and/or distinctive grid patterns to denote, caps, shirts, trousers, and leggings. On some figures the depiction of the cap follows Aboriginal sign language for the police:

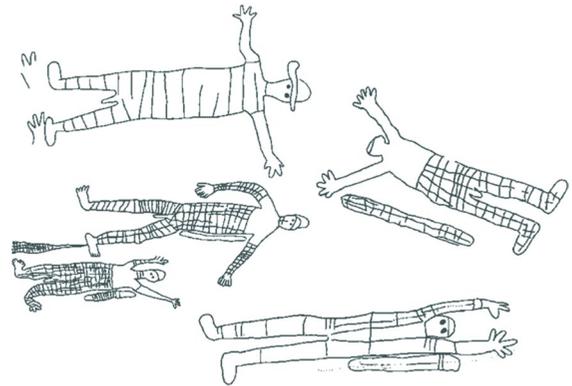


Fig. 14 Line drawings of rock-art motifs depicting Native Police in uniform. (Image after Cole [2010:figure 9].)

The Aboriginal hand sign for ‘bullyman’ was an open hand [horizontally] across the forehead followed by a gesture which meant ‘run away quickly’. ... As the troopers wore caps at all times to distinguish them from local Aborigines ... it is likely that the depiction of the cap symbolizes this practice. The lines across the foreheads of some police [paintings] are reminiscent of the hand sign. (Cole 2010:24)

Importantly, these figures are consistently painted in horizontal or inverted positions, or juxtaposed with paintings of objects or animals associated with death, apparently symbols of sorcery intended to cause harm to the NMP. However, as explained by Kuku Thaypann elders George Musgrave and Tommy George, painting the invaders was not only “to kill them,” but “to get strong to fight them” (George et al. 1995:33).

Conclusion

Insights into the Queensland NMP are evident through exploring the history and development of its uniform, including the role of such clothing in constructing officer and trooper identities; the indexical qualities of the uniform as a symbol of power and authority, and the different interpretations of that symbolism by Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences; and some of the ways in which agency could be exercised by troopers in the selective wearing of uniform components. The various elements of the troopers’ uniforms—especially the red stripes and the

cap—came to stand for much more than just a wage. For Europeans they connoted protection and the presence of “safe” Indigenous people, for the troopers perhaps a place in a world so entirely transformed that there were few other options available to them (Burke, Barker, Cole et al. 2018). While they were an ineluctable element of the discipline and control essential to successful and efficient NMP detachments, in their subsequent deployment beyond the camp the uniforms came to symbolize the exercise of that control over other Indigenous peoples. That the troopers’ uniform did not change in sync with the officers’ uniform over the course of the 19th century speaks to wider governmental attitudes about troopers and their place in the larger policing system. In short, while the image of officers evolved to reflect wider changes in the nature and place of policing in civil society, this was not the case for the Indigenous members of the force, whose appearance remained unchanged into the 20th century.

Archaeologically, the only known traces of these material symbols are the closures and accoutrements that made their way into archaeological deposits. That so many are found at NMP camps is intriguing. Unfortunately, the archaeological context of these items was insufficient to provide anything other than equivocal interpretations for their presence at any of the sites. The majority of the buttons from Burke River (75%) and Lower Laura (64%) were recovered from areas identified through both Aboriginal oral history and archaeological analysis as having been inhabited by the troopers, although only their spatial clustering was meaningful. While buttons were retrieved from excavated contexts at both sites, they were associated with general occupation debris rather than identifiable activity areas. At Mistake Creek the historical and archaeological evidence was insufficient to differentiate between troopers’ and officers’ living spaces.

Historically, given that the issuing and wearing of uniforms was highly regulated and constraints on resupply and a general lack of funding overall meant that uniforms were often not replaced for long stretches of time, uniforms would be expected to have been carefully curated to ensure both their longevity and suitability for public presentation. It would also be expected that uniforms would shift with their wearers when transferred, rather than be discarded. Troopers often took their uniform with them when

they deserted, e.g., Freudenthal (1863), but, if not, it is also unlikely that uniforms would have remained abandoned in camp, since government property, including uniform components, was recycled wherever possible (Ferguson 1855). Taken together, this implies that uniform buttons at NMP camps should be a rare find, perhaps only associated with uniforms in their end-of-life stage with no further possibility of reuse. Even in that context, however, the buttons themselves could reasonably be expected to be curated for their future value.

There are therefore two possibilities for how these objects transitioned into the archaeological record. The buttons at both Lower Laura and Burke River were the small variety used in the later period on collars and cuffs, shoulder cords, breast pockets, and caps, and it is possible that they were simply removed or lost as a result of general wear and tear to much relied upon items, especially caps. That the greater number of these objects was in areas associated with troopers is understandable, since the number of troopers in a camp was always greater and their turnover higher.

Given that coercion was probably more widespread than inducement when recruiting new troopers to the NMP (Burke, Barker, Cole et al. 2018), however, it is also possible that many troopers viewed their uniform in a negative light and associated it with a repressive system. In this context the act of button deposition may be the clearest direct archaeological expression of how at least some troopers viewed and treated these powerful objects. It is possible that abandonment served a symbolic purpose as an act of rejection, although constraints on their agency in camp limited such action to the smallest, yet not inconsequential, elements of their uniforms. Regardless, in the absence of any preserved uniforms, it is the buttons that have come to stand in for the whole. As a reflection of a particular type of policing, they condense an entire system of intent and its repercussions into some of the smallest objects, inconsistently worn, at times carefully curated and at others easily or deliberately abandoned.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare they have no conflict of interest.

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