

An Aboriginal Breast Plate or Gorget in brass

Inscription reads 'Major General Latouche/Tambo Barcoo/Queensland', with inscription surrounded by a scrolled design, crescent-shaped, flat in vertical plane, with a chain attached at each apex, left apex engraved with an emu and the right apex engraved with a kangaroo, both of which face outwards, 9cms wide, 21cms long

Provenance:

Collected by Lillius Shone from Tasmania, whose sister, Susie Jillet, lived on a large property near Blackall in Queensland, which is on the Barcoo River. Apparently, Lillius Shone met with the indigenous people who lived and worked near the homestead and returned from one of her visits to Blackall in the late 1800s or early 1900s with this breastplate. The town of Tambo, which was settled in the 1860s, is situated on the Landsborough Highway approximately 1000km north west of Brisbane.



Breastplates

Aboriginal breastplates, also known as **king plates**, **gorgets** and **brassplates**, were given by Europeans to individual Aboriginal people during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Originally governments awarded breastplates to individuals in Aboriginal communities who **they believed had control** over their community.

By the 1850s the government had lost control over the awarding of breastplates, and the rare distinction of having one awarded by government changed, with pastoralists often awarding them to Aboriginal people who served them well in any way.

Terms used on the inscriptions of breastplates, such as **king**, **queen**, **princess** and **chief** are **not part of Aboriginal cultures**.

The sizes, shapes, materials, inscriptions, decorative features and reasons behind awarding breastplates vary.

A crescent was the most dominant shape they were made, but squares, circles and other shapes were also used. Originally plates were made of **lead**, but this later changed to **brass**.

Breastplates whether seen as a symbol of dispossession and the mistreatment of Indigenous people at the hands of European invasion, or as a symbol of the survival and resistance of Aboriginal people, are a reminder to all of the complex history and stories that are part of Australia.