TRIAL BY ORDEAL (1828):

When I first came down here, in 1828, I resided for three months at Spring Hill, not far from the old Dapto Road, where I carried on my business of boot-making. The blacks were very numerous in the district at that time, especially about the Tom Thumb Lagoon, Mullet Creek and the Lake for they lived mostly upon fish. Whilst residing at Spring Hill about 100 blacks, including gins and their children, assembled one afternoon in front of my house, and not far distant. This gathering was made up of blacks from different parts of the district, but were only portions of those in the different parts. They assembled to punish one of their number, a blackfellow, for taking another man's gin. They were all painted, after the fashion of savage warriors with pipeclay, and they wore feathers and other things to give them a warlike look. On inquiry, I found from the most intelligible of them that the culprit was to stand a certain number of spears being thrown at him. This was his punishment. The man whose gin had been taken was the man who threw the spears. The culprit was allowed a shield behind which he could nearly hide himself. The thrower had his spears — about a dozen — slung on his back. They were a sort of reed, pointed with stone or iron. The crowd formed into two wings, the two principals being between, one at each end. The man with the spears often pretended to throw to see if he could catch his opponent unawares, and the culprit would dodge and crouch down behind his shield. Some of the spears went over his head and some were broken on the shield. The blacks were good marksmen, being very quick in the eye, and they were just as quick at using the shield. The thrower did a good deal of "yabbering", but what it was all about I could not tell. When all the spears had been thrown the man who had been the target walked away unhurt. As he was safe and sound he was considered victorious.

It then began to get dark, and the gins lit the fires. They stripped the bark off ti-trees and lay down upon it beside the fires. When the darkness came on they held a corroboree. The culprit was taken back into the fold and welcomed by his fellows with open arms. The corroboree was kept up till 9 or
10 o'clock, and when it was over they all lay down, and remained there till next morning, when they dispersed to their respective localities. Samuel Foley, the only blacksmith here at the time, and the first in Illawarra, with his family, witnessed the event as well as myself, but no other white people saw it. Foley's house was beside where I was living.

"REMINISCENCES OF EARLY ILLAWARRA", by ALEXANDER STEWART (published in the "Illawarra Mercury", 1894; reprinted 1934).