

The Moreton Bay Courier - Sat 29 Jan 1859

MURDER BY THE BLACKS—TWO OTHER WHITE MEN MISSING.

ON Thursday, the Captain of the Hawk steamer, found a dead body off Luggage Point in the river, which proves to be that of Robert Collins alias Bob Hunter, well known in Brisbane, from the long time he had been engaged in the Bay trade. The body presented a ghastly appearance, decomposition having set in; but the evidence of Dr. Barton, taken at the inquest, will give the particulars of its state. It was feared for some time the state of the body would prevent recognition; but the friends of the deceased were enabled to identify the clothes, and there are particulars in the evidence which point conclusively, we imagine, to the perpetrators of the crime. The deceased was well-known amongst the blacks and was generally reported to be good natured towards them, using them in his calling, fishing for the dugong. Of the fate of the two companions of the deceased nothing at present has been learned, but active search is being made to discover the bodies if they have shared the fate of their companion, or to relieve them if they are yet alive.

The inquest on the body was held yesterday, at the hospital, before K. Cannan, Esq., and the following jurymen, Mr. R. Cribb being chosen as foreman :—J. Petrie, R. S. Warry, A. J. Hockings, G. Jones, C. Trundle, E. B. Southerden, T. Clark, W. Brookes, T. Shapcott, T. P. Pugh, E. King, J. Gray.

The Coroner said they were met to inquire how Robert Collins (alias Hunter) came by his death. There was no doubt but that the deceased had been foully and brutally murdered; and though the evidence might be scant at present, they must do their best to trace the occurrences so as to arrive at a proper verdict.

Samuel Buckley, of Bulimba, said he knew Robert Collins. He said the deceased was his son in law; and he identified the body. I saw him last alive a fortnight last Wednesday, when he was intending to go after "young-uns." The last words he said were, he would go to St. Helena. There were two young men, one by the name of Morgan, and the other a stranger, with him. They were provisioned for about nine days.

They have often been in the bay before, and my son in law has been in the habit of going down there for two years. I used to call the other man "William;" but he was called Charles. I am sure he was a foreigner.

By Mr. Pugh: I identify the body by the clothes, by a tomahawk wound and a bit of hair I gathered from the head.

By Mr. Cribb: I had been expecting the boat back for the regatta. I had no boat or I should have gone down.

Captain Twine, of the Hawk, said: I saw the body on Luggage Point, about two feet from high water mark, at noon, on Thursday. Sent the men on shore; and had the body carried on board. The only opinion I can give is, that deceased must have been murdered near to where he was found. He must have come in from the northward. I did not know the deceased. The body was left there as the tide ebbed out. To all appearance he must have been dead six or seven days.

Mrs. Buckley, the mother-in-law, identified the body by the clothes, boots, and cetera. The name of the deceased was Robert Collins. The shirt he had on was broad striped, and the sleeve narrow striped. He had a digger's belt round him, with many pockets in it. I recognise all. He took two pairs of boots down, one new pair, and one old pair, and he had put one of the old ones on. Mrs. Collins, the wife, said, I saw the deceased alive the last time a fortnight ago yesterday, when he went down

to the Bay with Morgan, and a man who came from Holland. He went to catch "young-un." They had been down together about a fortnight, when the boat sprung a leak, and they came up to repair it. They had no blacks on board when they started. I think they had blacks with them afterwards, as they could not well manage without them. They said they were going to take some in. They were seen the day afterwards, looking after a black named Diamond and another called Dr. Ballow. They said they thought they should go to Bribie Island, and from there to Moreton Island.

By Mr. Cribb: I have not seen them since. Examination continued: The Holland man was a net maker. Morgan told the men they were to have £3 a week each from Mr. Harvey. He told an untruth—they had spent the foreigner's money, and they were bad friends because Morgan had deceived them.

By Mr. Pugh: My husband did leave Ballow on Moreton Island but I think he was left with as much provisions as they could spare. Ballow was not good friends with my husband since. Diamond was at my house after my husband left. John Williams, waterman, residing in Fortitude Valley, had known the deceased about 18 months. His occupation was bringing up oysters and catching "young-un." Saw him a fortnight ago last Wednesday. I spoke to Morgan, who was with him. They were going down the river. I asked if they were bound for St Helena, and they said "yes." I saw no blacks in the boat. There were three white men; but one of them I did not know.

Dr. Barton said, I examined the body today. With the removal of the socks the cuticle of the feet came off. The right foot is more swollen than the other, and that boot is not on as regards the upper leather, but merely tied on. A cut is noticed on the posterior of right arm, at its inferior third, exposing the extensor tendons, probably produced by not a very sharp cutting instrument. Size of wound say one inch and a half by one inch and three quarters deep. On the right side of the neck and chest there are two wounds, and probably a third one. The two first about and above the clavicle nearly parallel, say one-and-a-half inches apart, and with a direction upwards and outwards, and downwards and inwards.

The place in the neck is a mere chasm, and so occupied by the results of decomposition as to render it impossible to define or describe it, with any degree of accuracy. The hair has fallen off, leaving the scalp. A wound is seen a little to the left of the vertex, and it passes—a clean cut through everything, into the cavity of the skull. The bones of the face and jaws are found smashed. Precise injuries cannot be stated at present, but the fractured parts are removed for further examination.

The jury returned a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown.