

Central Victorian Aboriginal Weapons

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The illustrations for this article are from photographs of a set of models of the weapons formerly used by the Taungurong, a large Aboriginal tribe once inhabiting the valley of the Goulburn River, in Central Victoria.

The models are, perhaps, the only complete record of the weapons of this tribe, as no systematic collecting had ever been done amongst them. The early contacts between the Taungurong and the white colonists proved disastrous for the former. Whereas in 1850 they were a well-organised tribe, by 1860 not many of these unfortunate people were left. The discovery of gold, with its attendant influx of thousands of gold-seekers, soon reduced the Taungurong to a negligible number. The gold-seekers, of course, were not interested in the Aborigines as such, and nobody thought, in those feverish days, of studying them or of forming collections of their material possessions. When the importance of collections was realised it was too late. Hence the great value of this set of models.

Made in 1867 by Albert A. C. Le Souef, they are perfect miniatures of every type of weapon known by him to have been used by these Central Victorian Aborigines. He had every opportunity to handle and examine the originals. He was the son of Assistant Protector of Aborigines W. M. Le Souef, who, in 1840, founded the Mission Station at Murchison, on the Goulburn River. There the Assistant Protector took all his family and lived in a very primitive way amongst the natives, many of whom had never before seen a white man. Young Albert thus had ample opportunities to mix with them. This knowledge of the natives was of great advantage to him when, in 1858, in partnership with Sherbourne Sheppard and W. N. Atkins, he took up Tallygaroopna Station, consisting of 160,000 acres on the right bank of the Goulburn River, just north of, and adjoining, Shepparton. Here he continued his friendly relations with the natives, and left for posterity a number of published descriptions of their way and manner of life, while his wife, Caroline, a gifted artist, painted camp scenes and corroborees. Albert A. C. Le Souef died in 1902.

As seen by the illustrations, the models in this set were made with care, and, we can believe, are exact copies of the originals. They are, therefore, extremely useful as a guide for the student of the weapons used by the natives of this region. It must be borne in mind that the following description of the implements and the use to which they were put naturally refers to the originals from which these models were taken, and not to the models. The native names given are mainly in the language of the Yarra tribe, the Woewurong, the immediate southern neighbours and allies of the Taungurong. Woewurong appellations are used because, in most instances, the Taungurong name for the implements has never been recorded.

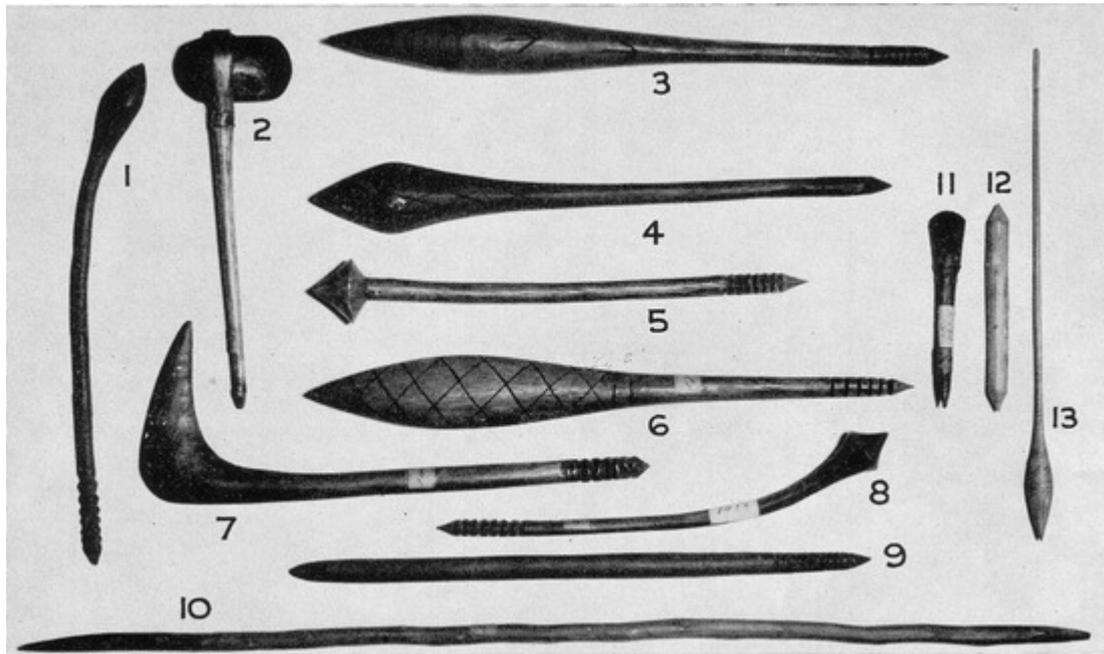


Plate 1

Beginning from the left:-

No. 1: *Worra-worra*, a throwing stick used in fighting and also for hunting game. It was generally made from the root of a sapling of the tea-tree (*Melaleuca ericifolia*).

No. 2: *Karagik* (in Taungurong), stone-headed axe; the stone used for the head was usually of metamorphic rock. The handle was a length of tough sapling, split, and bent around the head. It was tied near the head and at the distal end with the fibre of the stringy-bark tree, or the sinews of the tail of the kangaroo, and further secured by vegetable gum.

No. 3: *Kudjeroong*, a club, or waddy, with a bulbous round head, used most commonly in single combat, when both combatants protected themselves with the wooden shield (*mulga*). Blows were only aimed at the head, and it would have been deemed unfair to strike at any other part of the body.

No. 4: Another form of *Kudjeroong*. In this variety the head is oval in cross-section.

No. 5: *Yeamberrn*. This weapon was usually used in hand-to-hand combat, although it was sometimes thrown at an enemy.

No. 6 is another form of *Kudjeroong*. In this variety the bulbous head was flattened to the extent of producing two blunt cutting edges.

No. 7: *Leonile*. A good *leonile* was made of hard, heavy wood, and, in order that it might stand a heavy blow without splitting, a root with a curve in it was chosen. The weapon was employed in single combat in the same way as the *Kudjeroong*, but it is said to have been more dangerous, as the curvature enabled the point to get over the protection of the shield.

No. 8: *Yeamberrn*, the throwing form of No. 5, only differing from it by the curved shaft. It

was sometimes thrown in a way that caused the sharp point to enter the body of the enemy, thus inflicting a severe wound.

No. 9: *Konnung*, fighting stick, sharpened at both ends, employed in close combat, when it was held by the middle and used for stabbing.

No. 10: *Kannan*, woman's digging stick. This stick, sharpened at both ends and hardened over a fire, was made from any suitable sapling. It was principally used by the women for digging roots and small animals from the soil, but could also be used for fighting,

No. 11: *Stone chisel*. The head was an edge-ground flake of hard stone, such as basalt, or diabase, set in a cleft stick, held in position by a ligature of native string. Used in manufacturing wooden implements.

No. 12: *Koorngoon*. The illustration shows one of a pair of models of sticks made from a sonorous wood. These were used by the Aborigines during corroborees and sing-songs. One of these sticks was held in each hand and one struck against the other, thus keeping time or emphasizing the dance steps or the words of the song.

No. 13: *Wit-wit*, a plaything. When properly thrown to skim along the ground, it could be made to leap from spot to spot for over 200 yards. It was made from a suitable sapling, the head being part of the root.

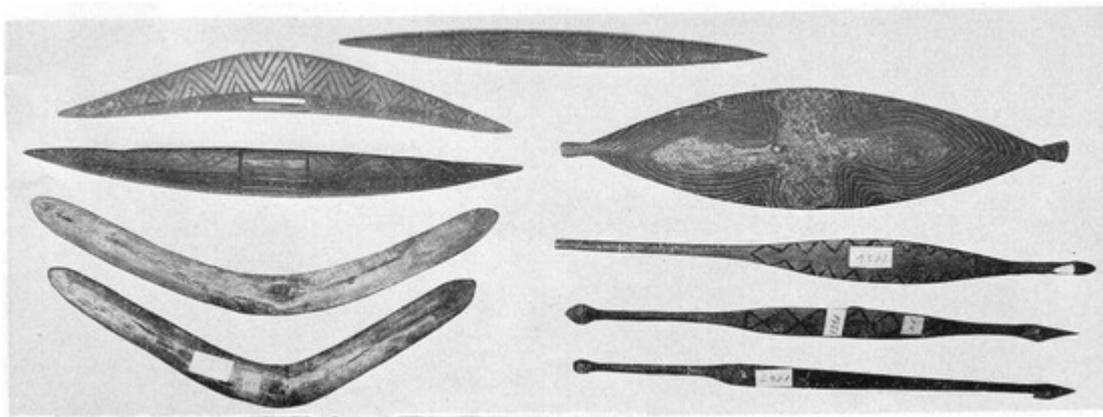


Plate 2

Top centre: *Mulga*, a strong wooden shield used for warding-off blows given with the *Kudjeroong* or *Leonile*. In these shields the section through the middle is diamond-shaped, the inner and outer face of the shield therefore being angular.

From top left down:-

Drunmung, another form of *Mulga*. It is wedge-shaped, or a flattened diamond in cross-section, thus presenting a very sharp edge to the incoming blow.

The next shield shown is a third form of the *Mulga*. In this specimen both the outer and the inner surface lack the typical angle, therefore presenting a convex-concave appearance.

Burngeet. War boomerang. The *Burngeet* was thrown straight at the enemy, who, if hit, would receive a severe cut. It was parried with the shield. Sometimes the thrower could cause it to strike the ground, rebound, and hit the person towards whom it was aimed. When thrown this way it was much more difficult to parry. The *Burngeet* did not return to the thrower.

Wonguin. This is the play boomerang which, when properly thrown, came back to the thrower. It was not used in fighting.

From top right down:-

Geeam. This shield was used as a protection against spears. It was most commonly made from the inner bark of *Eucalyptus viminalis*, the Manna Gum. Two types of this shield exist, the difference being in the handle. In one this part is cut from the solid, while in the other the handle is made of a separate piece of green wood, thrust in two holes, expressly bored for the purpose of receiving it. When dried it is almost impossible to take this handle off.

Murriwan (Goulburn tribe) or *Kurruk* (Yarra tribe). This is the spear-thrower, the implement with which spears could be thrown with much greater force and accuracy. Spear-throwers were furnished with a barb which fitted into the hollow at the butt end of the spear. Two types were used by the Aborigines of this region. In one the barb was cut out of the solid, while in the other, as in the present model, the barb was made from a fragment of bone, lashed on with native string smeared over with vegetable gum.

Murriwan. Spear-thrower, as above, except that the barb at the top of the implement was carved out of the solid.

Murriwan. Spear-thrower, similar to the last.

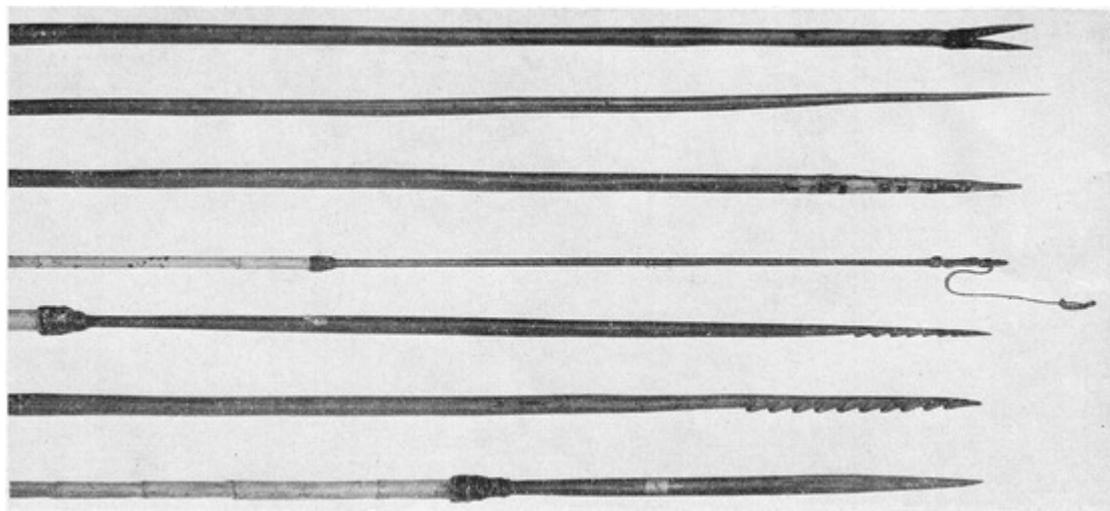


Plate 3

From top:-

Wormegoran, a two-pronged spear used for catching fish. The spear-thrower was not used with this implement.

Koy-yun. Hunting or war spear. This weapon was fashioned with great care. It had to be very straight and the point had to be very smooth and sharp. This spear was not barbed. It was thrown by hand.

Mongile, the jagged spear. These war spears were greatly feared because of the nature of the wound they inflicted. In making them, a groove was cut on each side of the point, and continued for a foot or more along the shaft. In this groove were embedded a number of sharp chips of quartz. These were further fastened on by coating the grooves with vegetable gum. In the model shown the chips of quartz have unfortunately been lost. This spear was thrown by hand.

The next implement shown was made from two long wooden rods, each fitted to a central section of reed. The reed ensured great flexibility. A noose of native string was fitted to one end of the rod. The hunter, hidden behind some bushes, would contrive to slip the noose over the head of a bird, when, with a quick jerk, it would be secured.

Tirrer. The upper part of this spear consisted of a shaft of hard, heavy wood, with a series of barbs cut along one side of the point. The heavy wooden shaft was inserted into a reed, where it was securely fastened with native string and vegetable gum. This spear was thrown with the spear-thrower.

Nandum. War spear. A spear similar to the last, except that it was made from a single length of hard wood and was not fitted to a reed base. This spear was not thrown with the spear-thrower.

Tare. This spear is similar to the second-last, except that it is not barbed. It was thrown with the spear-thrower, and mainly used in warfare.

These models are kept in a wooden box ornamented on the four sides and on the lid with scenes of Aboriginal life done in poker work by Caroline Le Souef. It is not the purpose of the present article to describe this European art. It is sufficient to say that, as can be seen by the battle scene illustrated, it is a faithful representation which adds to our knowledge of the life of the Taungurong.



This poker-work picture of the Taungurong Aboriginal tribe in battle was done by Caroline Le Souef, wife of Albert A. C. Le Souef, on the lid of a wooden box in which are kept models, made by her husband in 1867, of the weapons formerly used by this tribe.