LA TROBEANA

SPECIAL EDITION

Journal of the C. J. La Trobe Society Inc.

Vol 16, No 1, March 2017

ISSN 1447-4026

La Trobeana
Journal of the C J La Trobe Society Inc
Vol 16, No 1, March 2017

ISSN 1447-4026

The C J La Trobe Society Inc was formed in 2001 to promote understanding and appreciation of the life, work and times of Charles Joseph La Trobe, Victoria's first Lieutenant-Governor.
www.latrobesociety.org.au

La Trobeana is published three times a year: in March, July and November. The journal publishes peer-reviewed articles, as well as other written contributions, that explore themes in the life and times of Charles Joseph La Trobe, aspects of the colonial period of Victoria's history, and the wider La Trobe family.

Designer
Michael Owen michaelowen.mto@gmail.com

For copies of guidelines for contributors contact:
The Honorary Secretary: Dr Dianne Reilly AM
The C J La Trobe Society
401 Collins Street
Melbourne Vic 3000
Phone: 9646 2112
Email: secretary@latrobesociety.org.au

FRONT COVER
Thomas Woolner, 1825-1892, sculptor
Charles Joseph La Trobe, 1853
Bronze portrait medallion showing the left profile of Charles Joseph La Trobe, diam. 24cm.
Signature and date incised in bronze l.r.: T. Woolner Sc. 1853: / M
La Trobe, Charles Joseph, 1801-1875. Accessioned 1894
Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria, H5489

Contents

La Trobe and the Aboriginal People I

Note

This edition of *La Trobeana* includes images and names of deceased people; it may also include words offensive to Indigenous Australians.

There are numerous variations in the spelling of Victorian Aboriginal peoples' names in the relevant literature. For consistency, the spelling of names on the map *Aboriginal Languages of Victoria* (Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages, 2016) has been used in all articles in this edition of *La Trobeana*, see p.6.

A Word from the President

The current edition of *La Trobeana* is devoted to the subject of Charles Joseph La Trobe and the Aboriginal People, as will be the first issue for 2018. We are fortunate to have four eminent historians, experts in this field, writing on various aspects of the topic in this edition.

Dr Gary Presland, an authority on Aboriginal history and the natural history of Melbourne, has given us a perceptive article on the interaction between the European settlers and the Indigenous people. The complete lack of comprehension on the part of the administrators and the new arrivals of the Aboriginal worldview and connection to their country was fundamental to the inevitable failure of the Aboriginal Protectorate.

Emeritus Professor John Barnes, whose new biography of Charles Joseph La Trobe will be published shortly, gives an account of how La Trobe's Moravian religious beliefs influenced his official duties and his personal attitudes, especially in his support for the Moravian missionaries who saw their role as one of 'Christianising and civilising' the Aboriginal people.

Professor Ian D. Clark's expertise in Aboriginal historical geography, and his research of Djab Wurrung Aboriginal history provides the background for his paper on the Indigenous people and frontier violence in the Western District of Victoria. The correspondence of Richard Hanmer Bunbury, pastoralist and Superintendent of Water Police at Williamstown, to his father in England in the years 1841-1847 is published for the first time. Bunbury's personal experiences and attitudes to the Aboriginal people are revealed in these illuminating letters.

Dr Marguerita Stephens' 2016 AGL Shaw Lecture to members of the La Trobe Society and the Royal Historical Society of Victoria is published here. In this paper, she closely examines La Trobe's policies and practices in supplying rations to Port Phillip Aboriginal people from 1839 to 1842, and suggests that, in this policy domain at least, his humanitarianism was compromised by rigid adherence to instructions from superiors. These instructions were based on the harsh edicts and economies of the New Poor Law of 1834, rather than on any concern for the survival of the Kulin people.

***

All members of the La Trobe Society will be delighted that our Patron, Her Excellency the Governor of Victoria, the **Honourable Linda Dessau** has been appointed to the highest honour of the Order of Australia – a Companion (AC) in the General Division in this year's Australia Day honours list. The citation for the award reads: 'For eminent service to the people of Victoria through leadership roles in the judiciary, to the advancement of economic ties and business relationships, and as a supporter of charitable, sporting and arts organisations'.

La Trobe Society member **Margaret Birtley** was appointed a Member (AM) of the Order of Australia, 'For significant service to cultural heritage, particularly to the museums sector, to education, and to historical preservation'. One of La Trobe's Cottage volunteers **Jenny Happell** was awarded a Medal (OAM) of the Order of Australia 'For service to the community through voluntary roles with horticultural organisations'. Congratulations to Margaret and Jenny.

It is with much sadness that we record the death of our long-time member **Julianne Bell**. She was very much involved as a leader and protector of Victoria's public lands and cultural assets and a supporter of the Society. An early member of the La Trobe Society, **Berres Hoddle Colville** died on 5 February. The great-grand-daughter of Robert Hoddle, Victoria's first Surveyor-General who was the architect of Melbourne's 1837 grid layout, Berres was the author of the biography of Hoddle published in 2004.

Diane Gardiner AM
Hon. President
C J La Trobe Society

The Kulin people and the failure of the Aboriginal Protectorate during the superintendency of C J La Trobe

By Dr Gary Presland

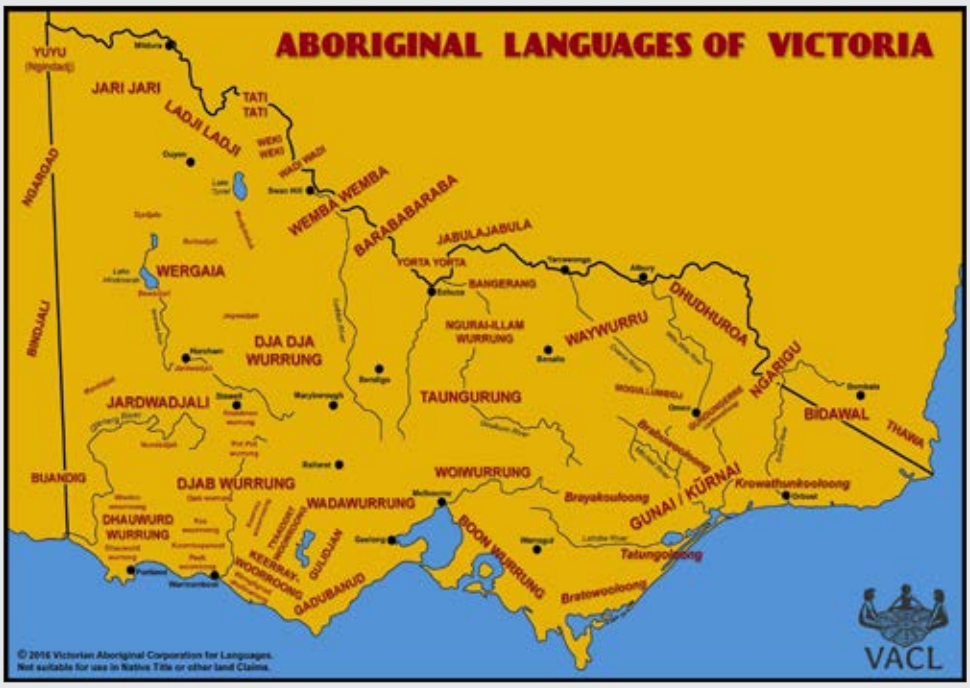
Gary Presland is an archaeologist and historian who has published widely on Aboriginal history and natural history in Melbourne. In 2000 he retired as a Head Curator at Museum Victoria, to concentrate on research and writing. In 2001 he was awarded a Thomas Ramsay Fellowship at Museum Victoria, and in 2005 completed a PhD in the School of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Melbourne. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, an Honorary Fellow of the University of Melbourne (School of Geography) and an Honorary Associate of Museum Victoria.

Stemming from their earliest encounters with Europeans, Indigenous Australians occupied a particular place in nineteenth century racial discourse. The first recorded contact between the Aboriginal people and Europeans, near present-day Broome in 1688, gave rise to beliefs about the Indigenous peoples of this continent that took centuries to shake. Over an eight-week period English privateer William Dampier observed the local people, who he later described as 'the miserablest... in the world'.[1] Dampier's assessment was based on his belief that not only did the locals make no attempt to clothe themselves, they neither made improvements to their natural environment, nor cultivated the land. In European thinking of the time the presence of such social practices — along with religious observance — indicated that a society was 'civilised'. Thus, from the beginning of contact, the apparent absence of these cultural markers in the case of Indigenous Australians consigned these peoples to an inferior rank in the European hierarchy of humanity.[2] Subsequent observation of Aboriginal groups by French and English exploring parties during sporadic visits around the coast of Australia and brief incursions inland, over the following 100 years, did little if anything to alter this view. The recorded descriptions by Joseph Banks and James Cook on the *Endeavour*, for example, of Indigenous people encountered around Botany Bay and north Queensland in 1770, echo the sentiments expressed by Dampier.[3]

The characterisation of Aboriginal people as uncivilised wretches eking out a hand-to-mouth existence persisted within European culture; it underlay the attitude about Indigenous Australians of almost all settlers and administrators at the beginning of the colonial period in Australia. As whites progressively occupied Aboriginal land, including in the Port Phillip District, these racial prejudices became an influential factor in the spectrum of interactions that took place between the two races. This clash of cultures was all the more tragic for being based on a serious misreading by the Europeans of Indigenous society and worldview.

Kulin culture

In creating a permanent settlement alongside the Yarra River in 1835, European settlers unknowingly occupied a location of crucial importance to local Aboriginal people. For



Aboriginal Languages of Victoria, 2016
Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages
This map was produced from information available at the time of printing
This map is not suitable for Native Title Claims

generations, members of a large confederation of clans called Kulin regularly gathered in the area to engage in activities essential to the maintenance of their culture and society. In order to renew and maintain the many connections that existed between widespread groups, the Kulin people needed to meet in large numbers at regular intervals. Locations within Kulin territory that could sustain large-scale meetings over a period of two to three weeks were not numerous. By an unfortunate coincidence, the area around the estuary of the Yarra and Maribyrnong Rivers, adjacent to the settlement, was one of the traditional places in which major meetings were held. The area that would come to be a pivotal place in the business of the immigrant Europeans, already functioned in similar fashion for the traditional Indigenous residents of an extensive region centred on Port Phillip Bay.

The initial settlement was situated within the estate of an Aboriginal clan named Wurundjeri willam. Their country stretched from the Yarra to the top of the Dividing Range; members of this local clan identified with this tract of land but they all had enduring connections to other clans also, in areas as far away as the Murray River. The social bonds that connected widely separated clans took the form of language, beliefs and marriage. They were manifest in ensuring that although they lived mostly within their estate, clans such as the Wurundjeri willam, for example, had access to resources over a large part of what is now central Victoria. Within that region, clans whose members spoke the same language, and whose estates were contiguous, formed a language group. Where the languages spoken in adjacent groups were closely related, these people considered themselves part of a larger alliance, and underlined that connection by forming marriage ties.[4]

The Wurundjeri willam clan were united with other local clans to the north and west of the Yarra by their language, called Woiwurrung. This language had as much as 93 per cent of its vocabulary in common with Boon Wurrung, the language spoken by a neighbouring group of clans to their south. The Boon Wurrung-speaking clans identified with the area south of the Yarra River, stretching as far as Bass Strait. The Woiwurrung and Boon Wurrung clans thus collectively claimed all of the area south of the Dividing Range, from the Werribee River in the west to the height of the Dandenong Ranges in the east. Within the wider region, the similarities of these two languages with those of a number of other such groups in central and western Victoria, connected the Woiwurrung and Boon Wurrung speaking clans to a confederacy or nation called 'Kulin'. The eponymous term 'Kulin' was used in all these groups to signify that members were regarded as properly human. Anybody who was

not a member of a Kulin clan was thought to be a different and inferior kind of human being. Within the Kulin world the Woiwurrung and Boon Wurrung language groups, along with the Taungurung and Ngurai-illam Wurrung (whose estates were in the Goulburn and Ovens River valleys on the northern side of the Great Dividing Range) made up what is now referred to as the Eastern Kulin. This was a nation of more than forty-five clans, whose members were connected by tongue and thought and kin.

particular animal species and to the locations and environments the animals inhabited. The purpose of categorising of people in this way was to underline the essential and intrinsic unity of humans and the natural world.[7] Totemic affiliation brought a duty of care — toward both the animal and its place — on the part of the individual; it was a requirement, imposed by ancestors as part of the act of creation during the Dreaming, that humans engage in ritual activity to guarantee continuance of their world.

Henry Godfrey, 1824-1888, artist
Yarra Tribe, Port Phillip: Tom, Jim [Woiwurrung men], Nov 8 1843
Pen and ink drawing and watercolour on cream paper
Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H90.53/1/81

Kulin people practiced exogamy; i.e. they married out of their clan, into clans of the opposite moiety,[5] and preferably in a distant language group. Connections of this kind were used, in part, to cement political alliances. There were economic benefits to be had, also, as they helped ensure that all individuals had access to the widest range of resources available. The exchange of marriage partners between two families, across generations, created enduring reciprocal rights and obligations that allowed people from either side of the marriage to make use of resources in the estate of the other.[6] In this way, people in all clans across the Kulin nation had a means of coping with temporary adverse conditions. When there was a drought or some other natural disaster such as fire, clans could break up into smaller groups and move to the estate of a clan to which they were allied. In this locality, removed from the adversity, they were permitted to hunt and gather until conditions improved in their own home range.

The Eastern Kulin lived in a well-ordered and highly regulated society. Every individual had both a defined place in society and a religious responsibility, stemming from the circumstances of his or her birth. Each person belonged to one or other of the two moieties that were a central feature of Kulin culture, by virtue of the clan into which they were born. Moreover, all individuals had a totem, which linked them to

Since this responsibility had to be discharged at specific places of power, at the appropriate time, regular movement of Kulin clans within their estate was measured and geared toward satisfying ritual obligation.

European perceptions

Totemism was a key, central aspect of the religious framework of the Aboriginal world, but not its entirety.[8] Aboriginal religious practice, bent upon expressing the link between humans and their physical world, was an integral part of everyday activity but was of such subtlety that it went virtually unnoticed by European observers. The ethno-centrism that was applied to Aboriginal culture in general extended especially to these aspects of ritual or ceremonial activity. Even those individuals who had a developed understanding of religion, and particularly their own religion, were disinclined to see anything positive in the Aboriginal way of life. For example, the Rev Joseph Orton, (who came to the Port Phillip District to set up a Wesleyan mission), in August 1836 wrote back to his headquarters, about the Indigenous people:

> After the minutest observation and strictest inquiry I could not discover that they possess the most indistinct notion of a Supreme Being — nor have I been able to ascertain that they have

Duncan Elphinstone Cooper, 1813/14 -1904, artist
Poultry house, Challicum, 1851
Watercolour , National Library of Australia. PIC, vol.176, R306
Mia-mia with two Aboriginal people at Challicum home station
From a series depicting Challicum at Fiery Creek, near Mount William

> the slightest vestige of religious worship or superstitious observance.[9]

And one of his brethren, the Rev Francis Tuckfield, likewise wrote, '… their mind as it regards religion seems to be a rude chaos presenting an awfully distressing vacancy of thought'.[10] Such characterisations complemented and were part of the overall impression of the original inhabitants held by Europeans — as naked, godless, nomadic savages. For many of the squatters who flooded into the Port Phillip District, they were regarded as no more than wild animals, and to be treated accordingly.[11]

By the early decades of the nineteenth century the British Government was being pushed to develop more humane policies toward the Aboriginal people of its newest colonies. British MPs Thomas Fowell Buxton and William Wilberforce, reacting to reports of genocide against the Indigenous population of Van Diemen's Land, were instrumental in this movement, as were the crusading campaigns of former anti-slavery groups.[12] The direct and extensive experience of settlers and missionaries was canvassed, and their widely-held views regarding Indigenous people came to form the basis upon which policies and strategies were developed.

The Port Phillip District was to be the area where a new approach to the problem of inter-racial conflicts was played out. In the months both before and after permanent settlement on the Yarra, a number of conflicts between the original inhabitants and settlers occurred within the District. George Stewart, a Police Magistrate from Campbellfield was sent to investigate the reported incidents;[13] but in the longer term measures needed to be taken, both to protect the Indigenous people from the depredations of Europeans, and to ameliorate their condition. The settlement was sanctioned officially in April 1836, and in the following September William Lonsdale was appointed as Police Magistrate. In addition to keeping the peace Lonsdale was charged with conciliating the Aboriginal people of the District, and endeavouring to improve their moral and social conditions. The long-term intention in this regard was to induce them to live in villages and to work in return for food and clothing.[14] In addition, and with the same intentions, in December 1836 Governor Richard Bourke appointed George Langhorne as a missionary to the Aboriginal people in the settlement.[15]

By October 1839, when Charles J. La Trobe arrived in Melbourne to take up the role of Superintendent of the District, the Christianising, agriculture-oriented elements of the British Government's strategy for dealing with the original inhabitants of the District had become a central focus. To give effect to these intentions an Aboriginal Protectorate had been established, and staff appointed, in the preceding December.[16] The primary objective in this exercise was for each of the four Assistant Protectors to set up a station within the District and induce Aboriginal people to gather there. Once local people were settled, the Protectors were '… to teach and encourage them to engage in the cultivation of their grounds, in building suitable habitations for themselves, and in whatever else may conduce to their civilization and social improvement'.[17]

A belief in the civilising impact of an agricultural way of life was clearly evident in the strategies and actions of the administrators who framed the Aboriginal Protectorate scheme. Given the prevailing view by the British of the paucity of Aboriginal culture, it was not surprising that such a scheme would thus aim at improving the situation of the Indigenous population. What is most telling about the intentions of European officials, however, is that they were formulated within an almost total lack of any understanding of Indigenous culture. This ignorance was so extensive that it can be seen as the root cause of much of what subsequently went wrong with the Protectorate. The actions of British reformers and policy makers were well-intentioned, but — based as they were on an inaccurate and incomplete comprehension of Aboriginal culture — they were almost certain to fail.

M. Gauci, lithographer
G.A. Robinson Esq., [c1850]
Lithograph
National Library of Australia PIC 7911 S8470

The Aboriginal Protectorate scheme

With the establishment of the Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate in 1839, the area south of the Murray River was divided into four Protectorate Districts. The boundary between districts to the north and those to the south corresponded with the line of the Dividing Range; the boundary between east and west was a line running from the top of Port Phillip Bay at Melbourne, to the Murray River upstream of Echuca. An Assistant Protectorate was assigned to each of these regions, whose initial task was to establish a home station. At the beginning, administrators accepted the Aboriginal practice of regular movement over their country, and the Protectors were directed to 'itinerise' with the local clans. This was to be the prelude to inducing them to settle down on the Protector's station and take up agriculture.

From its beginning, the Aboriginal Protectorate evoked opposition from every quarter. Squatters generally were hostile, particularly those in the vicinity of the Protector's station. Some were ordered to give up part of their own runs to allow the Protectorate to form a station; others complained that the presence of the Protectors had attracted Aboriginal people in greater numbers than previously seen, which brought on more pilfering and killing of sheep.[18] Many were opposed on the grounds that it was a waste of public funds.

Similarly, most contemporary newspapers were opposed to the Protectorate, none more vociferously than the *Sydney Herald*. That paper took the line that it was the settlers that needed protection, rather than the Indigenous people, who it regarded as a 'gang of black animals'.[19] The Melbourne papers were of similar opinion. In July 1839, with the Protectorate having barely begun operation, the *Port Phillip Gazette* was already dismissive of the Protectors' abilities, and disparaging of both the principle and practice of the Protectorate.[20]

The Protectorate was a matter of ongoing concern also to both La Trobe in Melbourne and Sir George Gipps in Sydney, which ultimately impacted on its operations. This concern was borne of the inherent difficulties encountered in trying to persuade Indigenous people to give up the customary ways of their ancestors and adopt those of the white strangers. The colonial government's issues were compounded by the problems of dealing with personnel who were largely unfitted to achieve the goals of the scheme. None of the four Assistant Protectors had any experience of living and working amongst Indigenous people; although in the main they were driven by the desire to do good works, this lack of experience, combined with the privations they had to endure, proved to be a major inhibitive factor. The Chief Protector, George Robinson, on the other hand, had spent more time among Aboriginal people than most other Europeans. He was, however, a difficult man with whom to deal; at his first meeting with La Trobe, the Superintendent took him to task for what La Trobe saw as Robinson's 'over reaching' attitude.[21]

The ineffectual approach to the task, on the part of the Protectors, and an unwillingness to give up their traditional practices, on the part of the Aboriginal people, meant that progress by the Protectorate in its first years was much slower than the government had hoped for. Although La Trobe had a Christian belief in the aims of the scheme, from the beginning he had little faith

in the abilities of either the chief Protector or his four assistants. To exercise a tighter control over operations of the department, from the beginning of 1840 La Trobe had Robinson report directly to him — rather than to Gipps in Sydney. This more hands-on approach led to greater restrictions on all Protectorate staff.[22]

The failure of the Protectorate

All such measures were to no avail, however; by the end of 1842 the British Secretary of State, Lord Stanley, was convinced that the efforts of the Protectors had been of no value. He left it to the New South Wales Governor to wind up the department if Gipps felt it was warranted.[23] But the Governor was loath to take that action and the Protectorate was allowed to continue, receiving less and less financial support, until December 1849.

Much has been written regarding the shortcomings of the Protectorate, its failure, and ultimate demise.[24] A variety of reasons have been suggested for the lack of success of the scheme, including the weight of opposition, a reduction of funds as a result of the economic depression in 1842-43, and (most commonly) the patent inability of the Protectors to fulfil their roles satisfactorily. During the decade of the scheme the Protectors were regarded by the press and most squatters generally as incompetent, an assessment that was not countered by a lack of effective action and in some instances inappropriate behaviour, on the part of the Protectors. Both Charles Sievwright in the western district and William Le Souef (who had replaced James Dredge at the Goulburn station in July 1840) were dismissed by La Trobe for misappropriating government supplies.[25]

There can be little doubt that the choice of Protectorate staff was a significant factor in the inevitable failure of the scheme. But all of the interaction between Protectors and Aboriginal people on a day-to-day basis was influenced as much by elements of Indigenous culture as by European direction. In the creation of the Protectorate, no consideration had been given by the British authorities to the complexities of Aboriginal culture; both they and the Assistant Protectors were completely unaware of the ways in which Kulin people organised themselves — in spatial, kinship and religious terms; they knew nothing of the imperatives that were imposed on people's lives because of the connections they had to their country. The Kulin clans could not easily put aside their commitment to sustain the world as it was given to them, so the attempts by Protectors to induce them to become sedentary farmers met with opposition in all Protectorate districts.

W.A. Hirschmann, engraver
Governor La Trobe, c.1851
Wood engraving, coloured
Roy Morgan Research Centre collection
Original engraving published in
Picturesque Atlas of Australasia, 1886

Even before the Protectors were on the ground the seeds of failure had been sown. In defining the boundaries of the Protectors' areas, the architects of the scheme had no knowledge of how the original inhabitants of the Port Phillip District traditionally organised themselves. The parameters of the Protectors' districts were arbitrarily drawn, of course, and took no account of the boundaries that already existed between clans or language groups within the Indigenous world. As a result, the areas defined by the white administrators broke the lines of fraternal connection between Kulin clans, with negative impacts. Some Kulin clans were forced into country with which they had no connection, and into association with people from groups outside of their customary realm. The Woiwurrung-speaking clans on the western side of the Maribyrnong River, for example, came under the control of Protector Edward Stone Parker and were grouped with the clans who spoke Dja Wurrung, from the area of the Loddon and Avoca Rivers.

Similarly, most of the Wadawurrung clans, in the vicinity of Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsula, were within Charles Sievwright's western district while the Boon Wurrung clans to whom they were related by marriage were administered by William Thomas on the other side of Port Phillip Bay. In May 1840 when a group of Wadawurrung and Woiwurrung visited their kin at his station on Mornington Peninsula Thomas refused to give them rations. Whether he was aware of the connections the visitors had to his Boon Wurrung and Woiwurrung charges, he was bound to do no other, since they had come from the district of another Protector.[26]

Henry Godfrey, 1824-1888, artist
Loubras, November 1st 1843
Pen and ink drawing and watercolour on cream paper
Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H90.53/1/77
Women gathering murnong (yam daisy) and other food

Movement from one clan estate to another such as in that case was a familiar and necessary aspect of Kulin life, undertaken with the purpose of ensuring that the Kulin world was sustained as it had been created. The practice of ritual and ceremonial observance to achieve this end required that individuals be in particular places at particular times.[27] Moreover, the economically important ties that had been established through marriage stretched from one side of the nation to the other and needed to be confirmed regularly. Few of the immigrant observers realised how important mobility was to an Indigenous way of life.

Europeans misconstrued Aboriginal movement as the constant search for food, and believed that by gathering Aboriginal people in one location and teaching them to farm, they could improve their life. The Protectors were instructed to initially accompany the Aboriginal groups of their district, in order to promote a more sedentary lifestyle, but of the four only William Thomas took up that challenge. Thomas was the longest serving of the Protectorate personnel and succeeded to a greater extent than his fellow Protectors. Standfield has argued that in part this may have been due to his preparedness to move with the people for whom he was responsible.[28] Even so, Thomas found — as the missionary George Langhorne had found before him — that the Aboriginal people could not be persuaded to stay in one place indefinitely. In the earliest years of the Protectorate this presented a major blow to the hopes of the British government and its local representatives. As Paul Carter has suggested: 'The refusal to live in one place, and hence to be accountable, was the major obstacle to the process of civilizing'.[29]

Aboriginal farming

There was irony, too, in the attempts of the British Government, as administered by La Trobe in the Port Phillip District, to persuade the Indigenous clans to settle in one place and adopt an agricultural way of life. The immigrant settlers could not have imagined it, but the Aboriginal people in fact already were farmers and cultivators; they had been managing the plant and animal resources of the Port Phillip District for thousands of years. On the volcanic plains to the immediate west of the Bay, for example, Aboriginal practices in resource management focused on a range of herbaceous plants. Through the regular use of burning, followed by the tilling of extensive areas — primarily done by women — the clan was able to ensure that there was a regular crop of edible tubers from a variety of forbs such as lilies, orchids and, particularly, the Yam Daisy or Murnong *Microseris lanceolata*.[30]

These practices were remarkable in themselves but the intent was more than just the provision of a food supply. One effect of the regular burning of their country over a protracted period of time was to create an enormous ecological zone that was dominated by ground-dwelling herbaceous and graminoid (grassy) vegetation. Aboriginal people in the

Port Phillip District were more than simply farmers; like Indigenous groups in all parts of the continent, they were actively shaping their environments to serve their own ends.[31] And it was the extensive grassy landscapes created by Aboriginal management that was the major attractor to European pastoralists, following in the wake of Major Thomas Mitchell and John Batman's Port Philip Association.[32]

On the western side of that extensive plain local clans focused their attention on the migratory behaviour of short-finned eels *Anguila australis*. In a number of localities adjacent to permanent streams and wetlands they had developed elaborate strategies to capture eels as they moved downstream to breed in the ocean. These strategies included linking two wetland areas by the excavation of 3.75 km of channels, 2.5m wide and 1m deep; creation of a complex of drains covering more than six hectares, on the lower slopes of Mount William; construction of a weir across the Moyne River; and, in the vicinity of Lake Condah, a complex of eel-traps comprising channels and rock-bound pens that operated at three levels.[33] Recent research has demonstrated that some of the traps at Lake Condah were in use as much as 8,000 years ago.[34]

***

It is one of many tragic elements of the interaction between European settlers and Indigenous populations in Victoria that neither the invading settlers nor the administrators who created policy had any understanding of the complexity of the Aboriginal worldview. The ethnocentrism that was a central characteristic of European thinking prohibited most of them from any appreciation of the finely-tuned and subtle ways in which Indigenous people were connected to their country. Europeans failed to see, and could not imagine, that the maintenance of these connections was the driving force behind everything that Aboriginal people did. The nett result of this ignorance was to hasten the end of a way of life that had existed for thousands of years.

---

1 William Dampier, *A New Voyage Round the World*, London: The Argonaut Press, 1927 [1697], p.312.

2 Kay Anderson and Colin Perrin, 'The Miserablest People in the World': race, humanism and the Australian Aborigine', *Australian Journal of Anthropology*, vol.18, 2007, pp.18-39.

3 Glyndwr Williams 'Reactions on Cook's voyages', in Ian Donaldson and Tamsin Donaldson (eds), S*eeing the First Australians*, Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1985, pp.35-50.

4 Gary Presland *First People: the Eastern Kulin of Melbourne, Port Phillip and central Victoria*. Melbourne: Museum Victoria, 2010. See also Ian D. Clark *Aboriginal Languages and Clans: an historical atlas of western and central Victoria, 1800–1900*, Melbourne: Department of Geography and Environmental Science, Monash University, 1990; Diane Barwick 'Mapping the Past: an atlas of Victorian clans 1835–1904', *Aboriginal History* vol.8, 1985, pp.100-130.

5 The Kulin divided their world into two parts (moieties) as a way of prescribing marriage connections. The two halves of the system were called *Bunjil* and *Waa*. Diane Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*. Canberra: Aboriginal History Inc., 1998, pp.13-15.

6 Ibid.

7 William E.H. Stanner, 'Religion Totemism and Symbolism', in R.M. Berndt and C.H. Berndt (eds), *Aboriginal Man in Australia*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1965, pp.207-237.

8 Stanner, pp. 230-237; Les Hiatt, 'Religion', in David Horton (ed.) *The Encyclopædia of Aboriginal Australia*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1994, Vol 2, p.337.

9 Joseph R Orton, Letter to Wesleyan Missionary Society August 1836, *Historical Records of Victoria*, vol.2A, *The Aborigines of Port Phillip 1835-1839*, editor: Michael Cannon, Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office, 1982, p.86.

10 Francis Tuckfield, Letter to Wesleyan Missionary Society February 1839, *HRV* 2A, p.114.

11 See, for example, evidence given before the 1838 House of Commons enquiry, as quoted in Michael Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria 1835-86*. Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 1979, p.36, n.44.

12 Ibid, pp. 81-82.

13 George Stewart to Colonial Secretary, 20 June 1838, *HRV* 2A, pp.332-333.

14 Robert D. Boys, *First Years at Port Phillip 1834-1842*, Melbourne: Robertson and Mullens, 1959.

15 Colonial Secretary's draft memorandum, 9 December 1836, *HRV* 2A. p.161.

16 The department was to be headed by a Chief Protector, George Augustus Robinson, who would have four assistants. The successful applicants for the assistant positions were James Dredge, Edward Stone Parker, Charles Wightman Sievwright, and William Thomas. For brief biographical details of these men see *Historical Records of Victoria*, vol. 2A: pp.33-36.

17 Lord Glenelg, Memo to Sir George Gipps, 31 January 1838, *Historical Records of Victoria*, vol.2B. *Aborigines and Protectors 1838–1839*, editor: Michael Cannon, Melbourne: Victoria Government Printing Office, 1983, p.375.

18 Michael Cannon, *Black Land, White Land*, Port Melbourne: Minerva Books, 1993, pp.23-24; Rachel Standfield, ''The Vacillating Manners and Sentiments of these People': mobility, civilisation and dispossession in the work of William Thomas with the Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate', *Law Text Culture*, vol.15, 2011, p.168.

19 *Sydney Herald*, 5 October 1838, p.3.

20 P*ort Phillip Gazette*, 3 July 1839, p.3.

21 George A. Robinson Journal, 10 October 1839, in Ian D. Clark (ed.), *The Journals of George Augustus Robinson: Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, 1839-1852*, [3rd ed.], Clarendon, Vic.: Ian D. Clark, 2014, Vol.1; and Ian D. Clark, 'George Augustus Robinson on Charles Joseph La Trobe: personal insights into a problematical relationship', *The La Trobe Journal*, no. 85, 2010, pp.3-21; Brian Plomley, 'Who was the Real Robinson?' *Overland*, no.111, 1988, pp.54-59.

22 Dianne Reilly Drury, *La Trobe: the making of a governor,* Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006, p.195; Ian D. Clark, 2010, p.17; Vivienne Rae-Ellis, *Black Robinson: protector of Aborigines*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988, p.195.

23 A.G.L. Shaw (ed.), *Gipps-La Trobe Correspondence 1839-1846*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1989, pp.222-223.

24 See Michael Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria 1835-86*, pp.10-135; Michael Christie, 'The Failure of the Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate 1838–1849', *ANZHES Journal*, vol. 8, 1979, pp.8-21; Michael Cannon, *Black Land, White Land*, Port Melbourne: Minerva Books, 1993.

25 Dianne Reilly Drury, p.194; Vivienne Rae-Ellis, pp.191-192.

26 Marguerita Stephens (ed.), *The Journal of William Thomas, Assistant Protector of the Aborigines of Port Phillip and Guardian of the Aborigines of Victoria 1839-1867*, Melbourne: Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages, 2014, vol.1, 1839-1843, p.30.

27 Catherine Laudine, *Aboriginal Environmental Knowledge: rational reverence*, Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2009, pp. 99-120.

28 Rachel Standfield, pp.162-184.

29 Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: an exploration of landscape and histor*y, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988, p.336.

30 The taxonomy of Murnong has changed through time: originally named *Microseris scapigera* (Walp), it later became *M. lancelolata*. For Aboriginal use and cultivation see Beth Gott, 'Ecology of Root Use by the Aborigines of Southern Australia, *Archaeology in Oceania*, vol.17, 1982, pp.59-67; David Frankel, 'An Account of Aboriginal Use of the Yam-Daisy', *The Artefact*, vol.7, 1982, pp.43-45; Beth Gott, 'Murnong — *Microseris scapigera*: a study of a staple food of Victorian Aborigines', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, vol.2, 1983, pp.2-18; Beth Gott, 'Aboriginal Fire Management in South-Eastern Australia: aims and frequency', *Journal of Biogeography*, vol. 32, 2005, pp.1203-1208; Fred Cahir, '*Murnong*: much more than a food', *The Artefact*, vol.35, 2012, pp.29-39.

31 Bill Gammage, T*he Biggest Estate on Earth: how Aborigines made Australia*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2012, pp.258-266.

32 James Boyce, *1835: the founding of Melbourne and the conquest of Australia*, Collingwood: Black Inc. 2011; Rex Harcourt, *Southern Invasion — Northern Conquest: story of the founding of Melbourne*, Backburn South: Golden Point Press, 2001.

33 Gary Presland, 'Man-Environment Relationships in Prehistoric Western Victoria', Unpublished B.A. (Hons) thesis, La Trobe University, 1976; Gary Presland 'Aboriginal Local Groups and Seasonal Exploitation in Southwestern Victoria', *The Artefact,* vol.2, 1977, pp.197-208; Gary Presland (ed.), 'Journals of George Augustus Robinson, May to August 1841', *Records of the Victorian Archaeological Survey*, no.11, 1980, pp.1-202; Harry Lourandos, 'Swamp Managers of Southwestern Victoria', in D.J. Mulvaney and J. Peter White (eds), *Australians to 1788*, Broadway, NSW: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, 1987, pp.292-307; Gunditjmara people with Gib Wettenhall, *The People of Budj Bim*, Heywood, Vic., emPress Publishing for the Gungitj Mirring Traditional Owners Corporation, 2010; Ian J. McNiven and Damein Bell, 'Fishers and Farmers: historicising the Gunditjmara freshwater fishery, western Victoria', *The La Trobe Journal*, no.85, 2010, pp.83-105.

34 Ian McNiven, *et al* and Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, 'Dating Aboriginal Stone-Walled Fishtraps at Lake Condah, Southeast Australia', *Journal of Archaeological Science*, vol.39, 2012, pp.268-186.

A Moravian 'Among the Heathen': La Trobe and the Aboriginal people

By John Barnes

John Barnes is Emeritus Professor of English at La Trobe University. His interest in La Trobe has a personal aspect, as his great-grandmother came from a Swiss family which emigrated to Victoria from Neuchâtel in 1854. John is a long-time member of the La Trobe Society, and was formerly on its Committee. Research for his newly-completed biography of Charles Joseph La Trobe allows him to reconsider La Trobe's words of the 1830s:

From my childhood I had been accustomed to hear of missionary labour, missionary trials, and missionary joy and sorrow, and to see those who had spent their lives freely in the service of God among the heathen.[1]

More than half-a-century ago I heard a visiting Archbishop of Canterbury lament that increasingly we were living in a post-Christian age. This passing observation came to mind often when I was writing the biography of Charles Joseph La Trobe, and compelled me to acknowledge to myself that I could never hope to enter fully into his perspective on human affairs, no matter how hard I tried. La Trobe and his contemporaries viewed the colonisation project, in which they took part with such enthusiasm and such conviction, within a framework of Christian belief. They told themselves that, as La Trobe put it, Australia was a country that 'God's Providence has given to the British Crown'.[2] They found moral affirmation of energetic pursuit of their own material interests in such statements as that of Lord Monteagle, who saw success in transplanting 'our domestic habits, our commercial enterprise, our laws, our institutions, our language, our literature, and our sense of religious obligations to the most distant regions of the globe' as 'the performance of a high duty and the accomplishment of a noble destiny'.[3] In Port Phillip as elsewhere, 'the conversion of the heathen' was represented as part of the 'high duty' to which the colonising power was committed; and probably no colonial official took that aim more seriously than La Trobe.

Most accounts of La Trobe mention his religion, but few consider how it shaped his outlook or attempt any assessment of how his religious beliefs may have influenced his official duties as well as his personal behaviour. La Trobe belonged to a family whose members were prominent over several generations in the Unitas Fratrum (the United Brethren), usually known as the Moravian Church. In his immediate family was, first, his grandfather, Benjamin, who had led the small but influential organisation in England from 1768 until his death in 1786, fifteen years before Charles Joseph was born. Then his father, Christian Ignatius, was from 1787 to 1834 the secretary of the Society for the Furtherance of the Gospel, the missionary branch of the church, being succeeded in this position by his eldest son, Peter: between them, father and son held the same office for sixty-eight years, a record for which it would be hard to find a parallel.

By 1790, when Christian Ignatius initiated the first missionary journal, *Periodical Accounts Relating to the Missions of the Church of the United Brethren Established among the Heathen*,

the missionary activities of the Moravians were extensive. They had been in the forefront of Protestant missionary activity, sending missionaries to the island of St Thomas, a Danish possession in the West Indies, as early as 1732. That was only five years after the formal reconstitution of the ancient church by Count Zinzendorf on his estate in Germany. In the following year Moravian missionaries were in Greenland, another Danish colony. To judge by reports in Australian newspapers, the struggle of the Moravians to Christianise Greenland's Inuit people was well known: after six unprofitable years they had started making converts, and by 1762 were able to report more than 500 baptisms. In a very short time there were missions to the Indigenous North Americans, to the Dutch colony of Surinam in South America, and later to South Africa. According to historian John Mason, within fifty years the Moravians had made more than 10,000 converts.[4]

The Protestant evangelical movement in the eighteenth century led to what Mason calls 'the missionary awakening' in Britain, with three major missionary societies being formed in the last decade of the century: the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792; the interdenominational Missionary Society ('London' was later added to the title) in 1795; and the Church Missionary Society (Anglican) in 1799. When the British established a penal colony in Australia in 1788 evangelical leaders were anxious that the Christian message should be brought to the Indigenous people. Reverend Richard Johnson, on being appointed chaplain to the First Fleet, assumed that he would be ministering to the 'natives' as well as to the convicts and their gaolers. This being so, it is not surprising that he turned to the Moravians when preparing for his new responsibilities. In December 1786, not long after the death of Benjamin La Trobe, he visited the Moravian congregation in Fetter Lane, London. According to Moravian records, he told them that he had come 'to learn how our Missionaries proceed in preaching the Gospel to the Heathen'.[5] They must have been gratified on his telling of his hesitancy about taking the position until he had heard — wrongly, as it happens — that they were to send missionaries. He maintained a link with the Moravians through receiving copies of the *Periodical Accounts,* as did his later assistant Samuel Marsden.

The episode is worth pondering for what it says about the high regard in which the Moravians were held as missionaries. If further evidence were needed, one could point to the formal request from Sir Charles Middleton and William Wilberforce in 1789 that the Moravian Church send missionaries

Unknown photographer
Rev. Peter La Trobe, 1795-1863
Photograph courtesy the Moravian Archive at Herrnhut

to New South Wales, as Johnson had found it impossible 'to pay any attention to ye Heathen'.[6] Both men had become familiar with the work of the Moravians through contact with the La Trobe family. The relationship between the Middletons and the La Trobes was especially strong for personal reasons. Benjamin La Trobe had become terminally ill as he began a visit to the Middleton country estate, and his wife and his eldest son, Christian Ignatius, had tended him there until his death over four months later. Middleton, who had retired from the British Navy, was then (like Wilberforce) a Tory member of the House of Commons. He had become interested in the abolitionist cause, and influenced Wilberforce to shift his attention from such causes as the suppression of vice and the prevention of cruelty to animals to the one for which he is remembered. Although the Moravians maintained a policy of supporting the status quo and carefully avoided participating in the campaign to end slavery, Christian Ignatius, with his knowledge of missions, was able to supply information about the condition of slaves to Wilberforce, who became his lifelong friend and supporter.

The Moravians were eager to send missionaries to Australia, but it was not until 1849 that they had the resources to do so. And when they did, it was the La Trobe connection that determined where they went, as Robert Kenny has pointed out. In 1844 Peter La Trobe had told the Moravian Mission Board that, if there were to be a mission in Australia, 'I would wish it to be made under the auspices of one on whose co-operation we could rely, and who has a personal acquaintance with our missionary work'.[7] To the Moravians it seemed to be a 'providential opening' that the senior colonial official at Port Phillip was a member of their

church and had been urging his brother to send missionaries. Two Moravians, Brothers Taeger and Spieseke, set out from Germany in August 1849, and arrived in Port Phillip in February 1850. By the time they arrived the Aboriginal Protectorate had been disbanded and two attempts to establish missions had failed.

***

The Protectorate, a humanitarian gesture towards the dispossessed Indigenous people by the Colonial Secretary of the day, Lord Glenelg, had been established in 1838, a year before La Trobe had taken up his post as Superintendent of Port Phillip. From the first, he doubted its value, believing that it had not been based upon the right principle. In early 1840 James Dredge, who had already decided to resign his appointment as a Protector, recorded in his journal how he had breakfasted with La Trobe:

> Was with His Honor at 8 o'clock, partook of a plain breakfast without ceremony. The interview seems to have been secured for the purpose of free conversation respecting the affairs of the Protectorate, in which His Honor made no concealment of his views. He stated his opinion that it was essentially wrong in assuming a civil character, that the *heathen* were Christ's inheritance and must be gathered by the instrumentality of pious means. That in his opinion the object was to be accomplished only by the appointment of Missionaries, who might receive the sanction and support of the Government, but be unshackled by its rules and regulations.[8]

Dredge, who had wanted to be a missionary, had various complaints about the organisation of the Protectorate, but his major objection was essentially the same as that of La Trobe: it was not directed towards the Christianisation of the Aboriginal people.

In an 1848 report to a committee of the Legislative Council of New South Wales (which decided to recommend closure of the Protectorate), La Trobe was dismissive: 'The Protectorate, as I had occasion to state officially eighteen months ago, has totally failed to effect any of the higher and more important objects aimed at in its formation'.[9] In his judgment, all the 'plans and arrangements made for the benefit of the Aboriginal Native', both by the government and non-government institutions, with the possible exception of the Native Police, had failed or were in the midst of failure. And even the Native Police was no more than 'an example of partial and temporary reclamation'.

La Trobe believed that, 'taking the higher view of the duties of a Christian people', the 'primary object' must be to Christianise the Aboriginal people. Although not a missionary himself, La Trobe's personal attitude towards the original inhabitants was essentially that of a missionary: in his eyes they were 'unenlightened Heathen', towards whom he felt a personal responsibility to replace their 'superstitions' with Christian 'truth'. His report characterises the Aboriginal way of life as wholly negative: 'They have their feuds, their superstitions, observances, preposterous and cruel murders, and abominable vices, to which many of those usually engrafted on the savage stock by the European are now unhappily to be added'.

His familiarity with the Moravian missionary activities led him to assert that 'the history of the Heathen furnishes distinguished examples of Christianization, through the simple preaching of the Gospel, preceding, and not following, the gradual adoption of those changes in the moral and physical character and habits, in which civilization consists'. But in 'the case of the savage races of this part of the world' he knew of no instance when this had happened:

> In this respect, the Protectors have talked and written, and the Wesleyan missionaries have faithfully laboured in vain, the latter year after year, with the firm belief that Christianity, if once imparted, was the shortest cut to civilization, and the former, perhaps with less clear conviction, that somehow or other the two might be brought about together, or even that civilization might lead to Christianity.

After a decade of endeavour no Indigenous person had been converted to Christianity in the Port Phillip District.

La Trobe and Dredge shared the belief affirmed by the London Missionary Society in its evidence to the 1837 Select Committee of the House of Commons, which led to the setting up of the Protectorate: 'No sooner does the Gospel begin to operate upon the mind of the heathen than it leads to the first step in civilization'.[10] 'I regard Christianity as the parent of "true civilization"', wrote Reverend Francis Tuckfield in 1847, defending the Wesleyan mission at Buntingdale (near Colac), shortly before it was closed.[11] Five years earlier, full of confidence, he had been sure that Christianity was the starting point: 'All merely civilizing schemes have hitherto failed and if ever we [are to] benefit the Aborigines of Australia I am quite convinced it

François Cogné, 1829-1883, artist
Charles Troedel, 1835-1906, lithographer
Merri Creek, Plenty Ranges, 1864
Colour lithograph
National Gallery of Victoria, 3050.5-4

must be done by bringing the Gospel to exert its full and glorious influence upon them'.[12]

That was not a view held by all clergy, as Jean Woolmington has shown.[13] The opposing view was that to grasp religious truth it was necessary to have a degree of 'civilisation'. In 1846, when the Yarra Aboriginal Mission, a school for children, was being set up at Merri Creek outside Melbourne, *The Port Phillip Christian Herald*, edited by Presbyterian Reverend James Forbes, having noted that the object was 'to civilize the native savage, by Christianising him', expressed misgivings about the proposal 'to convey divine truth, through the medium of the English language', and suggested that success would depend 'on the extent to which the children unlearn their own tongue; and instead of it, use the English as an instrument of thought'.[14] Two months earlier Forbes had quoted the views of one of the Protectors, Edward Parker:

> …the conveyance of truth to the mind of the Australian savage, is a work attended with many formidable, I might almost say insuperable difficulties. What can be done with a people, whose language knows no such terms as holiness, justice, righteousness, sin, guilt, redemption, pardon, peace &c., and to whose minds the ideas conveyed by such words are utterly foreign and inexplicable. It can only be by long continued preserving labour.[15]

As part of their duties, Parker and the other Protectors had been directed to instruct the Aboriginal people in 'the elements' of Christianity, and to prepare them for 'the reception of teachers whose peculiar province it would be to promote the knowledge and practice of Christianity among them'.[16] In giving these directions, Glenelg (one of the founders of the Church Missionary Society) and his officials in the Colonial Office had little or no comprehension of the 'difficulties' that might lie in the way of conveying the 'truth' of Christianity to the Indigenous inhabitants.

After nearly a decade at Port Phillip La Trobe was all too aware of the difficulties, but he had no confidence in governmental policies designed to 'protect' the Aboriginal population and was convinced that the long-term solution to the problem of race relations lay in missionary endeavour.

***

By the time that he was writing his 1848 report, La Trobe had come to think that 'all the

William Strutt, 1825-1915, artist
Thomas Ham, 1821-1870, lithographer
Native police, 1851
Hand coloured lithograph
Rex NanKivell Collection, National Library of Australia, NK3429/C

schemes devised at a distance for the protection and reclamation of the Aborigines' were based upon the mistaken notion that 'the Aboriginal native will submit, in a lesser or greater degree to your guidance'. He wrote as one seemingly baffled by their failure to respond positively to what, in European eyes, was for their own good. This led him to the extreme proposal that 'coercion' should be tried: the men subjected to military discipline; the children separated from their parents. La Trobe can hardly have made this harsh suggestion — which, he recognized, was 'open to some real as well as to much ill-founded objection' — expecting that it would be taken up. It was, though, a logical development of the British government's approach towards 'civilising the Aborigines'.

In his official capacity La Trobe conscientiously implemented policies which meant dispossession of the Aboriginal people and destruction of their society. While he accepted that this was inevitable, it is beyond question that as an administrator he was anxious to ameliorate their condition and to protect them against the excesses of settlers who would have denied them any rights at all. A striking example of his humane concern is the outrage he expressed at the behaviour of some fellow-Christians in 1842. A group of Western District squatters had petitioned him to 'protect' them against aggression by Indigenous people. At the same time he had received a report of 'the murder of no fewer than three defenceless aboriginal women and a child in their sleeping place' by a party of whites. In replying to the petitioners he pointed out that this atrocity had occurred 'at the very time your memorial was in the act of signature, and in the immediate vicinity of the station of two of the parties who have signed it'. He confronted them directly in terms more suggestive of the preacher than the servant of the Crown:

> Will not the commission of such crimes call down the wrath of God, and do more to check the prosperity of your district, and to ruin your prospects, than all the difficulties and losses under which you labour?
>
> I call upon you, as your first duty to yourselves, and to your adopted country, to come forward in aid of the authorities, to clear up the obscurity with which this deed is as yet involved, and purging yourselves, and your servants, from all knowledge of and participation in, such a crime, never to repose until the murderers are declared, and your district relieved from the stain of harbouring them within its boundaries.[17]

To the petitioners, who put little or no value on the lives of the Aboriginal people, this unexpected appeal to their Christian consciences must have been a disconcerting expression of the Superintendent's deeply moral attitude.

La Trobe was influenced, both positively and negatively, by this strong sense of Christian duty. As the 1844 episode demonstrates, a moral dimension added to his efforts to secure for the Indigenous population the basic rights of British subjects. At the same time, however, it worked against his developing any understanding of their culture and beliefs. His goal was always the 'conversion of the heathen', meaning that they should slough off and deny traditional beliefs. They should not only behave, but also think and feel — and believe — as European Christians were supposed to do. Ironically, while promoting humane treatment of the Aboriginal people, missionary endeavour unconsciously served the ends of empire in its drive to 'dispossess' them of their beliefs.

During his long stay in the colony La Trobe came to know a number of Indigenous people by name, and there are two recorded instances of his personal efforts to help individuals whom he saw as likely converts. In a scrapbook that belonged to his eldest daughter is a child's drawing captioned 'Tuggendun's Tomb / Banks of the Yarra', with a note by La Trobe:

> This was a youth I was much attached to. I scarcely ever went from Nerre Warren but he accompanied me. Often of a moonlight night had he charmed me singing the Old Hundred to an Aborig[l] Hymn. I had hopes that he might have been some evidence of my endeavours — he could read & write, knew the 10 Commandments, Lord's Prayer & Creed & apparently understood their import. After being at least 3 yrs partially civilized, he [took] leave for 6 months. Returned in a consumptive state & died by my tent between Mr Kerr's [Curr's] & Lyon Campbell's by the Banks of the Yarra — I got my son to sketch this from Nature — I gave the blacks a trifle to enclose his remains with saplings which they did by my direction very neatly.[18]

Tuggendun had been one of the native police, who were stationed at Nerre [now Narre] Warren, outside Melbourne.

When La Trobe made excursions into the country he was generally accompanied by one or two troopers, and sometimes by the commandant, 'Captain' Dana. Dressed in their colourful uniforms the mounted native police added to the public spectacle of ceremonial occasions, as the sketches of William Strutt testify. The troopers — more than 140 over the decade of its existence — were the group of Indigenous people whom La Trobe knew best. Their smart appearance and disciplined behaviour he read as signs of their progress towards being 'civilised'. As Jean Woolmington put it, 'civilising the Aborigines' meant that '[t]he naked would be clothed, the wanderer housed and the "lazy native" would learn the value of work'.[19] Yet, while outwardly appearing to conform to European expectations, the troopers were not fundamentally changed, as La Trobe recognised in his 1848 report.

In her impressively researched study of the Native Police, Marie Hansen Fels points to the 'state of dual consciousness and divided loyalty' in those who joined the force. As she interprets it, the choice represented a form of 'cultural adaptation or acculturation' and was not a rejection of Aboriginality. In passing she notes that 'if anything was being rejected in this choice, it was the missionary message and way of life'.[20]

Charles Albert La Trobe, 1845-1909, artist
Tuggundun's Tomb, Banks of Yarra, c.1852
Pencil on paper
Australian Manuscripts Collection,
State Library Victoria, MS 13354/12

Tuggendun appears to have been only sixteen when he was recruited, and at the time of his death in November 1845 his service in the Native Police amounted to three years and nine months. Protector Thomas identifies him as being of the Yarra people, but there are no details of his family relationships in Marie Hansen Fels's record of the troopers. She quotes Dana's assessment of him in 1844 as 'smart and likely to do well'; and clearly it was his aptitude that so impressed La Trobe, when the trooper accompanied him on his travels.[21]

Before being recruited to the Native Police Tuggendun had been at the Merri Creek Aboriginal School. La Trobe visited this Baptist mission school frequently, and a few years after Tuggendun's death became interested in the potential of another 'smart' pupil. His name was Murrumwiller,[22] but he was called Charley, until he protested that he wanted two names like white people. In *Among the Black Boys*, a memoir written a decade or more later, Lucy Anna Edgar, the schoolmaster's daughter, describes how her mother responded to this surprising request: 'Charley had a habit of contradicting everything you charged him with… So mamma

William Strutt, 1825-1915, artist
Thomas Ham, 1821-1870, lithographer
Charles Never Marunwilley, tailor to the Native Police Corps, 1851
Hand coloured lithograph
Rex NanKivell Collection, National Library of Australia, NK3429/A

with grave irony said, "We'll call you Charley No-no, or Charley Never!" What was intended as a joke was taken seriously by the naïve youth who announced: "My name Charles Never, I'll be called Mr Never. Capital Name!""[23]

It is hard to read Miss Edgar's memoir of the school without cringing at her condescension towards the 'black boys', especially Murrumwiller, whose Aboriginal name she never uses. He had been brought from a Murray clan to the school in June 1848, and remained there until February 1850. Nothing on the public record indicates the circumstances under which he left his family and his own country, but what is known reveals that he learnt very quickly. By November 1849, less than eighteen months after arriving at the school, he was able to write a letter in which he said: 'I have nine shillings in money and after awhile I am going to learn to be a tailor and then I hope to work at to get my own living'.[24] To Miss Edgar his ambitions — to dress like a white gentleman, wear Wellington boots, marry a white wife, and to own his own house and land (by writing to Queen Victoria) — are laughable. The very exactness with which he imitates polite social behaviour seems to offend her. She describes him as pompous and lazy; in her memory 'this black dandy of twenty' is 'Poor foolish Charley' who makes himself 'a laughing stock' by acting as if he were white.

A different sense of him emerges from contemporary reports. On the evening of 30 June 1851, the eve of Victoria's establishment as a colony, La Trobe presided at an overflow public meeting in Melbourne that had been called to support the two Moravian missionaries, who were now established at Lake Boga (near Swan Hill), a site chosen by La Trobe. Taeger reported on their efforts, saying that in about six months they hoped to begin translating the Scriptures into the local language, and regretted that 'it was not now more in their power to proclaim the gospel with success to these benighted natives'. The meeting then went through the formality of considering several resolutions, a procedure which allowed the Protestant ministers present to air their views at length.

The first motion, that 'the Christianization and Civilization of the Aborigines' was a 'matter of Christian obligation', was proposed by the Anglican Archdeacon of Geelong who praised the Moravians as having 'a peculiar fitness' for missionary work.[25] A second motion affirmed that 'the failure of previous efforts to effect the great object should not be regarded as proof of its impossibility', and urged 'warm co-operation' with the Moravian missionaries. The proposer, Reverend A. Morrison of the Independent [Congregational] Church, insisted that the Aboriginal people would never be civilised 'until

they were made Christians', and praised the Moravians in that they 'had preached the same doctrine wherever they had gone and always with the same success, inducing civilization and Christianity'. In seconding the motion, the Presbyterian minister Reverend A. M. Ramsay noted the Merri Creek School as one of the failed efforts, but acknowledged its success in teaching Aboriginal children to read and write. To illustrate his point he drew attention to the May issue of the *Illustrated Australian Magazine* in which there had been a lithographed version of a portrait by William Strutt of '"Charley", the Aboriginal Tailor'. This 'very promising young man', as the clergyman described him, was the only Aboriginal person to be named during the evening.

Mr Ramsay, rather self-importantly, recalled how two years earlier 'Charley, or more properly Charles' had been apprenticed as a tailor and he, Mr Ramsay, had been 'one of the witnesses to the indenture which was regularly drawn up, and His Excellency the Chairman would also recollect the part that had been assigned to him on the occasion'. The master tailor to whom 'Mr Never' had been apprenticed was John Lush, a Baptist lay preacher closely associated with the school, whose establishment was in Collins Street. According to the notice in the *Illustrated Australian Magazine*, La Trobe had paid a premium and received a guarantee that 'Mr Never' should be 'treated with kindness and instructed in all the branches of the business'. The experiment appeared to have been a complete success:

> He conducted himself during the period of his apprenticeship, which has recently expired, to the entire satisfaction of his patron and his employer. Having become master of his trade, during this period, His Honor the Superintendent has appointed him tailor to the Native Police Force, upon which situation he has lately entered. He is intelligent, industrious, and sober; can read and write, and appears to have abandoned the feeling as well as habits of his people.[26]

The last sentence was especially significant from the perspective of those wanting to 'civilise' the Aboriginal people; it suggested that here was a young man who had rejected the culture into which he had been born. Logically, one could argue that it was an example of missionaries not being needed, but no one made the point at the meeting. Although Mr Ramsay 'was happy to say' that Charley 'was fond of his bible', he was critical of the Merri Creek school because it 'did not in the first instance, convey to the attendant natives the simple and sublime truth of the Gospel'.

Other resolutions commented on Moravian successes in other parts of the world, which 'encourage us to hope for a like result to the labours of the brethren in this colony'; a following one set up a committee to collect funds for them. All the resolutions were carried unanimously; it was clear that the two German Moravians would not lack support. This public demonstration of the esteem in which Moravian missionaries were held must have gratified La Trobe. The meeting was his last public engagement before becoming Lieutenant-Governor. He may well have assumed that in his new office he would be able to do more for missionary activity, in which he believed so completely.

Within a few weeks, however, La Trobe was grappling with the consequences of gold discoveries, which were to remain his main preoccupation for the rest of his stay in the colony. Among the crowds who flocked to the goldfields was his Aboriginal protégé. Murrumwiller had become friendly with the German missionaries when they arrived in Melbourne in 1850 and, according to Taeger, 'appeared to place entire confidence in us'. The missionaries 'felt great affection for him, and were almost inclined to take him with us to Lake Boga; but, by the advice of our friends, we desisted from this purpose'.[27] However, in November 1851, just five months after the memorable public meeting where he had been singled out, Murrrumwiller, presumably calling himself 'Mr Charles Never', had left Melbourne to go with 'a steady party to the gold diggings at Mt Alexander'.[28] In July the following year a Tasmanian newspaper, *The Cornwall Chronicle* published an extract from a letter received from Mt Alexander: 'Charles Never, a civilized black, a protégé of Latrobe's, and employed as tailor to the native troops, having been sent to the Murray, his native place, with the hope of doing some good to his tribe, has been speared, and his kidney fat eaten by his brethren'.[29]

Periodical Accounts of 1853 carried the letter from Brother Taeger, dated 24 August 1852, from which quotation has already been made. It suggests a more probable reason for Murrumwiller's return to his own country:

> Latterly he had been working as tailor at the gold diggings, and had earned a considerable sum of money. But, now the desire arose in him to visit his relatives, and he joined a number of carriers, who were conveying goods to the newly established police-station at Swan Hill. About ninety miles

William Strutt, 1825-1915, artist
Thomas Ham, 1821-1870, engraver
Opening of Prince's Bridge, November 15th 1850
Engraving on paper
Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H28683
'Mr Never' is standing beside Protector William Thomas, centre right

> from the place, he fell in with the first Papoos of his tribe, and, in spite of the warnings of the carriers, followed them to their camp. He never returned; and his corpse was found some days after.[30]

The two missionaries had previously met his brother-in-law (known as Peter) whom they were hoping would live at the mission station with his wife and children, 'both because he exerts a considerable influence over his countrymen, and because we desire to instruct his children'. This is the only known detail of Murrumwiller's relatives. If the newspaper report is correct, his death was a ritual killing of one seen as an enemy.

Nothing on record indicates La Trobe's reaction to the tragic fate of his protégé. The Moravians saw Aboriginal people as (in the words of Peter La Trobe) 'this poor degraded race, who are on the very lowest stage of moral, as well as of intellectual and social culture'.[31] Only conversion to Christianity could raise these heathen to experience their full humanity and cease to be 'poor outcasts of the great human family'.[32] Murrumwiller/Charles Never had shown signs of responding positively to Christian teaching, but had not undergone a conversion. Given this view of Aboriginal culture, it may well be that La Trobe regarded the young man's attempt to make contact again with his family less as an expression of natural feeling than as a falling-away from his partial civilisation, a sort of backsliding.

Many questions will remain unanswered about the life and death of this extraordinary young Aboriginal man, not least his obsession with 'whiteness' and his determination to become the equal of a 'white gentleman'. No one at the time or since has remarked upon the surprising fact that he succeeded in making a living as a tailor on the goldfields. He might have gone unnoticed in histories of the colony but for the interest taken in him by the artist, William Strutt, who sketched him several times and included him in a crowd scene of the opening of Prince's Bridge in November 1850. Strutt's 1850 portrait of him ('a civilised Aboriginal lad') shows an attractive, well groomed, smartly dressed, self-possessed young man, equipped with a walking stick, apparently fit to go into polite society — exactly how 'Mr Never' regarded himself.

However, for all his sympathetic portrayal, the artist had the same class and racial prejudices as the rest of the colony. In his journal Strutt remembered: 'he became much attached to me, and I wish I could have kept him as a servant'.[33] Even before he met Murrumwiller, Reverend Ramsay, concluded from observing the pupils of the Merri Creek school:

> there is nothing wanting on the part of the Native Population, either as respects quickness of mental apprehension or the ordinary sensibilities of their nature, to hinder them from rising in the Scale of

> Society, and one day take their place among the civilized portion of Mankind'.[34]

The notion of a 'black gentleman', though, would have been beyond his imagination.

The Murrumwiller/Charles Never episode brings into focus the complex psychological, economic and social issues involved in the 'civilising and Christianising' the Indigenous people, the generally accepted ultimate goal of the European invaders in dealing with the people whom they had displaced. In La Trobe's time the goal hardly distinguished one process from the other; one might say that it was generally assumed that a truly civilised person would be a Christian. To La Trobe what mattered above all else was that the 'heathen' should have access to the 'truth' of Christianity, so that the coming of the two Moravian missionaries to the colony was for him an event of great personal significance.

Taeger and Spieseke certainly looked to La Trobe for advice and help, and he gave them all the attention that he could spare from his official duties. He wanted to believe that the mission would lead to the 'conversion of the heathen', being convinced that it was fundamental to the resolution of race relations in the colony. As always, however, he acknowledged that the outcome depended upon the will of God. The missionaries were in 'good heart', he reported to his brother at the mission's outset, 'knowing that, if it be the will of the Lord that the poor heathen of this far end of the earth should become recipients of His Gospel, whenever the hour may strike and whoever the instruments may be, they will believe'.[35] It was not until five years after he left the colony that the hour would strike, and the Moravian missionaries would be able to announce the first conversion among the heathen in Victoria.[36]

---

1 Charles Joseph La Trobe, *The Rambler in North America, 1832-1833*, London: R.B. Seeley & W. Burnside, 1835, vol.2, p.115.

2 Report of the Port Phillip District Committee of the Societies for Promoting Christian Knowledge and for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts on the Religious Condition and Prospects of the Population in the Interior of the Port Phillip District; forwarded by Ernest Hawkins to Colonial Secretary by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 13 July 1843, in *Historical Records of Australia*, series I, vol. 23, pp.65, 67.

3 *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, 23 July 1847*. Quoted by John Fitzgerald Leslie Foster, Preface to *The New Colony of Victoria, formerly Port Phillip: together with some account of the other Australian colonies*, London: Trelawney Saunders, 1851.

4 J.C.S. Mason, *The Moravian Church and the Missionary Awakening in England 1760-1800*, London: Royal Historical Society, 2001, p.112.

5 Mason, p.80.

6 Ibid.

7 Robert Kenny, 'La Trobe, Lake Boga and the Enemy of Souls', *The La Trobe Journal*, no.71, autumn 2003, p.100.

8 James Dredge, Diary 27 March 1840. Typescript, MS 11625, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria.

9 Letter from the Superintendent of Port Phillip to the Colonial Secretary, 18 November 1848, in *Report from the Select Committee on the Aborigines and Protectorate, with Appendix, Minutes of Evidence, and Replies to a Circular Letter, New South Wales Votes and Proceedings*, Sydney: Government Printer, 1849. Further quotations from this 1848 report have not been separately endnoted.

10 Quoted by Bruce Buchan, *The Empire of Political Thought: Indigenous Australians and the language of colonial government*, London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008, pp.111-112.

11 Letter to the Editor, *Geelong Times*, 7 December 1847.

12 Francis Tuckfield to Teichelmann, 17 March 1842; quoted Jean Woolmington, 'The Civilisation/Christianisation Debate and the Australian Aborigines', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 10, 1986, p.96.

13 Ibid.

14 *Port Phillip Christian Herald*, 4 July 1846, p.53.

15 Edward Parker, January 1845 Report; quoted 'The Aborigines of Australia — Second Article', *Port Phillip Christian Herald*, 4 April 1846, p.31.

16 Glenelg to Gipps, 31 January 1838, *Historical Records of Australia*, series I, vol. 19, p.255.

17 La Trobe to Dr Kilgour and others, 26 March 1842. *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Aborigines*, 1844, vol. 34, pp. 214-215.

18 Agnes Louisa La Trobe scrapbook, MS 13354, Folder 12, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria. Due to La Trobe's blindness the note is written in another's hand.

19 Woolmington, p.92.

20 Marie Hansen Fels, *Good Men and True: the Aboriginal Police of the Port Phillip District 1837-1853*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988, p.87.

21 Ibid, p.334.

22 I have accepted Fels's version of his name, although his signature on Strutt's portrait appears to read 'Marunwilley'.

23 Lucy Anna Edgar, *Among the Black Boys: being the history of an attempt at civilising some young Aborigines of Australia*, London: Emily Faithfull, 1865, p.79.

24 Letter to Dr Black, 20 November 1849. Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales. Reproduced in Fels, PhD Thesis, Appendix D.

25 *Argus*, 2 July 1851, 'The Moravian Missions'. All the details of the meeting are taken from this report.

26 *Illustrated Australian Magazine*, vol.2, May 1851, p.322.

27 A.T.C. Taeger to the Mission-Board, 24 August 1852, *Periodical Accounts*, June 1853.

28 William Thomas to Victorian Colonial Secretary, 1 January 1852. Cited in Fels, PhD Thesis, Appendix D, p.312.

29 *Cornwall Chronicle*, Launceston, 31 July 1852, 'Victoria'.

30 *Periodical Accounts*, June 1853.

31 Ibid, March 1850.

32 Ibid, June 1849.

33 William Strutt, *The Australian Journal of William Strutt, A.R.A 1850-1862*, edited by George Mackaness, Dubbo, N.S.W.: Review Publications, 1979, part 1, p.32.

34 Quoted M.F. Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria 1835-86*, Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1979, p.143.

35 Charles Joseph La Trobe to Peter La Trobe, 1 April 1850, *Periodical Accounts*, September 1850.

36 See Robert Kenny, *The Lamb Enters the Dreaming: Nathaniel Pepper and the ruptured world*, Melbourne: Scribe, 2007.

Aboriginal people and Frontier Violence: the letters of Richard Hanmer Bunbury to his father, 1841–1847

By Professor Ian D. Clark

Ian D. Clark is Professor of Tourism in the Faculty of Business at Federation University. He has a Doctorate from Monash University in Aboriginal historical geography. His book 'We Are All of One Blood: A History of the Djabwurrung Aboriginal People of Western Victoria, 1836-1901' was awarded the Local History Project Award in the Victorian Community History Awards 2016. Other areas of interest include the history of tourism, place names, and the music and life of Ella Jane Fitzgerald. In this peer reviewed article he draws on his extensive knowledge of Aboriginal people.

In 1841, twenty-eight year old Richard Hanmer Bunbury, a veteran of service in the Royal Navy, which left him with only one hand, arrived in the Port Phillip District of New South Wales, gripped by an 'epidemical rage for colonisation'. Through close relationships with officials such as Charles Joseph La Trobe, he lost no time in pursuing squatting interests in the Grampians (Gariwerd) district. This paper examines his relationships with the Djab Wurrung Aboriginal people[1] of Mount William (Duwil), and publishes extracts from his correspondence with his father on Aboriginal matters. It reveals that although he made many perceptive observations of Aboriginal lifeways, he accepted the view, common on the frontier, that Europeans should be armed at all times, and that Aboriginal people could not be trusted around stations.

We are fortunate that the Bunbury family correspondence spanning the years from 1824 to 1872 has survived, and excerpts from letters with an Aboriginal content are published here, in full, for the first time.[2] Many sketches by Richard Hanmer Bunbury are held in the National Gallery of Victoria; they are primarily of scenes at and near *Barton* station, and some are of botanical specimens (see p.37). Regrettably, none are of Aboriginal people.

***

Richard Hanmer Bunbury, born 18 December 1813 at Mildenhall, Suffolk, England, was the fourth and youngest son of Lieut.-General Sir Henry Edward Bunbury (1778-1860), 7th Baronet, and Louisa Amelia Fox, his first wife. He entered the Royal Navy on 23 January 1827, obtained his first commission on 31 July 1833 and ultimately reached the rank of Captain.[3] According to *Burkes Peerage*, the Bunbury family was of Norman origin, originally called St. Pierre, adopting the Bunbury name from the manor of Bunbury, part of the lands they obtained at the Conquest.[4]

On 19 December 1838 in England, Hanmer Bunbury — the name by which he was usually known — married Sarah Susanna

Richard Bunbury, 1813-1857, artist
Barton Hall, Grampians, 1844
Pen and brush and brown ink over pencil
National Gallery of Victoria, 3073.11-4
Gift of Sir Charles H.W. Bunbury, 1954

(Sally) Sconce (b.1816), eldest daughter of Robert Clement Sconce, Chief Commissary of Navy at Malta, and Sarah Knox. They had a family of seven children.[5] He died in Melbourne on 23 April 1857, at Murray's Prince of Wales Hotel, Flinders Lane East.[6] His family then left Australia for England where Sarah Bunbury died in 1872.

Billis and Kenyon mistakenly claim that Bunbury arrived in Port Phillip in February 1836, but he did not arrive until 1 March 1841.[7] He emigrated with his wife Sarah, her brother Robert Knox (Bob) Sconce (later Anglican minister at St Andrew's, Sydney) and Robert's wife Elizabeth Catherine (Lizzie) Repton, on the *Argyle*. Georgiana McCrae was a fellow cabin passenger, and so were William Campbell, James Hamilton McKnight, and James Irvine, later well-known squatters in the Western District.[8] On arrival, Bunbury rented *Forest Hill Cottage*, Brunswick Street, Newtown (now Fitzroy) in March 1841 for six months, while also purchasing *Stanney* on Darebin Creek, with the intention of moving there once their Forest Hill lease expired. On 7 August 1841, Bunbury was appointed magistrate in the Port Phillip District. Subsequent appointments were Superintendent of Water Police, Williamstown, in September 1842; first Harbour Master, Port of Melbourne, in February 1844, and Water Police Magistrate.[9]

In Melbourne the Bunburys were selective in terms of who they socialised with: primarily the La Trobes, Dr and Mrs Meyer, Georgiana McCrae, Mr and Mrs Lyon Campbell, and Major and Mrs St John.[10] Several sketches by Sarah Bunbury are held in the State Library Victoria collection, including one of the La Trobes' house at Jolimont.

'Seized with this epidemical rage for colonisation'

Hanmer Bunbury's motives for emigrating were, as his father described, that he had been 'seized with this epidemical rage for colonisation' and no parental argument could 'divert him from his scheme of settling in Australia'.[11] Fellow squatter Colin Campbell at *Mount Cole* recalled how the 'excitement on the revelation of a new country which was opened up by Batman and others during 1835 to 1840 combined with the Australia Felix discoveries of Major Mitchell had raised expectations to the highest pitch'.[12] It was dubbed 'Major Mitchell's Australia fever' and Australia Felix was commonly referred to as an 'Eden' and 'a promised land.' H.S. Wills commented in his 1843 diary about the manic speculation in the Port Phillip District:

> During the last three years what an entire revolution has taken place in the affairs of the colony! At the commencement of this period, speculation was a mania, and indulged in to an unprecedented extent. The Crown lands of Port Phillip realised enormous and, in our infantile state, the most preposterous sums.[13]

Bunbury's older brother, Henry William St Pierre Bunbury, had served as a lieutenant in the 21st regiment which was stationed in New South Wales, Tasmania, and Western Australia from 1834 to 1837. Whilst in Western Australia Henry explored the country between Pinjarra and Busselton and his diary contains comments on the local Aboriginal people and their way of life.[14] He gave his younger brother advice about which district to settle in and warned him to be wary of Aboriginal people.[15]

Within weeks of arriving in Melbourne, Hanmer Bunbury was making preparations to visit Horatio Wills' station in the Grampians where 300 head of cattle were available for purchase at £5 per head. As the Aboriginal people in this district were considered a problem another station stockman would be required. Nevertheless the 'general opinion is that if you treated them well there was nothing to be feared'.[16] In April he decided to take over squatting rights to the station which is referred to in correspondence as *Mt William* and *Barton*. The slab and bark hut was named *Barton Hall*, after his family home in Suffolk.

A minority of pastoralists in the 1840s did not live on their stations but placed them in the hands of superintendent-managers. Hanmer Bunbury appointed a superintendent named Grigsby or Gregsby, who was from Maidstone in Kent.[17] His own poor health and need for ready access to medical assistance prevented him from living full-time at *Barton*. Diagnosed as having an enlarged left cavity of the heart, it was recommended that he rest and avoid worry.[18] War injuries may also have influenced his decision. As a thirteen-year-old midshipman, he had lost his right hand on 20 October 1827 in the Battle of Navarino at Pylos during the Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire.[19]

R.B. Thompson has noted that 'success as a squatter in the Western District was never assured, even with its advantages of reliable rainfall and grassy plains. A constant state of anxiety from the need to make important decisions, often without experience or precedent, and with profound commercial consequences, was reinforced by an uncertain economic environment of boom and bust'.[20] In his study of thirty squatters he found that thirteen were 'successful' and sixteen ultimately 'failed'. Some were forced out by insolvency, such as the Kirklands of *Trawalla*; others such as Hanmer Bunbury avoided bankruptcy by finding employment in the public service.

Captain Bunbury held the *Barton* licence from April 1841 and sold it to Thomas Chirnside in February 1850. The property is described as of '38,000 acres carrying 2,000 head of cattle, at the head of Mt. William Creek'.[21] He also held *Moora Moora* (1844-1848), and *Saintfield* (1849-1850).

Sarah Susanna Bunbury, 1816-1872, artist
Mr La Trobe's House Jolimont, 1842
Ink, pen and wash with pencil on cream paper
Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria, H5531

By March 1842, neighbours at *Barton* included Horatio Spencer Howes Wills who had settled on land near Mount William, which he had sold to Bunbury to form *Barton*; William Musgreave Kirk at *Burrumbeep*; Thomas Chirnside at *Mount William*, a run initially taken by Alfred Taddy Thomson; and Charles Browning Hall at *Lexington*, *La Rose* and *Mokepilly*. Bunbury notes in a March letter:

> [Mr Acheson French] is now Police Magistrate at a place called the Grange [present-day Hamilton] about forty miles from Barton, so that we shall be well within visiting distance, and they will be our pleasantest neighbours. Our near neighbours are numerous, but

with one exception no society though many good friendly neighbours, willing to assist and support one another, whenever they can. Barton being upward of 170 from Melbourne by the road, you may imagine that we shall be more solitary than is quite safe, considering the disposition of the blacks.[22]

it formed part of his Loddon District, listed between them twenty-one clan members in 1841 and 1843. The clan-head of the Neetsheere baluk was Billy Urquor (aka Billy, Jacky Jacky), who was captured at Ben Boyd's *Ledcourt* station in April 1843, and chained to a tree for seven weeks before being transferred to Melbourne. *Ledcourt* had suffered many losses through Aboriginal raids on their flocks of sheep, but

Charles Joseph La Trobe, 1801-1875, artist
Mt William, Bunbury's station, 1844
Ink and sepia wash on paper, Collection: National Trust of Australia (Victoria)
Deposited on long-term loan in the Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria
Drawing dated 19 Nov 1844

Bunbury and the Djab Wurrung Aboriginal people

In a letter dated 3 August 1841, Hanmer tells his father that: 'It is a pretty place is Barton. I wish we were living there though the blacks are rather troublesome'. In signing off he notes 'Your truly affnt son Captain Boomering as the blacks call me, Hanmer B.'. It is likely that 'Boomering' is the Djab Wurrung attempt at pronouncing Bunbury; alternatively, it may be their name for him. James Dawson has discussed the names that Aboriginal people used for Europeans; they often highlighted physical characteristics, so it is possible that the name referred to the absence of his right hand.[23]

Barton station was on the lands of the Neetsheere baluk (Djab Wurrung) clan which was also associated with Mount William and Mount Moornambool.[24] The Djab Wurrung knew it as Lagillik, and the home station site as Wangoruc and Tallingareena (taling = tongue). Chief Protector George Augustus Robinson met with thirteen clan members at William Kirk's *Burrumbeep* and Baillie's *Mt. Emu* stations in July and August 1841, and three more on Bunbury's *Barton* station in April 1843. Robinson and Assistant Protector E.S. Parker, who was responsible for the Mount William district as Billy Urquor was indignant at his arrest, and blamed other clans for the depredations.

Hanmer Bunbury's correspondence with his father alluded to his older brother's advice, and more from other colonists about the habits and character of the Aboriginal people:

> Both in the town and also in my trip up the country I have been making enquiries about the Blacks and their habits and character and making due allowance for the prejudices of the settlers and their people. I am convinced that Henry [his brother] is perfectly right in all his warnings and accounts of them, never trust a native & never allow them near your house was his advice to me over & over again.[25]

The letter reflects prevailing views and prejudices against Aboriginal people and cites particular tropes about 'cowardice, brutal cruelty & treachery, idleness & dishonesty'. He believed that settlers should be armed at all times and not encourage Aboriginal people around their home stations. La Trobe's attitude towards Aboriginal people and his attempt to keep them from entering townships is also discussed. The attitudes of civil authorities to

the Aboriginal people's freedom of movement are complex. In the 1840s these views dictated that it was in the best interests of the Indigenous people to be kept away from settlements, where they encountered 'evils' such as alcohol abuse, increased mortality, prostitution, the spread of infections including venereal disease, and injurious changes to diet. Although such reasons were portrayed as protecting Indigenous welfare, in the final analysis this spatial control probably had more to do with safeguarding the fledgling interests of the immigrant community and not offending its sensibilities. In May 1840 Chief Protector Robinson began a system of writing memoranda for Aboriginal people which he intended them to show to Europeans to ensure their safe passage. By June 1840, this practice of character references had evolved into a new system of control. Passes had been introduced by the Protectorate; non-local Aboriginal people returning from Melbourne to their home country needed signed letters from Thomas, Robinson or La Trobe, which were to be shown to squatters to ensure safe passage. Passes were also necessary if Aboriginal people wanted to enter townships.

According to Bunbury, La Trobe believed the Aboriginal people were 'irreclaimable':

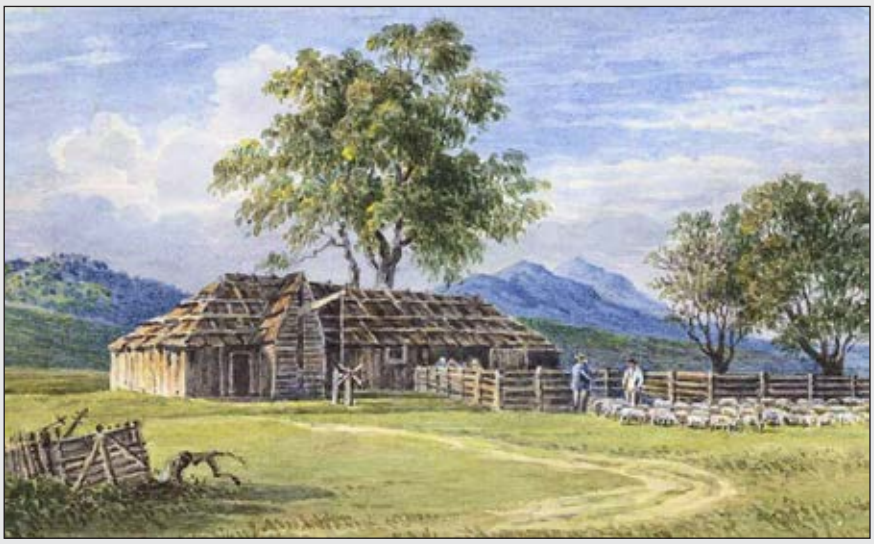
> Mr La Trobe a most humane & kind hearted person when he first came here exerted himself very much in their favour and endeavoured to settle & civilize them as much as he could but he has been obliged to give the attempt up in despair, for he found they became so devious & dangerous that for the sake of the inhabitants of the town he was obliged to keep them at a distance. He says that he has seen a great deal of the savages of different parts of the world, but that these are the only ones who appear to be perfectly irreclaimable; they have no feeling of gratitude[,] for any kindness shown them they attribute to fear and become insolent accordingly.[26]

Reference is also made to a raid which became known as the 'Lettsom affair'.[27] With a warrant from Governor Gipps in Sydney to find perpetrators of a settler killing, Major Samuel Lettsom, of the 80th Regiment, led a party of mounted police and arrested Woiwurrung, Boon Wurrung, and Taungurung people in Melbourne on 11 October 1840, during which an Aboriginal leader named Winberri was killed:

> All the time they were encouraged about the town & treated with great kindness; there were two or three large tribes encamped in the neighbourhood, by degrees the numbers increased, other tribes came gradually in, until their numbers had become quite alarming between 4 & 500 fighting men having mustered at one of their dances; information is said to have been given by some of the Black servants employed in the town that it was the intention of the tribes to attack the town in the night & make a general massacre, whether that was true or not a body of the settlers, police, & soldiers turned out surrounded the blacks and took 150 prisoners dispersing the remainder excepting a few who were recognized as having been concerned in murders and outrages up the country, the prisoners were soon released & warned not to come near the town again; since that time there are very few to be seen about here, about a dozen or so begging in the town but not more.[28]

Bunbury is not flattering in his characterisation of the Aboriginal people of western Victoria; he refers to an earlier massacre of clans in March 1840 at *Konongwootong*, the station of the Whyte brothers, on the Koroit Creek, north of Coleraine, that became known as *Fighting Hills*:

> Cowardice, brutal cruelty & treachery, idleness & dishonesty are the principal characteristics of the natives of this part of the country, but the tribes vary very much in character; about Portland Bay some of the tribes have shown the ferocity & determined courage that distinguished the natives of Van Diemens Land while others are the most abject cowards as an instance of the former: three brothers of the name Whyte were owners of a large sheep station between Portland Bay and Port Fairy, one night a tribe [...] in their neighbourhood & known to muster 43 fighting men came down to an outstation, watched till the shepherd drove the flock out in the morning then speared him & carried off the whole flock; the Whytes soon heard of what had happened, assembled their people and pursued the natives, about ten miles from the place where the shepherd was killed, in one of the steep wooded ranges they found them busy cooking some of the sheep they had killed with the others regularly encamped in a bush yard as well arranged as a shepherd could



Duncan Elphinstone Cooper, 1813/14–1904, artist
Woolshed, Challicum, 1845
Watercolour
National Library of Australia. PIC, vol.176, R.317
From a series depicting *Challicum* at Fiery Creek, to the east of Bunbury's *Barton* at Mount William

> have done it; a skirmish ensued[-] the blacks were driven back with the loss of several of their number and the sheep carried off towards the station; the blacks however having mustered all their force returned to the attack and the fight was continued for some time, the Whytes & their party sheltering themselves behind the trees from the spears and firing with great effect on their less wary assailants. Five times the blacks returned to the attack, one of the Mr Whytes & three or four of their people were wounded, but at the last attack the blacks could only muster nine fighting men, only two of whom escaped, 41 out of 43 had fallen.[29]

One form of European intimidation on the frontier was charging on horseback at Aboriginal people. William Adeney documented Aboriginal fear: 'Aborigines will often run at the sight of a stock keeper' who would 'dash in among these naked wanderers flogging them with their long heavy whips at the least symptom of ill will and often with no provocation whatever'.[30] Burchett was another to comment that 'a horse proves the best protection to a party of whites in the bush'.[31] Bunbury therefore fails to contextualise the Aboriginal response of flight. It was a rational reaction to past treatment rather than a symptom of cowardice:

> In this part of the country the tribes are generally fine athletic men but desperate cowards, I have seen several of them upwards of six feet high and very muscular, but whole tribes will run as hard as they can go from one man with a pistol or even from one man on horseback if he will but ride right at them, without looking whether he is armed or not.[32]

Bunbury reflected the common belief that many killings of white people resulted from encouraging Aboriginal people around their stations and treating them with kindness:

> A good many murders and outrages have been committed at different stations particularly within the last 8 or 10 months; two occurred while I was up the country the other day and within 25 miles of the station I was at, and the result of all the enquiries I have made is that in every instance the incidents have been occasioned by the extraordinary carelessness by the parties themselves.
>
> Experience appears to have no effect whatsoever on the shepherds & hutkeepers; on some stations they find the blacks useful in bringing in the wood & water they want and the women are an attraction they encourage them about their huts & give them part of their rations & any clothes they can spare and really treat them very kindly (regardless of the fact that almost every victim has been

> a hutkeeper or unarmed shepherd). This good feeling goes on for a few months, perhaps the man begins to put confidence in the blacks, goes about unarmed & has his hut constantly crowded with the blacks & their gins, they make their own observations as to the arms being carried by the man or kept loaded or not loaded in the hut and at last take advantage of his carelessness & secretly knock his brains out, sometimes without the slightest precious difference perhaps even when he is cooking some food for them; sometimes some theft or insolence makes the man angry, he refuses the usual quantity of food & tries to drive the blacks away but it is generally too late &… surrounded with blacks he is immediately despatched & the hut plundered & burnt; sometimes if he has prudence enough to get hold of his gun or pistols before he shows his displeasure he may succeed in driving them away but in several instances even that warning has not been sufficient, the blacks have been allowed to return to the hut as usual & have taken the first opportunity of the man being at work & off his guard to revenge themselves by murdering him and the way in which they mutilate the bodies of their victims is quite horrible, some they have completely cut to pieces.[33]

This commonly-held prejudice, however, is at odds with the experience of George Augustus Robinson, the Chief Protector of Aborigines.[34] When Robinson travelled through the western district of the Protectorate in 1841, he found that stations where Aboriginal people were welcomed and encouraged — such as at William Blow's *Sinclair's Run* (later known as Allanvale), and Colin Campbell's *Mount Cole* run (later known as *Buangor*) — had, by and large, experienced minimal losses from Aboriginal people, and both parties were on the best of terms. Yet Bunbury found no such examples:

> I have been unable to hear of a single instance in which people have been kind to them & encouraged them about their stations & given them food & clothing, and have not suffered for their good natures. The gentleman [Horatio Wills] from whom I have bought cattle was extremely kind & would not believe that they were a treacherous unfeeling race, the consequence was that he was nearly speared, one of his men wounded, & one killed. At the same time I cannot hear of anyone who has kept the blacks at a distance, & made a rule of no one at any time or under any pretence going unarmed, having suffered, a sheep or two speared now and then perhaps but nothing worse. No number of blacks in this part of the country will expressly attack even a single armed man.[35]

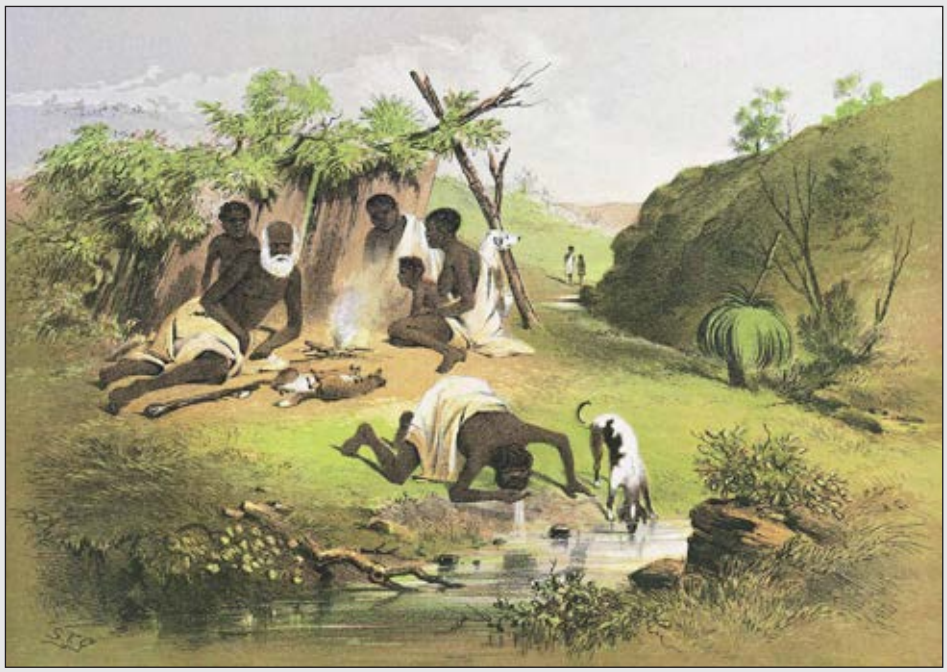
In early July 1841, Bunbury returned to Melbourne after several weeks at Mount William. He brought 'presents of emu ornaments, opossum skins and a kangaroo tail, from which they made a most delicious soup, "very like hare soup"'.[36] Katherine Kirkland at *Trawalla* was another who was open minded to sampling indigenous foods, particularly *murrnong* (daisy yam, *Microseris lanceolate*), which she put in soups for want of better vegetables.[37] She thought it tasted like turnip.

Visits from the Chief Protector of Aborigines

George Augustus Robinson visited *Barton* station on three occasions, in July 1841, April 1843, and May 1847, interacting principally with the station superintendent, Edward Grigsby, since Bunbury was in Melbourne. On the 1841 visit, Robinson was told by a youth, Currercalconedeet, that 'Thomson, Captain Bunbury, Captain Brigs and Mr Wills shot natives, plenty natives, "all gone too much boo white man"'.[38] It is difficult to determine whether Robinson is being told that these squatters personally shot Aboriginal people, or that their men were responsible. In 1928 a newspaper article presented an account from a former Barton employee of a massacre by station hands of Aboriginal people in a gully between Redman's Bluff and Mount William:

> The run called "Barton" at the foot of Mount William, was first owned by a man whose name has escaped my memory, but he was instrumental in the almost total destruction [of the] tribe of aborigines that proved troublesome, spearing sheep and cattle on the station. An old Stawellite, who was an employee on the station, recounted the incident in my hearing. He said that the blacks were enticed into the gully, between the Redman's Bluff and Mount William, and shot down by station hands, very few escaping. There was no inquiry made into the tragedy at the time, and the sheep-spearing ended.[39]

Captain Bunbury called on Robinson in Melbourne on 7 October 1841, after Robinson's return from his extensive tour of the Western



Samuel Thomas Gill, 1818-1880, artist
Hamel & Ferguson, engraver
Native miami [mia-mia, 1864]
Chromolithograph, coloured
National Library of Australia, PIC vol.537, S3212

District. Robinson noted that Bunbury 'had heard that I had said that natives had been killed at Grampians. Said the natives were more quiet the last winter than they had been for any period before… Captain Bunbury said he was of the party who went after Thomson's sheep, the natives fled, got a woman and she told where the sheep were put. Said natives were at Wills station, they recovered 200 of their sheep'.[40]

A Bunbury letter dated 14 August 1841 discussed that search for sheep stolen from Alfred Taddy Thomson's run at Mount William. He expressed surprise at Aboriginal people's skill in driving sheep, but abhorred their method of tethering the animals by breaking their legs. It was commonplace for Europeans on the frontier to retaliate by ransacking recently abandoned Aboriginal camps, deliberately destroying or stealing Aboriginal implements and items of clothing, such as possum and kangaroo cloaks. Their habitations, known locally as wurns, were regularly destroyed:

> I assure you it is a disagreeable ground to walk through as any man for his sins would not wish to meet with, particularly if you happen to be in chase of fifteen or twenty armed blacks with whom you have already had a brush with & who you know to be concealed in the scrub within a few yards of you but where you can't exactly tell for the life of you & every moment as you crawl laboriously along you expect to find the point of a spear or a knife in your side before you can make any use of the pistol ready cocked in your hand, or perhaps to have a regular volley of spears at you the moment you emerge at the farther side; such a scramble I had the last time I was at Barton in company with five other gents, & a more disagreeable job I never undertook; the story was as follows:
>
> One fine forenoon one of the shepherds of our neighbours a Mr Thomson came home in a desperate fright; he had been tending his sheep on the plain, about three miles from the home station when all at once, according to his story, a whole tribe of blacks advanced upon the flock from the forest, and chased & threw a great many spears at him, drove him off one way & the whole flock of 600 or 700 sheep the other though firing at them five times. Upon close cross examination however he acknowledged that they had not thrown a single spear at him though he saw some of them shake their spears at him, away he ran, at all accounts. Mr T. immediately mounted with some of his

men, & started in pursuit, followed the tracks, and though the blacks could not have had more than an hour's start of him, he never overtook them until after a round of about nine miles over sharp rocky ranges & through thick scrub which puzzled even the horses; he saw the smoke of their fires where they had camped to eat; the blacks ran instantly & he found about three hundred & fifty of the sheep and ten or twelve already killed and cooking. How the blacks had driven the sheep there was a mystery, most assuredly no white man could have driven sheep such a distance & over such ground in the time; half the sheep were still missing, the blacks had evidently divided them & gone different ways & where to look for the others he could not tell; next morning he came over to me for assistance & I went over with my stock keeper to his station to be ready to start early the following morning; in the evening Mr T's partner and another gent arrived from another part of the country.

Bunbury's description in the passage below of his stock keeper as a Sydney native meant a white man born at Sydney rather than an Indigenous person from Sydney:

> We stowed close that night four of us sleeping in Mr T's tent for he had no hut having only lately arrived. …up at daylight & off directly after breakfast for the mountains… singularly enough this run took us right on to the tracks of the missing division of the sheep. On the scent, we went right up the face of the mountain, my stock keeper a Sydney native was tracker & hard work it was at times; to puzzle pursuers the blacks had driven the sheep through the thickest parts of the scrub, over rocky ground where no foot marks would show, up the hill & across & up gullies, backwards & forwards & at last up a very steep ridge covered with thick forest & in some parts most dense & difficult scrub; when the blacks carry off sheep they drive them at such a pace that the fat ones are very often knocked up, in that case the blacks will neither leave them as they are for fear of them getting away nor kill them for fear of their spoiling, but they just break two or three of their legs as they know they will live many days in that state & they can carry them off at their leisure.
>
> In the course of our scramble we fell in with about twenty poor beasts in this condition, & they helped to guide us after the others, on we went, often obliged to dismount & lead our horses and at last caught sight of the smoke of the blacks camp rising through the thick trees more than a thousand feet above the bush of the plain we had left. On we went quietly until close up to the 'mi-mies' as the blacks call their little bark huts, the blacks saw us, and bolted in all directions through the thick scrub as we dashed into the camp; the blacks are like eels, down go their blankets & skin cloaks & they slip through the thickest scrub with extraordinary rapidity. Never take your eyes off a black even for a moment & where you think there is neither tree nor bush large enough to hide him & you will see no more of him hunt as you may; they do not merely escape, they vanish by magic or the black art; certainly though close upon them we only succeeded in capturing one old 'loobra', as they call their women here, she showed us after a good deal of trouble where the sheep were & we found about 200 of them in a patch of dense scrub which they had been forced into but could not of themselves get out again; at the camp which consisted of 8 or 10 mymies we found about 30 sheep killed; cut up, cooked & cooking, but no more live ones.

Bunbury goes on to recount how he 'souvenired' some items and then destroyed the camp. His description of its contents shows the interesting mix of Aboriginal and European implements in use:

> We then set to work & ransacked the mymies & a curious lot of things we found, stolen axes &… wedges, table knives ivory handled, files, chisels & sheep shears, a few things we carried off and then burnt everything else, spears, arms of all kinds, baskets, blankets, all the meat & everything that would burn.
>
> I appropriated some arms, opossum & squirrel skins and one of the original green stone tomahawks now becoming rare as the blacks are generally supplied with iron ones by the protectors. As soon as we had destroyed the camp and drove the sheep down to the plain & sending Mr Thomson back in charge

Charles Joseph La Trobe, 1801-1875, artist
Opening of the upper precipice of Mt William, Grampians, 1850
Sepia wash on paper
Collection: National Trust of Australia (Victoria)
Deposited on long-term loan in the Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria

> of them we returned up the mountain to the camp and after hunting for some time caught sight of the smoke of the blacks' fire higher up the ridges; with some difficulty we got up within about thirty or 40 yards of them when we stopped by a dense tea tree scrub we could hear the blacks talking and breaking sticks for their fires at the farther side, so dismounting we scrambled through the tea tree very fast and quietly as we could but the blacks heard us and bolted, nor could we see one of them again; at this second camp we found quantities of mutton roasting, but no more sheep & after a short search we were obliged to return to the station; next day we went out over the mountains but did not see either a black or a sheep.[41]

On 12 March 1842, Assistant Protector E.S. Parker was informed by Charley, alias 'Neptune', an employee of Captain Robert Briggs's at *Ledcourt* station, that one of Bunbury's stock keepers had killed an Aboriginal man named 'Cockatoo Jack',[42] who was believed to have killed Wills's hutkeeper John Collicott in late 1840.[43] The stock-keepers at *Barton* were Sydney men called 'Bill the Native'[44] and 'Cawpin'. When Chief Protector Robinson met these men on 11 July 1841, Bill 'became outrageously insolent to me; he damned and abused the government and would shoot all the bloody blacks in the place if they interfered with him, and set me at defiance'.[45] Eight days later at Kirk's *Burrumbeep* station on the Hopkins River, south of present-day Ararat, where Robinson had established temporary headquarters, Bill and Cawpin attended a corroboree staged by local Djab Wurrung clans. Later in the evening the Djab Wurrung people came to Robinson and accused the two 'blackguards with having fired at them and having taken their women'.[46] Bill and Cawpin later went to work at H.S. Wills's adjoining stations *Lexington, La Rose* and *Mokepilly*. When Robinson returned to this district in April 1843, he learned that Bill had been convicted for ten years for stealing cattle from Thomas Chirnside's *Mt. William* station. Wills had written to the court on his behalf informing it of the great distress into which the family had been thrown by the imprisonment. But by April 1843, Bill had escaped from gaol with two others and had returned to the Duwil (Mount William) district.

Robinson's second visit to *Barton* was on 13 April 1843. His record reads:

> I called my two native police and went on to Captain Bunbury's huts. My

> people and horses wanted refreshment but it was denied. Came to Bunbury at sunset. Mr. Grigsby a quiet man, is overseer, he is from Maidstone in Kent. A Mr. Young, brother to the young man in Aire's office, was there. Bunbury has moved his home; no water. I was well received. Some natives were encamped on a creek. I went alone to see them. They knew me. We had met before and they called me marmanorer [father] and was quite delighted. They all had venereal. No natives were allowed there when Bill the Native was there; he shot them. Got 34lbs beef at 3s 6d, ½lb tobacco 3s 1d for the natives.

Robinson took the names of seven Aboriginal people, noting that another six were on the station. They belonged to the Neetsheere baluk, Yam Yam Burer baluk, Tin baluk, and Watteneer baluk clans. The following day he climbed Mount William, accompanied by Gregsby and Young:

> Fine morning, stopping at Bunbury. Natives visited me. I gave them 3lbs salt beef and ½lb tobacco for which they were thankful. They were destitute of covering and sorely afflicted with venereal. The day was remarkable fine and as more natives were expected I thought I would avail myself of so favourable an opportunity to ascend to the top of Mount William. Mr Grigsby, the overseer to Captain Bunbury, and a Mr Young wished to accompany me.[47]

In November 1844, that climb was recalled during a meeting with Superintendent La Trobe who was a regular visitor to *Barton* and had himself recently climbed Mount William with Bunbury. Robinson recorded the occasion: 'Went to office, called on His Honor, civil, complemented [*sic*] me for having ascended top Mount William, he had been there this last trip, delighted with Mt William, equal to mtns Switzerland, told me yarn, and Captain Bunbury, who went up with him, said it was hard work for him but for Mrs R. [*sic*] it was no joke'.[48]

A visit by Bunbury to Robinson's Melbourne office in January 1844 is recorded in the office journal: 'Memo: Capt. Bunbury, this gentleman informed the C.P. [Chief Protector] yesterday that the blacks had been spearing his cattle at Mount William'.[49] Robinson's journal entry for his final visit to *Barton* on 23 May 1847 is very brief and matter-of-fact: 'Ten miles to Wills', went on to Bunbury, seven miles. Fine day. Remained for the night. Mr Gregsby there'.[50]

Aboriginal use of fire

Bunbury's correspondence discusses Aboriginal uses of fire, noting in August 1841 'the constant fires... in all parts of the country, kindled either accidentally or by the blacks for the sake of the young & sweet grass that springs up the year after the burning of the old & attracts game'.[51] Four months later, he wrote: 'The whole face of the country appears from any elevated ground to be enveloped in smoke so numerous & extensive are the fires. Sometimes they arise spontaneously from the friction of dead branches of the trees in windy weather; sometimes they are lighted by the blacks for the sake of the young grass that springs & entices the kangaroos & emus &c.; sometimes accidentally ... for even in the middle of summer there is a fire in every black "my-my" as they call their own huts'.[52]

Bunbury also notes that fires were used to burn out stations. Squatters around *Trawalla* in 1838 believed the Aboriginal people had deliberately lit fires in an attempt to drive them away.[53] It is possible though, that squatters assumed an intention that did not exist. As the year had been particularly dry, the Indigenous people may have simply been practising traditional methods of encouraging the growth of grasses. Elsewhere Bunbury supports the view that fire was sometimes used against intruders. In a letter dated 18 December 1841, he wrote that local clans near *Barton* had lit fires 'not unfrequently for the purpose of burning out a station; last year they made several most determined attempts to burn the huts of two of my neighbours'. In this early period, squatting runs were vulnerable and had little defence against the Aboriginal use of fire as a weapon.[54]

Loss of faith in the efficacy of the Aboriginal Protectorate

In a March 1842 letter Bunbury wrote:

> The blacks have been very troublesome lately in all parts of the District, near Port Fairy they took possession of a station and after being driven off, returned, dangerously wounded two of the mounted police & carried off and eat [*sic*] their horses; at another station they killed & eat [*sic*] four horses; at another they killed the hutkeeper & a lot of sheep, at another not far from me they speared two shepherds & carried off a whole flock of sheep, at another they speared a horse, at

> Barton they speared one of my best horses in both hind legs but he has recovered completely, and at Hall's they have speared about a hundred head of cattle. We shall have some trouble & bloodshed I fear in that part of the district before we can get them quiet again.[55]

Like many other squatters and settlers, he was critical of the Protectorate:

> I suppose in England the system of the "Aborigines Protectors" and their establishments are considered to be most useful, as everything that is praiseworthy & philanthropic, but out here there is but one opinion on the subject including Mr La Trobe & all persons who are most anxious to preserve & civilize the blacks, and that is that they have done no good whatsoever, that is in no one point are the blacks benefited by the protectorate system which rather encourages them in habits of idleness & covetousness, while in many they have lost considerably. I am going up to Barton again this day week but I will endeavour before I go to find time for telling you something about these unfortunate blacks & their prospects.[56]

An 1843 letter reveals the squatters' growing frustration with the government in terms of providing protection from Aboriginal attacks on people and stock. It also indicates the worry that his wife Sarah held for her husband's safety when he was at *Barton*:

> The government neither can nor will do anything for the protection of the settlers, but they are very ready to prosecute them if they treat the blacks harshly. Henry [Hanmer's brother] did not do the Blacks of this country justice; I don't think the worst of the North American Indians ever equalled them in treacherous cold blooded barbarity. Poor Sukey [his wife Sarah] heard of the Blacks being so troublesome up at the Grampians, and the stories of course had lost nothing in the transit from one terrified shepherd to another, so that the poor dear girl was in a terrible fuss, and I found her on my return last Tuesday night, after nearly six weeks absence, really worn as a curl [of] paper and far from well; dear little soul she is a sad fidget when I am away.[57]

Observations of Aboriginal lifeways

Hanmer Bunbury demonstrated his keen observation of Aboriginal lifeways. Three letters reveal his admiration of the efficacy of their hunting techniques, especially in hunting bush turkey, the Australian bustard, *Ardeotis australis*. His respect for Aboriginal ecological knowledge by concurring with their prediction of a long drought is also demonstrated. He begins:

> How formidable a weapon even a light wooden spear is in the hands of these savages, you may guess from the horse having been struck through the centre of the forehead & killed on the spot. The hardest blow I ever saw given by a spear was one where the spear entered the side of a large fat bullock 5 or 6 years old, a little behind the shoulder & the point protruded eight inches through the skin a little in front of the hip on the opposite side; I do not know the force from what distance the spear was thrown but I am satisfied that a ball… & smooth bore would not have gone through at twenty yards.[58]

The quality of local spears prompted comment:

> The spears used by the blacks about the western parts of this district are of the rudest possible description, for having no reeds like the tribes in this neighbourhood of the Grampians, they are compelled to use the long thin stems of the tea tree & the stringy bark saplings which amass there and amongst the thick scrubs; these they sharpen to a long taper conical point & harden the whole spear which is about six or seven feet long in the fire to prevent its warping but they can never take out the inequalities & a light zigzagging caused by the outside twigs, even the bark is often not removed so that the spear spins much this way, yet with the help of the throwing stick they can send these rude missiles from 80 to 120 yards & for short distances with surprising accuracy, provided it is not in the direction of a gun or pistol, their nerves being greatly affected by any such apparition; the inequalities of the spear thrower however give it a wobbling motion in its flight which renders it easy to avoid if thrown from any distance.[59]

He also noted the arsenal of weapons typically carried by a fighting man:

Richard Bunbury, 1813–1857, artist
Native Fuschia [*sic*]. Pink Epacris, 1844
Watercolour over pencil
National Gallery of Victoria, 3073.18-4
Gift of Sir Charles H.W. Bunbury, 1954
Thirteen botanical works by Bunbury are in the Gallery's collection

'Native Fuschia [*sic*], natural order Rutaceae, flowers in May, found in Victoria'
'Pink Epacris, natural order Epacrideae [*sic*], flowers in May, found in Victoria'

> Besides three or four light throwing spears every man when fully equipped carries one or two strong heavy spears about eight feet long for close quarters, these spears are almost invariably barbed either with barbs deftly cut out of the solid stick or with pieces of bone or glass and attached with strong cement & sinews. Considering that in addition to his spears, a shield, leangle, waddy, tomahawk, & one, or more, commonly two boomerangs, are invariably carried by a warrior his accoutrements are far from light.[60]

There is a fascinating account of the brilliant strategy used by the Aboriginal people in trapping for food the elusive bush turkey:

> … the blacks will generally succeed in catching them if they try but they are generally too lazy to go after them; their plan is to crawl along the ground perfectly flat holding a leafy branch of a tree or a small bush in the left hand in such a manner as to screen the hand from the bird's sight, while two long wands are carried in the right hand, one of which has a strong open noose at the end made of the sinews of the kangaroo, and the other has small bird generally a lark or a quail dangling by a string about six inches in length, the wands are kept close together so that the open part of the noose may always be over the bird; thus provided the black crawls towards the turkey whose attention is soon attracted by the little bird which is kept in constant motion as if fluttering over the bush, & nearer & nearer draws the bush, until the inquisitive bird stops to examine the little one which seems to be twittering towards it, when near the noose drops over its head & a twist is given to the stick & the prisoner is secured. The great art appears to consist in the management of the bush so as

> to make it always maintain a natural position & appearance.[61]

On their superior ecological knowledge:

> The drought continued with great severity until the beginning of this month and has done a good deal of mischief in different parts of the country, many thousands of lambs have perished from the want of grass for the ewes; the Blacks say we are going to have three dry seasons and I am inclined to believe them.[62]

Aboriginal–settler interaction

Captain Richard Hanmer Bunbury was one of many British emigrants who responded to 'Major Mitchell's Australia fever'; what did they know of the Indigenous people of Port Phillip? The myth that Australia was an uninhabited land derived from the Crown constitutional status placed on it as 'an uninhabited colony acquired by settlement'. Emigrant colonisers knew that Port Phillip was occupied by Aboriginal people, but probably gained the impression from Mitchell's reports that it was sparsely populated. Nonetheless, when deliberating a move to Australia Felix, the prospective emigrant may have been a little worried about the Aboriginal people. On this last point Hartwig has written: 'The very fact that a people is prepared to come unasked to a country, appropriate it and alter and disrupt the indigenous way of life pre-supposes that they believe their own culture to be superior, and that they constantly reassure themselves on this score'.[63] Hanmer Bunbury's correspondence reveals particular information about Aboriginal people received from experience, as well as from his older brother and other settlers at Port Phillip.

Thompson, in his study of thirty diaries, letters, and memoirs written by early western Victorian squatters, found a prevalence of negative references toward Aboriginal people, and these were maintained for life. Squatters felt 'no need, ethical or political, to resile from their earlier attitudes and actions when they came to give an account of themselves in their memoirs'.[64]

Don Watson has argued there were three types of squatter: 'those who thought that their right to the land was qualified by an obligation to treat the Aboriginal inhabitants with kindness; those who believed that their right was conditional only on extermination; and those who combined murder with kindness':[65]

> Christianity could instruct settlers in the language of the *Song of Solomon* or the *Book of Job*. It could inform Europeans that the Aboriginal people were 'black but comely' (a fact which many squatters had discovered for themselves), 'our sable brethren', 'our dusky neighbours', or it could underpin the idea that the blacks were born to suffer as an accursed race, the sons of Ham.[66]

Colin Campbell revealed through his actions and writings that he belonged to the type of squatter who adhered to the 'black but comely' view of the *Song of Solomon*. It is speculated here that Bunbury also belonged with that type, though he followed the conventional wisdom that Aboriginal people were not to be trusted, that his men should be armed at all times, and that any Aboriginal depredations should be punished. Bunbury's view that kindness towards Aboriginal people automatically brought suffering for those showing the kindness is not supported by the foregoing analysis of cultural relations on the colonial frontier.[67] Indeed the opposite is suggested — that on stations where Aboriginal people were welcomed, treated respectfully, and given gainful employment, the stations were violence-free, standing as islands in a sea of conflict. On the other hand, where European station hands failed to appreciate their cultural obligations or deliberately chose to ignore them, violence often ensued.

---

1 The spelling 'Djab Wurrung' conforms with that adopted by the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages. The alternative 'Djabwurrung' is used in the author's previous publications. (Ed.)

2 Papers of Bunbury Family, 1824-1872, National Library of Australia, Canberra, MS 8098. Also, copy in Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria, MS 13530.

3 For his naval service see W.R. O'Byrne, *A Naval Biographical Dictionary: comprising the life and services of every living officer in Her Majesty's Navy, from the rank of Admiral of the Fleet to that of Lieutenant inclusive*, London: John Murray, 1849.

4 B. Burke, & A.P. Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Peerage and Baronetage, The Privy Council, Knightage and Companionage*, 26th ed., London: Harrisons & Sons, 1914, p.529.

5 Henry Fox (Harry) Bunbury, b.8 October 1839, Malta – d.16 October 1870, Lahore, Bengal, India; Robert Francis Argyle (Frank) Bunbury, b.12 February 1841 [born at sea aboard the 'Duke of Argyle' on the voyage to Port Phillip] (Reg. 12479) – died September 1841, Darebin Creek; Louisa Harriet Constance (Cometina) Bunbury, b.5 March 1843, Williamstown – d.14 May 1923, Bad Kreuznach, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany; Cecil Hanmer Bunbury, b.12 February 1845 – d.22 December 1909, Brighton, Sussex, England; Robert Clement Sconce Bunbury, b.19 January 1847, Williamstown – d.10 December 1930, Hampshire, England; Frances Susannah Bunbury, b.1850, Melbourne – d.7 May 1915, Windsor, Berkshire, England; Herbert Napier Bunbury, b.15 February 1851, Williamstown – d.18 January 1922, Menton, Alpes-Maritimes, Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur, France.

6 *Argus*, 25 April 1857, p.4.

7 R.V. Billis and A.S. Kenyon, *Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip*, 2nd ed., Melbourne: Stockland, 1974, p. 36.

8 *Leader*, 14 June 1890; *Argus*, 18 April 1922, p.6.

9 *Port Phillip Gazette*, 25 August 1841, p.2, 10 September 1842, p.2; *Melbourne Weekly Courier*, 10 February 1844, p.3; *Argus*, 15 July 1851, p.1.

10 Trudie E. Fraser, 'The Bunbury Letters from New Town' in M. Lewis (ed.), *Brunswick Street Lost and Found: proceedings of a seminar at Fitzroy, 20 May 2012*, Fitzroy: Fitzroy History Society, Faculty of Architecture, University of Melbourne, National Trust of Australia (Victoria), 2012, 45-48, p.52.

11 Paul de Serville, *Port Phillip Gentlemen and Good Society in Melbourne before the Gold Rushes*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1980, p.29.

12 Colin Campbell, Memoirs, unpublished manuscript, Banfield Collection, Ararat Regional Library, n.d. p.9.

13 Horatio Spencer Howe Wills Journal, 29 April 1843, in Diary of Horatio Spencer Wills, 1843 Apr 30 — 1851 Aug 22, State Library Victoria, Australian Manuscripts Collection, MS 9139. Copy in Ararat Regional Library.

14 Cara Cammilleri, 'Bunbury, Henry William St Pierre (1812–1875)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (accessed online 21 June 2016).

15 W. St Pierre Bunbury and W. P. Morrell (Eds), *Early Days in Western Australia: being the letters and journal of Lieut H.W. Bunbury, 21st Fusiliers*, London: Oxford University Press, 1930.

16 Fraser, pp.45-48, 52.

17 Possibly Edward Gregsby, a 31 year-old farm labourer who arrived in Port Phillip on 1 March 1841 per the *Argyle*. (Public Record of Victoria, Melbourne, VPRS 14. Register of Assisted Immigrants from the United Kingdom).

18 Fraser, p.55.

19 Georgiana McCrae, who was a fellow passenger on the *Argyle* noted in her journal: 'We played whist, or looked at some capital landscapes painted by Captain Bunbury with his left hand, he having parted with his right one, so he said "to feed the Turks at Navarino"'. (Georgiana McCrae, *Georgiana's Journal: Melbourne a hundred years ago*, edited by Hugh McCrae, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1934, p.44). His right hand was severely wounded and he had his arm amputated at the elbow. Two medals were awarded to him: a Naval General Service medal and one from the Royal Humane Society sold at auction in March 2011. See https://www.dnw.co.uk/auction-archive/lot-archive/lot.php?auction_id=224&lot_id=198356. The latter medal was awarded to him for saving the life of a crew member who had fallen overboard. 'What rendered this act more brilliant was the circumstance that Lieut. Bunbury has but one arm, having been deprived of the other while a Midshipman of H.M.A.S. Asia at the battle of Navarino' (*The United Service Magazine and Naval and Military Magazine*, 1836, p.257).

20 R. B. Thompson, 'Sir Walter Scott in the Western District, 1836-1851, Thesis (PhD), Deakin University, 2013, p.128. See also Margaret Kiddle, *Men of Yesterday: a social history of the western district of Victoria, 1834-1890*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1961, pp.46-178; A.G.L. Shaw, *A History of the Port Phillip District: Victoria before Separation*, Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 1996, pp.87-143.

21 *Australasian*, 29 November 1941, p.32.

22 Bunbury letter to father, 9 March 1842.

23 James Dawson, *Australian Aborigines: the languages and customs of several tribes of Aborigines in the western district of Victoria, Australia*, Melbourne: G. Robertson, 1881, p.47f.

24 Ian D. Clark, '*We Are All of One Blood': a history of the Djabwurrung Aboriginal people of Western Victoria, 1836-1901*, [Charleston, SC]: Createspace, 2016, Vol.1, p.138.

25 Bunbury letter to father, Sir Henry Bunbury, 27 April 1841.

26 Ibid.

27 Vivienne Rae-Ellis, *Black Robinson: Protector of Aborigines*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988, p.207. See also Michael F. Christie's 'Lettsom Raid' in the *Encyclopedia of Melbourne* online at www.eMelbourne.net.au.

28 Bunbury letter to father, 27 April 1841.

29 For more information see Ian D. Clark, *Scars in the Landscape: a register of massacre sites in Western Victoria, 1803-1859*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1995, pp.145-155.

30 W. Adeney, Diary 19 August 1842 to 17 March 1843, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria, MS 8520A. Entry for 28 January 1843.

31 Burchett Letters, 1839-1875. State Library Victoria, MF. 170. Letter 23 November 1839.

32 Bunbury letter to father, 27 April 1841.

33 Ibid.

34 Ian D. Clark (ed.), *The Journal of George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, 1839-1852*, [3rd ed.], Charleston, SC, Createspace, 2014. Single volume edition, pp. 392, 404, 523.

35 Bunbury letter to father, 27 April 1841.

36 Fraser, p.55.

37 Katherine K. Kirkland, 'Life in the Bush. By a Lady' in *Chambers's Miscellany of Useful and Entertaining Tracts*, London: W. and R. Chambers, 1845, Vol. 1, No. 8, p.14.

38 Robinson Journal, 15 July 1841, in Clark, 2014, p.394.

39 St. E. D'Alton in *Australasian*, 7 July 1928, p.56.

40 Robinson Journal, 7 October 1841, in Clark, 2014, p.436.

41 Bunbury letter to father, 14 August 1841.

42 Aboriginal Protectorate Weekly, Monthly, Quarterly and Annual Reports and Journals, 1839-49, Public Record Office of Victoria, Melbourne, VPRS 4410.

43 A list in Great Britain, House of Commons, *Sessional Papers*, Vol. 34. Aborigines (Australian Colonies) 1844, p. 318, notes that in August 1841 Bood Yarramin, aka Good Morning Bill, was shot by R.H. Bunbury's storekeeper; however, Robinson, learned that this man and an Aboriginal woman, had been shot by a shepherd named Tarenbe, an employee of William Kirk on his *Burrumbeep* station. Good Morning Bill Creek which starts below Kirk Hill and merges with Nekeeya Creek, is believed to be named after Bood Yarramin, however *The Australasian* (29 September 1866) claimed the 'singular name Good Morning Bill Hill [presumably referring to Kirk Hill] has been given — said to have been from the custom of a lonely shepherd located in the neighbourhood, far from any other human being, and who, to practise his manners and his mother tongue to that small extent at least, every morning on leaving his hut doffed his bonnet, and looking up to his great neighbour [Mount William], addressed the mountain with a politely familiar "Good Morning Bill" ' .

44 Presumably a reference to the fact that he was born in Australia.

45 Robinson Journal, 11 July 1841, in Clark, 2014, p.391.

46 Robinson Journal, 19 July 1841, in Clark, 2014, p.397f.

47 Robinson Journal, 14 April 1843, in Clark, 2014, pp.501-502.

48 Robinson Journal, 23 November 1844, in Clark, 2014, p.641.

49 Ian D. Clark (ed.), *The Papers of George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate*, Volume 1: *Chief Protector's Office Journal 1839-1850*, Charleston, SC: Createspace, 2014, p.96.

50 Robinson Journal, 23 May 1847, in Clark, 2014, p.751.

51 Bunbury letter to father, 14 August 1841.

52 Bunbury letter to father, 18 December 1841.

53 Robert Hamilton, Memorandum of Robert Hamilton (1896) in H. Anderson, *The Flowers of the Field: a history of Ripon Shire*, Adelaide: Hill of Content, 1985, p.217.

54 Fred Cahir, Sarah McMaster, Ian Clark, Rani Kerin and Wendy Wright, 'Winda Lingo Parugoneit, or Why Set the Bush on Fire? Fire and Victorian Aboriginal People on the Colonial Frontier', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol.47, 2016, pp.225-240.

55 Bunbury letter to father, 9 March 1842.

56 Ibid.

57 Bunbury letter to father, 5 July 1843.

58 Bunbury letter to father, 25 December 1844.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Bunbury letter to father, 1 April 1845.

62 Bunbury letter to father, 25 May 1845.

63 Mervyn C. Hartwig, 'Aborigines and Racism: an historical perspective' in F.S. Stevens (ed.), *Racism: The Australian Experience; a study of race prejudice in Australia*, Vol. 2: *Black versus White*, Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Book Company, 1972, p.15.

64 Thompson, p.117.

65 Don Watson, *Caledonia Australis: Scottish highlanders on the frontier of Australia*, Sydney: Collins, 1984, p.169

66 Ibid.

67 Clark, '*We Are All of One Blood': a history of the Djabwurrung Aboriginal people of Western Victoria*.

'Unless a Portion be given to the Idle': the Kulin and the New Poor Law at Port Phillip

By Dr Marguerita Stephens

Marguerita Stephens is a member of the Collaborative Research Centre in Australian History at Federation University. Her PhD on race relations in colonial Victoria was awarded the University of Melbourne's Dennis-Wettenhall Prize for Research in Australian History 2004. She held a research fellowship at the University of Melbourne from 2007 to 2010, and was the Redmond Barry Fellow at State Library Victoria in 2013-14. In partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages, in 2014, she published a transcription of the Journal of Assistant Protector William Thomas, which received the Local History Project Award in the Victorian Community History Award for that year. She is currently working on a biography of William Thomas.

This peer-reviewed paper is a revision of the 2016 AGL Shaw Lecture given to a joint meeting of the C J La Trobe Society and the Royal Historical Society of Victoria on 21 June 2016.

Much recent analysis of Indigenous-settler interaction at Port Phillip has focused on the role of British humanitarians in producing what has been termed 'Victorian exceptionalism'. As Mitchell and Curthoys put it, Port Phillip (and later Victoria), 'was shaped by unusually intensive efforts to govern, survey, 'civilise' and control Aboriginal people, rather than to destroy or simply neglect them'.[1] La Trobe, an evangelical Moravian, is considered a foundational humanitarian at Port Phillip, his career in colonial administration having begun in 1837 when he was commissioned by Glenelg, Secretary of State for the Colonies and member of the Church Missionary Society, to report to government on the education of emancipated slaves in the West Indies.[2] But close examination of La Trobe's policies and practices in supplying rations to the Port Phillip Aboriginal people from 1839 to 1842 suggests that, in this policy domain at least, his humanitarianism was compromised by rigid adherence to instructions from superiors based on the harsh edicts and economies of the New Poor Law of 1834, rather than concern for the survival of the Kulin people.

Edwin Chadwick and Nassau Senior, the principal authors of the Poor Law Report[3] presented the new regime as a humane, Christian strategy that, in combination with a free labour market, would refashion Britain's burgeoning paupers into a moral, frugal, compliant, mobile and increasingly affluent working class. Despite their plan being widely denounced as ruthless utilitarian social engineering, the measure passed through a reforming Whig parliament with little opposition. Its key strategy was the removal of *discretion* in allocating relief to the unemployed and the destitute, and substituting uniform relief scales and a mandatory workhouse test so that those prepared to enter the workhouse accepted conditions that were always to be 'less eligible' than those of the poorest independent workers. Nassau Senior, Oxford professor of political economy and an evangelical, had previously, in 1828, defended the harsh strategy. He 'refut[ed] the assertion that political economy was hostile

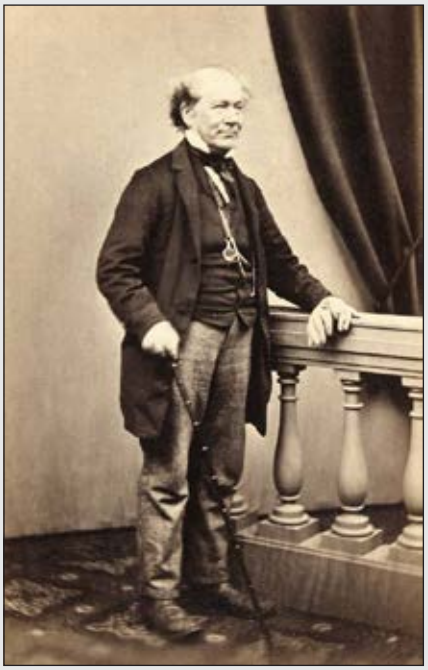
John Skinner Prout, 1805-1876, artist
Melbourne from Collingwood, 1847
Lithograph and watercolour
The Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, 1973.0426
A group of Aboriginal people gathered around a campfire, attired in decorated possum skin rugs and government-issue blankets

to charity' and argued instead that strict control of relief, far from being inhumane, would bring about the social and moral transformation of the pauper class, benefiting individuals and the nation's moral and industrial economy alike.[4] Senior's formulation of *Christian* political economy enabled self-declared humanitarians across the political spectrum — from high Tories to liberal Whigs, from evangelicals to Benthamite utilitarians — to agree (against more radical voices) that the former parish-based poor law was a 'mistaken institution' which discouraged independence and good character amongst the lower classes.[5]

In the Whig reform agenda of the 1830s, however, the new poor law legislation sits uncomfortably with Grey's abolition of slavery in British colonies in 1833, and Thomas Buxton's *Select Committee on Aborigines in British Colonies*, formed in 1835, both widely recognised as high points of colonial humanitarianism.[6] Boyd Hilton suggests that self-declared humanitarians in Lord Melbourne's government may have 'kept discreetly quiet' as it passed the parliament, 319 votes to 20, caught between the 'evangelical and utilitarian — [its] optimistic and retributive... elements'.[7]

The same tensions applied in the desire of evangelical humanitarians to alleviate 'suffering' in the colonies by transforming natives into civil, Christian subjects, and the advocacy of other self-declared humanitarians for a Christian political economy and the unfettered operation of the market for goods and labour. Michael Barnett argues that humanitarian concern for the demoralising effects of too liberal relief resulted in millions of deaths from famine in India in 1837-8 (and in Ireland a decade later) and concludes that '[t]hanks in part to the new ideology of humanitarianism, the early British colonial state was partly built on the skeletal remains of the Indians'.[8] While Barnett implicates an undifferentiated humanitarianism, a more tightly focused view might locate that causality at the unstable intersection between humanitarianism and political economy made manifest in the New Poor Law.

Little consideration has been given to how the domestic New Poor Law of 1834 — and the contested discourse that animated it — influenced colonial policy and practice in Australia. While Anne O'Brien has argued that its influence 'lurked uncertainly around the edges of discourse regarding Aborigines' in Sydney[9] that influence was, arguably, more direct at Port Phillip where official occupation began in 1836 only two years after the amendment took effect in Britain. A year later, Buxton's *Aborigines Committee* called for the establishment of a protectorate for the Aboriginal people at Port Phillip to save them from the fate that had befallen the people of Van Diemen's Land. By 1839, the moral and practical conflicts posed for humanitarians in Britain by the New Poor Law were directly reflected at Port Phillip in an ongoing contest between Assistant Protector William Thomas and Superintendent La Trobe over linking rationing with the performance of work by the Kulin, and specifically over whether the protectors ought to have a power to exercise *discretion* in their allocation of rations.



Davies & Co. (Melbourne), photographers
William Thomas, c.1860
Albumen silver carte de visite
Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria
H2002.87

The issue of discretion in the allocation of relief was pivotal to both the implementation of the new system and opposition to it. In Britain, Chadwick's 'less eligibility' edict 'explicitly denied discretionary authority' to those who administered the new relief system, but despite that, discretion was widely practiced to cushion the harshness.[10] One example was a Bridgewater Poor House Union board member, who, noting that the workhouse death book showed the prescribed dietary scale to be 'not sufficient for the paupers in it', arbitrarily raised the ration scales and distributed outdoor relief.[11] In the 1860s Chadwick argued that the continued, unauthorised application of 'discretion' in the rationing of the destitute had undermined his system, such that 'we failed to free the circulation of labour, and to improve the quality of the labour, and to improve production and wages'.[12] So too, at Port Phillip, the right of the protectors to use discretion in the distribution of rations as a means of enhancing their influence and control over the Aboriginal people, and sometimes to save lives, was the pivotal matter in the ongoing debate between La Trobe and Protector Thomas.

The Poor Law at Port Phillip

By October 1839, when La Trobe arrived as Superintendent at Port Phillip, the four Assistant Protectors appointed in London on the recommendation of Buxton's *Aborigines Committee,* had been in the colony for some nine months. They had accepted their appointments in the belief, as expressed by Buxton's committee, that in the light of the enormous wealth yielded from the sale of Aboriginal lands in New South Wales, 'no expenditure should be withheld which [could] be incurred judiciously' to protect the lives and the rights of the Aboriginal people.[13] By the time they arrived at Port Phillip in January 1839, however, such largesse had evaporated. A series of cascading retrenchments meant that Lonsdale, and then La Trobe, were under instruction, from Glenelg, through Gipps, to practice strict economies and to issue to the protectors only 'such supplies... as may be... indispensable'.[14] In August and September 1839, Gipps made clear his intention 'to abolish as far as possible the practice of issuing to [the Aborigines] general and gratuitous supplies', and insisted 'that whatever they are allowed should be in return for services of some description performed by them'.[15] '[G]eneral issues of food or clothing to the Aborigines', advised Gipps, 'are mischievous — as tending to lower the inducement which they would otherwise feel to work for wages'.[16] Under this new formula, rations were no longer a gesture of compensation, but a means of control, designed to transform the Aboriginal people into productive compliant economic subjects. At Port Phillip, the new frugality had immediate practical effect on the work of the protectors.

From the outset the protectors had been under pressure from Lonsdale and Chief Protector Robinson to remove the Kulin from their encampments on the Yarra by Melbourne where as many as four and five hundred often gathered. Early in August, the Woiwurrung people of the Kulin confederacy agreed to abandon these age-old meeting grounds on Thomas' promise of liberal rations if they settled at his protectorate station at Tubberubabel on the Mornington Peninsula below Arthurs Seat. Since 1835, when Billibellary and other clan leaders had made pacts with John Batman and John Pascoe Fawkner, rations had become an everyday part of the Kulin economy and they had reason to expect the same liberality to continue now that each clan had its protector.

But barely three weeks after the Woiwurrung joined their Boon Wurrung confreres at Tubberubabel, Thomas had to tell the Woiwurrung leader, Billibellary: 'frankly that Governt tho' promising them stores would not give them'.[17] The promised requisition had been held up by both concern for economy and red tape leaving Thomas marooned. As some 150 people gathered round, importuning for supplies from Thomas' own store hut, from which 'Mrs

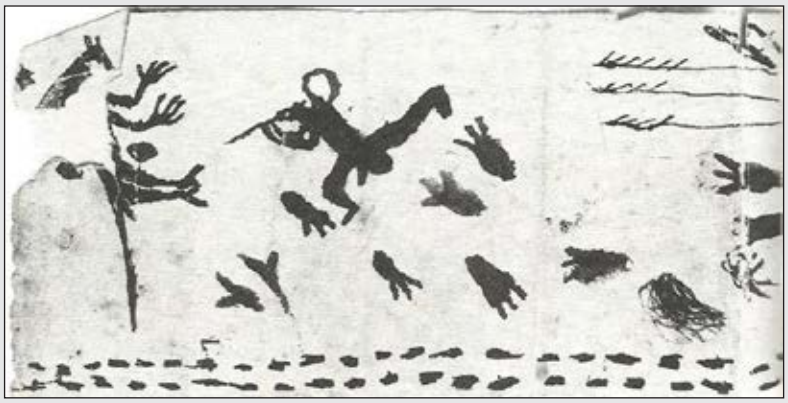
Thomas had given them much', Billibellary expressed profound disappointment, saying 'very bad that no good Govern[men]t' and 'very good Mr Fawkner & Bateman', and from all around there were 'murmurring why bring us here, Big one gammon You'. Thomas begged Billibellary to 'protect my wife & children from the blacks who would no doubt be awfully sulky at coming 60 Miles & be deceived after all'.[18]

The Tubberubabel encampment broke up, and the clans made once again for Melbourne where La Trobe's arrival was keenly anticipated. 'The Blacks', wrote Thomas, 'already begin to talk of a feast' recalling feasts in March 1839 on the arrival of Chief Protector Robinson, and two years earlier on the occasion of Governor Sir Richard Bourke's visit to Port Phillip, of which, wrote Thomas, 'they give some strange (I expect exaggerated) acc[ount]t of... the quantity of Blankets flour &c &c &c they had'.[19] From La Trobe they expected the same bounty, and Thomas likewise hoped that liberal rationing — in line with Buxton's formula — would now resume. On 1 October, as guns saluted La Trobe, Billibellary called on Robinson to enquire as to 'whether [La Trobe] meant to give them any thing'. Thomas also called, noted Robinson, 'and wanted to accompany me to Mr La Trobe. Said it was time to present a petition for the natives'.[20]

The feast took place in mid-October, and then, with much sickness in the Melbourne camp, Billibellary took his people back to Tubberubabel. But hopes for a system of regular and ample rations there were dashed when, late in November, La Trobe ordered that protectorate station provisions be restricted to half-rations for the sick and the aged, and one third to children. For the able-bodied, rations were to be given only to those who worked at the protectorate stations.[21] Thomas therefore persuaded the women to make baskets and straw hats, and the men to tan skins which he planned to 'send... to Melbourne for Sale' to supplement their provisions.[22] Tubberubabel was soon a hub of industry, but with so many assembled in one place game became increasingly scarce, and it was soon clear that the people could not stay.

On the last day of 1839, with many of the people again in Melbourne where they could acquire food by selling game and skins, by doing odd jobs, by begging and by providing sexual services and performing corroborees, Billibellary remonstrated with Thomas about the pressure his people were under from La Trobe to leave town. Once again he invoked Batman's promised 'plenty bread plenty sugar', and blanket, and unfettered ingress to the town.[23] A day later, on New Year's day 1840, Thomas pressed the case for rations for all, divorced from any requirement of work, to encourage them to settle at Tubberubabel. Writing to Robinson, he noted that eleven Kulin had died in Melbourne in the previous few months, while only two infants had been born, and that 'on the broad grounds of Philanthropy, it would be desirable were the whole of the Tribes induced to avoid the Settlement, which I fear they never will do for any length of time unless an equivalent be held out to them in lieu of what they get in it' — meaning that rations must replace all that they got from working and begging in and around Melbourne.[24]

In mid-January 1840 Billibellary abruptly took his people back to Tubberubabel. Again Thomas' urgent request for rations met with



Billibellary, artist
Aboriginal frieze depicting the Lord's Prayer, 1841-1845 (detail)
Pen and ink on paper, 71 x 5.4 cm.
Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria
Robert Brough Smyth Papers, MS 8781/FW48

administrative delays leaving the people hungry and 'very disappointed' and they 'would not do any the least of work'.[25] 'Truly this is bad work', Thomas confided to his journal.[26] With game again depleted by February 1840, the clans broke into family groups to seek food. For three weeks Thomas followed the largest party across the top of Western Port Bay, observing as they fired country to replenish game. He noted, with delight, their protocols for food distribution, so different from those imposed through the controlling ration system. Here, it was 'like Billingsgate in the Wilderness':

> at night the men all brought in what fish they had collected and brought them to a large fire... where... the fish were all counted & 3 Old men distributed the whole according to their families not a murmur or word of disapprobation was [uttered?]. I was so pleased & delighted with their equity that I gave them all some Rice & Sugar.[27]

On returning from Western Port, Thomas found another gathering in Melbourne and pleaded with his superiors that only universal rationing would keep them away from town. In response, La Trobe insisted that a 'discretionary power... in the distribution of food and clothing to the Ab[original] natives' must only apply when 'the [Assistant Protector] falls in for the first time with clans, and wishes to establish intercourse with them'.[28] In all other circumstances, excepting emergencies, La Trobe was adamant that the able-bodied must work for their rations.

Such an emergency arose when the *Glen Huntly* entered Port Phillip on 17 April, 1840 with typhoid and measles on board. La Trobe hastily quarantined the ship and ordered Thomas to requisition whatever supplies might induce the people to leave Melbourne to prevent infection spreading amongst them: all were to leave immediately and '[t]here must be no exception'.[29] Some 120 Boon Wurrung and Woiwurrung retreated to Thomas's station, where they were joined by thirty-four 'strangers' (as Thomas called them), fraternal Kulin from Mt Macedon, the Goulburn River and Geelong, who, being away from their prescribed stations, were not entitled to rations from Thomas. This being entirely foreign to Kulin notions of hospitality and mutual rights, meant further bad feeling. On 7 May 1840, '[a]n altercation arose between myself & my Blacks, they insist upon my giving the Strangers flour I refuse'. On the following Sunday the issue again flared when Ninggollobin (aka Captain Turnbull) & Poleorong (aka Billy Lonsdale) insisted that they take charge and 'distribute at their will'. Ninggollobin, a senior man, insisted that the rations were theirs by right: that 'the Governor sent [rations to] Black fellows'.[30]

Fearing they would again abandon the station, Thomas directed the 'strangers' to work for Susannah at the family's nearby Tuerong run. In payment, she rationed them from her private store and they were temporarily pacified, but issues of power and rights simmered on.[31] A week later they again demanded free rations and when Thomas refused, 'Blacks threaten to go to Governor'. Pointedly, Thomas locked the storehouse and sat writing in his tent in full view. 'At last they come & apologize, go & cut bark for my house & 12 of them work hard'. Some of the 'strangers' went once more to work for Susannah. '[F]or encouragement I give them about ½ lb flour on their return to the encampment & a cup of rice', he recorded.[32]

With his authority and rules now established, through June and July 1840 the people worked on the station, building huts, fences and gardens, while again making baskets and tanning skins for sale in Melbourne. Thomas hoped soon to be able to supply enough 'to defray great part of the expences [*sic*] if not all of the supplies granted to them from time to time'.[33] With satisfaction, he recorded:

> they now are almost asham'd of throwing an animal unskin'd upon the fire, the advantages derived from bringing me the skins is so apparent to them... while on the one hand it furnishes them with what they consider luxuries of life, it give[s] them employment & keeps them in action, no menial vehicle in the path of civilisation.[34]

But the lure of Melbourne remained strong, especially when the rations they had partially purchased through their own labour, failed to arrive. In August 1840, Thomas reported **'**supplies all gone I give some to the Aged &c. [from] my own store. **...** Mrs T very angry... says I will starve my own children'.[35] On Sunday 9 August 1840 he noted the dissatisfaction amongst those few who remained: '[They say] Melbourn Melbourn. I get but few to attend my Service.'

By late spring, barely a year since its first hopeful establishment, the Tubberubabel station was effectively abandoned, due primarily to the shortage of rations and the rigid terms of their distribution, so in conflict with Kulin protocols around the sharing of food. Boon Wurrung people continued to camp there intermittently

William Thomas, 1793–1867, artist
Boon wurrung Elder Budgery Tom firing reeds to catch eels, 1841
Pen and ink on paper
Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales,
Thomas Papers, taken from MS214, reel 3, frame 11
Briggery Lagoon north of Mr Ryrie's run on the upper Yarra

but most now camped by the Yarra at Melbourne or near Heidelberg or by the Bolin (Bulleen) lagoon, which the Woiwurrung now nominated as their preferred station site. La Trobe deemed all these sites too close to town, and increased police surveillance of the camps. In any case, the whole river bank well beyond Bulleen had been taken up by settlers.

Early in September 1840, with considerable reluctance and after much debate, Billibellary and Budgery Tom agreed to settle at Nerre Nerre Warren, by the Koran Warrabin [Dandenong] Ranges, on country at the overlapping margins of their domains. Five young men, including Wonga and Barak, took Thomas to the place, telling him 'that a long time ago Blks very fond of this place and plenty sit down here'.[36] But with many resisting the move, La Trobe issued an order that 'no Aboriginal Blacks of the District are to visit the Township of Melbourne under any pretext whatever'.[37] Thomas pleaded with Robinson that the use of 'coercive measures' to facilitate their removal would exacerbate the 'spirit of growing dissatisfaction' amongst them, and urged instead the immediate issue of provisions and tools for the new station 'without further delay' to encourage them to relocate. [38] But it was too late. On 1st of October, and again on the 11th, mounted police led by Major Lettsom, acting under warrant from Gipps and under the immediate authority of La Trobe who was bound to act on Gipps' instruction, were sent against their camps, ostensibly in search of Taungurung men accused of 'outrages' on the Ovens River.[39] The first raid upset them profoundly, with Old Moragine stating he would not go to Nerre Warren but 'stop here, die here';[40] the second resulted in two deaths, the round-up of some 300 Kulin who were marched through the streets of Melbourne harried by armed troopers, before being incarcerated overnight in the stockade. Thirty men were imprisoned for weeks without charge and La Trobe ordered their dogs to be slaughtered. Ten Taungurung were eventually tried on charges unconnected with events on the Ovens River, and nine were convicted and sentenced to transportation.[41]

After the first raid, many fled to Nerre Nerre Warren , where Thomas 'distributed to those present blankets, ... as encouragement for their being the first to locate in number'.[42] While Thomas maintained that Robinson approved the issue of blankets to those seeking refuge, Robinson failed to support him when La Trobe delivered him a reprimand, and an invoice, for issuing too liberally. He later told Fawkner, 'all discretionary power [was] stop'd me'.[43] La Trobe's 'purport', noted Thomas, 'is that I must shew some reasons for deviating' and that, even in these dire circumstances, 'I should insist upon them all doing a something'. When, following La Trobe's insistence, he rationed only those who worked, five of the 'idlers' berated Thomas saying they would not stay. He relented, '& g[a]ve 5 lb flour out of my private stock', and promised to 'write to Governor & see'.[44]

Wary now of any indiscretion, he continued to pay rations to those who brought in skins, but even then La Trobe objected, seeing it as encouragement to live away from

the station. In December 1840 La Trobe again accused Thomas of 'continu[ing] to issue indiscriminately' and suspended all provisions for the station.[45] Thomas readily admitted rationing those who 'brought skins or made baskets', arguing that through such transactions, 'the Aborigines got into such habits of Industry as to do almost without gratuitous relief, ... [as] a degree of shame check'd their applying'. To Thomas, the long-term benefit of discretionary rationing was in line with the overriding aim of Gipps and La Trobe, and of Chadwick and Senior, to reform the habits and morals of the benighted –whether at home or abroad. With government rations suspended, Thomas was forced to be 'very parsimonious' with the remaining stores, producing more disaffection and some refusals to work.[46] Soon afterwards, perhaps to distance himself from any hint of irregular practice, Robinson issued a circular requiring Assistant Protectors to certify at the end of each month that rations had been issued only 'to those entitled and duly authorized to receive them'.[47]

Following the Lettsom raids of October 1840, there was much anxiety that the police would raid the Nerre Nerre Warren station.[48] On 3rd February, 1841 'about 30 of the principal Blacks', assembled by Thomas' hut, and informed him that all would again leave the station and be away for '3 moons'. This time they begged him to go with them for it had been 'predicted' that 'a Cloud of Blood was about to fall upon the District & Melbourn in consequence of the Blacks being imprisoned... that but few white people would be left alive'.[49] La Trobe ordered Thomas to accompany them, but warned, 'It is impolitic and inexpedient to take stores with you for their use when contrary to your wishes they think proper to absent themselves from their... homestead. Let [them] learn that by leaving their District they forsake their comforts and advantages.'[50]

For twelve days in February 1841, Thomas accompanied a party of some 165 Kulin through the Koran Warrabin/Dandenong Ranges as they headed for the upper Yarra. With no 'sabbath flour' to give them, they ignored his Sunday service saying 'no Flour no wash Face'.[51] Despite their fear of the 'cloud of blood', when the principals of the Woiwurrung, Boon Wurrung and Taungurung clans all came together on the upper Yarra, they agreed to turn again for Melbourne. Gellibrand assured them, wrongly, of 'the Governors good grace' towards them and disparaged Thomas's fears about re-arrest and imprisonment if they went to Melbourne as 'all gammon'.[52] Thomas pressed them to return to Nerre Nerre Warren, but its restrictive rationing regime was hardly a recommendation,

Bernardino Giani, 1823-1886, artist
George Augustus Robinson, 1853
Oil on canvas
Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, ML 27

especially to the older men who most keenly felt the encroachments on their authority. By early March they were again at Bolin swamp, only nine miles from town and near farmers who made accusations, for instance, that the women and children were crossing their paddocks and stealing potatoes — as indeed they were for little else was available and hunger was now rife.[53] After repeated threats from farmers to bring the police out, around eighty people reluctantly headed back to Nerre Nerre Warren late in March. With relief, Thomas recorded their resolve 'not to leave it more'.[54]

Almost immediately, the perennial question of entitlement to rations again arose. While some worked enthusiastically, others refused, and after 'some altercation' Thomas 'g[a]ve them from my own Store', for they were 'plenty Big one hungry'.[55] Twice more, in March and April , Thomas wrote to La Trobe arguing that he could not retain the people at the station 'unless a rationing system be adopted to all who remain on the Station' and that 'the laboring part be left as voluntary', but La Trobe insisted still that they be rationed 'according to rule'.[56] Relations between Thomas and the people were now in free fall. The men were 'very independent say[ing] plainly they & women no work', and 'appeared to delight in being contrary & ridicule work'. One of Kurboro's wives said 'no good stop here", wrote Thomas, while the young men 'were regularly abusive. I told them that they could not expect that white men would feed them & they not do anything'.[57]

Late in May 1841 they all left the station again, and soon some 225 Kulin were camped

within view of Melbourne.[58] With winter upon them, and with seven recent deaths amongst his two language groups Thomas now penned his strongest plea to La Trobe, arguing that 'the evil' of idleness was surely far less an evil than their extinction. **'**That the Station will occasionally be deserted in *toto* unless a portion of food be given to the idle I feel a growing conviction', he wrote, '& of the two evils I feel that will be the least, if it has but a tendency to keep them at the Station the rising generation will be secured.'[59]

Thomas also took his campaign above La Trobe's head. From their encampment by Bolin lagoon, he penned a petition to Gipps in which, amongst other things, he requested **'**that the labour required from them be optional not compulsive', and urged Gipps to give priority to 'that Grand object ... of keeping the Aborigines on one place, & thereby securing the rising Generation'. 'Your Petitioner', he continued,

> is not unmindful of the weighty objections against this clause in occasionally encouraging indolents, but from past experience hopes that the evil will not be so great as fear'd, they have already shewn what they can do on the station, & when their wants are supplied in full will have no interest to go elsewhere.

Echoing Buxton, he urged on Gipps the 'humane consideration of the many weighty sums already added to the Treasury by the sale of Lands ... within the last few months, no less than 20,000 pounds'.[60] As they broke camp to move up the Plenty River valley towards the Trangible (King Lake) range and a meeting with the Taungurung, he sent the petition to La Trobe, begging that it be forwarded to Gipps. With his own rations almost exhausted, he wrote with wry humour, late in June, as he shared damper and tea with the children: 'the Blacks ready to eat me I scarce get a mouthful myself'.[61] By mid-July he was limiting himself to one meal a day '& that Bread'.[62] With game increasingly scarce, despairingly he confided to his journal, that even with the threat of jail hanging over them, 'I knew I should not be able to keep them from [Melbourne], that den of indolence'.[63]

La Trobe was deeply angry at their return, threatening, that 'not one without an order will for the future be permitted in Melbourn'.[64] To encourage their departure, he granted a supply of Sunday meat, and blankets, but still refused to grant universal rationing; nor had he forwarded Thomas' petition to Gipps.[65]

In August around 170 people returned to the station. Bending the rules, Thomas justified 'more liberal' rations, sometimes 'a Trifle, on coming from a journey', sometimes 'from a conviction that the weather prevent'd them from seeking food' or working, though mostly he 'insist[ed] upon something being done'. Sometimes he '[b]orrow[ed] of Mrs Thomas... for Childrens breakfast'.[66] They remained anxious about staying due to three recent deaths and rumours maliciously spread that the police would again come.[67] 'I give them as far as I dare', he wrote,[68] but remained hamstrung. As he observed: '[s]ome demur at night because they had nothing, which served as a handle to Going Away, I give about 12 lb away from my own stores', but it was not enough to persuade them to stay.[69] When, on 12 August, Gellibrand arrived and again impressed on them that they could get 'Tobacco, Plenty of Bread, Bulganna, & no work' in Melbourne, many again left the station, causing Robinson to gleefully note: 'all Thomas's natives left him. They say they will not stop with Thomas. Too many devils, too much very bad there, no good Thomas'.[70] 'Oh that I had a discretionary power in exigencies like this', Thomas lamented.[71]

In September 1841 Thomas took a census of his two language groups. Compared to the 230 people he had counted in November 1839, only 190 Boon Wurrung and Woiwurrung remained — a population decrease of 17 per cent in two years — and many more were sick.[72] He wrote, 'most earnestly solicit[ing]' Robinson to recommend 'to the humane attention' of La Trobe that 'in order to secure a more stable stay of the Aborigines... to give to all adults on the Station, Daily one pint panican of Flour or rice & about 2oz of Sugar, rewarding those who labor'd extra.' The cost to government, he argued (then scratched it out) would 'in the end [be] but trifling'.[73] Robinson declined, instead suggesting to Thomas that *any work* would suffice to remove the restriction: 'say to one move that piece of wood & the difficulty is overcome'. It was, Thomas considered, '[a]n inconsistent subterfuge... if not unjust', and told Robinson, 'it was a pain to return to the Station under such circumstances, no Blankets, nor any discretionary power to act so as to further encourage them'.[74]

Discouraged and in a barely concealed rage as he prepared his quarterly report, the words of this normally mild-mannered, considered man tumbled out, falling into disorder on the page as he pressed, once again, the need for a more humane rationing policy if his mission was to succeed, and his people saved. 'It [i]s with regret', he wrote:

> that I cannot lay before you a more [successful?] acc[oun]t [of?] the 3

William Strutt, 1825-1915, artist
Black Troopers of Victoria, Melbourne, 1851
Pencil and wash
Dixson Library, State Library of New South Wales, DGSSV/NatP/1
Members of the Native Police after its move to Merri Creek

> months now forwarded, I have to record that 2 out of [the last three months?] the Station has been destitute of Blacks... The Encouragement by Settlers & the Town of Melbourn is an hindrance to Narre Narre Warren Station that will ever be a drag back upon its ultimate success... Where [*sic*] I permitted to relieve all who come to the Station (and it appears on my humble judgement neither unreasonable nor unjust that I ought to do so considering the much inclosed private property in my district & the immense scems [*sic*] that must soon be realized therefrom)... I state were I permitted that discretionary power to act thus… The mournful list of the dead since the last 6 months report & not one to fill up their ranks will shew the necessity of more effectual measures being adopted in order to save them from speedy extinction.[75]

Thomas's report as submitted refrained from such passion, but the depth of his anguish was clear. With his petition to Gipps still unforwarded, he finished this year 'disgusted at the hindrances thrown in the way of Ner[re] Ner[re] Warr[en]'.[76]

Late in 1841 a new teacher was appointed to run the school at Nerre Nerre Warren and in February 1842 the station became the headquarters of the reconstituted Native Police, but while station and school continued through 1842 and 1843, Nerre Nerre Warren was rejected as a place of 'location' by the Boon Wurrung and Woiwurrung. Thomas maintained that he was still 'far from dispairing of its ultimate success', but his returns for May 1842 show only five boys at the school, and '[n]o rations were issued for work done' during May or June.[77] When La Trobe 'remark[ed] upon the Instibility of the Station at Nerre Nerre Warren, [and] ... the Awful Expense & little good done', Thomas once again 'press[ed] the Subject of discretionary power to the protector, and assure His Honr... that unless labour is left voluntarily, & the whole Ration'd or partially so that no good will ever be done'. La Trobe then proposed, as noted by Thomas, that 'had I discretionary power for 6 months & my plans not succeed would I resign my situation, to which I said that I had no objection, for... my present situation was far from enviable'.[78]

But the challenge had come too late. In August 1842, four boys were the only church attendees for the whole month,[79] and the Boon Wurrung told him plainly 'they did not like Nerre Nerre Warren, they liked a country where the Sea was, where they could be the[re] & catch Fish'.[80] From their encampment on Merri Creek, the Woiwurrung gave 'their old plea, big one bread Melbourne and no work'.[81] By January 1843, with the colony, and much of the empire, hit by economic recession, funding for the Protectorate was severely cut and was never revived.[82]

The Kulin objection was not to working on the stations *per se*, but to imposed regimes and routines that undermined lines of authority and

protocol on many levels. An inflexible rationing policy which privileged the moral reconstruction of the Kulin above their survival, and which failed to take account of Kulin cultural and political imperatives, was the principal cause of the failure of the Tubberubabel and the Nerre Nerre Warren stations. Chadwick's intention that short-term pain would effect humane long-term transformation might have had merit in Britain, but at Port Phillip, La Trobe's adherence to ideological and practical rigidity contributed to the deaths of a very large proportion of the Kulin. Whether they would have settled and more survived is, of course, one of the 'what-if's' of history. Nevertheless, La Trobe's failure to support Thomas's pleas for more liberal, discretionary rationing suggests that humane considerations, like Prospero's visions, often 'melted into air' when pitted against political and economic concerns of empire.

---

1 Jessie Mitchell and Ann Curthoys, 'How different was Victoria? Aboriginal 'protection' in a comparative context', in Leigh Boucher and Lynette Russell (eds), *Settler Colonial Governance in Nineteenth-Century Victoria*, Canberra: Australian National University Press and Aboriginal History Inc., 2015, p.183.

2 Dianne Reilly Drury, *La Trobe: the making of a governor,* Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006, p.107. La Trobe's 1837 and 1839 reports on West Indian Education are referenced by Reilly Drury, n.60, p.129.

3 *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of Poor Laws,* London: \ House of Commons, 1834.

4 Salim Rashid, 'Richard Whately and Christian Political Economy at Oxford and Dublin', *Journal of the History of Ideas,* vol.38, 1977, pp.148-149. Peter Mandler, 'Tories and Paupers: Christian political economy and the making of the new Poor Law', *The Historical Journal,* vol.33, 1990, pp.81-103.

5 Mandler, p. 89, after John Davison, *Considerations on the Poor Laws,* Oxford: University Press, 1817.

6 Anne O'Brien, 'Humanitarianism and Reparation in Colonial Australia', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History,* vol.12, 2011, p.3; Boucher & Russell, p.12.

7 Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: the influence of Evangelicalism on social and economic thought, 1795-1865,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, p.242.

8 Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: a history of humanitarianism,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011, pp. 62-64.

9 Anne O'Brien, 'Kitchen Fragments and Garden Stuff', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 39, 2008, pp.150-166 (abstract).

10 Anthony Brundage and David Eastwood, 'The Making of the New Poor Law Redivivus', *Past & Present,* no.127, May1990, p.193. Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, & Dangerous People? England 1783-1846,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.594-595.

11 *Times*, London, 20 October 1838, p.2.

12 Edwin Chadwick, 'Poor Law Administration: its chief principles and their results in England and Ireland as compared with Scotland', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, vol.27, 1864, p.497.

13 *Report of the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, London, 1837, p.83. See also O'Brien (2011), 'Humanitarianism and Reparation', p.5 of 28; A.G.L. Shaw (ed.), *Gipps-La Trobe Correspondence 1839-1846,* Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 1989, p.117.

14 Gipps' minute in reply to Assistant Protectors (per Col. Sec), 25 November 1838, in *Historical Records of Victoria,* vol.2B *Aborigines and Protectors 1838-39,* editor: Michael Cannon, Melbourne: VGPO, 1983, p.386; Col. Sec to Lonsdale 11 December 1838, in *HRV* 2B, p.391.

15 Gipps (per Col. Sec.) to La Trobe, 26 August 1839 in *HRV* 2B, p.477.

16 Robinson to Col. Sec. 5 September 1839 in *HRV* 2B: 478; Colonial Secretary to La Trobe 11 September 1839 in *HRV* 2B, p.479.

17 Marguerita Stephens (ed.), *The Journal of William Thomas, Assistant Protector of the Aborigines of Port Phillip and Guardian of the Aborigines of Victoria 1839-1867*, Melbourne: Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages, 2014, (hereafter *Thomas Journal*), vol.1, 1839-1843, p.39, My 1st Journey with ye Blacks.

18 Ibid.

19 *Thomas Journal* 30 September 1839.

20 Clark, Ian D. (ed.), *The Journal of George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate,* Melbourne: Heritage Matters,1998-2000, (hereafter *Robinson Journal*), vol.1, 1 October 1839.

21 Robinson to Thomas (transmitting La Trobe's order), letter no. 236/75, of 25 November 1839, in Thomas Papers, MS 14624 Box B, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria, Officials Rec'd/Official Communications 1839.

22 *Thomas Journal,* 26 October 1839.

23 *Thomas Journal*, 31 December 1839.

24 Thomas to Robinson, in *Thomas Journal*, 1 January 1840, p.116 fn.24.

25 *Thomas Journal,* 6-14 January 1840; 14 January 1840.

26 *Thomas Journal,* 10 January 1840.

27 *Thomas Journal,* 8 February 1840.

28 Robinson to Thomas (transmitting orders from La Trobe), letter no. 311 of 1 April 1840, in Thomas Papers, Official Communications 1840.

29 La Trobe to Thomas, letter no. 40/181 of 18 April 1840, in Thomas Papers, Official Communications 1840; and Elizabeth Janson, Victoria Before 1840: They Came on the Glen Huntley, http://www.oocities.org/vic1847/40/glen40.html?20169 (accessed 2 August 2016).

30 *Thomas Journal*, 10 May 1840.
31 *Thomas Journal*, 18 May 1840.
32 *Thomas Journal*, 20 May 1840.
33 Thomas to Robinson, *Thomas Journal*, n.40, 22 May 1840.
34 *Thomas Journal,* 9 July 1840.
35 *Thomas Journal*, 6 August 1840 and 8 August 1840.
36 *Thomas Journal*, 5 September 1840.
37 *Thomas Journal*, 12 September 1840.
38 *Thomas Journal*, Thomas to Robinson, 8 September 1840, n.52; *Thomas Journal*, 14 September 1840.
39 *Thomas Journal*, n.59, p.216: Robinson to Thomas, 26 September 1840.
40 *Thomas Journal*, 1 October 1840.
41 *Thomas Journal*, 14 October 1840.
42 *Thomas Journal*, 7 October 1840.
43 *Thomas Journal*, memorandum to Fawkner, 1 March 1843.
44 *Thomas Journal,* 17 October, 18 October 1840.
45 *Thomas Journal*, n.79 at 3 December 1840. See also Robinson to Thomas, 14 November 1840 in Thomas Papers, Official Communications 1840, letter 418/518.
46 *Thomas Journal*, 16 December 1840.
47 *Thomas Journal,* 13 December 1840, Robinson Journal 15 December 1840.
48 Thomas to Robinson in *Thomas Journal*, [n.d.] December 1840 n.80; *Thomas Journal,* 28 December 1840 n.81, 31 December 1840 n.83, 25 January 1841. Robinson to Thomas, *Robinson Journal*, 1 February 1841.
49 *Thomas Journal*, 5 February 1841.
50 La Trobe to Thomas, 6 February 1841, in Thomas Papers, Official Communications 1841, letter no. [-]/143.
51 *Thomas Journal*, 14 February 1841.
52 *Thomas Journal*, 19-25 February1841.
53 *Thomas Journal,* 3 March 1841.
54 *Thomas Journal,* 20 March 1841.
55 *Thomas Journal*, 23 March 1841.
56 *Thomas Journal,* 23 March 1841, 6 April 1841 n.100, 11 April 1841.
57 *Thomas Journal*, 12 April 1841.
58 *Thomas Journal,* 4 June 1841, 15 June 1841.
59 *Thomas Journal,* Thomas to La Trobe, 16 June 1841.
60 *Thomas Journal*, 21 June 1841, 22 June 1841 (Petition), 23 June 1841.
61 *Thomas Journal,* 26 June 1841, 27 June 1841.
62 *Thomas Journal,* 19 July 1841 n.120.
63 *Thomas Journal,* 23 July 1841.
64 *Thomas Journal*, 28 July 1841.
65 *Thomas Journal,* 28 July 1841.
66 *Thomas Journal,* 4-7 August 1841.
67 *Thomas Journal,* 3-8 August 1841.
68 *Thomas Journal,* 18 August 1841.
69 *Thomas Journal,* 13 August 1841.
70 *Thomas Journal*, 12 August 1841; *Robinson Journal*, 29 August 1841.
71 *Thomas Journal,* 16 August 1841.
72 *Thomas Journal*, 28 August 1841 n.126 (p.366).
73 *Thomas Journal*, Thomas to Robinson, 11 September 1841.
74 *Thomas Journal,* 17 September 1841.
75 *Thomas Journal,* 22 September 1841.
76 *Thomas Journal,* 11 October 1841, 9 January 1842.
77 *Thomas Journal,* 31 May 1842, 30 June 1842.
78 *Thomas Journal,* 30 June 1842.
79 *Thomas Journal,* 31 August 1842.
80 *Thomas Journal,* 15 December 1842.
81 *Thomas Journal,* 21 December 1842.
82 Shaw (ed.), *Gipps-La Trobe Correspondence,* p.191, letter no.173 n.2,

Forthcoming events

MARCH

Sunday 19

La Trobe's Birthday Celebration
Time: 4.30–6.00pm
Venue: Mueller Hall, Royal Botanic Gardens, Birdwood Avenue, Melbourne, then La Trobe's Cottage Garden
Speaker: Professor John Barnes
Topic: In Search of La Trobe: Traveller, Writer, Governor
Refreshments
Admission: $20 per person.
Bookings essential*

APRIL

Tuesday 11

Wild Colonial Boys: Bushrangers in Victoria, exhibition
Time: 6.00–8.00pm
Venue: Old Treasury Building Museum, **20 Spring Street, Melbourne**
Guest Speaker: Margaret Anderson, General Manager, Old Treasury Building
Topic: There is more to Bushranging than Ned Kelly
Refreshments
Admission: $40 per person
Bookings essential*

MAY

Tuesday 9

Friends of La Trobe's Cottage Annual Lecture
Time: 6.00–8.00pm
Venue: Mueller Hall, Royal Botanic Gardens
Guest Speaker: Simon Ambrose, CEO, National Trust of Australia (Victoria)
Topic: Heritage and the National Trust
Refreshments
Admission: $20 per person
Bookings essential*

JUNE

Sunday 11

Members Talk to Members and Friends
Time: 2.30–4.00 pm
Speaker: Dr Fay Woodhouse
Topic: Surveying the Landscape: Robert Russell, Robert Hoddle and the first plan of Melbourne.†

Tuesday 20

Joint La Trobe Society/ RHSV AGL Shaw Lecture
Time: 6.30–8.00 pm
Venue: Royal Historical Society of Victoria, Cnr William and A'Beckett Streets, Melbourne
Guest Speaker: tba
Topic: tba
Refreshments
Bookings essential*

Friday 30

Melbourne Rare Book Week Lecture
Time: 6.30–8.30 pm
Venue: 401 Collins Street, Melbourne
Speaker: Dr Sylvia Whitmore
Topic: Charles La Trobe, Lord Kingsborough and the nine magnificent volumes of *The Antiquities of Mexico*
No charge. Bookings essential*

JULY

Sunday 9

Members Talk to Members and Friends
Time: 2.30–4.00 pm
Speaker: Dr Walter Heale
Topic: Pioneer Public Health Practitioners in the Port Phillip District.†

AUGUST

Wednesday 2

La Trobe Society Annual General Meeting and Dinner
Time: 6.30 pm
Venue: Lyceum Club, Ridgway Place, Melbourne
Invitations will be sent in July.

Sunday 13

Members Talk to Members and Friends
Time: 2.30–4.00 pm
Speaker: John Botham
Topic: Captain 'Old King' Cole: from Port Phillip pioneer to Victorian patriarch.†

SEPTEMBER

Sunday 10

Members Talk to Members and Friends
Time: 2.30–4.00 pm
Speaker: Tim Gatehouse
Topic: La Trobe and the Cape Otway Lighthouse.†

NOVEMBER

Friday 24 (tbc)

Christmas Cocktails

DECEMBER

Sunday 3

Service to mark the Anniversary of the Death of C J La Trobe
Venue: St Peter's Eastern Hill.

*** General Bookings**
secretary@latrobesociety.org.au, or phone 9646 2112 (please leave a message)

† Members Talk to Members and Friends
Venue: Mueller Hall, Royal Botanic Gardens
Refreshments: afternoon tea will be served
Admission: $5, payable at the door
Bookings essential: by the previous Wednesday, please email daryl@latrobesociety.org.au, or phone 9592 5616 (leaving a message)
Note: Allow ample time to park.

Back Issues

Back issues of La Trobeana are available on the Society's website, except for those published in the last twelve months.
The back issues may be accessed at www.latrobesociety.org.au/LaTrobeana.html
They may be searched by keyword.

Contributions welcome

The Editorial Committee welcomes contributions to La Trobeana which is published three times a year.

Further information about the Journal may be found on the inside front cover and at www.latrobesociety.org.au/LaTrobeana.html.

For copies of guidelines for contributors and subscriptions enquiries contact:
The Honorary Secretary: Dr Dianne Reilly AM
The C J La Trobe Society
401 Collins Street
Melbourne Vic 3000
Phone: 9646 2112
Email: secretary@latrobesociety.org.au

BACK COVER
La Trobe Family coat of arms
INSIDE FRONT COVER
Charles Joseph La Trobe's coat of arms, taken from his bookplate


"Qui la cèrca, la trova"