



Source: Martin Chulov, 'Dealing with the enemy', *The Australian online*, 30/01/06.

Tags: [death](#), [racism](#)

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This is the one written testimony ever recorded from a convict in the first decades of the New South Wales colony. He was a trustee, a servant permitted into households, accorded certain privileges. Here's the tale he offered to his master:

At night, if there's a full moon, you can see your shadow in front of you, walking kind of drunk. Your shadow, falling over your feet. You can see things on the ground like you might be under water. And there's noises all around you...whistling and such. The blacks, whistling and such, so as you know they know about you, how you're under their moon.

That's the kind of night when we found him. A full moon night. A skeleton is what he was. But still in his clothes. Even in his red jacket. Which is strange because of red and how much the blacks take to red...for their old men to be wearing it when they make speeches and such. But here is a man with red clothing and the blacks have not interfered with him. This gives me the flesh of a goose! A dead man is fright enough. But a dead man so gone to the devil that the blacks will not touch him! Well I ask you! What are we to do?

We pick him up in pieces. We carry him home in a canvas sack.

There are people here woud pay money for the skull, but I will not do that. I want to take the bones away near the water. I want bury him near the water.

And it's there that the blacks come and talk with me. I find I am not frightened, when I'm speaking with them. This is unaccustomed. I am not frightened!

The blacks have explanations. They say how they found him in the first days of our Fleet. He was dying of the runs.

I have figured him now. His name being Mr Hill. We had always spoken his name like scared men. For the talk in the tents was how he'd been eaten. But here they were, the black men, explaining him to me. He died on his own, like we all do, I suppose. The blacks looking and having no idea what to do with him, what was left of him. The right way to dispose of him, a man who is white and not from their country. How to pay the country back for his being here. How to rest him down? What to do with him? To put him to rest, to get the regular payment the world expects from the people who use it?

They talked with their old people. The ones who wear red. The rules are not clear for them. They decided to let the sun and dirt take him. They left him on his own. They walked a long way around him.

Ever since I have heard this, I can't look at these things our merchants bring back from New Zealand. These heads of brown men that the seal hunters take from the temples to sell to collectors. Have these dead men been put down to rest?

These statues and teeth. Now, I'm not bowing down to the devil. I'm not like a native. But why should I be taking any chances with these dead men? What I'm asking is, have they been put to rest? Their ghosts, I mean. These brown men's heads. Their statues, their teeth. Have they been put to rest? What of their due payment?

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ross Gibson.*